

***The Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time***  
***Homily ~August 14, 2011***

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A man was headed up to bed one night when his wife told him that he had left the light on in their shed. She told him she could see it from the bedroom window. He told her that he hadn't been in the shed that day. When he looked out the window, he saw that there were people in the shed stealing things, so he phoned the police. The police told him that no one was in his area and, consequently, there was no one available to catch the thieves. He said, "OK," hung up, counted to thirty, and called the police again. This time he said, "Hello, I just called a few seconds ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now. I've just shot them all."

Within five minutes, there were half a dozen police cars in the area and an armed response unit. They caught the burglars red-handed. One of the police officers said to the man, "I thought you said you'd shot them!" And he replied, "I thought you said there was no one available."

Sometimes you just feel like you need to get somebody's attention any way you can. That was certainly true of the episode we just heard in today's Gospel.

A Canaanite woman who came from the country north of Palestine, a country hostile to the Jews, she was presumably married—she had at least one child—but that's all we know about her. All we know is that she was at the point of desperation. Her daughter was being tormented by a demon and she needed Jesus to help her. No one but Jesus could help! She wasn't going to give up. In this single encounter with Jesus, he spoke to her four words: "*Great is your faith.*" Only four words, but they are enough to make her immortal.

As a gem collector searches for fine pearls, Jesus searched for faith. He did not always find it in his disciples. On no occasion that we know of did he ever say of Peter, James and John, "Great is your faith!" More often the words he spoke to them were, "You of little faith!"

The Canaanite woman awakens in us a feeling of admiration, perhaps even envy. She stands where most of us would like to stand. What faithful Christian would not like it said of him or her: Great is your faith. Think of what it would mean if an aspiring young artist had Picasso place his hand on his shoulder and

say, “You have great talent.” How wonderful it would be to be a believer of God, if Jesus would place his hand on our shoulder and say, “You have a remarkable talent for faith.” How does one qualify for this praise? What does one have to do? Is there something we can learn from the woman in today’s encounter with Jesus?

Yes, there is. We must be willing to cross barriers. Her faith consisted in the fact that she turned to Jesus for help. That was quite remarkable when you remember that she was a Gentile—a Canaanite. A traditional enemy of the Jews, they had been despised for centuries.

Faith consists of turning to Jesus for help.

Today, barriers must still be crossed.

There is the barrier of **time**, two thousand years to be precise, which is a wide gulf. Jesus lived then and we live now. We think that it’s such a different ballgame today. How can he possibly help me?


There is the barrier of **culture**. A generation that travels faster than the speed of sound may well wonder how it can get help from a Palestinian Jew who traveled on a donkey. Can Jesus even understand our problems?

There is the barrier of **pride**. Am I willing to get beyond myself and admit that I cannot handle every situation that comes up in life? Are we able to cross the barriers that say I don’t need you, Jesus, I am doing quite well by myself?

A story came across the news about a family of ducklings who fell down a sewer gate in Vancouver. The mother did what any parent would do. She got help from a passing police officer. The mother duck grabbed the policeman by the pant leg while he was on foot patrol. The policeman shoved what he thought was just a goofy duck away, but she persisted, grabbing his leg again when he tried to leave and then waddling to a nearby sewer grate where she sat down and waited for him to follow and investigate. The policeman came to where she sat and saw eight baby ducklings in the water below. Police removed the heavy metal grate with the help of a tow truck and used a vegetable strainer to lift the ducklings to safety. Mother and offspring then departed for a nearby pond.

The mother duck did what the Canaanite woman did. She persisted in seeking help until she got it, even if it meant crossing barriers. And that is what Jesus wants us to do. Be persistent in getting the help we need. Remember, we have a friend who can help us even when human endeavors fail. Jesus is waiting to help today. Will you ask him or are you, too, of little faith?

∞ 140<sup>th</sup> Jubilee ∞

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