

**20<sup>th</sup> Sun A – 2017 (August 19 – 20, 2017)**

**01. Is 56:9 - 1, 6 – 7; 02. Rom 11:13 – 15; 03. Mt 15: 21 – 28**

My sisters and brothers,

St. Mother Teresa is known for her ministry to the poorest of the poor. She began her ministry with nothing in hand. She trusted in the Lord and sought help from people to feed the poor. One day, Mother went to beg bread from a bakery to feed the hungry children in her orphanage. The baker, outraged at people begging for bread from him, spat on her face and refused to give her any bread. Mother Teresa calmly took her handkerchief out, wiped the spit from her face, and said to the baker, “Well, that was for me. Now what about some bread for my poor children?” The baker was touched by Mother Teresa’s love and humility. He later became a permanent benefactor to St. Mother Teresa.

The episode in today’s Gospel is built around a conversation between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. The conversation is unfolded in three stages. The first stage unfolds the Canaanite woman’s journey of faith. She is not a Jew but is now standing before a Jew. Leaving behind her pagan faith, she now turns to a Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, and places her faith in Him. This is a big transition. She looks to Jesus for a miraculous cure for her daughter. It is important to take note that she is here not for herself but for her daughter who is in trouble. She wants

an answer for her daughter. Did she receive an answer? No. This is very striking. Jesus remained silent. Why did Jesus remain silent? As you meditate on this story, you will find yourself standing before Jesus. This is the story of many mothers and fathers who are in tears before God in prayer on account of their children and family members. Once a Mother came to me and said, "Father Benny, I have four children who were brought up well, given the best Catholic Education and sent them to the college. I am sad now because three out of four do not anymore go to the Catholic church. I spent my years praying for them but no sign of their return to the faith." This is the story of many mothers and fathers. Often, we ask the question, "Why is God so silent?"

The second stage unfolds the woman's act of humility. She falls on her knees before Jesus and cries out, "Lord, help me." She doesn't give up. She doesn't take offense at the silence of Jesus. Pride doesn't take hold of her life. She is humble and patiently waits for an answer from Jesus. Humility is the mother of all virtues, and the first door to holiness. The humbler you are, holier you are. In response to her cry, "Lord, help me," she receives a humiliating reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." Jesus' reply at this point looks to be very harsh and inhuman. People are very sensitive to such humiliating remarks but her reaction is one of humility.

The third stage unfolds her profession of faith. She had enough chances to give up her faith in Jesus. But she didn't. She moves from "Have pity on me, Lord" to "Lord, help me." Now for the third time she says, "Please, Lord." In abject humility, with her face in the dirt, stripped of her dignity, having abandoned her own religious background, she has nothing left, not even her pride. She expresses the best manifestation of her faith in these humble words, "Please, Lord."

The key that unfolds the mystery in this episode is to recognize that Jesus saw in this Canaanite woman a reality that even she didn't know herself – a faith that could withstand any assault; a hope that could not be shaken; a love that was divine. The critical point of this story is that Jesus sees the same thing in you and me. Miracles do happen and healings do take place but Jesus is looking for your faith. We must consider why Jesus led this mother through a jumbling and difficult process before granting her request. While His response seems harsh, the lesson of persistent faith displayed through a time of testing is a common theme in Scripture. Abraham was tested by being asked to sacrifice Isaac. Jacob wrestled with God. Joshua had to conquer fortified cities before claiming the Promised Land. David fought Goliath and lived in exile before becoming king. The Gospels record several stories where Jesus tested the disciples. Jesus said we must "ask, seek and knock" if we desire to have our prayers answered. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:7 that God tests our faith to develop in us a faith that is greater than gold.

Truly, there is no better way to close this reflection than leaving you with Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

God bless