

20th Sunday, Year A. (Is 56:1.6-7; Rom 11:13-15.29-32; Matthew 15:21-28)

In the Gospel reading of this Mass, we meet a pagan lady, a psyrophonician, who had an extraordinary faith, an amazing faith. This faith was rewarded with the cure of her sick daughter. The themes of this mass are: faith and inclusiveness.

Homily

Love is the greatest power or force in the world. To be possessed with love is to be filled with a power which will not be denied. It's amazing what people can do, when they are motivated by love. We see this especially in the case of a mother. A mother will do anything, brave anything, suffer anything, endure anything, for the sake of her child. God knew about this because he is the one that puts this compassionate and loving attitude in the hearts of mothers. That is perhaps the reason why he likened the love he has for us to the love of a good mother. In Isaiah 49, he says that even if a mother forgets the child in her womb or abandons her child that suckles at her breast, that He, the Lord will never forget us.

A prison Governor friend of mine said that in all his years of prison service, he had not met five prisoners who have not had a good relationship with their mothers. The mothers, he said, never fail to visit, never fail to take responsibility. We see them every day, mothers with more than one drug addicts in the family, queuing to visit the son or the daughter in jail, living out their lives with no resources, no support, nothing.

It is unbelievable, considering the amount of pressures that mothers come under and the amount of torture they have to go through because their children get into trouble and into crime.

Once during a particularly severe winter in the Arctic, all but two people in a certain camp died of starvation. The two surviving person was an Eskimo woman and her baby. The woman began a desperate search for a means of obtaining food. Eventually, she found a small fish hook. It was a simple matter to rig a line but she had no bait and no hope of getting one. Without a moment hesitation, she took a knife and cut a piece of flesh from her thigh. Using this as bait, she caught a large fish. She and her baby lived on fish until spring when she walked across to the other side of the camp to find some other people.

It was no coincidence that the only adult to survive in that camp was a woman, a mother. What kept the mother alive was the concern for her child. There seems to be no limit to what a mother can go

through for the sake of her child. We see another wonderful example in today's gospel story. There we see the unshakable determination of a loving mother for her child. She refused to be put off or to give up. How delighted she would have been when Jesus finally answered her prayers. It meant all her trouble, all her begging, all her embarrassment had not been in vain. She is a typical example of perseverance, doggedness, resilience, faith and love. Jesus himself said to her 'woman, you have great faith. Let your wish to granted'. She is a model of what could be called tough faith.

Sometimes one hears people say 'it's easy for you. You have great faith'. But life is not always that way. Faith does not make things easy at all. In fact, the opposite is most likely the case. It is because we have faith that we refuse to give up. Faith impels us to persevere, to struggle on, often with no scientific guarantee of a happy outcome. Faith never gives up. Faith like love always wins. Love is the expression of our faith.

The lady who came to Jesus was a pagan. To make matters worse, she was a member of a tribe that had been ancestral enemies of Jesus' own people, the Jews. Yet she had more faith in Jesus than Jesus' own people themselves. Faith requires humility and the awareness of one's need. The Canaanite woman had to face all kinds of obstacles in order to obtain a cure for her daughter. She had to overcome her pride in order to beg. As a gentile, she knew she wasn't welcome among the Jews. She had to overcome first of all the apparent indifference, snobbery, a put down attitude and an apparent rejection. Jesus was merely finding out the level of her faith. She wasn't put off by all these because she knew she had a case and she knew she was selfless. Unselfishness or selflessness makes up put up with almost anything. It enables us to transcend ourselves. She is amazing. Many people here, I am sure have done equally the same thing in near impossible circumstances. That poor Canaanite woman is held up to us as an example of faith, courage and love. We are encouraged to do the same. Keep up the faith. God bless.