

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 16, 2020

Have you ever felt like an outsider? Someone on the outside looking in, and that you are not part of the in crowd, whoever the “in crowd” may be. All of us at one time or another have felt this way, and it is not a good place to be. It is a dark place to be. Many people today feel a little on the outside due to the Pandemic. My Mom is in a nursing home, and we can't go in to see her. We are on the outside, and she feels like she is on the outside. The other side of this coin is we could be making people feel like they are on the outside.

I remember a time when I was in a dark place and felt all alone. So I wrote about it, again this was a long time ago. I call it Night Quiet.

It is Night Quiet. I am locked out and I have no place to go. I cry out in the dark, does anyone hear? Who would open their door and let me in at this hour? A lonely place awaits me somewhere. Are there others like me, who feel locked out and have no place to go? Do you hear this voice God? What do I do? Where do I go? Can you show me the Path through this darkness I find myself in? I am afraid to go ahead. I am afraid to return. I am frozen in time, in a place that is fit for no one. Does anyone hear? Does anyone care? What can I do, but wait! Wait in hope that things will turn in time. So I wait and I cry out, into this night! Because I am locked out and have no place to go. It is Night Quiet.

You can tell that it was a dark time in my life, so I know what it feels like to be on the outside. So now think about St. Matthew, he was an outsider - a tax collector. He was forbidden to go into the temple. He was forbidden to pray close to the Holy of Holies. Being a Tax Collector, he joined with the Romans, the oppressors of the people. He was hated by the Jews and disliked by the Romans. He was an outsider on both major groups of society. I feel for Matthew. What a blessing he must have received when Jesus came into his life and said “Matthew, come and follow me”. I am sure from that moment on, he felt like he belonged. He was never an outsider again.

This is why the Canaanite woman got some attention in Matthew's Gospel today. Since he was an outsider at one time, he felt for this Canaanite woman. She was an outsider. She was an outcast. She was someone not welcomed among the

Jewish people. They were outsiders. These are just the kind of people Jesus loves, the outsider, and the outcast, those on the outskirts of society.

Probably Jesus was feeling a little bit of this Himself. Jesus was over and over again rejected by the scribes and Pharisees. So He headed to the district of Tyre and Sidon, a place no Jew would have ever entered into. Jesus was seeking a quiet place. We can recall when Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho, it was against the Canaanites, who were trying to drive him and the Jewish people into the Jordan. This hatred the Jews have for the Canaanites, and the Canaanites for the Jews, goes way back in their history.

So now, knowing this about this woman, look at this Roman's determination. She is committed to get a healing from Jesus, a Jew, and she would let nothing stop her. "Jesus, "Have mercy on me, Lord," the Canaanite woman said. She was shouting at a distance, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David."

Shouting out, "Son of David," which is a great surprise, because what she is saying is: "You are the Messiah of the Hebrews." Because it is written in the Bible that someday, from the House of David, there will come a Messiah, and he will teach us all things.

Where did this woman get such knowledge about Jesus? It had to be by word of mouth from others, as they traveled the countryside. Someone had to tell her about Jesus and about His healing miracles and cures. Listen to her heart, it is a mother's heart crying out for her daughter. She is desperate for her daughter's life, "Heal my daughter, Jesus."

She says, "My daughter is tormented by a demon." Talking about being locked out – we can't imagine the darkness her daughter was going through. We don't know what demon, or darkness was working within, but it was violent enough to send a Canaanite woman to her knees before Jesus, this Rabbi.

"My daughter is tormented by a demon." And Jesus does not answer her. Jesus remains silent. It is quiet. How many times do we feel Jesus is silent to us in our prayers? While God is silent, the disciples add to her misery as they start urging him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us and following us." But Jesus is still quiet.

Then Jesus says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." His mission is to the House of Israel, but we also know that God's love, light and truth has been given to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus wants his disciples to hear, to see, to understand what is happening before Him. He was sent to the

House of Israel. We know that His mission is for all people. Isaiah even states, “My house will be a house for all people”.

With this we still can see the courage this woman has as she continues to draw near Jesus. This is a gesture of great humility. She kneels at his feet, and she says to Jesus, “Lord, help me. I have no other person or place to go. I tried everything, but nothing seems to be able to heal her. And now I come to you and I beg you, I beg you, Lord, help me.”

What Jesus says next is hard for us to understand. He says to her, “It is not fair to take the children’s food, the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” The Israelites called the Canaanites dogs. Dogs here are in the sense of pets. It is still a derogatory term, but it is how the Jews referred to the Canaanites.

Still she persists, not even being called a dog, she says to Jesus, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.”

Her determination, her persistence, her great faith, wins the ears and the heart of Jesus. And what does Jesus do? Jesus answers her prayers. And he says to her, “Woman, great is your faith and let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Her faith in Jesus saved her daughter. “Great is your faith.” It is your faith. She loved her daughter more than the ridicule and yelling. She persisted through it all, no matter what was in her way or who, she knew Jesus could heal her daughter. So her love for her daughter was greater than her fears. And her faith was greater than her doubts. She cried out into her dark night, her own night quiet, and God did hear, because of her faith.

I wonder how she felt after she left Jesus, seeing her daughter whole and healed. To God she was not an outsider. To God Matthew was not an outsider. To God, my Mom is not an outsider. We are not outsiders. So cry out to God, in your own Night Quies, He will hear. No matter how Quiet is the Night, God hears!