

II LENT 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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1 THESS. 4.1 ST. MATT. 15.21



What does it mean to have faith? The writer of Hebrews calls faith the assurance of things hoped for...the evidence of things not seen.

When we talk about faith in God...we are talking about trusting in him completely...and our trust (faith) in him should be unshakeable...because we truly believe he knows what is best for us and loves us.

Today's Gospel is about a Canaanite woman whose faith was tested...and it never wavered. She has a sick daughter and she comes to Jesus for help. Mothers want what's best for their children...it's a universal truth.

Jesus has just finished teaching and healing people near the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Some Pharisees and lawyers from Jerusalem show up and criticize Jesus' disciples for not washing up properly before lunch.

Jesus dismisses their criticism as failure to understand what the Law was really about and obsession over man-made rules and regulations they use to make themselves look good to others. He calls them hypocrites.

What follows is a short story Jesus tells about the blind leading the blind and both falling down. Even Peter doesn't get the message and Jesus says, "Peter, you aren't any more intelligent than the other guys. Don't you get what I'm saying?" Poor Peter. He would eventually get the message.

It's been a busy and exhausting time for Jesus so he tries to get away from all the excitement and heads toward Tyre and Sidon, a distance of about 60 miles. The Canaanite mother heard about Jesus and comes to him for help...her daughter is sick with a demon and in a terrible condition.

We might be perplexed at Jesus' lack of response to the Canaanite mother's pleas for help. Her persistent cries bother the disciples and they ask Jesus to do something and make her go away. Jesus' response is equally perplexing...he says she isn't a lost sheep of Israel...she isn't a Jew...and he was sent only to find the lost sheep.

Our Canaanite mother is not deterred by Jesus' seeming indifference...she calls him "David's Son"...an honorific title for the Messiah...she falls at his feet and begs him to heal her daughter.

Jesus then says to her it isn't right to give good food meant for God's children...the Jews...and throw it to dogs. Dogs are mentioned 41 times in the Scriptures...not as family pets but as hungry and dirty animals that hung around garbage dumps looking for food. Even today calling someone a dog isn't exactly a compliment.

The mother's response is remarkable. She acknowledged what Jesus says might be true...but even dogs get to feed on the leftovers that fall from the dinner table...and she wants some for her daughter.

Jesus consistently shows a tendency to break down barriers. Canaanites were Gentiles and despised by the Jews who considered them to be little better than dogs. He knew exactly who the Canaanite mother was and why she had come to him for help. He fully intended to do exactly what she asked him to do...make her daughter well again.

What Jesus wanted was for the mother to say out loud what she already believed in her heart...he could and would heal her daughter...and no amount of insults was going to shake her faith.

Jesus wants us to respond with the same kind of faith the Canaanite mother shows. Part of what it means to have faith in God is to not just say but show we truly believe Jesus can and will help us work our way through seemingly impossible situations.

Jesus invites us to come to him with our cares and worries whatever they are. Whenever we feel the burdens of everyday life are just getting us down...we know he hears us and wants what's best for us.

We leave here today knowing what we have received is full assurance of God's love and compassion and no leftovers.

