

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Jesus is of course the perfect revelation of God the Father's love for us at work in our lives, but you wouldn't necessarily conclude that just from today's gospel lesson.

- This Canaanite woman comes to Jesus in utter desperation, yet He seems at first indifferent, then "opposed," and even seems to insult her, before finally giving in and healing her daughter.
- It's long been one of my least favorite passages in the gospels, as it makes me uncomfortable and doesn't seem to fit with the rest of my picture of Jesus.

That begins to change if we look at this in the right context.

- Still a little uncomfortable and not necessarily my favorite, but it starts to open up and make sense.
- The context that's done that for me is a kind of spiritual therapy.

Now, by "therapy" I mean correcting a distortion caused by our human experience.

- Physically, injuring my foot will change the way I walk until it heals.
- Various emotional experiences can distort the way we view ourselves, world around us
- Both traumatic and positive; success just as likely to distort, causing us to overestimate our abilities

This happens in the natural course of events all the time – distortions are created, but also corrected.

- Injuries heal, egos get deflated, and so on, but sometimes it takes a while.
- Until they're corrected, the effects of the distortions spread.

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For example

- Foot injury very slow in healing, changing the way I walk is now causing hip/back pain
- Criticism or unkind word really sticks, We start to interiorize that criticism and doubt ourselves
- By the time something challenges our overconfidence, we've already become convinced of our abilities and, when we fail, assign the blame to someone else.

Once we reach that point, we've lost the ability to help ourselves.

- Our bodies don't remember the right way to move
- Our hearts have lost sight of who really are.
- So we need someone from the outside that can see the problem that we can't and how to fix it.

Breaking out of that kind of dysfunctional pattern is a painful and difficult process.

- As a result, it's not always pretty, even when it's working, and so we also need that person to encourage us and keep us moving in the right direction.
- And I think that's really the best way to understand what we're seeing in the gospel today.

The first thing we need to recognize is that the Canaanite woman's suffering has given her an incredible level of resolve.

- When pagan spirituality couldn't help her daughter, she immediately left her world behind and starts approaching Jesus.
- Nothing will deter her, she just keeps advancing, no matter the cost.

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In fact, she gives us a perfect picture of the determination we need to have in the spiritual life, **which is why Jesus keeps holding back.**

- In the beginning, even though the woman's recognized Him as the Messiah, Jesus is still just someone that can give her what she wants.
- Noble as her desire to see her daughter freed is, Jesus wants to give her *more*.

She's still far from Him, spiritually, and advancing beyond this point in the spiritual life is difficult.

- It means thanking God for the thing we didn't ask for or didn't want.
- Accepting what he's doing in our lives when it's difficult or doesn't match up with what we want.

Often it's only suffering that gives us the spiritual focus and energy to be willing to do that, and so Jesus is making the most of it while He can.

- Now, that probably still makes you a little uncomfortable because it sounds manipulative, but consider this: once her daughter is healed, that energy will evaporate and she may *never have it again*.
- So rather than let her stay far off, Jesus is coaching and encouraging her, bringing her as close to Him as she's willing to come.

Difficult as this passage might be for you, spend some time *today* meditating on it.

- Try to identify the woman in her suffering, and think about the times in your life God hasn't answered your prayer or hasn't answered it when or how you wanted.
- Try to remember a time when someone or something in your life brought more out of you than you wanted to give
- Try to identify with Jesus, and think about times when you've seen someone settle for less or stop short of an important goal or lesson.

As you do, pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to persevere in loving God the way he loves us – always willing to keep coming, even when it isn't pretty.

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