

20th Sunday
8/16/2020

DRAWING OUT THE JUICE

There's a simple pasta dish I like to make in the summer. Just cut up some cherry or grape tomatoes, add freshly chopped garlic and basil, then a little olive oil, some pepper and coarse kosher salt then seal it and let it sit for few hours. The salt draws the juices out of the tomatoes and you have a refreshing, zesty tomato sauce without any cooking.

Today's gospel leads us to ask a question—What's going on? Was Jesus being mean to this woman? Was Jesus racist? She keeps crying out and he seems to ignore her and even put her down apparently on the basis of her not being Jewish. Jesus was NOT racist. The fact that Jesus heals her daughter clearly shows Jesus was not racist.

This woman is a foreigner, a non-Jew and not only that but a Canaanite, an ancient enemy of the Jewish people. Now Jesus had earlier cured the servant of a centurion who would not have been Jewish but here he seems reluctant.

Let's take a closer look. *Have pity on me Lord, Son of David!* She cries out for help and calls Jesus both Lord and Son of David. She *did Jesus homage*. She worshiped or at least highly respected him. *Lord, help me*. Again she called Jesus, Lord. Literally she says, *Elesion Kyrie*—Lord have mercy, as we say at Mass. *Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters*.

Great is your faith! Three times this woman calls Jesus, Lord. This pagan foreigner acknowledges who Jesus is, while some of his own people reject him. She's a double outsider as both a foreigner and a woman, but she's the *only* person whose faith Jesus ever describes as great.

She has great faith but she also has persistence. She won't give up and not only that, she has some spunk. When Jesus makes a comment about dogs, she hands it right back to him in a way that reveals her faith as well as her humility.

Perhaps what's going on here is that just like that coarse kosher salt drawing out the juices of the tomatoes, Jesus is drawing forth her faith, bringing it out if not

for her own sake, then perhaps for those around her. Not getting what she wanted, made her pursue it all the more. You could even say that it strengthened her faith or at least her resolve and she continued on with persistence and some spunk. Gentile or not, like the centurion, she has faith in Jesus.

Similar to last week's gospel, of Jesus walking on the water, we find the importance of faith and of worship. Both the disciples in the boat last week and the Canaanite woman pay Jesus homage.

Each reading today reminds us of God's love and care for all and that we're called to mirror that same love and care to others. Isaiah speaks about foreigners who will join themselves to the Lord, and that God's house is to be a house of prayer, a place of divine encounter for all people. St. Paul speaks of how God wishes to show mercy to all. And in the gospel, this foreign woman shows great faith.

Faith in Christ is to be stronger than ethnic divisions, national differences and even centuries old animosities. What matters isn't who your ancestors were or where they came from. It doesn't matter if they came over on the Mayflower. That's nice to know and genealogy can make a great hobby, but what matters is faith, your faith, *your* faith, your faith in Jesus.

Being Catholic means that we have brothers and sisters in the faith that are to be found on every continent and nearly every nation. How do we treat our brothers and sisters who are different from us? Here in our own parish, while I don't have an exact number, I know that we have people from over thirty different countries. That's a gift to all of us and it shows us the universality of the Church.

And that leads to yet another question, how do we treat those who are different from us even if they don't share our faith. Do we still see them as made in the image and likeness of God? Do we by our example, seek to show Christ to them? At the end of St. Matthew's Gospel, the risen Christ tells the disciples to go forth and make disciples of all nations; not some nations but *all* nations. God has a universal outlook. Do we?

And there's a lesson in this story for us. Sometimes we ask God for something and we don't get it because, God in his wisdom, doesn't will it for us. Disappointment can weaken our faith but it can also strengthen it. Disappointment

can cause us to grow in hope. But sometimes we might not get it, at least not at first, because we don't desire it enough, because we aren't persistent enough.

St. Augustine described prayer as an exercise in holy desire and when we pray we seek to stretch our hearts so that we might be able to receive what God wishes to give. Persistence and even some spunk can help our hearts expand. Perhaps God is using this as an opportunity to strengthen, not weaken our faith, to draw faith out of us, if not for our own sake for that of others. Perhaps, like salt, Jesus is trying to draw out the juice of faith in our lives as he brought it forth in this woman.

No. Jesus was NOT racist. Jesus didn't care about race but about faith, faith in him. Your faith is more important than your race. And not just any faith but your faith in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus teaches us. Jesus was not racist and those who would be his disciples are called not to be racist but to be faithful.

Here in the Eucharist, Jesus gathers us as his people, as his assembly, as his Church to strengthen our faith together. Here we gather in his name with those who minister in his name, listen to his word and here he nourishes us with his Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine. And from here, strengthened by Jesus and each other, we go forth to live lives of intentional faith.