

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Aug. 17, 2014**

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Recipient of the 2013 Aquinas Institute's  
Great Preacher Award

***MT 15:21-28***

### ***“Cure of the Canaanite Woman”***

In my early years, when traveling with my family to visit relatives, we would have to pass through what was referred to as “a bad part of town.” As a youngster I did not know exactly what that meant, but I knew it was serious. My father would drive with a bit more of a white knuckle grip on the steering wheel and even sharper focus. My mother would instruct we kids to “not make eye contact and lock the car doors.”

Who were these people that raised the level of concern for our safe passage? What were they going to do? How were we going to respond? What would be everyone’s fate? In some fashion or another, these were the concerns that came to the fore.

In reflecting upon this Gospel passage I was wondering if Jesus heard the same sort of comments from the apostles as they made their long and dusty trip to Tyre and Sidon. If you close your eyes and concentrate really hard you might hear them ... “Why are we going through this territory? ... Guard your valuables. ... Keep quiet, don’t be conspicuous. ... Keep a lookout. ... Pick up the pace. ... Look, there are some of THEM. ... Let’s get out of here!”

If the heightened tension and prejudice were not enough, one of THEM calls out to Jesus. Possibly still mindful of the warnings and heedings that Jesus heard from his companions, He does not respond to THAT woman’s

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cry. But she is persistent. She begins to approach. The apostles begin to prepare for the worst; instead they will be surprisingly treated to the very best. They will be exposed to a depth and level of faith that astounds them.

Listen how Jesus responded to her, and **still** she approaches Him with respect and anticipation. “What is going on here?” they muse. Jesus responds to the greatness of her faith and healing is extended to the woman’s possessed daughter.

With so much going on in this brief passage it is easy to jump to the conclusion that the point of this account is to remind us of the depth of faith that the woman possessed and the reward that comes from believing, trusting and stepping out.

As true and important as that certainly is, most of us will miss that, quite possibly, the parallel point of emphasis might well be the real danger there is in judging people prematurely and keeping them at arm’s length. If the Apostles, indeed even Jesus, would have had their way, she would have experienced the initial ignoring of her plea, and felt the sting of Jesus’ curt response to her. It would have been quite easy, indeed not totally unexpected, if she would have cursed them and run away.

But, her faith was greater than their fear. Her persistence was mightier than their reluctance. Her willingness to do whatever it takes overwhelms their conditional and cautious approach.

Quite possibly the miracle of equal value was the exorcising of the demons of hatred, prejudice and fear from the Jewish community that passed through the Canaanite region.

The Canaanite woman received exactly what she had hoped for in the healing of her daughter, because that great was her faith. The apostles, on the other hand, must have been stupefied beyond imagining when they experienced nothing they had anticipated. And yet, journeying with Jesus,

they were beginning to understand that He was changing their attitudes, transforming their hearts and deepening their own faith by His witness, teaching and love; and the great faith He elicited from others, especially those for whom they had previously had little regard. They had much to share with family and friends once they returned home and recounted their experiences.

I wonder what it was like when they made their return trip through Canaanite territory to return home after their time away. Maybe now we can imagine something new and different: close your eyes and imagine again ... As they pass through, Jesus can overhear the Apostles say, “Remember when we last came through here and the amazing things we witnessed. ... Slow down, you’re walking too fast. ... Look there she is, there is the woman that approached Jesus. Let’s wave to her. Hey, Jesus, do you think we can stop by her home and see how the little girl is doing and maybe get a drink of water. Who knows, we might even get a meal out of this if she allows us to receive a few scraps from **her** table!”

You just never know what you are going to experience when you commit to travelling with Jesus as your companion.