

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

We have just heard Jesus affirm the great faith that a woman had by asking him to heal her daughter. We could ask the question, “Where did this woman get that faith?” She was not a Jew. She did not have the opportunity to know God in the way that they people of Israel could know God. How was it possible that she able to call Jesus Lord and Son of David?

We could the same questions about Billy and Marcella who are standing before us asking to be Confirmed and to receive their First Holy Communion. Where did they get the faith to believe in the God who loves them? How did they come to know Jesus? Why do they want the Holy Spirit to come down upon them today and to give them the gifts that they need to live as God’s children? Why do they want to receive Jesus in Holy Communion?

In today’s gospel Jesus leaves his home country for a little while. A woman from that part of the country came to him shouting, “Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.” Her very way of addressing Jesus is a great act of faith in him. But to our surprise he ignores her. She is not put off by that. He explains to his disciples that his mission is only to the lost sheep of Israel. When the woman comes up to him and kneels at his feet and cries out, “Lord help me.” we can hardly believe what Jesus says to her. “It is not fair

to take the children’s food and throw it to the house dogs.” But even that does not put the woman off. With wit and persistence, she comes back at him to tell him that surely a puppy under the table can eat the scraps that fall from that table when the children are too clumsy to eat what they have been given. Jesus recognises and affirms the woman’s great faith. He assures her that her prayer will be answered. Matthew tells us, “And from that moment her daughter was well again.”

It is a remarkable moment in the gospel. Jesus is forced by this woman of faith to admit that his ministry can go beyond the people of Israel. This woman represents all those non-Jewish people who will come to faith in Jesus because of the work of the Church. You and I are that Church. We are the ones who are now called to share our faith with our families and with all who know us and are influenced by the way we live. Billy and Marcella stand before us today because their families have chosen to share their faith in Jesus with them.

In a few moments they will tell us all that they believe in the God who created them, in his Son Jesus who suffered died and rose again to save them, in the Holy Spirit who came down upon the apostles and now comes down upon them to confirm them in their faith. I will then pray that God’s Spirit will gift them with everything they need to live their lives generously for others. I will then

anoint them with oil and pray that they be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Billy and Marcella have been preparing for a long time to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. They have been learning how important it is to belong to a community of faith like ours if we want to be a disciple of Jesus. They will become full members of God's Family the Church when they receive Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time. They are beginning to understand what happens when we gather here. They know that it is Jesus himself who speaks to them when the Scriptures are proclaimed to them. They stand in wonder as they see that what Jesus did with his disciples at his last supper with them is happening here in front of us. They don't know how it happens, but they believe that the bread and wine that they will bring to the altar today becomes Jesus himself so that they can be fed by Jesus in Holy Communion. They are beginning to understand that Jesus comes to them so that they can bring him to others.

Today's reading from the Prophet Isaiah talks about how God chose the people of Israel to make him known to others. His Holy temple will be a house of prayer for all the peoples. The Canaanite woman in today's gospel can represent all of us who come from a non-Jewish background and have come to faith in Jesus. She can

represent also all those people in our world today who are searching for God. She can represent all those who still do not know Jesus but are searching for the truth that will give meaning to their lives.

Today's gospel can challenge us to revalue what we have as Catholics who are part of this community of faith. We are given so many opportunities to come together to hear God's word to us, to be nourished by Jesus present in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist and to grow in faith in the God who loves us. We are given many opportunities to deepen our faith by spending time in prayer and reflection. Do we value those opportunities? Do we look forward to the Eucharist as a time to be nourished by the Lord and to grow in our love for Him? Do we pray that our faith will grow ever deeper and influence all that we do?

Today's gospel also challenges us to respect the faith journeys that others are making. We are challenged to look for the signs of God's presence in the lives of others and to rejoice in whatever we can see. Today's gospel helps us to remember again that God works beyond any boundaries that we may wish to place upon God. For God, no one is a stranger, no one a foreigner.