

St Thomas Church
Lent II
March 8, 2020
rmcneely+

“we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs
under thy table”

One of the great benefits of our church is its liturgy

Ancient liturgy

Which over the Centuries has been

Refined

And honed,

Scores of great thinkers have worked with it over the
centuries

To make it useful

To make it pertinent to our lives

This great benefit is no more real than in the Lenten Season

The Church has carefully written

the collects

and selected the Epistles

and Gospels for the Lenten season

to provide us comfort,

fortitude

and guidance.

The study of them can be a valuable Lenten discipline.

Last week's Gospel, the Temptations of Christ

Brought us forward to our own fast and discipline

And the so practical advice and warning of Satan's

Temptations
Today's Gospel is an abject lesson in the state of mind,
heart
and soul
in which we must approach our Lenten task

If we are to get through the Lenten boot-camp
if we are to profit from the work
the pain and
the absolution and freedom from our sins
we must first achieve
the posture,
the frame of mind,
heart
and soul that will allow it all to happen.

Today's Gospel: the story of the woman of Canaan, is the perfect example for us. A gentile woman who sincerely sought Jesus' healing for her daughter.

But the manner in which Jesus responds to the woman of Canaan
is in such stark contrast
with all other accounts of His compassionate ministry that
we are almost shocked by the way He treats her.

The Jesus we expect to see;
the man of love and compassion,
the Son of God

who came into the world to save us,
is missing from most of the story.
I feel compelled to talk with you about it. This one is deep.
We know from other Gospel accounts that Jesus means to
change our lives. That change is most likely to occur
and we are most likely to understand His Word,
when we have to work to find it.

He often tries us,
not to see how well we are learning
(He already knows that),
but to show us something about ourselves.
Today's Gospel contains three trials.

Silence

The first one is silence. He gives silence to the woman's
plea. Silence is something that barely exists in our lives
anymore. It's too bad. There is great value in silence.

Sometimes it is only in silence that we can hear the word of
God in our hearts. As the psalm teaches sometimes we
must "be still and know that I am God".

This silence trial is one for both the woman
and His apostles.
Let's see who aces the test and who fails it.

The apostles tell Jesus that this woman is a nuisance
She keeps wailing on and demanding,

get rid of her.
The apostles fail the trial.

But the woman's reaction is to pray all the more. She prays through God's silence. Sometimes we must learn to be persistent in our prayers;

to endure
until the time is right
according to God's will,
not our own.

Deliberately Induced Frustration

Jesus offers the second trial:

He rejects the woman,
telling her He is come only to minister unto the Jews and
she is a gentile.

We know from the prophets and the Gospels that Jesus came to save us all.

The rejection is a trial.

How will the apostles react to Jesus' statement?

Will they stand up for the woman, even if she is a Gentile?

Sometimes Jesus places obstacles in our path to force us to struggle to understand His lesson.

Truth discovered has a much deeper impact than truth merely told.

He tells his apostles to feed 5000 people when they don't have enough for 50; He puts them in a boat one day with a storm coming up that threatens to drown them.

I think some of the mysteries of the faith are all about making us discover the truth of God.

In our struggle to try to understand
there are other discoveries
that reveal things about ourselves
and about God
that bring us deeper meaning
and bring us closer to Him.

The question in this second trial is:
Will the apostles see the error of their ways?
Will they see beyond their selfish interest?
As is so often the case with them
and sadly too often with us:
not this time.

You can almost feel the apostles gloat when Jesus tells the woman that He came only for the Jews .

Way to go Lord,
get rid of her.
High fives all around.

What of the woman? Will she become so disheartened that she bows her head and slowly slinks back to her stricken daughter?

The woman came to Our Lord, knelt at His feet and said a perfect prayer of just three words:

“ Lord, help me”.

Instead of lashing out at Jesus for treating her so poorly, she examines herself inwardly and prays all the more.

“Lord, help me”.

She seeks the Lord’s guidance,

“Lord, help me.”

Jesus has made her prove and thus improve her faith. He has withdrawn from her to draw her closer to Him.

A test of love and of faith
Now, the third and hardest trial of them all:
Jesus seemingly rebukes the prayer.
Not only that,
 but He cuts her off and then insults her.
He equates the woman with the dogs.
Now, You must understand,
 in the culture of the time and place;
 dogs were the unclean scavengers,
 the lowest,
 most despised, of creatures.

They fed on the filth,
 refuse
 and the garbage
(which Waste management did not collect once a week).

It is one thing for the apostles to mull it in their minds, that this woman is a nuisance and things would be easier if she

is sent away, but to hear the words out loud meant the apostles would face their beliefs.

Would they be moved by the woman's lament? Jesus was trying them. It was a test of their love. Would hearing the ugliness of their thoughts persuade them? Would any of them find charity in their hearts; Christian love?

No.

Not today.

The apostles fail the trial again.

What of the woman of Canaan?

Will she finally collapse under the insult and go away?

Will she, in anger,

chastise our Lord

and fight with Him for the awful way He is treating her?

Or will her love for her daughter

or her faith in Jesus

be so deep

that even in the face of the meanest of insults,

her love

and her faith

will give her the strength to press on.

Her response?

It's unbelievable:

In abject humility and purpose, she says:

"Truth Lord."

Still calling Him Lord,
 she accepts
 that she is the lowest of the low,
 utterly devoid of all worth or merit.
 “Truth Lord”, She says.

But even us dogs, eat of the crumbs of the Master’s table.
 Even us dogs receive the mercy of God.
 Do you hear the echoes of the communion liturgy?

“We are not worthy
 so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table”.
 Jesus sometimes exercises those of great faith
 with great trials.
 He tempers us
 like steel in the fire,
 purifies us in the trial of fire
 like the jeweler purifies gold in the crucible.

The woman of Canaan perfectly personifies the contrite
 heart necessary for us to approach God.
 And that is our lesson for today and why this story is the
 gospel for the second Sunday in Lent

She approaches as the lowest of the low,
 devoid of any thought of her own merit,
 humbly seeking her daughter’s spiritual health.
 She personifies the words of the Lenten Season collect:

“Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we,
 worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our

wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy perfect remission and forgiveness.”

We are prepared for the greatest of God’s mercies
when we set aside our notions of entitlement.

The woman of Canaan becomes the model of exactly
the frame of mind,
heart
and soul of the penitent.

If we could only be more like her in our Lenten devotion,
discipline and meditation.

The trial is over.

The purpose fulfilled.
the mask comes off
and the Jesus we know
shines through.

“O woman, great is thy faith, Be it unto thee as thou wilt”.

This Gospel is presented to us in Lent,
when the season,
scripture,
the liturgy,
the music
the vestments,
and even the flowers
call out to us to consider
our lives,
our faith

and practice,
to atone with God
and become closer to Him in preparation for Easter.

Has He tested you and me?

Have we prayed through the silence of God?
Have we, in the silence, heard His voice in our hearts?

Have we struggled with the obstacles He has put in our way
to discover His truth?

Have we faced His test of love
His test of faith
His test of endurance;
has He required that you and I
endure
and endure until His time is right?

And perhaps most important of all; as the woman of
Canaan,

can we ignore what we may perceive to be our many
merits

can we in abject humility;

and despite all our faults,

all our sins and warts,

summon the faith to know and to truly accept His
forgiveness and the love of God?

Are we more like the apostles or more like the woman of
Canaan?

It is the penitential season of Lent;

Lord, Help Us.

Lord, help us.

Lord, help us.

