

*Ordinary Time 20A 2017*

*The Persistence of Faith*

**Persistence:** There are people who are always persistent. It doesn't matter what you say to them. It doesn't even matter if you insult them; they are always persistent. They know what they want; and so they are persistent. The woman of today's gospel is a case in point. Her daughter was being tormented by a demon, and she was single-minded in her determination: She wanted Jesus to heal her daughter.

**Problem:** But there was a problem however. The woman was a foreigner, a Gentile; she did not belong to the people of Israel. And so, when she approached Jesus, he responded that God had sent him to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His mission was to the people of God, the people of Israel. Salvation for the Gentiles would have to wait until later. To emphasize this Jesus tells the woman that it is not right to take the food of the gospel that belongs to the people of God and to give it to the dogs! What an insult! Supremely aware of his mission, Jesus says that it would be wrong to give the gospel at this time to outsiders, to foreigners, to dogs!

**Persistence:** But the woman will not be deterred, even though Jesus has insulted her. In a remarkable play on words, she turns the tables on Jesus and says, "That may be true, but even dogs are willing to eat the scraps that fall from the table." To the best of my knowledge this is the only time in the Gospels that someone gets the better of Jesus, and it is a woman! She accepts that she does not belong to God's people. She acknowledges she is a foreigner. She even endures Jesus' insult. She doesn't want everything. She only wants the scraps fall from the table.

**Faith:** What faith, what trust in Jesus! Even though Jesus refuses her, the woman persists because she knows that Jesus, and only Jesus, can heal her daughter. And so, Jesus says to her,

“O woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish.” And the woman’s daughter is healed. The little girl is healed because her mother is persistent, her mother believes and trusts in the power of God; she believes in Jesus.

**Two Kinds of Believers:** There are two kinds of believers: those who persist in faith and those who do not. On the one hand, there are believers who begin their life in Christ by trusting and believing in Christ, giving themselves entirely to him. But then, at a certain point in their life, when it becomes difficult for them to believe, or when they face adversity, they do not persist in faith. They say, “I no longer believe because God does not answer my prayers.” “I no longer believe because the Church and those who attend church are hypocritical.” “I no longer believe because I was insulted by this or that person that person.” And then comes the most tragic moment. Because they no longer believe in God’s power in Christ, they are reduced to believing and trusting in themselves and themselves alone. How sad!

On the other hand, there are people like the unnamed woman of today’s gospel, people on the margins of society, people who have always believed no matter how difficult their life circumstances. Indeed, the more difficult the circumstances of their life, the more they believe and trust in the power of God in Christ. They believe and trust in the power of God in Christ because they know how foolish it is to trust and believe in themselves alone. They know that only God in Jesus save them. They know that Jesus is their life and salvation. They know that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus, and in Jesus alone. And because they know this, they believe even when others insult and reject them. Like Abraham, they continue to believe when there appears to be no reason to believe. The wisdom they have come to understand is this: if we do not believe and trust in the power of God in Christ, what is there to believe and trust in? If we do

not believe in the power of God in Christ to save us, what will save us, who will redeem us, who has the power to give us new life?