

Wow, do we have some powerful readings for this weekend. When I first read them a few weeks ago they took my breath away. There are so many things to talk about in these readings that I don't know where to begin. Then I began to think to myself.

There are so many things going on in my life right now that I feel like the Canaanite woman. I feel left out on things going on in the parish, because I am not able to commit time to the things I want to do. I have decisions to make and can't seem to find answers. I try to ask others opinions but they have their own problems to deal with in life. I feel ignored and put off by God, because compared to other people's problems, the things that are bothering me might seem small in comparison. But you know what, they are still happening to me, and I still need answers, and my problems still bother me.

But I persevere; I continue to do what I can, to ask others for help and most importantly to pray. Can you relate to this, do you sometimes feel the same way?

This Sunday's Gospel reading (Mt.15: 21-28) presents us with one of Christianity's most enduring models of perseverance, the Canaanite woman. She is at the end of her rope. The Scripture tells us that her daughter was tormented by a demon.

We don't see the long nights of caring for her daughter in her fits of anguish. We don't see the gut-wrenching helplessness this widow would have felt as she watched her suffer. What we do see is a woman determined not to let her one chance of healing for her daughter pass her by. Motivated by love, she would not let Jesus ignore her or tell her, "No."

Her persistence pays off as she secures the word from Jesus that her daughter would indeed be healed. The story of this nameless pagan woman will be forever told by Christians as an example of persistence.

But this gospel is not just a story about the persistence of one person but it is also a lesson for us on how we sometimes do things and how Christ wants us to act.

When Jesus was stopped by the Canaanite woman He did not exactly welcome her with open arms. . She was a Gentile having nothing to do with Judaism. Acting like the Jews of his day, Jesus ignores her pleas for help for her daughter. Acting according to cultural norms, Jesus duplicates the behavior of his fellow Jews: "Jesus did not say a word to answer her." Uncomfortable with her persistence, the disciples plead for Jesus to get rid of her. Jesus, offering the customary response of Jews to non-Jews says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of

the house of Israel." the woman debated that statement with Jesus and this discussion proved to Jesus the woman's faith, and He granted her request.

That Jesus would have healed a Gentile and a foreigner would have been cause for scandal. She was not part of the group. She was an outsider. Jesus acted as the customs would dictate that He should have acted, but then Jesus taught us something. With Jesus, there are no outsiders. Did Jesus' disciples understand the lesson? Maybe not right then and there, but sometime later Paul got it.

Paul, writing to the Romans, declares himself the "apostle of the Gentiles," and seems to identify more with them than with his own people, the Jews. "I glory in my ministry," he writes, "in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them." Paul understood the concept of sharing the faith.

The reading from *Romans* refers to the many times that Paul visited various cities. When he visited a city, he preached to the Jews first. If they rejected the Gospel of Christ, Paul then preached to the gentiles. Many times the Jewish people were so inspired by the faith of the Gentiles that they took another look and opened themselves up to faith.

That's why Paul says that their being closed to faith, being closed to the Gospel of Christ resulted in the gentiles receiving faith, and ultimately led to the Jews embracing that faith.

Now the question is do we get it? When we worship as a community, we are exposed to each other's faith. We are inflamed by each other's faith. When we bring up the gifts of bread and wine in the offertory procession, we use these symbols to represent all that we have and all that we are. We offer these gifts to God, and He transforms them into the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Eternal Sacrifice of Love. Who are we to keep this love to ourselves?

Just like in the time of Paul we too are being watched. There may be strangers here today among us. Foreigners to our parish who are watching how we sing and respond, how we receive Christ in communion, how we greet those we do not know. You could be the one who will strengthen their faith.

Faith is a raging fire. It spreads from person to person. When we are exposed to a person of faith, our faith grows. As our faith grows, we ignite others with the fire of God's love. As others grow in faith, our faith increases. This Fire is the Fire of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can stop the flame. Nothing can stop the Spirit.