

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time: August 16, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

Reflection on the Gospel

Today's Gospel is one that spoke to me in different ways over the years. As a child, I was pleased that Jesus cured the little girl; I did not understand why He talked about dogs, but the heart of the story came through. Years later I was disappointed by Jesus' seemingly rude challenge to the mother, but heartened by her most-fitting response, smart and unforgettable, and apparently one that moved Jesus. Even the dogs get crumbs. Hmmmm. Today questions arise, and I let them in. Who would have the nerve to challenge Jesus? Why did Jesus compare her to a dog? And, most importantly for me, what is this Faith that Jesus praises so much?

Many years ago, I taught in a small Catholic High School. One of our programs involved this very story, and a charming, spunky sophomore, Ingrid, played the desperate mother. And desperate she was. Ingrid howled and wailed, circled Jesus like a dervish, laid on the ground and grabbed Jesus' ankles and would not let go. It was almost comical--yes, it was comical. But it brought the point home. Jesus would have been exhausted and ready to make any concession just to get rid of her. Her faith won out.

Faith??? Of course. The part of me that identifies with outcasts, the overlooked, and dogs, doesn't link faith to any doctrinal beliefs. But neither with histrionics and desperation. Instead, faith for me involves a tremendous amount of trust in God as Father of all Who will care for each one of us. It also involves the willingness to speak and act to that trust. Imagine if the woman at the well, the woman with the hemorrhage, and the one in today's readings merely shrugged at the difficulty of it all and walked away. How much poorer we would all be! Yet all three trusted God, and spoke to that trust with courage, acceptance of risk, and more than a little spunk.

Liz Hasan