

Without a doubt, my favorite part of the hospital to visit is neonatal care. To peer through the window of the nursery and see all the newborn babies is a heart-warming sight. Even better is visiting with the proud parents of a newborn and maybe having the pleasure of holding the baby boy or girl. I then like to give a prayer of thanksgiving to God with them for the life of this little one and ask the Lord that He will continue to watch over this child until he or she is brought into God's kingdom through Holy Baptism.

On the other hand, the saddest part of the hospital for me to visit is pediatric care or pediatric ICU- where sick or injured children have been admitted. Just walking through the doors into the pediatric ward is enough to choke me up, I admit. If you've ever had a child in the hospital, you probably know exactly what I mean. I'll never forget the heart-sick feeling of having Nathan hospitalized twice before his second birthday with lung problems, once with the RSV virus and the second time with pneumonia. That was the time his doctor had to be called to come to the hospital at 4 AM as Nathan almost didn't make it through the night. Thankfully, the Lord saw Nathan through it and now today at 20 years old judging by how loud I hear him yelling when he works on cars his lungs turned out just fine!

But my point is this: When your child is sick or hurt, it's one of the most helpless feelings in the world. Try to put yourself, then, in the place of the Canaanite woman from today's Gospel.

She is *desperate* to find help for her daughter who was demon-possessed. Like a parent today who has a child with a rare illness, she had likely sought help from every possible source, but no one could give her any help. Still, this courageous woman refused to give up hope.

As this remarkable scene in our text opens, she comes to Jesus for help and hope. Somehow, she has heard that this man- this Jesus of Nazareth- is visiting her native region of Tyre and Sidon by the great Mediterranean Sea. The text doesn't tell us for sure, but she may very well have been a "God-fearer", someone who trusted in the true and living God of Israel, despite the fact that most of her neighbors and fellow citizens of that area would not have worshipped the LORD, the one true God.

So, what was it that drew the Canaanite woman to *Jesus* that day? She may have heard of this Man's teachings and miracles. She was a desperate mother, after all. Could He, just maybe, pull off a bit of "magic" for her daughter? Was this how she viewed Jesus, as a just a "magic man" who could impress people

with a few parlor tricks? Or, was He something more? Had she come to believe that this was none other than the promised “Son of David”, God’s Messiah come to restore people’s broken relationship with God and to make all things new? Did she decide to come to Jesus for help that day because she sincerely believed what the Scriptures said about Him, that He is the Christ, the Messiah of God?

Whatever the case may have been, she knew she had no reason to expect *any* help from Jesus. After all, she was a Gentile. She came from a people that did not believe in the LORD God of Israel. More than that, she is a descendant of the *Canaanite* people. They were the ancient, sworn *enemies* of the Israelites. What’s more, Jesus had likely come to this region for rest and teaching time with His disciples, not to heal demon-possessed children of an unbelieving people.

When she arrives, Jesus’ disciples try to turn her away. She is upsetting them and causing a commotion with her constant cries for help. They know she’s not part of their race or religion. To the disciples she’s an outsider, and a very annoying outsider, at that! So, they plead with Jesus to get rid of her.

But this distraught mother from the region of Tyre and Sidon, that heathen area by the Mediterranean Sea, is not only bold, but she is *persistent*! She simply will not give up! She keeps following Jesus and His disciples and keeps on crying out for help: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon” (v. 22).

Jesus’ reaction to her cry is very surprising: Silence. But Jesus has a good reason for doing what He’s doing. He’s testing her faith and in the process Jesus teaches His disciples, and us today, some much-needed lessons.

The disciples can say what they will about her, but this Canaanite woman expresses a *humble, confident* faith. Something that was often lacking in the disciples themselves. She knows Jesus can help her. She ignores the disciples’ disdain, Jesus’ silent treatment, and even His apparent brush-off: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” She humbly and worshipfully kneels before Jesus *despite* His seeming rejection of her. She comes to Jesus as a beggar before the Master. She is nothing but given to by Jesus. She pleads for His mercy and help for her daughter.

What a lesson for us to learn! We also must come before Jesus with a humble, confident faith. We have no right to expect Jesus’ help because of our religion or ethnic origin. We, too, come as beggars before the Master, pleading for His mercy. We are truly nothing but given to by Him.

Jesus responds to our faith-filled plea by sharing with us the fullness of His kindness and forgiveness, which He earned for us on Calvary's cross. Our Baptism into Christ and our trusting faith in Him give us confidence that God will "be gracious to us and bless us" (Ps 67:1).

Second, the Canaanite woman gives evidence of a childlike, trusting faith. She places her hope and trust in the hands of this man from Galilee. She believes that Jesus can rescue her daughter from the grip of Satan.

Have you ever gone on a hike with a young child, maybe your one of your own or a grandchild where you had to cross a rickety bridge or a narrow path near the edge of a steep embankment or cliff? If so, maybe that little boy or girl has grasped your hand tightly and pleaded, "Don't let go!" When we assure him or her that they are safe in our grasp, the child will have the courage and confidence to go forward with us. He or she trusts that we will hold on and not let go. In a much, much greater way we can trust Jesus to hang on to us, no matter what dangers or obstacles we may face as we journey through the life. We go forward in faith, following Christ and serving Him, with the confidence that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

A few years ago, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sponsored a hymn-writing contest. They received quite a few original hymns. One entry that never won a prize and probably never made it into any hymnal was entitled "God's Grip Don't Slip." That is not the best grammar, but the message is clear: God won't ever let go of you. Nothing and no one can snatch you from the grip of your loving, powerful Savior. Jesus has rescued us from the grip of Satan through His perfect life, victorious death, and triumphant resurrection. We are safe and secure in His almighty grip, now and forever.

A third thing Jesus teaches His disciples and us here is that this outsider, this Canaanite woman, is blessed with a patient, ***persistent*** faith. She patiently waits for Jesus to respond to her cry for mercy. She endures silence and what could have seemed like scorn. She prayerfully and persistently pleads for Jesus to help her daughter. She has a faith in Jesus that will not give up or let go.

There are times when ***we*** must wait patiently for our Lord to answer our prayers. Sometimes He may seem to be silent for a long period of time. We don't always understand the reasons why we have to wait for an answer to our prayer. But, as with the Canaanite woman, the Lord could very well be waiting for the right time to respond.

It's precisely during that time of waiting that our faith in Christ is often times strengthened. Jesus encourages us to be persistent in our prayers for His mercy and help. God often speaks to us in the midst of the silence. God once spoke to the prophet Elijah in a gentle whisper, not in the wind, earthquake, or fire that directly preceded His whisper. Our Lord speaks to us today through the gentle whisper of His Word and Sacraments.

Remember in the text how the Canaanite woman calls Jesus, "Lord" and humbly kneels before him? She knew who *she* was, and she knew what *Jesus* could do for her. She asked for a table scrap as a dog, but she receives a place at the table with huge blessings for her and her daughter.

For us too. It's just the right posture to kneel before Jesus when we come to the Communion rail to eat at His Table. We humbly ask for His blessings, even though we do not deserve to be in His home. Yet the wafer is placed into our mouths. A sip of wine touches the tongue. Jesus' very body and blood are present, and those are not leftover scraps. "Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Take and drink. This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin unto life everlasting."

We learn from the faith of the Canaanite woman to humbly ask for God's blessings and to be patient and persistent in our prayers. It's then that we discover the fullness of our Lord's power and peace. We receive His answers to our prayers according to His will and timetable - which are always better than ours!

A husband was seriously ill in the hospital for several days. Things were very touch and go. During that time his wife took very literally the admonition of St. Paul to "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). As his recuperation suddenly began to progress rapidly, he said to his wife one day, "I think God answered your prayers so that He could have some peace and quiet."

That may be funny, but that's not how God works. Jesus did not answer the prayers of the Canaanite woman so He could have some peace and quiet. He answered her prayer and answers *our* prayers so *we* can have His peace and hope, as we receive anew His mercy and strength and comfort, no matter what the outcome may be. There are times when our faith may become weak. But we live in confidence with the blessed assurance that "God's grip don't slip." He will never let go of you! Amen!