



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel is a difficult Gospel. It seems that Jesus is insulting this Canaanite woman, ignoring her request for her daughter's healing, and then calling her a dog. It is in these moments when we don't understand the Scriptures, that, more than ever, we need to approach the Bible with humility, asking God for understanding.

I've preached on this passage before, including recently when it came up at daily Mass (August 5). As I continue to ponder over this passage, I am reminded (and so I remind you) that God loves each person He made – passionately, intimately, devotedly, tenderly. He loves you so much! He loved that Canaanite woman. He loves us so much that He wants us to be with Him forever (a.k.a. – “God wants to marry us!”). He loves us so much that He *literally* died for us, for *you*.

It is hard to approach this Gospel with trust and faith in His love since it seems that, in this moment, Jesus is anything *but* loving! Yet, somehow, this passage is revealing to us the love of God. Somehow, this encounter – which Matthew specifically chose to recount – reveals to us the Fire of Mercy, which is the Heart of Christ, the furnace of passionate love which resides in the Heart of God! If we don't understand this (which I can say, I don't fully understand), we need to approach God in humility begging for that understanding.

Do we really trust that God loves us so much? Do we trust Him, even when He seems distant and silent? Do we trust Him when His timing is so different from our timing? Do we really mean, “Thy will be done” when we pray the *Our Father*, or do we mean “**My** will be done,” or “Thy will be done... as long as I understand it and agree”? The silence of God can make us feel so empty, forsaken, discouraged, and we may even despair. Yet, Jesus shows that this silence is not really distance from God. Jesus experienced that emptiness on the Cross when He cried out, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Matthew 27:46). The silence of God, the feeling of distance and forsakenness, is an experience that Jesus has *redeemed*. He went through it to show us that when we go through it, we are **closest to God**, not furthest away.

Somehow, in the “abandonment” by God, He uses it to help us to become the best version of ourselves. Our emptiness is an invitation to yearn for God even more. Our weakness is an invitation to rely totally, constantly and explicitly on Him. Even when God seems to reject us (as He seemed to reject the Canaanite woman), Jesus is really inviting us to press on into faith, to persevere, as did the Canaanite woman.

In fact, Jesus not only encourages this woman to show the depths of her faith, He uses her to show His disciples what true faith looks like. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we hear over and over again about how “little” the disciples' faith is (including last week, as Peter sunk into the sea after walking on water). Here, Jesus says, “**Great is your faith!**” (Matthew 15:28).

An image that has helped me to understand God's silence, delays, and even His, “Nos”: if you hold an ice-cream cone out to a child, he will take it from you, looking at the ice-cream, and not you. But if you hold it out of his reach, he'll keep asking until finally he looks at you. More than anything else, Jesus wants to have relationship with us. He wants us to look not only at His gifts, but at Him. When He gives us what we want as soon as we ask, we will inevitably stop looking at Him. But if He delays, if He seems to say, “No,” eventually we will have to look at *Him*.

I wonder if this is what is happening in the Gospel today. I wonder if this is why God allows bad things to happen to us, why He allows us to feel His silence and distance. May we use every opportunity of emptiness, forsakenness, discouragement and despair to turn our eyes to God, persevering in faith and trust in His love.