

Dear members and friends of St. John,

We read from Matthew chapter 15: *"And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly."* (vv. 21-28, ESV)

Have you ever noticed how people go through the **process of suffering in different ways**? For some, it's completely debilitating, removing from them the ability to accomplish anything. For others, even though trials and tribulations pile up like the winter snows, life continues. They look toward to the future, and seek to accomplish all that they can in the present day. Life has new challenges, but it's not going to keep them down.

The Canaanite woman from our reading was one of these people who could not be stopped. From this, we learn that **the faith that wins is a faith that has faced adversity, and does not give up**. We see this in this woman. Her daughter was incapacitated with a demon spirit. The mother's life was upended by her daughter's condition, and both lives were desperate to find a remedy. The mother must get help. To obtain relief, she needed a faith that could give her the courage to go to Jesus.

While this may sound simple, to go to a prophet of Israel was not easy to do. She was a Gentile and a stranger. From this we see something remarkable about **faith: It has the power to carry us through the most difficult of trials**. And so, she went.

What she discovered is that **her faith would be tested again and again**. In her case, she must face the **test of silence**. Jesus did not say a word to her; He paid no attention to her. But His silence was the silence of love. And faith that wins will not take silence for an answer. God had promised, and He has the power to fulfill the promises He makes. This the woman believed. She saw in Jesus a greater man than Elijah and John the Baptist. To her He was God.

Next, **the faith that wins** must face the **test of patience and delay**. The woman came and found no enthusiastic reception. The disciples were irritated, and Jesus paid no attention to her. No help seemed to be in sight. However, the persistent woman won out.

Finally, **the faith that wins** must even face the **test of rebuke**. Jesus compares her to dogs. He reminds her of her past. Even that does not drive her away. Dogs get the crumbs. She, too, is entitled to that consideration.

And so, by **the strength of her faith**, God is able to restore her daughter's life, and therefore her own life as well. Christ would not give up on her. He tests her again and again, and **develops a heroic faith in her** that provides a perpetual example to all of us who are tempted to become impatient and discouraged because our burdens and troubles are not lifted at our first cry. With these thoughts in mind, we can read the woman's story with greater appreciation.

Is Christ developing **a heroic faith in you?** We first must realize that **heroic faith is not something that we can develop on our own.** It's not some fuzzy feeling inside, nor a muscle that can be exercised to make it stronger and stronger. No, faith is a gift from above, that always points outside of us to our Savior. We see Him through the eyes of faith as our God who is able to rescue us from all harm and danger. Since **faith comes from God by hearing His word** (Romans 10:17), **faith is also strengthened by God's word.** The Sacrament of the Altar is a visible, tangible form of God's living word. Therefore, God's word and the Sacrament of the Altar are able to strengthen us.

As the Christian (who is alive in Christ) suffers, he or she is drawn to the very source of God's power and strength (Romans 1:16-17). As we face the various tests of faith, silence, patience and delay, rebuke, and others, God is using this to draw us closer to Him. He is using this time to refocus us on what is important. He's providing us with a stronger faith that is able to withstand whatever may come our way. **In this, we see suffering as another gift from God!** He's working His good in us as we suffer!

Suffering is universal. However, all our suffering can be lightened and made easier if we come to the Great Physician who never fails us. We come to Him through worship and Bible study. By His grace we come through suffering as heroes of faith who can face every ordeal of life with greater confidence and with a greater courage. *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4: 13).

Pastor Travis