

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, August 16, 2020

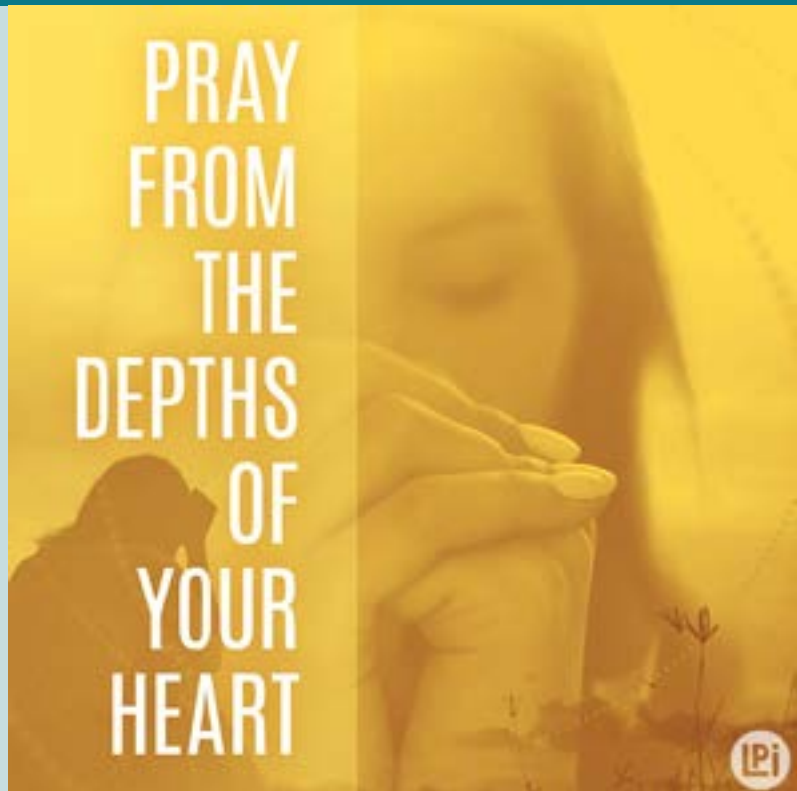
Sincerity in Prayer, Humility in Faith

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28



This Sunday we see a woman whose plight has been ongoing, and she seems to be at her wit's end with no answers on the horizon. She clearly loves her sick daughter, so this mother — a Canaanite who is not a part of the chosen people of Israel — attempts the unthinkable because she's run out of options. She humiliates herself with her desperate plea. Jesus himself seems not to respond at first, and the disciples consider her a nuisance and want her to leave so they can be about the rest of their day. Instead of becoming angry and stomping away or becoming bitter at the lack of assistance, she worships Jesus, despite what this would surely do to her reputation. This catches his attention, and a quick dialogue ensues. She knows the inherent tension between the Canaanites and the Israelites, but this does not deter her from seeking help from the only option left. In the end, her prayer is answered according to her desire.

What a model of faith!!! So many of us are accustomed to prayers; we learned them when we were young. But our familiarity with prayers isn't always accompanied by a sincerity in our prayer. We rattle off words while our minds are onto the next task on our day's agenda. Our bodies are present, but our hearts haven't yet left the last moment of pleasure, concern, or anxiety. Our prayer life is fragmented because our need for help has been disconnected from our belief in Jesus' mission to save. Certainly, there are life circumstances that are graver than others that bring us to our knees faster; but that doesn't mean that kneeling in prayer — literally and metaphorically — is limited to the grave and dire situations. [St. John Chrysostom](#) remarks on the "earnestness of her prayer," and this catches the attention of Jesus in a new way. Jesus admires the tenacity of her faith, and then the miracle of her daughter's healing happens. As we review the flow of the text, this mother does not outright ask Jesus to heal her daughter, as it happens in other healing stories of the Gospels. This mother confesses her need for help with a situation

beyond her control. And Jesus recognizes the confidence of her humility, and rewards that with the healing of her daughter. The mother brings all of herself to Jesus, and in her great faith, she sees that the powers of heaven are on her side.

How do we learn, then, to be more present each time we pray?

Listen to yourself breathing. So often, we rush into our times of prayer without properly disposing ourselves for a spiritual encounter. [The Rosary](#) and [Lectio Divina](#) are, for example, powerful tools for penetrating deeper in the mysteries of God, but without a stilled soul, our efforts lack a key ingredient. Taking a few minutes to quiet ourselves — externally and internally — can be a tremendous aid in deepening our prayer life.

Talk less. Listen more. We live in uncertain times. No doubt. There's an anxiety and hostility in the very air we breathe. There's much to complain or at least converse about. We look for answers to the very complicated situations we face. Yet the only answer is Jesus; the only path is towards the Cross and Resurrection. As we learn to listen to ourselves breathing, hopefully, one of the things that will happen is that we learn to listen to that still, small voice hidden in the deepest corner of our hearts. That small voice is so often crowded out by the mechanics of our prayer time and by the constant barrage of distractions in our interior world. If we can become silent, then God's booming voice can be heard.

Live in faith. Sometimes, we forget that we've already read the last chapter in the 'book of life!' We know that, in the end, Jesus wins! We know that Jesus has already shared his winnings with us

because of our Baptism. Yet we approach Jesus in prayer with nonchalantness (If you wanted to do this ...), doubt (I don't know if you can do this, but ...) or sometimes over-meekness (I'll accept whatever you want ...). While there is merit to each of these attitudes, this Canaanite mother gives us an example of the humble boldness of her faith in confessing her need for mercy. She knows she's coming to the Lion of Judah, not — if you'll allow me to be cheeky — to the mouse of Nazareth!

Our prayer life is not rooted in our own strength or resources to find answers to remedies to the complexities of life; rather, it ought to be rooted in Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Each situation we find ourselves in can be seen — with eyes of faith — as opportunities to practice the kind of faith exemplified in the mother of today's Gospel. The prayer of this mother came from her heart to the heart of the only one left for her to ask. It's as if the depths of her heart was speaking to depths of Jesus' heart. Jesus always responds to the prayers that come from the depths of our hearts rather than the multiplicity or eloquence of our words! Would that our prayer life be more like that!

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Lord, I feel as though I am losing my grip
and can barely hang on a moment longer.
In desperation, I reach my hand to you.
Grab me and pulled me out of this mess!
I give my life to you today again, every bit of it.
I am yours. Please help me. Be my God.

No longer will I build my life on shifting sand.
You are my rock, and with your help,
I will establish my life on your firm foundation.
Deliver me from this pit, and I will praise you.
I will tell of your great wonders.
I will make known your wonderful ways,
steadfast love, and unending power.

Thank you! I know you hear me,
and that you save the humble and contrite heart.
Forgive me for my decisions, actions,
and attitudes that got me to this place.
I receive your forgiveness and power to change.
And as I am forgiven, I forgive each person
that has contributed to my temporary defeat,
for my victory is at hand.
You are here.
Amen.