

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Humility Helps Persevere in Prayer

Isaiah 56:1, 6–7; Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8; Romans 11:13–15, 29–32; Matthew 15:21–28

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Have you ever prayed and felt God was silent? How did that make you feel? What did you do in that moment? Did you keep going or wait patiently? How did you pray then?

This weekend's readings remind us to approach prayer with the right attitude. Prayer is how we speak to God, and the Bible is how God speaks to us.

The story of the Canaanite woman teaches us a powerful lesson in humility in prayer. She begged for her daughter's healing but was initially turned away. Jesus seemed to ignore her, and his disciples wanted him to send her away. Then Jesus made surprising remarks about the distinction between Jews and non-Jews. He said, "I am sent only for the lost sheep of Israel" and "It is not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (cf. Mt 15:23-26).

I believe Jesus made these remarks not to insult the woman but to teach his disciples what it means to follow him. Being God's chosen people is a gift that sets them apart, but it also entails responsibility. They are called to be a light and an example to others, so their faith can lead others to God.

Even though things seemed hopeless, the Canaanite woman did not give up. She replied, "Please, Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their master's table" (Mt 15:27). Her response demonstrates persistence and humility in prayer. It shows us what Jesus wants from his followers.

First, she humbly acknowledges her need before God. She does not come with a sense of entitlement but instead asks for mercy. Second, she shows deep devotion to Jesus, calling him Lord and Son of David, much like a child seeking a Father's attention. Finally, she is willing to wait and accept whatever God gives, just as a house dog waits for scraps from the table and is content with what it receives.

Her humility helped her persevere, even when things were difficult. Humility does not mean thinking less of ourselves, but seeing ourselves honestly before God and others. We can do nothing on our own, only with God's grace. Because of our human weakness, we should also be patient with others. Jesus praised the Canaanite woman, who was not part of Israel's faith, for her deep humility in prayer: "Woman, great is your faith. Let it be done to you as you wish" (Mt 15:28). She fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that God would welcome outsiders into his house to serve him (cf. Is 56:6-7). Her humble prayer is an example for all of us. God listens to the prayers of the humble—those who do not brag about their faith or long prayers, do not take pride in their good deeds, and do not focus on saying the perfect words, but always give credit to God's grace.

The most powerful prayers do not come from intense focus or passion but from humble surrender. Humility means recognizing that we are nothing without God and need His grace. True prayer requires humility; without it, prayer is not real.

We all find it hard to be humble. Still, we should keep trying because this is what Jesus wants from us. He told us to learn from him because he is gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29). Jesus did not ask us to learn from him because he is generous, hardworking, or a great teacher, but because his humility is our example. Our Lord Jesus wants his followers to be humble because humility helps us grow in all other virtues. Without humility, pride can twist even our best qualities.

Humility is also the key to truly receiving Jesus and to understanding the Holy Eucharist's healing power. We should not merely say the words but mean them in our hearts: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."

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