

Homily.20OrdA.8.16.20  
St. Bernard Church  
Deacon Tim Sullivan

It helps me, and it might help you, to think of the life of Jesus as theater, as a play. God the Father wrote the script and gave it to His Son. And He not only gave it to Jesus, but to all the players in the drama that had to unfold.

So in today's Gospel, there are basically two players, two parts. There is Jesus, and then there is this woman.

You have to appreciate how improbable this meeting is.

The first line in the Gospel tells us that Jesus left Israel and walked north to pagan territory outside Israel. That's very strange. Why did He go there?

Next, we're told that a woman from that pagan area came south to find Jesus. Who is she? How does she know anything about Jesus? How far would she have gone to find Him?

Right off the bat, this woman is shouting, and she refers to Jesus as "Lord, Son of David." How in the world does she know He is the Son of David? And on what basis does she call Him "Lord?"

What's more amazing than the fact of their coming upon one another is their dialogue with one another.

At first Jesus responds to the woman's demand with silence. Then He ridicules her, comparing her to a lowly dog. This comes across so harsh to us. But Jesus knew His lines.

Despite saying to the woman what seemed so cruel, Jesus knows something about this woman that has touched His heart.

It's the woman's daughter who is tormented by a demon. Yet the woman's first words to Jesus are "Have pity on me." After Jesus has told her that His mission is only to the Jews, the woman says to Him, "Help me."

The woman's choice of words tells Jesus that she has the heart of a mother. A mother internalizes the pain of her children, and so this woman is saying to Jesus, "Have pity on me. Help me," by curing my daughter, for I cannot bear her suffering any longer.

Jesus is moved by the fact that this woman from a pagan land shares the heart of Jesus' own mother, who will soon internalize the suffering of her child.

This woman and the mother of Jesus have something else in common besides a suffering child. They both have a very, very deep humility.

Just as Mary has said to Gabriel, at the news that she would bear the Savior of humanity, “May it be done unto me as you have said,” this woman compares herself to a dog that is content to eat the scraps, the crumbs, that fall on the floor from the master’s table.

The reference to food is so fitting. The woman is starving for mercy. Somehow she knows that this man from Israel is the only person on earth who can heal her daughter. And so she begs for just one scrap, one crumb of His mercy.

For me, and for many of us, this story is embarrassing, maybe even humiliating. For us Catholics, we don’t just get a crumb from the Master’s table. In the Eucharist, we get the Master Himself.

When we approach the altar to receive Jesus, do we have the humility of the woman in today’s Gospel? Are we starving for mercy, for one scrap, one crumb of mercy?

Or does our pride, our sense of self-sufficiency, keep us from being hungry for Jesus?

A few years ago, I was at a meeting at a parish in a small town in upstate New York. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a mission statement for the parish. What came to me at this meeting was to suggest this mission statement: “To feed Jesus to a starving world.”

That wasn’t accepted for various reasons, but it expresses a good mission. The world today is starving for Jesus, for His love, His truth, His grace and the order that He expects from us. One of the messages in our Gospel today is that Jesus is for everyone. But our world is becoming more and more chaotic because more and more we are rejecting Jesus, pushing Him away so that we humans can take over. And that’s not going very well.

I might suggest that before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, each of us might say, in our own words, something like this: “Lord Jesus, I am hungry for you. Please let just one crumb of Your flesh, one drop of Your blood, change my life.”