



TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A

There is the true story of Sephali Begum, a 26-year-old mother from Bangladesh who, out of concern for the future of her daughter, took the desperate step of offering to sell one of her eyes. She intended to use the proceeds to buy land that would provide for her daughter after her own death. Sephali was willing to sacrifice her very self, to protect her daughter from a horrible future beset by the demons of shame, poverty and abuse. Her courage in desperate straits attracted the world's attention to her and her daughter's plight. Individuals and groups provided for her daughter's plight with generosity.

Today in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 15:21-28), we encounter another mother who is desperate for Jesus to heal her daughter who is possessed by a demon. Like any mother, she will move earth and heaven to make her child well again. However, the woman is a Canaanite, which means she is a pagan, or a non-Jew. And, Jesus is deaf to her pleas to him to heal her daughter. Why this show of aloofness and coldness by Jesus to this woman?

Scripture scholars have wrestled with this question, and there seems to be a number of levels on which this story's message is being conveyed. One thought seems to be that Jesus, a rabbi and a Jew and an 'insider' has an obligation to convert the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel.' The Canaanite woman is the ultimate 'outsider' who is not deserving of Jesus' healing. However, this would seem to go against everything that Jesus stands for. Is it a test? Well, I think it is. Because when Jesus says to the woman: "...it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house dogs." The woman matches Jesus' answer by saying: "Ah yes, sir, but even the house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table."

We admire this woman's persistence with Jesus, but, she also knows that Jesus can heal her daughter. And, her faith and persistence has evoked in Jesus a more inclusive approach to his ministry, as the barrier between Jew and non-Jew comes crashing down.

We, can often consider ourselves as the 'insiders' and think that the 'outsiders' have nothing to teach us about faith. But, sometimes our faith can be complacent, and we can take it for granted.

St Paul, was known as the 'apostle' to the pagans, the unbelievers, and in his letter to the Romans he says that all people are imprisoned by sin. But that faith in the mercy of God can bring all to salvation.

The Canaanite woman, a pagan and an unbeliever, came to faith in Jesus because she knew he alone could heal her daughter, let us renew our faith in Jesus as the Saviour who came to save us all from sin and death.

[Fr Kelvin](#)