

O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

IS 56:1, 6-7, PS 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8, ROM 11:13-15, 29-32,



Dcn Frank Sila
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Good morning. The prophet Isaiah writes to us this morning telling us that the Lord's house, "...shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." St. Paul goes on to tell us that, "... the gifts and call of God are irrevocable."

Then, in our Gospel, Matthew shares the story of an outcast seeking help. She was a Canaanite and viewed as unclean by the Jewish community. So strong was the cultural bias that Jesus makes a less than glowing reference to her people. With the woman's persistence, Jesus relents. He reaches across the boundary of religion, culture and gender, responding, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

I want to share with you the story of how Fr. Ken and I met the women we hear of in today's Gospel. Some years back, as Ken and I were leaving the hospital, a woman approached. In a troubled voice, she introduced herself and her story, "My name is Cheryl and my daughter is in the Intensive Care Unit. Could you see her and pray with me? The three of us went to the daughter's room. I saw Brianna for the first time. She was a young woman, college age. She was comatose, intubated and connected to a machine that assisted her breathing. She had several IV's dripping and was curled on a Stryker bed in a fetal position. Cheryl said that she had been that way for several days and that the doctors told her that morning that Brianna's body was shutting down. The EEG showed little activity and if she did wake, it was feared that her mental capacity would be diminished and she would not be able to breath on her own. There were test results showing her heart working at only 20% capacity. It made for a parent's worst nightmare. The weekend had started for Brianna with a party that included alcohol and pills. Brianna collapsed and was rushed by ambulance to the ICU.

Cheryl told us that neither she nor Brianna attended church but she thought Brianna might believe in God. Again, she asked, “Will you pray with me?” To the measured thump and wheeze of the ventilator, we prayed.

Several days later, I returned to the hospital and much to my surprise, Brianna was awake. She looked at me with bright eyes and smiled. Her eyes showed a new understanding of something I can only guess at. If the eyes are the window to the soul, then what I sensed there was a freshness; like the air after a morning rain. The breathing tube had been removed but her throat was still too painful to speak. She mouthed, “Thank You.” I looked to her mother. Cheryl said that Brianna was on her way to a full recovery. Brianna experienced the gift of restored health beyond scientific understanding. I cannot help but wonder what she experienced. Did she recall the moment that she was healed?

Cheryl was a loving mother who like the woman in our Gospel went outside the norms and boundaries, asking two strangers to pray with her. The faith of these women were not drawn from the rules and prescriptions of a religious community. Their faith flowed from an inner compass and conviction that love will make all things possible. The Lord heard a parent’s plea and whispered, “Great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”

I would have loved to follow up with Brianna but when I returned a day later Cheryl and Brianna were gone, the room was empty. Smiling, one of the nursing staff told me that Brianna had been discharged in full health. It kind of felt like Easter; a smiling nurse in white with an empty room telling me Brianna is gone. Jesus heals today as he did some 2000 years ago.

As parents, we are to be an extension of God's love to our children. In loving them, we teach them to love. In teaching them to love, we invite them into the deeper mystery of Christ's life and love. By loving her daughter, the Canaanite woman entered into the Divine Mystery. Through that mystery of love, she and Jesus were able to recognize each other. Loving family and loving neighbor will always guide our spiritual journey through the mystery of our days.

To paraphrase, Ron Rollheiser, 'The mystery that we live in, is huge, and as we begin to grasp the cosmic and spiritual world, the more the wonder of God is revealed. God is beyond us, beyond our language and imagination. Knowing this, we must be more humble in every encounter and in all that we touch and do. It is there that the sacred is revealed. The Eucharist, because it is one of the rituals given to us by Jesus himself, is one place of our confidence.'

It is in the Eucharist that the Lord Jesus touches and renews.

References

All scripture quotations are taken from;. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

Rolheiser, R. (2011). *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*. New York: Doubleday Religion.

Note: *Someone recently asked what it is like to be a deacon. Do you enjoy it? Because of stories like Brianna's (not her real name) and others like her, the experience of being a deacon is incredibly rich. In caring for others, we are given insight into God's immeasurable love for his people.*