

## 20A

*We remember last Sunday Peter was chided by Jesus because of his lack of faith and trust. Today, in contrast, He praises the Canaanite woman for her steadfast belief. And again last Sunday Jesus invites Peter on to the turbulent waters of the Sea of Galilee, today he seems to ignore the woman completely and keep her at a distance. In both cases there is a testing of faith going on. Peter fails the test and the woman passes with flying colours.*

The woman, I believe, stands for all those whose prayers seem to come up against a wall of stony silence. Remember the gospel tells us that Jesus answered the woman not a word. Even though pressed by his apostles, he seems strangely uninterested. But she is not so easily put off.

There was an article a week or two ago in a national newspaper on Mother Theresa where it stated that she struggled with her prayer life on many occasions as a nun. She was even tempted to leave the convent. God seemed far away. Like the woman in today's gospel her prayers seemed to go unheeded. We could call it her 'dark night of the soul'. Despite all this she hung on doggedly to her faith and never let up on helping the poor of Calcutta.

It appears to me that the closer we're drawn to God, the more distant he may appear. Of course, in reality, God is anything but distant from us. Without Him we would cease to exist. As we say in the Mass 'in Him we live and move and have our being'.

When he puts off answering us it must be in our best interests. It's like when a woman is pursued by a lover, she often plays 'hard to get' and deliberately 'keeps him at arm's length'. If he loves her, he won't be so easily put off. The Canaanite woman is at first frozen out by Jesus, but the story shows that her faith in Him was not based on a whim. Even when He gives the impression of avoiding her, to the annoyance of the apostles, she pursues Him even more'.

But Jesus Himself must have felt a bit like this on the cross when he cried out: 'my God my God why have you forsaken me.' This line taken straight from the psalms was more a prayer of desperation from someone in great distress rather than a cry of despair. When we sometimes get the sense that God is paying no attention to us that's the time to imitate the Canaanite woman who 'stuck to her guns' come what may. Her persistence was amply rewarded.

Yes, we may have urgent needs to pray about – remember the woman's prayer was that a devil would stop tormenting her daughter. How could Jesus turn down that request? If we have a pressing need which hasn't yet been answered in prayer our faith is likely being tested 'like gold in the furnace'. If we fail the first test, like Peter last Sunday, I'm sure he'll afford us further opportunities to prove our mettle if we haven't already given up on Him by then. The woman from Canaan has a great deal to teach us.