**Solidarity with Sisters’ Communal Prayer**

**August 20, 2023 – twentieth sunday in ordinary time**



***“Even the dogs get to eat the scraps that fall from the table.”***

***Mt 15:27***

**HELLOs (Betty Thompson & Suzie De Quattro)**

Betty mutes everyone.

**WELCOME (Terri Butel)**

Welcome, everyone!

* I am Terri Butel and I prepared our prayer for today.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* My thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today:

Debbie Ballard, Kathy & Bill Cavanaugh, Maria Desjardins, Paula Lake, Sister Kay Smalley and Alicia & George Urban. Also, thanks to Norb Bufka and Sister Vera Ruotolo for agreeing to start our sharing today.

* We are always looking for new readers and grateful for all readers. I understand that Kathy Cavanaugh has enough readers for next Sunday, but if you are available to read on September 3rd, please contact Richard McGinnis ([rcmcginnis@live.com](mailto:rcmcginnis@live.com)).

**SETTLING IN (Alicia Urban)**

Take a moment to breathe and to silently name the main distraction weighing on your heart that might keep you from being fully present to our community this morning. (Long pause)

Now give it to Jesus for safekeeping. (Pause)

Enjoy several slow breaths, noticing the weight that has been mercifully lifted. (Pause)

Finally, take a third breath to enter into our community, relieved, welcomed, honored and loved. (Pause)

Now let us begin our prayer together by singing **Eye Has Not Seen**.

**OPENING SONG** **-** Eye Has Not Seen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRyOS0nZr7s>

(play at 1.25 speed, end at 2:55),

**Refrain:**

Eye has not seen, ear has not heard what God has ready for those who love him;

Spirit of love, come, give us the mind of Jesus, teach us the wisdom of God.

When pain and sorrow weigh us down, be near to us, O Lord,

forgive the weakness of our faith, and bear us up within your peaceful word.

**Refrain**

Our lives are but a single breath, we flower and we fade,

yet all our days are in your hands, so we return in love what love has made.

**Refrain**

To those who see with eyes of faith, the Lord is ever near,

reflected in the faces of all the poor and lowly of the world.

**Refrain**

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Debbie Ballard)**

Holy One, how we long to encounter you, for our eyes to meet, to have our prayers answered before we even ask, in the precise manner we desire. But that is our way, not yours. Give us the heart to persist in prayer, regardless of the outcome, so that at least we are healed.

In our gathering this day, we welcome your Spirit to bless us and make us a community of contagious peace and hope, no matter how you answer our prayers. Amen.

**Debbie Ballard:** Now **Terri Butel** will introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Terri Butel)**

Today’s theme is twofold. First it is about persistence in prayer, modeled by a woman, who, in Ron Rolheiser’s words, “is walking on the edge of her country, ethnicity, gender and religion, seeking a miracle.…”

It is also about the widening of Jesus’ mission to include non-Jewish people because of his openness to encounter, to listen and be transformed by compassion. Jesus initially treats the Canaanite woman’s plea for help like a temptation, an attempt to divert him from his mission to the people of the Covenant. Her persistence pushes Jesus to accept that distinctions of gender and nationality are ultimately meaningless. She calls him to remember that God's creation has no borders; humanity knows no nationality.

*(Slight pause)*

Now **Kathy Cavanaugh** will read from the Gospel of Matthew, and **Bill Cavanaugh** will offer questions that will lead us into silence.

**READING 1** Matthew 15: 21-28 **(Kathy Cavanaugh)**

Jesus left there and departed for the district of Tyre and Sidon. It happened that a Canaanite woman living in that area came and cried out to Jesus, "Heir to the house of David, have pity on me! My daughter is horribly demon-possessed."

Jesus gave her no word of response. The disciples came up and repeatedly said to him,  
"Please get rid of her! She keeps calling after us."

Finally Jesus turned to her and said, "My mission is only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

She then prostrated herself before Jesus with the plea, "Help me, Rabbi!"

Jesus answered, "But it isn’t right to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs."

“True, Rabbi,” she replied, "but even the dogs get to eat the scraps that fall from the table."

Jesus then said in reply, "Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass.”   
At that very moment her daughter was healed.

**QUESTIONS 1 (Bill Cavanaugh)**

1. What word or phrase in the Gospel stayed with you?
2. What boundaries do you maintain to excuse your not responding to people in need?
3. Jesus needed a persistent stranger to call him beyond his bias. To whom should you be listening to challenge the limits of your compassion?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** **(Betty:** Share slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**Betty:** Now **Paula Lake** will read an excerpt from Peggy Thompson’s homily, written for Catholic Women Preach.

**READING 2 –** from a homily by Peggy Thompson  **(Paula Lake)**

Have you ever been called a “dog”? This is not the sort of language we normally associate with Jesus, especially in reference to a woman! And yet, by the end of the encounter, he is calling her a “woman of great faith” and granting her request to heal her daughter. Stated simply, the unnamed Canaanite woman—a foreigner, an alien—becomes one of only two women in scripture who manages to change Jesus’s mind. [The other, of course, is Mary during the wedding feast at Cana, but what nice Jewish boy is able to say no to his own mother?]

The Gospel of Matthew is largely directed to the Jewish people, and historians tell us that the Canaanites were their traditional enemies. This may be why Jesus initially rejects the woman who calls out to him. So when he eventually does respond to her plea, calls her faithful and promises to heal her daughter, he is opening up the promise of the Good News beyond the nation of Israel. And that is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah: “The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord… will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for ALL peoples.”

**ALL** peoples. While this can be understood as referring to ethnic groups — to “gentiles” — perhaps it can be understood in other ways, too. God’s house is open to women, to the LGBTQ+ community, to the poor, to the stranger, to those of different abilities, and to so many more. Even to tax collectors like Matthew. Perhaps Pope Francis’s decision to invite women and other laypeople to participate in the upcoming Synod on Synodality is a step in the “all people” direction?

*(Slight pause)*

**QUESTIONS 2 (Bill Cavanaugh)**

1. How was it for you when you advocated for someone despite criticism?
2. What can you do to widen acceptance of all people within the Church?
3. Whose burdens feel outside the borders of your solidarity?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE (Betty:** Share slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**Betty**: Now **Terri Butel** will read a poem by Jan Richardson.

**READING 3 Stubborn Blessing (Terri Butel)**

Don’t tell me no.

I have seen you

feed the thousands,

seen miracles spill

from your hands

like water, like wine,

seen you with circles

and circles of crowds

pressed around you

and not one soul

turned away.

Don’t start with me.

I am saying

you can close the door

but I will keep knocking.

You can go silent

but I will keep shouting.

You can tighten the circle

but I will trace a bigger one

around you,

around the life of my child

who will tell you

no one surpasses a mother

for stubbornness.

I am saying

I know what you

can do with crumbs

and I am claiming mine,

every morsel and scrap

you have up your sleeve.

Unclench your hand,

your heart.

Let the scraps fall

like manna,

like mercy

for the life

of my child,

the life of

the world.

Don’t you tell me no.

*(Slight pause)*

**QUESTIONS 3 (Bill Cavanaugh)**

1. What word or phrase in the reading stayed with you?
2. What longing have you been holding back, not asking for in prayer? Try it out now, as a prayer….

**COMMUNAL SILENCE** **(Betty:** Share slide, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**Betty:** Now **George Urban** will lead our sharing.

**SHARING (****George Urban)**

Take a moment to look at all of us gathered here this morning – usually at least 50 people. In our Sharing, we offer each other unique glimpses of God. Let us honor this like an offertory procession of personal words and of quiet listening. We have invited a few people to begin. After them, we welcome any of you to share one awareness or feeling from your reflections. We ask that you allow a bridge of respectful silence after each speaker to receive the gift they offer – enough time to take two slow, deep breaths.

So let’s begin in silence to gather our reflections and prepare our hearts to listen deeply.

[Long-ish pause]

**Norb,** please unmute yourself…

*[After Norb finishes, pause for two slow breaths.]*

**Vera,** please unmute and share.

*[After Vera finishes, pause for two slow breaths.]*

*[People share brief personal reflections.]*

*[Stop by 20 minutes after the hour.]*

**George Urban** (at 20 minutes after the hour):  Thank you to each of you who shared and to all who listened.  If there was not time for you to share or speak fully, we can continue after the final song as we often do or send your reflection to Judy Sholes for our follow-up email.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Maria Desjardins)**

Like the Canaanite woman, let us now approach Jesus with our needs and longing.

(Pause) Our response will be**,** **God of Mercy, hear our prayer.**

For all who are sick: that God’s healing love will strengthen them, remove their pain, and restore them to wholeness, we pray, **God of Mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the leaders of our nation: that God will give them wisdom and inspire them to make healthcare available to all, we pray, **God of Mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, who courageously inspire us to be a healing presence in the world - ***without*** boundaries, we pray, **God of Mercy, hear our prayer.**

For what else shall we pray? Please end your prayer with “We pray, **God of Mercy, hear our prayer.** (*People share prayers.*)

O You who love us without exception, we are grateful for this chance to ask for healing, whether spoken or held in our hearts. We entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (****Kay Smalley)**

Take a moment to gather your unanswered prayers, to gently bundle them and bring them to the center. (Pause)

These prayers, O God, we offer to you again; you’ll notice they include fragments of our hearts.

Consider them, once more in your boundless mercy… (Pause)

Strengthen our faith that you are ever near, ever loving, ever drawing us home.

Until then, may we make of our lives bread for the life and good of all your creation, without exception.

Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Alicia Urban)**

As bread that was scattered on the hillside was gathered together and made one, so too, we, your grateful people, scattered throughout the world, are gathered together here and become one.

As grapes grown in the fields are gathered and pressed into wine, so too are we drawn together and pressed by our times, disappointments and heartbreak - yet transformed into your life-blood for all.

Make us nourishment for others, inviting the stranger to our tables, welcoming people who cannot repay our invitation, and eliminating artificial divisions that separate us. Surely these encounters will transform us into the Body of Christ.

May it be so!

**All (muted):** Amen

**Alicia Urban**: To extend our communion, **Debbie Ballard** will lead us in the Prayer of Jesus.

**THE PRAYER OF JESUS**  **(Debbie Ballard)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands in harmony with our family throughout the world:

**All (muted):** Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come. We pray that your good will be done. Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need. Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, from each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence beyond the evil of our days — Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One.

**Amen.**

**FINAL BLESSING - (Kay Smalley)**

Holy One, give us faith like this unswerving woman.

Make us stubborn. Fearless.

Bold, creative.

Whatever it takes.

Let us hear, “O, great is your faith.

Let it be done for you as you wish.”

And, if your wisdom is otherwise,

let us be grounded in the peace

that is not dependent on the outcome,

knowing that, breath by breath, moment by moment,

you are ever and always with us. Amen.

**CLOSING SONG –** **One Little Crumb** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6feFnwEZxzo>

They told her, “Go away!”

But she begged for him to stay..

She cried for him to come.

He said for Israel’s sons,

Why should he give his Father’s food to a dog such as you?

She said, “Jesus, my hope,

I’m at the end of my rope.

My child needs your touch;

I know I ask way too much.

I know where I’m from,

But shameless I come for that one little crumb.

That’s what I need,

Something to feed

Oh this desperate spirit in me.

Jesus, I feel your power’s real

And from one word you can heal.

But if that’s all you’ll give,

I know it’ll make her live.

My faith will stand and say

You chased the demons away.

With this little sum, I’m overcome, with this one, little crumb.

That’s what I need,

Something to feed

Oh this desperate spirit in me.

Jesus, I feel your power’s real

And from one word you can heal.

**RESOURCES**

**Readings for the day:** 1st: Is 6:1, 6-7; 2nd: Rom 11:13-15, 29-32; Gospel: Mt 15:21-28

**Opening Song:** Eye Has Not Seen – Marty Haugen, GIA Publications.

**1st Reading:** Matthew 15:21-28, Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation, Copyright 2007 by Priests for Equality.

**2nd Reading:** Adapted from a homily for Catholic Women Preach by Peggy Thompson. Listen to or read the full homily here: <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preacher/margaret-susan-thompson>

**3rd Reading:** A Stubborn Blessing by Jan Richardson

<https://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/08/11/stubborn-blessing/#.U-ykjWNexuB>

**Some text (Intro to Theme) and reflection questions taken from Mary McGlone’s reflection:** <https://www.ncronline.org/august-20-2023-twentieth-sunday-ordinary-time>

**Our Father:** Parker Palmer

**Celebration of Communion:** The French priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who at one time was silenced by the Church for his teachings, was not able to celebrate Mass when he was out in the Ordos desert in China. This is an excerpt from his “Mass on the World” [https://www.tarsus.ie/resources/SSS-2020/The-Mass-On-The-World.pdf ]. This very short passage of his 9 page “Mass” was inspired by Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr’s book, Circle of Life: The Heart’s Journey Through the Seasons, p.49.

**Final Blessing:** Adapted from a prayer by Anne Osdieck, SCLA and James Finley’s reflection for the Center for Action and Contemplation on Mystical Nonviolence:

<https://liturgy.slu.edu/20OrdA081620/prayerpathmain.html>

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/mystical-nonviolence-2023-08-04/>

**Closing Song: One Little Crumb** by Woody Winn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6feFnwEZxzo>

**A lovely music resource for those times our prayer isn’t answered the way we want: Thy Will** by Hillary Scott and the Scott Family, <HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=ICR_FA8YV2U>

**Images**:

**Woman, crying:** Pexels, KarolinaGrabowska, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/lonely-woman-crying-with-closed-eyes-4471316/>

**The Woman of Canaan**, illustration from 'Women of the Bible', published by The Religious Tract Society, 1927. <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-woman-of-canaan-harold-copping.html?product=poster>