

Timothy J. Grassi

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

In the book *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky refers to an old woman whose spiritual health begins to deteriorate as rapidly as her physical health. One day she discusses her problem with an old priest, named Fr. Zossima. She tells him about her weak Faith and the doubts she is beginning to have: Is there a God Who cares? Is there life after death? Fr. Zossima listens compassionately and says: “There’s no way to prove these things, but you can become surer of them.” “How?” cries the old woman. “By love,” says the old priest. “Try to love your neighbor from the heart. The more you love, the surer you will become about God’s existence and life after death. The more you love, the stronger your Faith will grow and the weaker your doubts will become. This is sure. This has been tried. This works.” What Fr. Zossima says is beautiful. He makes the important point that Love and Faith go hand in hand. They are like the two rails of a train track. Where you find one you find the other. Faith and love are linked like body and soul. “Jesus then said in reply, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass.’” Jesus told only one person in the Gospels that she had GREAT faith. This Canaanite woman was the only person mentioned in the Gospels to have been told by Jesus: “You have GREAT faith!” While the disciples complained that she was a nuisance and

tried to get Jesus to send her away, this woman perseveres in her request and even when Jesus' response seems curiously cold, she refuses to give up: "But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" What faith! What humility! What steadfastness in her plea! There are some very important points here. First of all the Canaanite woman came to Jesus for another, not herself. Second, she came out of love. Finally, she came as a loving faith-filled mother. In this we can see that God listens in a special way to the prayer of those who know how to love, even though at times it may appear that He is deaf to the request. He wants our faith to grow stronger, our hope to become more profound, our love to become more trusting. He wants everyone to have the desire and humility that a good mother has. This is one of the reasons that Jesus did not respond to the Canaanite woman immediately. Although our Lord provides countless blessings without our ever asking for them, He has set aside many graces that depend upon our personal prayer, or upon the prayers of others who are close. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that our petitions don't change the Divine Will, but instead win for us what has already been set aside for us if we should ask. As a result, we should petition the Lord without ceasing. Who knows how many blessings are waiting for us if only we ask for them? We should ask others to pray for the fervent intentions we have in our hearts as well. We see this in the Canaanite woman's request. First she asked

the disciples and they couldn't or wouldn't help; then she persevered in her request of Jesus. Finally she got what she asked for because her faith was GREAT! Pope St. JPII said that the primary reason for the various crises in our world is the crisis of faith. I think this is an undeniable truth. And if that is true, then I also believe that God is raising up men and women of great faith to try to bring us back to where we need to be. Are you willing to be a volunteer to be one of those men or women of GREAT faith? If you are a parent who feels the need to strengthen your faith, do what the Canaanite woman did and go to Jesus on a daily basis to ask His blessing on your children. If you are a young person who feels the need to strengthen your faith, do what Dostoevski said, begin acting in a more loving way toward your parents, brothers, sisters and friends. And remember, we all have good and bad days with regard to our faith. One day life might be depressing and exasperating and we find fault with everyone and everything. We curse our enemies and shout at our friends. On another day, life is exciting and exhilarating and we love everyone and everything. We forgive our enemies and hug our friends. Faith can be a lot like this. Some days bright and exciting and other days dark and exasperating. The next time you have a bad faith day, remember this true story. Shortly after WWII, workmen were clearing out the debris from a bombed-out house in Cologne, Germany. On one of the cellar walls was found a moving inscription.

It had apparently been written there by a fugitive Jew who had used the basement to hide from Nazis. The inscription read: “I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I feel it not. I believe in God even when He is silent.” Hopefully, that will keep things in perspective.