

AUGUST 16, 2020
Sunday of the 20th Week in OT
Matthew 15: 21-28

“HAVE MERCY ON ME LORD, SON OF DAVID.”

Persistence and dedication in prayer leads oneself and others to conversion, healing and requests granted. Perseverance in prayer is driven not only by our desire to receive the grace we want but by a complete trust and faith in Jesus. We believe that He will respond to our prayers no matter how unworthy we may and how impossible it may seem. I admire people who pray not only for themselves but for others most especially. Parents are admirable when they pray for their children and sometimes only when they are in the next life that their children will understand how much parents prayed and sacrificed for them. Let us look at the life of St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. St. Monica “lived in Tagaste in North Africa which is called Algeria today. She and her husband Patricius had three children, Augustine, Navigius and Perpetua. Navigius was always a good son, and Perpetua became a nun and abbess. But Augustine was different. As a teenager he was influenced by the loose living of his companions. When studying in Carthage he decided to take a mistress. Augustine was, as we would say now, such a brat that he even once said to Monica his mother that there would be no problems between them if she gave up her faith! After that Monica was so desperate that she went to a bishop who advised her to be patient. He told her it would be impossible that a son over whom she had shed so many tears would perish and that he would soon return to the faith. From then on, she stayed as close as possible to Augustine and she prayed and fasted for his conversion. When Augustine was 29, he moved to Rome to teach rhetoric and then he moved to Milan where he received a position teaching rhetoric. Monica moved to Milan after him. Augustine often heard Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, preaching and this is probably what sowed the seed of faith in his heart. All the prayers of his mother Monica for his conversion were now beginning to be heard after many years of seemingly being unheard. Augustine began to study the New Testament and especially Paul. He was close to being baptized but could not take a decisive step. His soul was crying out for conversion, but his body said ‘no.’ ‘Lord make me chaste but not yet’

describes Augustine at this stage. The turning point came when one day Augustine read a passage from Rom 13:13-14: 'put on the Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.' Augustine described in his Confessions telling his mother that his struggle was over. She leaped for joy and understood that God had given Augustine more than she had begged. Augustine was baptized by Bishop Ambrose of Milan and he and Monica decided to return to North Africa. While waiting in Ostia, the port of Rome, to catch a boat back home, Monica said to Augustine, 'I have no further delight in anything in this life...There was one thing for which I desired to linger a little while in this life, that I should see you a Catholic Christian before I died...Why am I still here?' Five days later Monica caught a fever and went into a coma and died after nine days. Augustine devotes many passages of his Confessions to his mother and all he owed her. Augustine went on to become a priest at the age of 36 and a bishop at the age of 41 and was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa for 35 years."¹

My brothers and sisters, the Canaanite woman in our gospel today was not worthy of anything from Jesus considering her position in the society: poor, Gentile and a woman which was a second-class citizen at the time of Jesus. But look at her persistence, even if she was refused three times: Jesus didn't answer her, when Jesus refused his disciples' request on her behalf and when Jesus said the children's food shouldn't be thrown to the dogs. But the woman also cried persistently three times: "Have mercy on me, Lord"², "Lord, help me"³, and "Yes (Please), Lord."⁴ Such faith led Jesus to cross cultural barriers to grant her requests: "Let it be done for you as you wish."⁵

Sometimes or even many times, it seems that the Lord is not answering our prayers. It seems that He refuse or not listening to our requests. In our modern world wherein we get things in an instant or at a push of a button or a click of our fingers, our gospel is teaching us three

¹ www.frtommylane.com

² Matthew 15: 22 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

³ Matthew 15: 25 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

⁴ Matthew 15: 27 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

⁵ Matthew 15: 28 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

important things to obtain healing, to grant our request whether for ourselves and for other people whom we love most: pray to Him with all humility; trust totally in God's generosity, and persevere in our prayer request.

My brothers and sisters, like St. Monica who was refused in almost twenty years of praying for Augustine's conversion, and the Canaanite woman persisted in prayer before God, we too must be patient and persistent in our prayers. Let us not be discouraged and even lose hope and give up. We too may hear the same words of Jesus, "Great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish."⁶

Let this be our prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy and please help me as I pray to you. Grant my petitions and request not only for myself but for those people whom I love most dearly. Strengthen me and help me to be patient as I long for your answers and may I not lose hope and give up. I trust you my Lord and my Savior. Amen."

⁶ Matthew 15: 28 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA