

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Tenth Sunday after Trinity  
August 16, 2020

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In the gospel at Mass last Sunday St Peter asked the Lord Jesus to allow him to walk on water. The Lord agreed, and Peter *did* walk on water. But then, realizing what he was doing, Peter became afraid and began to sink, and for the first time cried out “Lord, save me.” The great Doctor of Souls knew what He was doing! He knew what was in Peter and brought it to the surface. “Lord, save me” is the heart of the gospel incident.

It is easier to recognize Christ working this way in Peter 2000 years ago than when it happens to you and me today. Peter nearly drowned! In similar circumstances a man of lesser faith might very well conclude God had abandoned him. When we don’t get our way (even when the stakes are not as high as they were for Peter) we easily conclude God doesn’t care. But this is a *false* conclusion. Abandoning souls is not a Divine character trait! Abandoning is what *we* do. It is part of the character inclination of fallen human nature.

Today’s gospel has a different set of circumstances. But the same Divine Physician is seen bringing another soul to the point of acknowledging dependence upon Christ. Unlike Peter, the Syro-Phoenician woman wanted nothing for herself, but only healing for her daughter. The political, social, and religious deck was all stacked against her. None of that stopped the Lord Jesus! We do not know just *how* Jesus set up the situation which led to this exchange, or how He prepared the conditions which led to Peter’s request to walk on water. But we do know what Jesus did.

The Lord began by giving the woman the definite impression He wanted to be left alone. She got the silent treatment. Then Jesus remarked to His disciples, in a way she could hear, that He only dealt with Jews. Finally the Lord called her a *dog*. By today’s standards of crude invective that may seem a mild epithet. But it was a great insult in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine.

Yet in all of this the woman did not take “no” for an answer. Recall that on *other* occasions Our Lord had said this is *exactly* how we are to treat our Heavenly Father. We are to clamor at Him with loving insistence. The chairman of the board may be treated with deference on Wall Street. But his child doesn’t think in those

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terms. This man is his father. And he gives no thought to crumpling up his father's business suit as he climbs into his daddy's lap for some quality time. The Syro-Phoenician woman was behaving in a way the Lord commends, and the Sacred Heart must have been smiling.

The thing which was really important about this woman was not that she believed Jesus could do what she wanted done, or even that she was insistent in her petition. What mattered most was that deep down *she knew Who Christ is*. She knew when very few others knew at that time. And the Lord brought her to bring this faith to the surface and declare it in words.

All the apparent rudeness and aloofness was actually the working of Christ's compassion. It gave this woman opportunity to express what was in her heart. Christ knew that faith was in her before she knew it herself! Just as He knew what was in Peter even when no one else did. The woman's daughter would be healed. But that is only a minor incident! (She would probably go on living a typical self-centered life, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and then she would eventually die.) But *her mother had come to faith in Christ*. Her declaration of faith was so eloquent that it became included in our sacred story. Her faith, and she who had it, would live forever.