

20th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 15:21-28

In *A.D.* 2006 Pope Benedict XVI canonised a Mexican bishop who died in *A.D.* 1938, Rafael Guizar de Valencia. The bishop lived at a time when in Mexico the Church was outlawed and a Catholic would be arrested for practising the faith. At that time many priests were arrested and tortured. In spite of this persecution the bishop would visit those soldiers and government officials and those in prison to encourage them to stand firm in faith and to confess their sins. Even when he was arrested he would still preach to the soldiers and plead with them to seek the mercy of God. When he met a man who so persisted in sin and refused to make his confession the bishop returned to his private chapel and prayed. He prayed that his right eye may be taken from him if only it would mean the conversion of that man.

Twelve years after the bishop's death his corpse was exhumed so that it could be buried in a more fitting place. When the coffin was opened the body of the bishop was found to be incorrupt. Twelve years after his death there was no sign of decay except for one part—his right eye. Whilst his body remained as it had the day he died his right eye was found to have rotted away. The bishop had boldly pleaded for a sinner's conversion and had offered his right eye for the sake of that man's soul and although the bishop did not lose his eye in life the Lord had heard his pleadings and his desire to sacrifice for the salvation of a soul that in death the bishop's prayer was heard.

It can be difficult to pray, to believe in the providence of God, to believe that He hears our prayers and answers them. Often people will disregard prayer and the Sacraments because they seem futile, because it seems that their prayers are never heard. And so they seek their refuge elsewhere; in drugs, in alcohol, in gambling, or even in superstitious and demonic things like astrology.

These things seem to give the immediate relief that modern man seeks and to which he has become accustomed. These things are tangible and palpable when God can seem ethereal and distant. So we must be bold in prayer and in faith. We must be as bold in pleading for the conversion of sinners as was Bishop Rafael Guizar de Valencia, and we must bold in seeking the mercy of God for ourselves.

The Canaanite woman in the Gospel, too, was bold. Here was a woman from a people, the Canaanites, who were the professed enemies of the Jews, who herself was a pagan, who pursued a Jewish man pleading with Him to cure her daughter, for in Him, Jesus, she saw the divine presence. She makes her request even though the time does not seem to be right, she persists even though she is regarded as unworthy, she perseveres even though she is pushed away, and in the end she gets that for which she asked. St. John Vianney said: "We often find that Our Lord does not grant us what we ask for immediately; He delays so that our desire might increase in ardour, so that we might better appreciate the value of what we ask for. It is not a refusal but a test that prepares us to receive more abundantly what we desire."

None of us have to pursue God and plead that He remain with us for He is always with us in the Blessed Sacrament and in the Sacrament of Penance and in all the Sacraments. It is we who walk away from Him.