

20A SML 2017  
MT 15:21-28

A person is judged as having good character when they possess a virtue to a high and eminent degree. Military generals are ranked as men of great character because of their valor, scientists because of their wisdom, noblemen because of love of peace or their bravery in war.

But there is a better way to judge character. The possession of one virtue to an eminent degree no more makes a great man than one wing makes a bird. Just as an eagle's power is measured by the span of one wing to the other, so a man's character should be judged, not by the possession of one virtue, but by the span between that virtue and the opposite one which compliments it. In other words, great character is not just bravery, but a brave man who can be tender. Great character is not just love of peace, but a lover of peace who has courage. Great character is not just wisdom, but a wise man who enjoys simplicity. A person of real character, then, does not possess a virtue on a given point on the circle without, at the same time, possessing the complimentary virtue which is diametrically opposed to it.

Two opposing virtues that Our Blessed Lord

recommended to His Apostles at the beginning of His public life were wisdom and simplicity. “Be wise as serpents and as simple as doves.” (MT 10:16) Our Blessed Lord did not make this recommendation without possessing it Himself. He was wise with the Wisdom of God, but He was simple with the simplicity of a child. But what is more remarkable, He never used His wisdom before the simple, but only before those who thought themselves wise. He was wisdom before the so-called wise. He was simplicity before the simple. He exceeded the worldly wise with His wisdom and the simple with His simplicity. A case in point is the simplicity of Our Blessed Lord with the Canaanite woman in this morning’s gospel.

In the middle of His public life, Our Blessed Lord made His way to the coast of Syria where the cities of Tyre and Sidon had seen their day, and were falling into ruins. No sooner had He come into these cities than a woman, a Gentile, a non-Jew approached Jesus. She had a daughter, now growing up, who was suffering from an unclean spirit and was quite mad. This shame obligated her to live apart from her neighbors.

But when she heard the great Wonder-Worker had come into her city, she knew she had to go and see Him, even though He was Jewish and she was Gentile. She noticed He

was kind, gentle, and above all simple. She heard her Jewish friends call Him “Lord,” and others, “Son of David.” So she called him both. “Have pity of me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” (15:22)

Our Blessed Lord did not look displeased but He answered her not a word and walked on, testing her faith and her perseverance. She walked on as well.

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” He told her. She seemed to sense it was not a rebuke, otherwise He would have sent her away as His disciples had asked Him to. Our Blessed Lord did not say he would not cure her daughter, but that His mission was first to His own people.

This time, with more appeal than before, she fell at His feet. “Lord, help me.” (15:25)

Would Our Blessed Lord remain indifferent by her plea? Her desperation? Would He leave her to a lifelong agony of watching her daughter be tortured?

“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” And as prompt as an echo came her retort.

“Please, Lord, for even the pups eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.”

Now, if a self-wise Pharisee had made a retort like that,

Our Blessed Lord would have exhausted him with His Wisdom, but when a simple soul makes a retort against Divinity and says she is only a puppy begging for a crumb, then He became so simple as to be matched by her simplicity. He Who was wise before the Wise,

- ✓ He Who at 12 years old, astounded the teachers with His understanding and His answers
- ✓ He, after He had cleansed the Temple, gave Levites, scribes and Pharisees the answer, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it,” an answer that would take them three long years to figure out

He Who was wise before the Wise, is now simple before the Canaanite woman with her simple use of the word “pup,” His Sacred Heart expanded and His precious lips moved, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” (15:28)

Wonderful wisdom! Wonderful simplicity! Such is the character of Our Blessed Lord. A God and a Child!

Will the worldly wise ever learn to imitate that beautiful tension between opposites? Will it go on dividing itself into the educated and uneducated, the literate and illiterate, heaping praise on the so called wise who reject the Wisdom of God and criticize the simple who accept it? Or will the world someday,

with the grace of Almighty God, realize the truest wisdom is being simple and the truest simplicity is being wise with the Wisdom of God. It is easy to be one or the other but so difficult to be both. That's why it is easier to be anything but a good Christian. It is hard to be wise, and yet still be simple enough to want to be taught, and yet that is what is necessary to enter heaven. "Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." MT 18:3