

August 20, 2017 The Silence of Christ Homily: Brothers and sisters, only recently, one of America's famed filmmakers, Martin Scorsese, directed a film which was based upon a novel written in 1966 by a renowned Japanese novelist, Shusaku Endo. For over thirty years the director wanted to reach as large an audience as possible by bringing the story to life on film. It is a riveting story of two Jesuit missionaries who travel to Japan in search of their missing mentor at a time when Christianity was outlawed. Eventually they are captured and brutally tortured for their faith. The title of the novel (and film) is not without significance: "*Silence*".

According to reputable film critics who reviewed the film, the author and filmmaker ask, "Why does God remain silent as believers are drawn into cruelty in his name? Why does he seem deaf in the face of human suffering?" The silence of God is a test of one's faith and patience. Such searching questions were not unknown to the inspired writers of the Old Testament. In the Book of Psalms, the psalmist writes, "My God, I call for help by day, but you do not answer" (Ps.22)

In today's gospel from Matthew's fifteenth chapter, the account of the healing of the pagan woman's daughter "tormented by a devil" (Mt.15:22) we are unexpectedly shocked at the initial response of Our Lord to the woman's appeal. "But he said not a word to her", writes the evangelist. In many of the great artistic works in which this scene is captured on canvas, Jesus even has back turned on her!

What is the meaning of this silence? Should the woman have turned to someone else to make known her distress? Should she have addressed Jesus differently? Did she shout too loudly or not loudly enough? Was she a nag, an annoyance, a pest?

The silence of Jesus is mysterious indeed. But should we be alarmed at God's silence? In his reflections on the silence of Jesus, St. Augustine writes, "Christ showed himself indifferent to her, not in order to refuse her mercy, but rather to inflame her desire". The silence of God serves a hidden purpose which we may never understand. She is a model of effective prayer. In desperation, the heathen woman perseveres in her personal entreaties to the Lord. She persisted, even though the disciples of Jesus wanted her to be sent away. (Mt.15:23)

Unlike many of the chosen people, this woman shows remarkable trust in Jesus. She even addresses Him as Lord! And it is worthy of note that she is the only person in Matthew's gospel whose faith Jesus characterized as great! (Mt.15:28).

From time to time, we all have an experience of the silence of God. Oh, how our faith is tested. In those very difficult moments, let us recall the extraordinary example of the Canaanite Woman, whose persistence in the end paid off and whose faith was praised by no less a figure than Our Lord Jesus Himself!

Amen!