

Mural Unveiling
Newman University

August 5, 2009
Dedication of St. Mary Major

I always enjoy the feast days in which we celebrate the dedication of the great churches in Rome. On these days we should have a good sense of who we are and what we are about. We can take comfort that we are part of the Universal Church that we are joining in the faith professed by millions of people that have gone before us. We take comfort that as we join in the celebration of this Mass, our prayers are joined with all or the prayers of our brothers and sisters in faith, giving worship and glory to God.

Today's readings are a good example of what it means to be people of faith. The readings demonstrate the impact that faith will have in our lives. The first reading gives us a prime example of the lack-luster faith that the people of Israel were so good at showing. Once again, we see them resisting God's gifts. Time and again they demonstrate that they are more concerned with their own comforts and desires than in actually following the call of God. Their lack-luster faith leads them to another forty years of bearing no fruit as they wander in the desert.

The Gospel passage presents us with a totally different story. It is a passage in which we are first taken aback by Jesus' actions and words. We do not expect him to act in this way nor do we expect him to speak as he spoke to this woman. First he totally ignores her to the extent that his companions come to ask him to do something about her. Jesus' response, he is only concerned with the people of Israel. The woman persists, and Jesus calls her a dog. Biblical scholars will try to explain this away. They tell us that it was common for Jews to call the Gentiles names such as "dogs." They will also point out that Jesus does not use the common term for dog that being a mutt or a mongrel, but he used the term implying a pet. Well, I do not know about you, but when someone is calling me a dog, it doesn't really matter to me if they are calling me a mutt or a Cocker Spaniel. They are still calling me a dog!

So what gives? Why would Jesus speak to a woman in that manner? Even is she is a Gentile, we do not expect Jesus to behave or speak in this manner. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. He was teaching this woman the power of her faith. They banter back and forth, Jesus beginning with calling her a dog, the woman, even dogs get the scraps from the master's table. Jesus finishing her lesson, "O woman, great is your faith; let it be done for you as you wish." Her daughter was healed. The woman's faith brought Jesus to heal her daughter. Her relationship to Jesus was deepened as she answered his queries.

Today we are gathered in a holy place, the Chapel of Newman University. It is a place that would not have been here if we did not have the example of another young woman that demonstrated her faith in Christ by her actions here on earth. Some two hundred years ago, Maria De Mattias answered God's call to leave her home, journey to Acuto, Italy and serve the poor. Much like the bantering between the woman and Jesus in the Gospel today, there were times when Maria's faith was challenged, getting settled in one house only to be told that they have to move to another. There were days when they wondered if they were going to have any food for the poor, let alone their own table. She persisted in her faith. She knew that it would be provided one way or another. Other young women came to offer their help. A community grew. Over the centuries, thousands of women would come to follow the steps of Maria De Mattias and offer their lives in service to others. Who would have thought that the actions of one young woman some two hundred years ago would bring us to this chapel that was founded and built by the workings of the Sisters of the Adorers of the Precious Blood, those women that were called to follow the charism of Maria De Mattias? Saint Maria De Mattias, like the woman in the Gospel responded to Jesus with an act of faith. St. Maria De Mattias joined Christ in building the Universal Church.

Eighty some years ago, the lives of St. Maria De Mattias intersected with the life of young Emil Kapaun. A number of those that were walking in the footsteps of Maria found their way to their convent in Wichita, Kansas. These professed women, following their call to be teachers of the faith were sent to Pilsen, Kansas to teach at the local public

school. The faith that was instilled in young Emil at home was nurtured and grew in the hands of these Precious Blood Sisters. Sixty-nine years ago, Emil Kapaun, lay prostrate on the floor of this very chapel. He too was responding to God's query of faith. That day, Emil Kapaun was ordained a priest. He was receiving graces that he did not fully comprehend. Why was he chosen to be a holy priest of God? In a letter to his cousin he wrote:

I have a feeling that I am far, far from being a saint worthy to receive the priesthood. Think what that means!! To offer up the Living Body and Blood of Our Savior every day in Holy Mass – to absolve souls from sin in Holy Confession and snatch them from the gates of hell in which they would suffer for all eternity. These and a hundred more duties and responsibilities make a person realize that the vocation to the priesthood is so sublime that the angels in heaven were not given a vocation to the priesthood, no, not even the Blessed Mother who was never stained with sin – even she was not called to be a priest of God – and here I am, called!!!

Father Emil Kapaun left this chapel a changed man, leaving this chapel a priest, ordained to serve the Universal Church in the Diocese of Wichita. Father Kapaun continued to answer this call to faith. This call of faith was to take him to the corners of the earth. This call would eventually lead him to lay down his life for his friends. Father Kapaun, building the Universal Church that he was called to serve.

We can only express wonder and awe at the workings of God. We witness his plan of salvation unfolding throughout history by witnessing the lives of those who have great faith. We pray that we too may in some way demonstrate that same courage of faith. We pray that we too may follow our own call to faith and be part of building the Universal Church, the Church of God.