

IN MEMORIAM
Rev. Roger C. Bourgeois SSS (1930-2026)



On August 22, 2026, the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament lost one of its longstanding members, Father Roger C. Bourgeois SSS. Father was much-beloved by those who knew him during his nearly seventy years as a priest and seventy-four years of membership in the Congregation. He held multiple pastoral and administrative roles within the Congregation during his decades of priestly ministry and, at the time of his death, was serving as chaplain of the Saint Ann Shrine at the Congregation's headquarters in Highland Heights, Ohio.

One of Father Roger's last occasions of presiding at Mass in the Shrine was on Wednesday, August 5, during the eighteenth week in Ordinary Time. His homily for this liturgy, drawn from Jeremiah 31:1-7 and Matthew 15:21-28, is reprinted in full below.

Readers of Emmanuel Magazine wishing to perpetuate and honor the work of Father Roger and his fellow SSS priests and brothers may direct contributions to the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Highland Heights, OH 44143.

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“Faith Born of Trust Beyond Understanding”

Homily for Wednesday of the Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

My Brothers and Sisters:

At first glance today's readings seem very different. Jeremiah speaks of God's tender love for Israel, while the Gospel presents us with a difficult encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. But both readings reveal the same truth: *God's love is faithful, and faith opens us to receive that love.* In the first reading, Jeremiah speaks to a people who have suffered greatly. Israel has been conquered, many have been carried into exile, and hope seems lost. Yet, into that darkness God speaks these beautiful words: *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.”*

Those words are among the most comforting in all of Scripture. God's love is not temporary or conditional. Human love can fail. Friendships may fade. Families sometimes disappoint us. But God's love is everlasting. Even when His people have wandered away, He does not abandon them. Instead, he promises to gather them, rebuild them, and restore their joy. The promise reaches beyond ancient Israel. It is spoken to each of us. Every one of us has known moments when we wondered whether God had forgotten us—during illness, grief, disappointment, or personal failure. Jeremiah reminds us that God's love remains constant even when our lives are shaken.

The Gospel gives us a living example of someone who believes that promise, even though she has never heard Jeremiah's prophecy. A Canaanite woman approaches Jesus, crying out, "Have pity on me, Lord, son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." She is not Jewish. She belongs to a people traditionally considered enemies of Israel. Yet she recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. Surprisingly, Jesus does not answer her.



Christ and the Canaanite Woman
Anonymous German Master (c. 1550)

Imagine the silence. She cries out in desperation, and there is no response. How many of us have experienced something similar in prayer? We ask God to heal a loved one, to remove a burden, to answer a heartfelt prayer—and heaven seems silent.

Silence can be one of the greatest tests of faith.

Then the disciples ask Jesus to send her away, because she keeps shouting after them. Instead of encouraging her, they get rid of her. Jesus says, "Was I sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Still, she refuses to leave. She comes closer, kneels before Him, and simply says, "*Lord help me.*"

Three words. No long explanation. No arguments. Just complete trust.

Then comes the hardest saying of all. Jesus replies, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." At first hearing those words sound harsh. But Jesus is drawing out something extraordinary. He is testing and revealing the depth of this woman's faith—not to humiliate her, but so that everyone around Him can see it.

Her response is remarkable: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table.” She does not become angry. She does not walk away offended. She remains humble, confident that even the smallest of Jesus’ mercy is enough. The humility touches the heart of Christ. Jesus finally says, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”

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Only twice in Matthew’s Gospel does Jesus praise someone for having great faith, and in both cases the person is a Gentile. The religious insiders often struggle to believe, while outsiders recognize who Jesus truly is. There is an important lesson for us. Faith is not about demanding that God act according to our timetable. Faith is trusting Him even when we do not immediately understand His ways. Many of us have prayed for things that seemed to receive no answer. We may have prayed for healing that never came, for reconciliation that took years, or for guidance during confusing times.



The Canaanite woman teaches us not to give up. She shows us that persistent prayer is not about changing God's mind; it is about allowing our hearts to grow in trust and perseverance. Her prayer becomes simpler as the story unfolds. First, she explains her problem. Then she simply says, "*Lord help me.*" Sometimes those are the only words we can pray. And often they are enough.

Jeremiah assures us that the God to whom we pray already loves us with an everlasting love. The Gospel shows us that this love reaches far beyond the boundaries people expected. God's mercy is not limited by race, nationality, or background. In Christ, God's saving love extends to all who come to Him in faith.

That should also challenge us.

Do we draw lines where God does not? Are there people we quietly dismiss because they are different from us? Do we decide who is worthy of God's mercy? Jesus came to gather all people into God's family. The Church must never become a place that closes doors when Christ is opening them. As we gather around the altar today, we come like the Canaanite woman. We come with needs, burdens, worries, and hopes. None of us deserves the Bread of Life by our own merits. Like her, we come empty-handed, trusting entirely in the mercy of Christ. And unlike the scraps under the table, the Lord does not offer us crumbs but the fulness of Himself in the Holy Eucharist. So let us leave today holding onto two truths.

From Jeremiah: "*I have loved you with an everlasting love.*"

From the Canaanite women: “*Lord, help me.*”

If we remember God’s everlasting love and preserve in humble faith, we will discover that His mercy is always greater than our fears, His timing is wiser than our own and His love never fails.

Amen.

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