

In today's Gospel, we hear a rather curious encounter, in which Jesus is tracked-down by a non-Jew, pleading with him to heal her daughter. After making her way through his handlers, she at last got Jesus' ear directly: *"Help my daughter, please"*. And in what sounds like a rather harsh and dismissive response, Jesus told her, *"Sorry, but no. I came to get my own people in order"*. This mother pleaded with him more, until at last, Jesus was moved to grant her petition, and her daughter was healed. The mother, advocating on her child's behalf, wanted something essential, that only Jesus could provide. How beautiful.

I'll say it again: I never doubt how much our parents love their children. I also don't doubt that our parents pray for their children—a form of pleading with Jesus, advocating for them. But parents, ask yourselves, *do you believe that there is something essential that only Jesus can provide your children?* If so, then *what is it?* And I should ask, aside from your private prayers, *in what ways do you advocate for them—to get for them whatever it is that only Jesus can provide?*

I consider all this, because the ways parents advocate for their children is very different today than in times past. For example, only a generation or two ago, if a child got in trouble with a teacher or coach, it resulted in him/her getting in trouble a second time when they got home. The parents were disappointed at their child causing a problem for others. I know that experience too well.

I often hear it said that it's so different now. If a child gets into trouble with a teacher or coach, too often the parent immediately sends an email, declaring their child's innocence and decrying the teacher or coach's poor handling of their child, as well as their leadership—*"And by the way, I expect you to respond before I go to bed this evening"*.

If this is accurate at all, how did it get to that? Perhaps it's because some parents are concerned with how it reflects upon them—that they're therefore looked at as bad parents—and so they push-back as a defense mechanism. But perhaps also it's because parents feel guilty for whatever ways their obligations, career or otherwise, prevents them from being as present to their children, so they make up for it by having their son/daughter's back. Maybe that's true.

A person might reasonably ask: *"What does a celibate man know about parenting?"* I know very little, first-hand. But I have the privilege of being brought in close to a lot of parenting experiences. And to be sure, all parents struggle. But I see some advocating to bring their child to Jesus, desiring something for their child that only he can provide.

And I see some who seem to be advocating for all sort of other things—what the culture says is necessary and that it can provide: status, power, privilege, comfort. In a culture like ours, in which it certainly seems that everything revolves around children—their non-essential needs, their wishes, their endless schedule of structured activities—the result is that too often, a parent, finds his/her life and personal identity, is centered around their child's life and identity. If that's true, it's neither healthy for the parent, nor in the long-run, for the child.

You might also say, *"Why am I hearing a homily about parenting, and sociological constructs?"* Please understand, God gave us the human family to participate in and reflect the life of the Holy Trinity. God also gave life-generating capacities to husband and wife, and entrusted them with *His* child. Family dynamics are a major part of how we experience and live our faith. Family life pertained to God, long before it pertained to society's laws or it's influences.

But back to the mother in today's Gospel, wanting something only Jesus could provide. She knew that if she got close to Jesus, it would be a way of advocating for what her child truly needed. And for you, if your primary job as a parent is to get for your child something that only Jesus can provide—that is, to get your child to heaven, maybe it can only happen to the extent that you get close to Jesus. And as important as Mass is, it must be more than that. If you're stuck in your faith, then, as an act of faith, let me, or the skillful people I work with, help you. And as it was for the mother in the Gospel, that act of faith, will be advocating for the child God entrusted to you, advocating for something only Jesus can provide—ultimately, their salvation.