

Test Anxiety is a combination of physiological and psychological symptoms that occur before or during testing situations. These symptoms can drastically hinder someone's ability to perform well ... as well as negatively affecting their feelings about themselves and school.

Signs of test anxiety may include mental blank-out, racing thoughts, and difficulty concentrating; as well as nausea, sweating, headache, increased breathing rate, rapid heartbeat and muscle tension.

Test anxiety has been shown to have a consistently negative relationship to test performance. Anxious students might perform as much as 12 percent below non-anxious peers. Researchers suggest that between 25 to 40 percent of students experience test anxiety.

While a small amount of anxiety isn't bad ... It can actually be helpful to be "psyched up" when preparing for or taking a test. But for those with test anxiety, their level of stress can be too much; and may hurt your preparation and performance.

Through proper preparation, familiarity with the subject matter and the test format, and positive thinking, many people can lessen the effects of test anxiety and excel.

Today is the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In today's Gospel, we are confronted with an image of Jesus that appears on its face to be quite harsh.

Scholars are divided as to just what is Jesus doing here? Is this a glimpse into His raw humanity untempered by His divinity? Perhaps He's trying to show His disciples what not to do. Maybe He's trying to shock the disciples - who wanted Him to "*send her away*" - by giving voice to their own inner prejudices and darker thoughts.

My take on this is that Jesus is testing the woman's faith.

Just like a beloved teacher whose thorough and challenging test might leave students wondering if they really still like her or not ... Jesus is engaging the Canaanite woman's faith to demonstrate to the disciples that God's gift of Faith is not limited to the Chosen people.

First, Jesus ignores her.

But, she persists. What was it that she saw in Jesus that inspired her to continue trying?

Next, Jesus speaks, but His words only serve to exclude her.

Yet again, she persists. Somehow, she seems to have an understanding of what was going on, that kept her coming.

Finally, Jesus outright insults her.

Dog is hardly a compliment to a woman - in any culture.

Yet she plays back his own words to Him; and in some ancient manuscripts the word she says means puppies ... making this a playful twist on what appears to be a harsh, derogatory, and biting comment.

At this point, Jesus comes clean, saying: "*O woman, great is your faith!*"

In other words, she's survived the test ... passed it with flying colors ... demonstrating the strength and depth of her Faith ... not to Jesus ... but to the disciples ... and to herself.

And only now does Jesus grant her request, telling her: "*Let it be done for you as you wish.*"

In our own lives, we may feel that we are being put to the test ... that our Faith is being tried and tested ... or perhaps that God isn't paying attention ... or isn't listening. We may even develop a form of "test anxiety" where we hold back in our prayer life for fear of failure or rejection ... which can prevent us from experiencing a deeper ... a closer ... walk with Christ.

But there is nothing to dread ... there is nothing to fear.

God in His infinite charity can use a difficult situation to coax from us a stronger faith than we ever knew we had within us. God's justice may be challenging us to step up in our faithfulness ... or to stand up for what we believe in ... while in His mercy, he enthusiastically desires to grant us whatever we ask ... provided we are properly disposed to receive His gift.

St. Paul tells us that "*the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable,*" and in those times where we feel that our Faith is being stretched ... what is really happening is that through these struggles, we are being called to live out a deeper ... a stronger Faith so that we might respond to God's call with renewed vigor and power.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray for the courage to step up our engagement of Faith, Hope, and Love. May we receive God's irrevocable gifts of grace, and mercy, and charity ... so that we might daily deepen our walk with the Lord ... always growing in our life of Faith ... Faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ.