

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 15:21-28

Jesus left Gennesaret and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

**A REFLECTION
BY POPE FRANCIS**

Today's Gospel presents us a unique example of faith in Jesus' encounter with a Canaanite woman, a foreigner to the Jews. The scene unfolds as he is walking toward the cities of Tyre and Sidon, northwest of Galilee: it is here that the woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter, who — the Gospel says — "is severely possessed by a demon". The Lord, at first, seems not to hear this cry of pain, such that it causes the intervention of the disciples who intercede for her. Jesus' seeming indifference does not discourage this mother, who persists in her invocation.

This woman's inner strength, which enables her to overcome every obstacle, is to be found in her maternal love and in her faith that Jesus can grant her request. This makes me think of the strength of women. With their strength they are able to obtain great things. We have known many [such women]! We could say that it is love that stirs faith, and faith, for its part, becomes love's reward. Heartrending love for her daughter causes the woman to cry: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David". And her untiring faith in Jesus

allows her not to become discouraged even in the face of his initial rejection; thus the woman "knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me'".

In the end, before such persistence, Jesus was in awe, nearly astonished, by the faith of a pagan woman. Therefore he acquiesces, saying: "'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly". Jesus points to this humble woman as a model of unwavering faith. Her persistence in beseeching Christ's intervention is incentive for us not to become discouraged, not to despair when we are burdened by life's difficult trials. The Lord does not turn away in the face of our needs and, if at times he seems insensitive to our requests for help, it is in order to put to the test and to strengthen our faith. We must continue to cry out like this woman: "Lord, help me! Lord, help me!". In this way, with perseverance and courage. This is the courage needed in prayer.

This Gospel episode helps us to understand that we all need to grow in faith and fortify our trust in Jesus. He can help us to find our way, when we have lost the compass of our journey; when the road no longer seems flat but rough and arduous; when it is hard to be faithful to our commitments. It is important to nourish our faith every day, by carefully listening to the Word of God, with the celebration of the Sacraments, with personal prayer as a "cry" to him — "Lord, help me!" — and with concrete acts of charity toward our neighbour.

Let us entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit, so that he may help us to persevere in faith. The Spirit instills courage in the heart of believers; he gives our life and our Christian witness the power of conviction and persuasion; he helps us to overcome skepticism toward God and indifference toward our brothers and sisters.

May the Virgin Mary render us ever more aware of our need of the Lord and of his Spirit; may she obtain for us a strong faith, full of love, and a love capable of making itself a supplication, a courageous supplication to God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What made the woman's faith so strong? What can we do to grow in faith?
- When we feel discouraged in our faith, what are some things you have done to overcome it?
- Have you had an experience in prayer where your persistence has been rewarded? What happened?

PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.