

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

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Today's Gospel recounts the encounter of Jesus with a Canaanite woman outside the territory of Israel (cf. Mt 15:21-28). She asks him to free her daughter, who is tormented by a demon. But the Lord pays no attention to her. She insists, and the disciples advise Jesus to acknowledge her so she would stop. Jesus, however, explains that his mission is directed to the children of Israel, using this image: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs". And the courageous woman responds, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table". Then, Jesus says to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly" (vv. 26-28). This is a beautiful story. And this happened to Jesus.

We see that Jesus changed his attitude. What made him change was the strength of the woman's faith. Let us pause briefly over these two aspects: the change in Jesus and the woman's faith.

The change in Jesus. He was directing his preaching to the chosen people. Later the Holy Spirit would push the Church to the ends of the world. But what happens here, we could say, is an anticipation through which the universality of God's work is already manifested in the episode of the Canaanite

woman. Jesus' openness is interesting. On hearing the woman's prayer, "he anticipates the plan"; faced with her concrete case, he becomes even more sympathetic and compassionate. God is like this: he is love, and the one who loves does not remain rigid. Yes, he or she stands firm, but not rigid; they do not remain rigid in their own positions, but allow themselves to be moved and touched. They know how to change their plans. Love is creative. And we Christians who want to imitate Christ, we are invited to be open to change. How good it would do our relationships, as well as our lives of faith, if we were to be docile, to truly pay attention, to soften up in the name of compassion and the good of others, like Jesus did with the Canaanite woman. The docility to change. Hearts docile to change.

Now let us look at the woman's faith, which the Lord praises, saying that it is "great" (v. 28). According to the disciples, the only thing that seemed "great" was her insistence; but Jesus sees her faith. If we think about it, that foreign woman had probably little or no awareness of the laws and religious precepts of Israel. What does her faith consist of then? She does not have a wealth of concepts but of deeds — the Canaanite woman draws near, prostrates herself, insists, takes part in a close dialogue with Jesus, overcomes every obstacle just to speak with him. This is the concreteness of faith, which is not a religious label but is a personal relationship with the Lord. How many times we fall into the temptation to confuse faith with a label! This woman's faith is not fraught with theological gallantry, but with insistence — she knocks at the door, knocks, knocks. Her faith is not made up of words, but of prayer. And God does not resist when he is prayed to. This is why he said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Mt 7:7).

Brothers and sisters, in light of all this, we can ask ourselves a few questions beginning with the change in Jesus. For example: Am I capable of changing opinion? Do I know how to be understanding and do I know how to be compassionate, or do I remain rigid in my position? Is there some rigidity in my heart? Which is not firmness: rigidity is awful, firmness is good. And beginning with the woman's faith : What is my faith like? Does it stop at concepts and words, or is it truly lived with prayer and deeds? Do I know

how to dialogue with the Lord? Do I know how to insist with him? Or am I content to recite beautiful formulas? May Our Lady make us open to what is good and concrete in the faith.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis notes that the Canaanite woman had little knowledge of Israel's laws or teachings, yet Jesus praises her faith. What does this reveal about what faith truly is?



Heart: The woman refuses to give up when she encounters obstacles, silence, and apparent rejection. What does her persistence challenge or encourage in your own relationship with God?



Hands: Pope Francis says that faith is not just words or labels, but a living relationship expressed in prayer and action. What is one way you can seek, ask, or knock more intentionally this week?

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. Offer 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 praying the 'Glory Be'.