

Scripture Study

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Isaiah 56:1,6-7

(Ps 67:2-3,5-6,8)

Romans 11:13-15,29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel takes place right after a discussion between Jesus and his opponents, the Pharisees, who are critical of Jesus' disciples for not following their interpretations of the minute details of the Jewish purity laws (Matthew 15:1-20).
- Many of these Pharisees (the name means "separated ones") made it a point to not associate with those whom they felt did not live up to these laws. They also distanced themselves from Gentiles (non-Jews) whom they considered unclean. They would not even enter their house for fear of defilement (John 18:28-29).
- After this confrontation, Jesus takes a nearly 100-mile round trip "detour" to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon (present day Lebanon). Sidon was named after the son of Canaan (see Genesis 10:15-19), forefather of the original inhabitants of the Holy Land who were traditional bitter enemies of the Jews.
- Though Jesus is sometimes seen to be taking a cold approach to the Canaanite woman seeking his aid, he is in fact mimicking the "separateness" of the Pharisees to highlight their blindness and to make a point about how God, on the other hand, shows no partiality (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1,9).

Questions:

- Regarding the 2nd Reading: from what religious roots does Christianity come? If you are not ethnically Jewish, what do those roots make you, as a believer in Christianity? With what kind of awe, then, should you regard Judaism? With what kind of awe should you regard the grace of God in you?
- In the 1st Reading, the prophet Isaiah foretells the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God, and the enthusiasm and sincerity of their worship. How well are you fulfilling this prophecy?
- Look at a map of Israel in Jesus' time. Where is Tyre and Sidon in relation to Jerusalem?
- How would Jesus' accusers in verses 1-20 have viewed his 100-mile "detour" to the region of Tyre and Sidon? Would they have likely done the same? Why or why not?
- What do we learn about the Canaanite woman? How are you like her? *Not* like her?
- What do we learn about Jesus? About Jesus' attitude toward non-Jews?
- When you deal with needy people or "outsiders," are you more like the disciples or Jesus? Why? How has God gone a long distance to heal you?
- Do you ever feel "put off" by the Lord? What happens to your faith when God appears not to answer? Do you give up, or do you persist? Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 528, 781, 439, 448, 2610

Closing prayer

Persevere in prayer. Persevere, even when your efforts seem barren. Prayer is always fruitful.

–St. Josemaria Escriva

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire"

Scripture: *Matthew 15:21-28*

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Meditation: Do you ever feel "put-off" or ignored by the Lord? This passage describes the only occasion in which Jesus ministered outside of Jewish territory. (Tyre and Sidon were fifty miles north of



Israel and still exist today in modern Lebanon.) A Gentile woman, a foreigner who was not a member of the Jewish people, puts Jesus on the spot by pleading for his help. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her, and this made his disciples feel embarrassed. Jesus does this to test the woman to awaken faith in her. What did Jesus mean by the expression "throwing bread to the dogs"? The Jews often spoke of the Gentiles with arrogance and insolence as "unclean dogs" since the Gentiles were excluded from God's covenant and favor with Israel. For the Greeks the "dog" was a symbol of dishonor and

was used to describe a shameless and audacious woman. Matthew 7:6 records the expression: *do not give dogs what is holy*. Jesus, no doubt, spoke with a smile rather than with an insult because this woman immediately responds with wit and faith – "even the dogs eat the crumbs". Jesus praises a Gentile woman for her faith and for her love. She made the misery of her child her own and she was willing to suffer rebuff in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had indomitable persistence. Her faith grew in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with faith – whether Jew or Gentile – was refused his help. Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith?

"Lord Jesus, your love and mercy knows no bounds. May I trust you always and pursue you with indomitable persistence as this woman did. Increase my faith in your saving power and deliver me for all evil and harm."

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