

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Matt 4:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 15:21-28; L118A

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out,

“Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!

My daughter is tormented by a demon.”

But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her.

Jesus’ disciples came and asked him,

“Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.”

He said in reply,

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, “Lord, help me.”

He said in reply,

“It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.”

She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps

that fall from the table of their masters.”

Then Jesus said to her in reply,

“O woman, great is your faith!

Let it be done for you as you wish.”

And the woman’s daughter was healed from that hour.



Reflecting on the Gospel

None of us enjoys walking into a situation and being made to feel unwelcome.

Perhaps at a social event we join a group of people deep in conversation, only to have all talking stop. Or we present a new idea to the staff with whom we work and it is immediately cut down and we are ignored. Or a friend invites us along to dinner with mutual friends, and when we arrive there is obviously no place setting for us at the table and no move on the part of the hostess to set one. These

situations hurt. If we can, we take leave of the situation as soon as possible. If we cannot remove ourselves from a difficult situation, we try to become as inconspicuous as possible. A corner becomes our friend! A first glance at this Sunday’s gospel might lead us to think that the Canaanite woman is a very unwelcome person! The disciples want Jesus to send her away. Jesus says some pretty harsh things.

The Canaanite woman (a foreigner) approaches Jesus with a heartfelt request to heal her daughter. Jesus’ reply seems anything but welcoming! But rather than give up and remove herself from a seemingly unpleasant situation, she is determined to receive healing for her daughter. She does anything but give up! Her heart is steadfastly turned toward reaching one goal: healing for her daughter. She is willing to accept any rebuke, rebuttal, rebuff in order to get what she desires for one she loves. Love conquers any unwelcome.

The Canaanite woman demonstrates the kind of faith needed to be healed by Jesus and to receive God’s gift of salvation, the kind of faith that brings us into divine embrace. Her faith was visible in three habits of the heart: awareness that she needed Jesus’ healing intervention, persistence against all odds, and concern not only for herself but for her daughter.

Her great faith moved Jesus to have “pity on” her. Anyone who approaches God with this kind of great faith will be given healing and salvation. We too must develop and grow in the habits of the heart that make visible the great faith necessary for our healing and salvation.

Here is the twist of this gospel: a seemingly unwelcome situation gives way to one in which everyone is welcome. Jesus initially declares that his mission is only to “the house of Israel,” and, consequently, harshly rebuffs the Canaanite woman. Then a change occurs. The encounter between Jesus and the woman reveals the unrestricted welcome of Jesus, the power of great faith, and the universality of salvation for those who believe.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The Canaanite woman’s cry to Jesus was that he “[h]ave pity on me” (not on her daughter, although that is surely implied in the request). Her love for her daughter and her great desire that she be healed could not be separated from herself—she and her daughter were one in the need for healing and life. Her daughter was welcomed into her heart in love, and this was the source of her great faith and persistence. This gives us an insight into our inclusivity and ministry: we must be so “at one” with others that their plight is our own plight. Ministry is more than *doing* for another; it implies an empathy with another that discloses the unity we share as members of the Body of Christ. One dimension of living the Gospel is that we work to increase our unity with one another, which in turn draws us to reach out to others in mercy and compassion, welcome and inclusivity.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Canaanite woman; Have pity on me; My daughter is tormented; she keeps calling out; great is your faith; daughter was healed

To the point: The “Canaanite woman” demonstrates the kind of faith needed to be healed by Jesus, the kind of faith needed to receive God’s gift of salvation. Her faith was visible in three habits of the heart: awareness that she needed Jesus’ healing intervention, persistence against all odds, and concern not only for herself but for her daughter. Her great faith moved Jesus to have “pity on” her. Anyone who approaches God with this kind of great faith will be given healing and salvation. We too must develop and grow in the habits of the heart that make visible the great faith necessary for our healing and salvation.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: How shocking Isaiah’s prophecy must have been to the Jewish community who understood themselves to be God’s chosen ones! The gospel shows that the disciples are still struggling with this same issue: to whom God extends salvation. Both Isaiah and Jesus make clear that salvation is for all peoples.

to experience: A heart strongly set on a goal is unwaveringly persistent. Scientists pursuing the mysteries of outer space don’t give up when a rocket fails to launch. Medical researchers don’t give up when a failure occurs while pursuing a cure for cancer. A loving parent does not give up on a wayward youngster. A heart strongly set on salvation must be as unwaveringly persistent.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Psalm 67 was a song of thanksgiving for the harvest which expressed the ever-widening reach of God’s blessings: first upon the people of Israel, then upon all nations, and finally to the ends of the earth. Even during the period of the Old Testament, the Israelites were beginning to see that their election as God’s chosen people was to be a means of salvation for all peoples.

The first reading also proclaims that God’s blessings and salvation are for all peoples, not just the Israelites. In the gospel Jesus makes this revelation concrete when he responds to the Canaanite woman’s persistent plea and heals her daughter. In singing Psalm 67 we pray that all peoples be brought into the circle of God’s embrace. We expand our hearts to the reach of God’s salvation. We move from the disciples wanting to dismiss a needy person who is bothering them to Jesus acclaiming her faith and answering her need. We stretch our hearts to take in God’s unlimited expansiveness. We act like Christ.

to psalmist preparation: As you prepare to sing this responsorial psalm, you might spend time reflecting on your own understanding of the reach of God’s salvation. Whom do you find it hard to see within God’s saving embrace? Whose cries of need seem more a bother to you than an opportunity to show God’s saving care (gospel)? How, on the other hand, have you grown in your understanding and in your ability to respond? How has your heart been widened?

ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- What I could learn from the Canaanite woman when I am faced with resistance or rebuff is . . .
- I need to ask God for salvation when . . . I experience salvation right now in my life when . . .
- The habits of heart I must develop as visible expressions of my faith are . . .

PRESIDERS

Seeing the great faith of another, I am prompted to . . .

DEACONS

I am like the Canaanite woman advocating for those in need when I . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

The habit of the heart I must develop more fully to be true to my hospitality ministry is . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

When I persist in practicing my music, I gain . . . When I persist in practicing my faith, I gain . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

My serving is really a kind of persistent prayer expressing my great faith when I . . .

LECTORS

My care and persistence in preparing to lector expresses great faith in that . . .

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

My manner of distributing Holy Communion responds to the communicants’ great faith whenever I . . .