

A Dialogue of Faith

20th Week of Ordinary Time – Matthew 15: 21-28

The gospel for this week has the potential to leave the reader a bit off balance. It almost sounds like Jesus has insulted the Canaanite woman in her request and plea for Jesus to cure her daughter. In fact, Jesus does not apologize for His seemingly callus response to the woman's continual appeal. He is rather blunt about the purpose of His mission. What is actually going on in this scene from the gospel of Matthew is a dialogue of faith. Jesus is challenging, not just the woman, but all of us in what we believe and how we express our faith in Him.

The story is simple. A non-Jewish woman approaches Jesus on His journey through the region of Tyre and Sidon, somewhere outside of His homeland of Galilee. In a sense, this is hostile territory. It is a territory that is not so much geographically, but religiously defined. Jesus is in search of the **"lost sheep of the house of Israel."** He is walking with, and ministering to, the Jewish nation who are scattered to the four corners of the region.

In this scene, a Canaanite woman, a person that Jews would have considered part of a group associated with evil and profane practices, attempts to have a conversation with Jesus about her anguish and worry over the health and well-being of a beloved child. She opens this dialogue with **"Have pity on me, Lord Son of David!"** Jesus ignores her. His silence only amplifies her petition as well as the tension in the story. How could Jesus, the loving Almighty God, be so callus and cold to one in need? Or is He?

Jesus waits. His silence provokes the apostles' quick response. **"Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us"**, they say. Jesus affirms that His mission is only for the Jewish people. Is this truly what He is saying or, perhaps, is Jesus toying with everyone in this story? Is God opening an opportunity, a dialogue, where Gentiles might also have a place at the table of the Lord?

The woman is undaunted by Jesus' initial rejection. She turns the conversation into a dialogue, a prayer, where she takes the initiative to do him homage. With another simple petition she says, **"Lord, help me."** Simple, humble, and with great faith, she is not willing to give up on a God that does not initially answer her in the way she has requested. Instead, she waits.

Jesus' response now seems extremely cold, **"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."** Jesus has just said that the Gentiles are equal to dogs! Or is Jesus' pointed example intentional? Is He challenging this ideal of religious division as not being in line with the reign of God? Could Jesus be in this difficult dialogue in order to prove a point?

The woman does not pale in the tension of the moment. In fact, her dialogue with Him continues and grows. She responds with a quick wit and straightforward response, **"Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."** Jesus' next point is an affirmation of their entire dialogue, **"O, woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."** The conclusion of this dialogue of faith is the healing of the woman's daughter.

How often do we, as believers, set God up to prove His love for us by giving us what we want? Do we take the time to turn our conversations with God into a dialogue, a prayer, where we actually listen and then respond to God in an act of worship? Do we persevere through the difficulties and disappointments of life with a faith that does not pale in the midst our own personal hardships and tragedies?

Blessings!

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