



Matthew 15:21-28

21 Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. **22** 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.' **23** 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.' **24** He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' **25** But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' **26** He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs.' **27** She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table.' **28** Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Other readings: Isaiah 56:1,6-7 Psalm 66 (67) Romans 11:13-15,29-32

One of the important issues in the ministry of Jesus is his attitude to foreigners, those who were not of the Jewish faith, known as 'Gentiles' or 'pagans'. The Gospel of Matthew is particularly keen to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish hopes. He is the Jewish Messiah. Earlier in the gospel, during the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10, Jesus had instructed his disciples to avoid the Gentiles and preach only to the 'lost sheep' of Israel. But Jesus has now entered the pagan region of Tyre and Sidon. When confronted with the Canaanite woman he ignores her and then affirms that his own mission is limited to Israel.

The persistence in faith of the pagan woman is sufficiently strong to obtain a healing for her daughter. We might ask why Jesus is so harsh with her. Is it simply that, knowing her faith, he tests her to express it? After all, earlier in the gospel, in chapter 8, Jesus had cured the servant of the Roman centurion and praised his faith.

The good news of the Kingdom is to be preached to all, but the initial priority of Jesus is to bring the gospel to his own people. The mission to the nations had already been hinted at in the visit of the magi from distant lands to the new-born child. It will be the mission of the Church to teach all nations, as the Risen Lord will make clear at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

In the excerpt from the Letter to the Romans Paul declares that he has been made apostle to the nations. He is nevertheless convinced that it is God's purpose to bring his own Jewish brothers and sisters, as well as the pagans, to life in Christ. The faith of the nations will in time convince Israel that the God of all peoples has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Is my faith resilient when I am faced with trials?

Do I rejoice in the faith of the nations which is displayed in the Catholic Church?

We pray that Christ's message of hope may reach all people.

We pray for the Jewish people that they may know the fulness of God's mercy.