

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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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.

(Matthew 15:21-28)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The cities of Tyre and Sidon were the leading towns of ancient Phoenicia. Both cities were on the Mediterranean coast of what is now modern Lebanon. The Phoenicians were descendants of the even more ancient Canaanites, who populated the area earlier.
- Israel despised the Canaanites. It loathed the Canaanite religion with its pagan gods and fertility cults and found many of their practices abominable.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In this gospel, we find another example of the common device used by Matthew to denote the movement of Christianity from a Jewish to a Gentile setting. Jesus has left the Jewish region around the Sea of Galilee and travelled north-west to the Gentile territory of what was ancient Phoenicia in Syria.

Jesus' fame has obviously spread even here, but the focus of the passage is not the cure but the dialogue. The woman knows full well that Jesus is Jewish as she hails him as 'Son of David'. His silence in the face of her plea is explained in the next verse—a reference to the messianic mission of gathering all Israel into the kingdom. Jesus' response sounds harsh, but the woman is quick to seize on his imagery and twist it to her advantage, but with humility. Through her, Jesus reveals a great truth—God's salvation is available to all. He responds generously with both his praise and his healing power.

- Discuss some 'moments of revelation' or learning that participants may have had.
- How is inclusion understood and practised in the Church today?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever felt unfairly treated and had to stick up for yourself? What are the things that cause your heart to be troubled?
- Share a story of a time when you felt alien and unwelcome.
- The Gospel is universal. It is for all people. Are there ways you can participate in spreading the Gospel, even in small ways, this week? The best way to do this is by living the Gospel. Try to include an outsider.
- This week, recite the psalm and refrain:

O God, let all the nations praise you!

*O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help.*

O God, let all nations praise you!

