

August 20, 2023  
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus went from that place and 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 he did not say a word in answer to her. His 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 him 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 her daughter was healed from that hour.

### **Background:**

Last's week's Gospel ended with the disciples giving Jesus homage. They had witnessed Jesus walking on water, rescuing Peter from the raging sea, and calming the chaos of the winds. As Matthew continues his Gospel, he states that when their boat landed at Gennesaret, the people recognized Jesus and they brought the sick for him to cure. The Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem questioned Jesus as to why his disciples did not respect the tradition of washing before meals. Jesus responded by questioning their breaking of the commands of God by excusing someone from the obligation to care for a parent if they would declare that the money was instead dedicated to God. Jesus quotes the great prophet Isaiah to support his case. Then Jesus publicly humiliates them by turning his attention to the crowd that had gathered and offering them an instruction about what it is that really defiles a person. His instruction is only one verse, "It is not what enters one's mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one." (Matthew 18:11) The disciples approach Jesus to make him aware that he has offended the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus disregards their concerns and continues calling them blind guides, and he goes on to explain his teaching on what it is that really defiles a person.

It is with that instruction on what truly defiles a person that Matthew begins his account of Jesus' entrance to the pagan territory of Tyre and Sidon, where he encounters the Canaanite woman that is the focus of the Gospel text this week.

The first verse of the Gospel indicates that Jesus entered the pagan territory of Tyre and Sidon without any indication that he was compelled to do so. His actions are a contradiction of his own instruction to the disciples when he sent them on their mission to the lost sheep of Israel. "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town." (Matthew 10:5b) The understanding of the day looked upon the border between Jewish and Gentile territory as being set by God, to separate God's holy land, from the pagan territory. The woman that Jesus encounters is described as a Canaanite. This description was rarely used. It recalls the tribes that were occupying the land before the Jews gained control. The Canaanites were one of the primary enemies of the Israelites. Besides being a pagan and one of the most hated enemies of God's people, she was also an unescorted woman in a strictly gender-divided society. These factors make Jesus' contact with her a threat to his honor.

Jesus breaks with what was traditionally understood as sacred norms of behavior, enters the pagan lands, and encounters this mother whose daughter is possessed by a demon. She calls him "Son of David," and asks that Jesus have pity and mercy on her. The request for mercy is a request to honor a debt that is owed. By calling Jesus "Son of David," she is placing him in the line of King David and

asking him to act according to David's reputation of being a compassionate ruler. Even when she is ignored and insulted, she continues to treat Jesus with respect and honor. Jesus is touched in a way that leads him to both cure the daughter and remark about the faith of the woman. There is no indication in the text that Jesus had deliberately gone to the region with the intention of extending the blessings of God's healing to a non-Jew. The opening part of the dialogue seems to indicate that he had no intention of doing so. Yet that is what happened.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Have you ever been the object of discrimination? Did that affect your self-understanding or your relationship with God?
2. Do you recognize times in your life when you have discriminated against others?
3. What are you thinking when you realize that Jesus would even go into the region of Tyre and Sidon and risk such an encounter?
4. In your imagination, place yourself within the scene as it unfolds. Do you imagine yourself as Jesus, a disciple, the woman, or someone caught in the commotion on the street? Where does it take place? Who is in the crowd? What is the mood of the crowd, of the disciples, of the woman, and of Jesus as the scene unfolds? What is your mood as the scene unfolds?
5. Do you connect with the woman? Why?
6. Why would Matthew include this encounter in his Gospel?
7. How is God speaking to you in this text? How will you respond to God?
8. Can you take the time now to speak with God about what was happening within you as this Gospel unfolded, or the times in your life when you or others have felt ignored by society, or ignored by the church, or even by God?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com](mailto:fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com).

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for August 20, 2023, the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Thus says the Lord: Observe what is right, do what is just;  
for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed.  
The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to him,  
loving the name of the Lord, and becoming his servants—

all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant,  
them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar,  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

O God, let all the nations praise you!

May God have pity on us and bless us; may he let his face shine upon us.

So may your way be known upon earth; among all nations, your salvation.

May the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity;

the nations on the earth you guide. May the peoples praise you, O God;

may all the peoples praise you! May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear him!

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

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

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.

**Excerpts from Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; and Matthew 15:21-28**

**Excerpts from readings for August 15, 2023, Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple.

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet,

and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored

to give birth. Another sign appeared; a red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns.

Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth.

Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth.

She gave birth to a son, destined to rule all the nations. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed One."

The queen stands at your right hand, arrayed in gold of Ophir.  
Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house.  
So shall the king desire your beauty; for he is your lord.  
They are borne in with gladness and joy; they enter the palace of the king.

Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.  
For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man.  
For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order:  
Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ;  
then comes the end, when he hands over the Kingdom to his God and Father,  
when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power.  
For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.  
The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet."

Mary set out and traveled to the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.  
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb,  
and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said,  
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.  
And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?  
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.  
Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."  
And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him  
in  
every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever."  
Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**Excerpts from Revelations 11:19; 12:1-10; Psalm 45:10-16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; and Luke 1:39-56**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for August 20th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Matthew, Jesus at first ignores an appeal from a Canaanite woman for him to help her tormented daughter. He tells his disciples, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." When the woman persists, he suggests to her it is not right to give the

children's food to dogs, and she replies that even the dogs get table scraps. "O woman, great is your faith," he acknowledges. "Let it be done for you as you wish." And the woman's daughter was healed. The other readings also have references to the willingness of God to receive as his own any and all who choose to come to him. In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord says, "My salvation is about to come. The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord and hold to my covenant, I will bring to my holy mountain. Their offerings will be acceptable. My house shall be for all peoples." Psalm 67 exclaims, "O God, let all the nations praise you; may your salvation be known among all nations. You rule the peoples in equity; the nations on the earth you guide." In the second reading, from the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "I am the apostle to you Gentiles. As you once disobeyed God, so does my race; now you all may receive mercy. God delivered all, that he might have mercy upon all." These readings show that God welcomes any who join themselves to him, from any nation. But not only that--they also show, throughout the readings, what things a person can do to accomplish this. A number of ways are mentioned. In Isaiah: "My justice is about to be revealed," says the Lord. "Observe what is right, do what is just. Minister to the Lord, love his name, become his servants, and keep the Sabbath free from profanation." In Psalm 67: "Be glad and exult, and praise God." In Paul's letter to the Romans: "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Accept God and be the reconciliation of the world." And in Matthew: "The Canaanite woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" As if the situation had been set up to make a counterpoint about Jesus being sent "only to the lost sheep of Israel," Jesus had taken a bit of a side trip outside of Galilee, where he typically ministered. Going north of his usual area, "Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon," and this Canaanite woman was "of that district." The movement wasn't only in one direction—the two moved toward each other. He went into her district, and she sought him out when he was there.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!