



**PARISH OF ST. AGATHA**  
**15TH/16TH AUGUST 2020**



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**POPE FRANCIS: HUMBLE FAITH HAS NO BOUNDS**

Pope Francis reflected on the Sunday’s Gospel of the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman who provoked the Lord to admire her faith. He highlighted the faith of the Canaanite woman who sought healing for her daughter and showed that humble faith has no bounds.

**CRY OF SUFFERING**

While Jesus is in foreign territory to the north of Galilee a Canaanite woman approached him begging Him to heal her daughter. “Have mercy on me, Lord” is the cry from a mother who feels helpless, a “cry that is born out of a life marked by suffering”, Pope Francis said. The mother insists, even though “Jesus initially ignores her,” and even after Jesus says His mission “is directed only to ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’.” At that point, Pope Francis said, Jesus “puts her to the test, citing a proverb: It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs”.

**JESUS’ ADMIRATION**

Her response, said the Pope, shows that the woman senses the Most High God present in Jesus: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” That trust-filled wisdom “touches the Master’s heart,” provoking Him to admire her faith with the words “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” (v. 28). Pope Francis then reflected on “What type of faith is great.” Our faith is great when we bring our wounded past to Jesus’s feet, “asking Him to heal it, to give it meaning.”

**BRINGING OUR STORY TO THE LORD**

Each one of us, the Pope continues, has our own story, a story that is often difficult, filled with pain, misfortunes, and sins. “What do I do with my story,” he asked. “Do I hide it?” No, the Pope said. Instead, “We must bring it to the Lord,” with the prayer, “Lord, if You will it, You can heal me.” This is what the woman in Sunday’s Gospel teaches us, the Pope said, inviting everyone to consider their own life-story and to make the Canaanite woman’s prayer their own. “Let us go to Jesus, knock on Jesus’s heart, and say to Him, ‘Lord, if You will it, You can heal me’.”

**JESUS LOVES US AS WE ARE**

We will be able to do this, the Pope continued, “if we always have the face of Jesus before us.” Pope Francis insisted that Jesus loves us “as we are, without make-up,” with a love and compassion “that bears our sins, our mistakes, and our failures.”

**FINDING JESUS IN THE GOSPELS**

The Holy Father once again invited everyone to carry a copy of the Gospels with them, in their pockets or purses, or even on their phone – because it is there, in the Gospels, “that you will find Jesus as He is, as he presents Himself... You will find Jesus who loves us, who loves us a lot, who tremendously wants our well-being.” Pope Francis concluded his reflection with the prayer that the Blessed Virgin Mary “might intercede with her prayer so that the joy of faith and the desire to communicate it with the witness of a consistent life might grow in every baptised person,” and that we might be given the courage to draw near to Jesus and pray, “Lord, if You will it, You can heal me.”

**FAITH ENABLES US TO RECOGNISE JESUS PRESENT BEFORE US**

In today’s Gospel (Matt 15:21-28), Jesus is making a strong point, in that only by using our Faith, can we recognise His true Presence. He has come into the world to spiritually feed every nation from the Eucharistic Table, with the Living Bread (Himself) of Faith. *Give us this day our daily bread.* The Canaanite woman was a pagan, a non-believer but who obviously believed in His healing powers. This scrap of interest and the desire to seek Him out left her heart open to receive Faith. Her **daughter was tormented by the devil** - meaning living in sin. She may have served the devil by succumbing to addiction, prostitution living in a state of anger, selfishness, greed, laziness or impatience?

**HER HUMILITY STOPPED JESUS IN HIS TRACKS**

We can all be *tormented or tortured by the devil* when he tempts us to sin out of Pride. The woman revealed her humility and her trusting faith in Jesus by kneeling at His feet saying; **Sir, Son of David, take pity (mercy) on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.** He replied with a statement to test and cultivate the new faith she now enjoyed and to also educate us. The disciples in their desire for Jesus to give this woman what she wanted represent the members of the Church when we pray to Jesus for each other. Jesus said, **I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.** He was putting forward a theory, as it were, that His Presence on earth was surely only for God’s Israelite People and not Pagans. This is an important point because after Jesus’ Resurrection from the Dead, Peter only preached to God’s People of Israel and not to the Pagans or Gentiles. This encounter with the pagan woman was lost on him but he would later come to understand in a heavenly vision (Acts 10:9-6) that Jesus came to find and save everybody - the lost sheep of the whole world.

**JESUS IS THE LIGHT TO ENLIGHTEN GENTILES**

St Paul understood this mission when he wrote; *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same Body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel* (Eph 3:6). When the High Priest Simeon encountered baby Jesus at the Presentation in the Temple, he referred to Him as; *A Light to bring the Gentiles from Darkness* (Lk 2:32). This pagan woman was coming into faith and earlier referred to Jesus as **Son of David**, which only faith could have revealed to her, as the Messiah came from the House of David. This concerned mother, who had first addressed Him as, **Sir**, is now influenced by the Holy Spirit, who increased her faith and ability to recognise God’s Presence. She now refers to Him as **Lord**.

**LORD HELP ME**

Not giving up Hope, through her persistence, she simply said, **Lord, help me.** Jesus knew fully His mission to unite all unbelievers and believers from every corner of the earth by conversion through faith. However, He knowingly tests her **hunger** to seek the delivery of her daughter from evil and replied, **It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the house-dogs. She immediately retorted, Ah yes, Sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps (crumbs) that fall from their master’s table.** The children are the Children of Israel, who are the members of the Church today. The Food on the Table is the Healing Word of God on the Altar Table at Mass. His referral to dogs represents unclean pagans and unbelievers. Jews viewed dogs as unclean animals because they ate everything including pork. The Word of God falls from the Master’s Table onto many deaf ears today, but not with this Canaanite woman. She rightly believed it only took one **scrap of a Word** from this Master to defeat Satan, just as in the same way, with the **Word of Absolution** in Confession.

**PERSEVERANCE IN FAITH**

Her perseverance in faith paid off. Jesus answered her, **Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.** And from that moment her daughter was well again. Her prayer to Jesus expressed both helplessness and faith. It shows the need for us to persist in prayer anchored in our faith. We pray in the spirit of humility not in order to change God but that we might be changed. We pray in order to expand our will to accept what God is going to give us. He knows best and helps us grow in the virtue of patience. Love and mercy are extended to all who call on Him with trust, no matter where we are in the darkness of sin. In these dark times of Covid 19, let us never lose faith and if one is sunk in sin, don’t be ashamed or embarrassed to come and kneel before Jesus in Confession. He will forgive and heal. God bless, Fr. Brendan