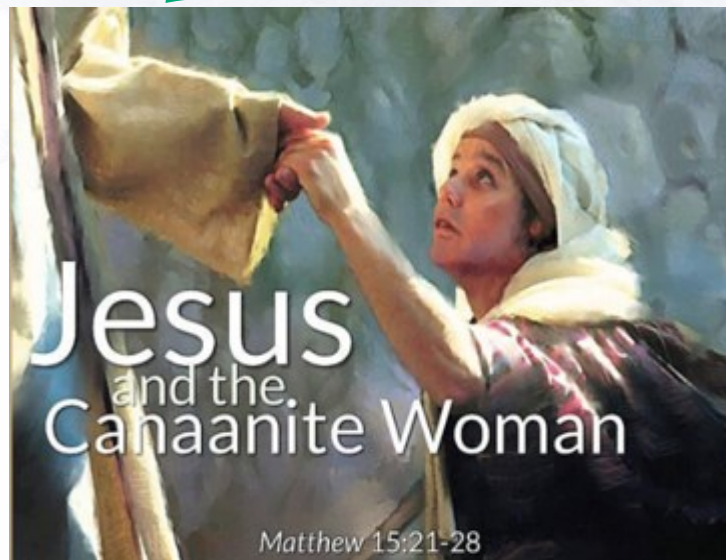


The Pastor's Corner...

The Power of Faith

This Sunday's Gospel describes an extraordinary encounter between Jesus and his Apostles and a Canaanite (Lebanese) woman. She was not a Jew. She was a pagan. She came to Jesus with an unusual request: to free her daughter from being possessed by a demon. Seeing her daughter's suffering, which may have gone on for a long time, she became desperate. She shouted for mercy: "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!" Why did she turn to Jesus with such a request? Was He not just a teacher, a rabbi, and a leader of a group of men? Who can expel a demon? Only a person who is stronger than a demon—a person sent by God or only God himself! With the very first plea, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!" she professed her faith in Jesus—not a rabbi, not a wise man only, but as an authentic messenger from God—even more—the Messiah himself. Although Jesus was the son of Joseph, she called him "Son of David," the title of the Messiah. She did not make a mistake. The Messiah, according to the prophecies, is a descendant of King David.

Surprisingly, her profession of faith seemed not to have impressed Jesus at all. It looked like Jesus was indifferent to the suffering of this woman and her daughter. Even worse, he seemed to use words that would be regarded as tasteless or even rude in relation to women or to any person. Why did Jesus behave in this way? The answer to this puzzle is the same as in the case of Jesus' controversial delay in helping the disciples during the storm on Lake Gennesaret, the story from last Sunday's Gospel. In both cases, Jesus obviously was testing these people's faith. To be sure, Jesus did not need to know the result of these tests. He, a divine person, knew everything. He knew everything, but he wanted this Canaanite woman to learn about her faith for herself. Only such a person who is tested and determined is able to have faith that is sure, strong, and lasting. Faith can move mountains and trees. There is no surprise that the strong faith of this Canaanite woman was comparable to moving mountains, so she was rewarded by the expulsion of a bad spirit from her daughter. "Let it be done for you as you wish."



In the Gospels many times we witness Jesus' healing people after seeing their faith, but he said something special about this woman's faith: "O woman, **great** is your faith!" This is something extraordinary as Jesus explicitly used the phrase "great faith" only twice in the Gospels. In both cases, the "great faith" was the faith of a pagan and not a Jew.

The other occasion in which Jesus used such a description of someone's faith is recorded in the eighth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. This was in reference to a Roman centurion whose servant was paralyzed. The centurion humbly acknowledged Jesus' authority, saying, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Jesus marveled at his faith and said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

In both cases, Jesus recognized their extraordinary trust and persistence, especially as pagans. That is why he challenged the prevailing Jewish assumptions about God's grace, which many Jews took for granted.

May the Lord give us true, strong and great faith, so we can hear from Him as the Canaanite woman heard, "Let it be done for you as you wish."

Fr. Mark Jurzyk