



Parish of Saint Joseph

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THE PASTOR SPEAKS...

(20th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026)

The Canaanite woman in the gospel today (Matthew 15:21-28) catches everyone's attention in relation to the faith which she manifests before Jesus. However, what really makes her outstanding is not so much that she believes that her daughter's health be restored by Jesus but the manner she responds to the challenging remarks of Jesus about the people of Canaan. A little geographical explanation is needed here to understand the symbolic significance and perhaps a theological implication of Tyre and Sidon mentioned in this gospel. *"Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came"* (Matthew 15:21-22). The ancient land of Canaan now corresponds to modern-day Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, and western Syria. The district of Tyre and Sidon is in the present-day Lebanon, and we know that Jesus has strong words against the people who lived there who were Gentiles or non-Jewish people. Jesus reproached them for their unbelief and, accordingly, they will be judged for their stubbornness of their hearts: *"because they did not repent"* (Matt 11:20-22). The Canaanite woman is then identified by her non-Jewish language and ethnicity.

In biblical times, the Canaanites are cast in a bad light. We find in the Book of Kings of the Old Testament about their god Baal (2 Kings 10:18-28) or their goddess Asherah (2 Kings 23:4-7). Even their ritual practices of fertility and sacrificing children make the Canaanites evidently wicked. The Book of Leviticus 18:25 chastises the Canaanites: *"Even the land was defiled; so, I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants."* Now we understand why Jesus tells the woman: *"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs"* (Matthew 15:26). Her response indicates her courage to face her nothingness before the Lord and humbly recognizes that her being a Canaanite or non-Jew does not exclude her from the God's bountiful love. *"Yes, Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table"* (Matthew 15:27). Her faith in Jesus defies every cultural or ethnic barrier.

The woman's response to the demeaning or degrading word "dogs" referring to her ethnic origins is a powerful reminder to the disciples that the Land of Canaan, whether Jews, or Lebanese or Jordanian and Syrian (or people from West Bank and Gaza) belong to the family of God. This lends a lesson that the mission of the Apostles is not only to the lost sheep of Israel but to the people in need of a God who they recognize as a loving and forgiving God. This also reminds us that in God's kingdom all are welcome and there is more than enough room for all people. We need not worry about whether we are accepted or not; neither should we worry about how we appear the people of God; the most important thing is to accept that we belong to God's holy people. Not that we deserve to belong by what we can do for the kingdom but more of the realization that it is God's initiative to bring us to Himself through Jesus Christ. By our rebirth at baptism, we have become part of God's life and now God in the Holy Spirit lives in each of us.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today strengthens our belongingness to the kingdom and reminds us of the call to unity and love for one another. Let us partake of this Eucharist and be transformed by it so that we can effectively bring the message of love and forgiveness that God bestows in each of us.

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Pastor