

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - YEAR A

Isaiah 56:6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28]

Excerpts from Pope Francis - Angelus - 20 August 2023

by Father Charles Fillion

16 August 2026

Brothers and sisters, today's Gospel may stir in us many questions. It is not the kind of Jesus we are used to. But we must understand that he is outside the territory of Israel, so in enemy territory. This means that Jesus had to be careful not to ruffle some feathers. That is why he pays no attention to the Canaanite woman.

But the disciples advise Jesus to acknowledge her request. It took a lot of courage for the woman to respond as she did. Impressed, Jesus heals her daughter instantly. We could say that Jesus changed his attitude. What made him change was the strength of the woman's faith. Remember, Jesus directed his preaching to the chosen people. Later the Holy Spirit would push the Church to the ends of the world. But what happens here, we could say, is an anticipation through which the universality of God's work is already manifested in the episode of the Canaanite woman.

Jesus' openness is interesting. On hearing the woman's prayer, "he anticipates the plan"; Faced with her concrete case, he becomes even more sympathetic and compassionate. God is love, and the one who loves does not remain rigid. Yes, he or she stands firm, but not rigid. They do not remain rigid in their own positions, but allow themselves *to be moved and touched*. They know how to change their plans. Love is creative.

And we Christians who want to imitate Christ, we are invited to *be open to change*. Many times, we hear people say: "We have always done it this way." Is that how we deal with our relationships? How about our faith? How do we live our faith, to truly pay attention in the name of compassion and the good of others, like Jesus did with the Canaanite woman. Hearts open to change.

The disciples needed to change. According to the disciples, the only thing that seemed "great" was her insistence; But Jesus sees her faith. If we think about it, that foreign woman had probably little or no awareness of the laws and religious precepts of Israel. What does her faith consist of then? *She does not have a wealth of concepts but of deeds* — the Canaanite woman draws near, prostrates herself, insists, takes part in a close dialogue with Jesus, overcomes every obstacle just to speak with him.

This is the concreteness of faith, which is not a religious label but is a personal relationship with the Lord. How many times we fall into the temptation to confuse faith with a label! This woman's faith is not defined by theological labels, but with insistence — she knocks at the door, knocks, knocks.

Her faith is not made up of words, but of prayer. And God does not resist when he is prayed to. This is why he said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (*Mt 7:7*).

Brothers and sisters, in light of all this, we can ask ourselves a few questions beginning with the *change in Jesus*. For example: Am I capable of changing opinion?

Do I know how to be understanding and do I know how to be compassionate, or do I remain rigid in my position?

Is there some rigidity in my heart? Rigidity is awful, firmness is good.

And based on the *woman's faith*: What is my faith like?

Does it stop at concepts and words, or is it truly lived with prayer and deeds?

Do I know how to dialogue with the Lord? Do I know how to insist with him?

Or am I content to recite beautiful formulas?

May this Eucharist make us open to what is good and concrete in our faith.