

## We are called to persevere in faith

We all begin our walk of faith when we come into an encounter with Jesus. We start this race well but we are called to persevere in faith till the end of our lives. In the gospel reading this morning we look at a Canaanite woman who persevered in her faith and earned the reward of having her daughter released from demon-possession.

Jesus had earlier landed in Gennesaret after walking on the water and getting on the boat with the disciples. There he healed many people and also engaged with the Teachers of the law who questioned him about why his disciples did not wash their hands before eating. Jesus explains to them that a person becomes unclean only by what comes out of their heart rather than what goes into the body. After dealing with them he moves further North out of the Jewish territory to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre adjoined northern Galilee and was a Gentile city located in Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) and was about 50 km from Capernaum.

As they entered the city a Canaanite woman came to him crying out, "Lord Son of David have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly". Mark records a Greek or Syro-Phoenician origin. The woman had several things going against her: firstly she was a woman and a respectable Jewish teacher was not expected to be holding a conversation with her.

Secondly, she was a Gentile an outsider and Jews believed that their teacher should not be engaging with her. Thirdly, her daughter was tormented by a demon. Her daughters condition would have been viewed with fear, superstition and disgust. The disciples told Jesus to send her away as she kept crying out after them. She persistently shouts, "Lord, Son of David have mercy on me".

Jesus responds saying that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus was stating that his initial mission was to the Jews, but when they reject him and the good news, it moves to an international community of faithful people. The woman kneels before Jesus and pleads for help. Jesus said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs". Jesus' answer is quite shocking and offensive when he says, that the children's bread cannot be thrown to the dogs. Jews frequently referred to the Gentiles as "dogs." With a shocking statement, Jesus was telling the Syro-Phoenician woman that his mission at this point was meant exclusively for the chosen people of Israel. Jesus is like a wise teacher who provokes his pupil in order to get them to respond and counter his argument. The woman is persistent and has excellent debating skills. She replies with realism and wit. She says, "what you say in fact is true, but then even the dogs get to eat from the crumbs that fall of the table".

Jesus immediately compliments her answer saying, "Woman you have great faith! Your request is granted". "And at that very hour her daughter was healed. The perseverance of the woman resulted in her daughter being released from demon-possession.

Jesus had come to release people from all kinds of bondages. Many of us have our own bondages and we struggle with it by trying to deal with it by our own strength. However, when we come to Jesus with faith and seek his help he is always able to release us from our bondages. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see.

God calls us this morning to have faith in him. The writer of Hebrews says that “Without faith it is impossible to please God”. Faith is the crucial ingredient that is essential for pleasing God. We are called to believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him earnestly. We are called to persevere in faith and seek him inspite of all the odds that we may face. May we truly persevere in faith and receive the reward of eternal life.

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