



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

ANGELUS

Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 20 August 2023

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, *buongiorno!*

Today's Gospel recounts the encounter of Jesus with a Canaanite woman outside the territory of Israel (cf. *Mt* 15:21-28). She asks him to free her daughter, who is tormented by a demon. But the Lord pays no attention to her. She insists, and the disciples advise Jesus to acknowledge her so she would stop. Jesus, however, explains that his mission is directed to the children of Israel, using this image: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs". And the courageous woman responds, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table". Then, Jesus says to her, "'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (vv. 26-28). This is a beautiful story. And this happened to Jesus.

We see that Jesus changed his attitude. What made him change was the strength of the woman's faith. Let us pause briefly over these two aspects: *the change in Jesus* and *the woman's faith*.

The change in Jesus. He was directing 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 like this: he 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*. How good it would do our relationships, as well as our lives of faith, if we were to be docile, to truly pay attention, to soften up in the name of compassion and the good of others, like Jesus did with the Canaanite woman. The docility to change. Hearts docile to change.

Now let us look at the *woman's faith*, which the Lord praises, saying that it is “great” (v. 28). 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 fraught with theological gallantry, 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? Which is not firmness: rigidity is awful, firmness is good. And beginning with 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 Our Lady make us open to what is good and concrete in the faith.

After praying the Angelus the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, I am following with concern what is happening in Niger. I join the Bishops' appeal in favour of peace in the country and for stability in the Sahel region. I accompany with my prayers the efforts of the international community to find a peaceful solution as soon as possible for everyone's benefit. Let us pray for the dear people of Niger. And let us also pray for peace for all populations wounded by war and violence. Let us especially pray for Ukraine, which has been suffering for some time.

I greet all of you, the faithful from Rome and pilgrims from various countries. In particular, I greet

the new seminarians from the North American College and I wish them a good formative journey; I also greet the “*de la Borriquita*” community from Cadice, Spain; I greet the Polish people, thinking of the women and girls, pilgrims to the Shrine of Our Lady of Piekary Śląskie.

I greet the young people from the “Tucum” Project who today are beginning a *Via Lucis* through Italian railway stations to meet with people who live on the margins to bring them the hope of the Gospel.

I greet all of you and I wish you all a good Sunday. Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*