

# **Canaanite Woman's Faith**

**Homily for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Matthew 15:21–28**

**Reverend Robert Gillelan**

**August 5, 2026**

**Editor's Note:** This transcript was prepared from an audio recording. Only formatting, punctuation, capitalization, and obvious spelling have been corrected. The wording has otherwise been preserved as closely as possible.

The back story to today's Gospel is almost as good as this Gospel because Jesus has just had a run-in with the Pharisees regarding impurity and what defiles a person. Jesus says it's not what you put into your mouth that defiles you; it's what comes out.

After Jesus says that, His disciples come up to Him and say, "You know you offended the Pharisees by saying that." Jesus says, "Look, you guys should not be hanging out with the Pharisees. They are blind guides, and it's like the blind leading the blind with the Pharisees. If the blind lead the blind, eventually you are going to fall into a ditch."

Peter comes up and says, "Can you explain that to me?" Jesus is like, "Are you still lacking in understanding?" Jesus says, "Here it is... it doesn't matter what you put into your mouth. What you put into your mouth goes into your stomach and out into the latrine."

So Jesus is frustrated, and He knows they need a break. He needs to get Himself and His disciples away from the crowds.

These run-ins with the Pharisees are problematic. He doesn't want to get Himself arrested before His appointed time.

He's had all of this, and all these encounters with these huge crowds, the feeding of the 5,000. He needs to get away for Himself and for the disciples. So they decide to go from Jewish territory into pagan territory because that will be safe.

That will be a nice little retreat. And so they go to Tyre and Sidon, which is just north of Israel's border, into Lebanon, and lo and behold, here comes the Canaanite woman, and now she's got a problem, and her daughter is possessed.

Let us consider the way that Jesus responds to this situation. And let me ask you to hear these words of Jesus as if you held the moral high ground and you count yourself among the "woke" of today, those who know best.

So this woman cries out for help, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David." Jesus did not say a word to her.

He ignored her. So you have a Jewish man ignoring a Canaanite woman in need.

"Well, that's racist and sexist, isn't it?" But she is calling out.

And Jesus' next reply is, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Well, now Jesus is a bigot, isn't He? Because He is not ticking off any of the boxes that are DEI. No diversity, equity, or inclusion there. And then finally, the crowning blow, when Jesus says, "It's not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." Now He's going to be prosecuted for hate speech.

Of course, we understand that none of that is who Jesus is, and none of

that is His intention. His intention is salvation. And so, what do we take from this?

So we know how it ends. This woman has this excellent reply, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Jesus commended her with such great faith.

Traditionally, the two really big theological statements that this Gospel makes are the faith of this woman, especially when being tested by Jesus—not being ignored, and not being hated, not being talked down to, but being tested in her faith.

Maybe we can take from that, in our spiritual lives, perhaps too, we should suspect that Jesus is not always going to speak to us in the nicest of terms, or the way that we would like Him to speak to us.

Jesus is going to speak to us in our hearts the way He needs to in order to shake us up and move us one step closer to holiness and salvation. Sometimes that may not sound nice, sometimes it may not feel good, but that's who Jesus is.

The other big theological point of this Gospel is that Jesus is inclusive in His offer of salvation. He has an order about how He's going to accomplish that, but we see a foreshadowing of salvation being offered to pagans and Gentiles with the exorcism of this Canaanite woman's daughter.

And so there's a lot here to think about. May we be up to the challenge of defending our faith against unbelief in our world today.

Let us pray, I think maybe at this Mass especially, for the grace to have the faith of this pagan Canaanite woman, remembering that she said,

"Lord, for even dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish."

May Jesus speak those kind of words to us.