Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Gospel text (*Mt* 15:21-28): At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus' disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour.

"Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."

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Today, we are given to contemplate the scene of the Canaanite woman: a pagan woman —not an Israeli one— whose daughter was very sick, possessed by the demon, and who had heard of Jesus. She comes to meet him and starts crying out: "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon" (Mt 15:22). She is not asking for anything; she is only telling him of her daughter's sickness hoping Jesus will decide what to do.

But Jesus does not answer her. Why? Perhaps He had already realized the faith of that woman and wanted it to grow still further. And she keeps on begging, so that the disciples ask Jesus to send her away. This woman's faith is evidenced, above all, through her humble insistence, emphasized by his disciples' words: "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us" (Mt 15:23).

The woman keeps on insisting; she does not get tired. Jesus' silence is explained by the fact He has only been sent to look after the lost sheep of the nation of Israel. Yet, after his resurrection, He will tell his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15).

At times, God's silence torments us. We have often complained of such silence, haven't we? But the Canaanite woman kneels before Jesus. It is the worshipping position. He replies that it is not right to take the bread from the children to throw it to the dogs. And she answers: "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters" (Mt 15:26-27).

This woman is very shrewd. She does not get angry, nor she loses her temper, but she actually admits that He is right. It is true, Sir! It looks like if she would be telling Him: —I am like a dog, but the dog is under its master's protection.

The Canaanite woman offers us a great lesson: she acknowledges the Lord is right, He who is always right. —Do not pretend to be right when you appear before the Lord. Do not ever complaint but, if you do, end up your prayer by saying: "O Lord, let your will be done."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Let us then learn, or let us hold fast, humility. If we have it not yet, let us learn it; if we have it, let us not lose it." (Saint Augustine)

- "The Lord does not close his eyes to the needs of his children, and if he seems at times insensitive to their requests, it is only in order to test them and to temper their faith." (Benedict XVI)

- "Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gifts, so he teaches us filial boldness: 'Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will.' (Mk 11:24) (...) Jesus is as saddened by the 'lack of faith' of his own neighbors and the 'little faith' of his own disciples as he is struck with admiration at the great faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2610)