

Thursday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 7:24-30): Jesus went to the district of Tyre. He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but he could not escape notice. Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, “Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She replied and said to him, “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s scraps.” Then he said to her, “For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter.” When the woman went home, she found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

“Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet.”

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Today, we see the faith of a woman who did not belong to God's chosen people, but trusted Jesus could cure her daughter. That mother “was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter” (Mk 7:26). Pain and love bring her to insistently beg, ignoring scorn, delays or indignities. And she gets what she is asking for, as “When the woman went home, she found the child lying in bed and the demon gone” (Mk 7:30).

Saint Augustine used to say that our prayers are not heard because we ask “aut mali, aut male, aut mala.” “Mali”, because we are evil, for that our personal dispositions are not good, or they are bad, and we should be asking for, in the first place, to become good; “male” because we pray badly, without faith, not persevering, not humbly; “mala” because we ask for bad things, that is, things

which are not good for us, things which can harm us. In the last analysis, prayer is ineffective when it is not true prayer. Therefore, “Pray. In what human venture could you have greater guarantee of success?” (Saint Josemaria Escrivá). The Syrophenician woman is a good mother; she was begging something good (“she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter”) and she begged rightly (“and came and fell at his feet”).

Our Lord wants us to use insistently the petition prayer or prayer of faith. There are, indeed, other kinds of prayers —worship, salvation, prayer of thanks—, but Jesus insists very much on our often using the petition prayer.

Why? There could be many reasons: because we need God's help to attain our greatest aim; because it expresses hope and love; because it is a clamor of faith. But there is also a motive that perhaps is sometimes ignored: God wants things to be a little as we like them. Thus, our petition —which is an act of freedom— along with God's omnipotent power, can contribute to make the world as God wishes and a little as we wish, too. The power of prayer is just wonderful!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“Our prayer is not heard because we ask badly, without trust in God or lacking humility and perseverance.” (Saint Augustine)

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“Jesus praises the Syro-Phoenician woman who asks with insistence for the healing of her daughter. Insistence, even though she is tired, but this is an attitude of prayer. Saint Teresa speaks of prayer as a negotiation with the Lord.” (Francis)

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“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 1:24). Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt (Mt 21:22): ‘all things are possible to him who believes’ (Mk 9:23) (...)” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 2610)