



# Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

## Sunday 16th August 2020

1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. Over the next week, set aside times to come back more than once to the passage. You could read it all or part of it again, slowly. Perhaps there is a special word for you in this passage of Scripture? Keep this word or phrase in your thoughts and gently repeat it, bringing it to mind and allowing God to speak to you in your heart.
5. Finally, come back to the text to conclude: What is God in this scripture asking of you this week? What is the one challenge, one little change you are asked to make or the thing you have been asked to do? Then say a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news in the passage. End in quiet prayer.



### THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL – Matthew 15:21-28

*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.*



### A Short Thought

In today's Gospel, Jesus changes his mind! How is that possible? In today's story, however, a very feisty woman, clearly not a daughter of Abraham, with her urgency and her witty retort, brings Jesus to recognise the needs of those beyond the ethnic confines of the Jewish people. They are ordinary human beings too, just as much in need of the Good News of the Kingdom as anyone else.

The Canaanite woman approaches Jesus and his disciples, begging for Jesus to cure her daughter. Jesus, however, completely ignores her, acting as though she does not exist. This image of the cold-shoulder Jesus is completely unexpected; the Lord of Love refuses to even acknowledge her, not even gracing her with a word of dismissal. But at the same time, it is not that shocking. How often do we pray and not feel immediate fulfilment or get an immediate response or the response we wanted? Sometimes, in dire moments of frustration, when our problems just seem to multiply and we feel ostracized and completely disconnected from both the ones we love and the One who loves us, we experience this image of Jesus without realizing it. The funny thing about images is that they can be misinterpreted – our "eyes playing tricks on us." Continuing on in the story, we see the image change. The woman prays again, saying "Lord, help me." Jesus turns and acknowledges her and reminds her that she is not a part of his audience. This woman is a foreigner, holds different beliefs and customs, and yet she comes to Jesus, begging for divine assistance. While different, the Canaanite woman has one very special connection to Jesus: her humanity. So, she does the unexpected; she humbles herself down to the lowest point that she can and places her daughter's fate and her own pride in Jesus' hands alone. At that point, when she opens her eyes and opens herself up entirely for the Lord, opening all of the doors of her heart for Jesus, Jesus finally shows mercy. Sometimes pride and exclusivity get in the way of our prayer. In this Gospel example, the woman opens her heart up to the Lord more and more with each exchange. Jesus is able to help her more as she continues to grow. The more we open ourselves up and humble ourselves down, the more the warmth in our heart grows as God feeds the fire of our faith. Let us put our pride, our hearts, and everything of ourselves in God's hands, and let us let him help us.

## SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. This woman shows great persistence; she did not allow the disciples' irritation or Jesus' offhand remark to put her off. She knew what she wanted and she trusted that Jesus could help. Does my faith have something of her clarity and persistence?
2. Jesus is presented to us in the Gospels as a formidable debater but in this instance the Canaanite woman comfortably wins the debating point. Jesus praises the woman for her faith. What is your passion and what are you willing to stand firm for?
3. The Canaanite woman was not concerned for herself but for her daughter. Recall people you have known who have been committed to a noble cause. Who are you willing to stand up for?
4. Who are the "Canaanite women who call out for attention today—people in church, or our community or state whose needs are not being attended to? Are we willing to raise our voice for them?

## Prayer -

God of the nations, to your table all are invited and in your family no one is a stranger. Satisfy the hunger of those gathered in this house of prayer, and mercifully extend to all the people on earth the joy of salvation and faith. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen**

### Prayer in these uncertain times

*We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen*

