



Daily Reflections

RESPONDING TO THE FOREIGN WOMAN

By Sr. Christine Hilliard, CSJ

Today's Gospel

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.

1 KINGS 10:1-10

Reflection

The author of this gospel mentions that Jesus didn't want anyone to know about his journey to Tyre, a pagan city in Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast south of today's Beirut and known for its commercial richness. When he encounters the pagan woman whose daughter was "possessed by an unclean spirit," he initially dismisses her by saying: "Let the children be fed first. . . For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." [The term "dogs" referenced the Gentiles and was an insult indicating Jesus saw Israel as his priority over the Gentiles.] The woman responds to Jesus in a courageous and humorous way by turning these terms back to Jesus as a play on words. "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." Perhaps Mark wanted to point out that even someone as "unclean" as a Gentile woman with a possessed daughter was able to contend on equal terms with Jesus, a Jew. The words exchanged between them may also carry a special meaning. It is a common Jewish expression to speak of God's word as "bread." The word translated in this passage as "the food of the children" is literally "the bread of the children." Thus Jesus may be understood as saying: "It is not right to take God's bread/word and throw it to the dogs," i.e., to those who do not understand it. Perhaps this encounter might be understood as Jesus' willingness to extend God's word to the Gentiles.



Hand holding bread
Photo by Ariane Dias

For Pondering

- The woman challenges Jesus and he is open to her. When have you experienced God's openness to you? When have you experienced your openness to God?
 - Consider the word of God as bread. How has it nourished you in your life?
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For Prayer

*Join the Syrophoenician woman and her daughter in prayer today.
Use Psalm 106:4:*

*Remember us, O LORD, as you favor your people;
visit us with your saving help.*

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