
 Refuge Under God's Wings



And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out 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." And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread 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, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matt 15:21-28)

A Eucharistic celebration was going on in a church in Xi'an, China. Communion was being distributed to the faithful. Suddenly, when a young girl was approaching the altar to receive the communion, a commotion erupted. An old lady went out of the pew and grabbed her by the hand. Apparently, the girl was an outsider and the old woman doubted whether she was a Catholic Christian. "Send her away, for she is crying out after us" (Matt 15:23).

Sending Her Away

It is said that the community, which the Gospel of Matthew was written to, was composed of those Jews who believed in Jesus, as the Messiah and the Son of God. Their faith in Jesus, however, did not change their tradition and they kept following the law of Moses. As long as a fellow Jew wanted to join their community there was no problem in accepting him or her. However, the problem had arisen if a non-Jew wanted to join the community. What to do with such a person?

According to the rabbis of the first century, when

someone wants to covert to Judaism, he or she must go through a four-time request, three-time rejection, and, finally, reception period in order to become one with the community. In today's Gospel we clearly see this pattern.

request 1	“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon (15:22b).
rejection 1	But he did not answer her a word (15:23a)
request 2	And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us” (15:23b)
rejection 2	He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24)
request 3	But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me” (15:25)
rejection 3	he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs” (15:26)
request 4	“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table” (15:27)
acceptance	Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (15:28)

The process was meant to make sure that those who wanted to become Christians knew perfectly well what they were doing. To be a Christian is not a trivial matter. It calls for allegiance to God alone and for a change of life. One needs to be ready to make choices that make the world around him or her wonder. The prophet Isaiah was very clear regarding those foreigners who wanted to join the Jewish community. It called for total devotion to God, ministering and loving Him, and obedience to the covenant, keeping the Sabbath and other commandments (Is 56:6). Ruth, a Moabite woman, who became the grandmother of king David, left her own country and her own family in order to find refuge under the wings of God (Ruth 2:12). Even more challenging was to be a Christian. The moral code was very high (the Sermon on the Mount - Matt 5-7) and the choice could cost one's life. Today, as yesterday, it is not a trivial

matter to join a Christian community. One can be laughed at or insulted, put into prison or even killed for confessing that Jesus is Lord and the Son of the living God. So before you make such a choice think twice.

Her Love and Faith

The Gospel of Matthew states that from the very beginning of his ministry Jesus' mission had a clear objective: to renew Israel. “Salvation comes from the Jews” (John 4:22) and so they should be the primary object of receiving the Gospel. “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:5-6). The missionary strategy of the early Church was to preach first to the Jews. Yet again and again, we come across the people of other nations and religious backgrounds, who are commended for their great faith. When a Roman centurion approached Jesus asking for help to heal his servant, Jesus commented: “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith” (Matthew 8:10), and the Canaanite woman amazed him with her great faith (Matthew 15:28).

God has different plans. “O God, let all the nations praise you!” (Psalm 67:6). God is not satisfied with the praises coming only from one nation. He wants other nations to join in one song of praise. To the surprise of many Jews, “God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18). Paul realised this fact. Although salvation comes from the Jews, yet those who had accepted it were mostly the Gentiles. The Jews wanted to be worthy of salvation by perfect observance of the law. The Gentiles received it as a free gift. The statement, “o woman, great is your faith”, is directed to everyone who puts his or her trust in the saving power of Jesus. Salvation cannot be gained by fulfilment of the law. The fulfilment of the law is the fruit of salvation.

St. Paul has a beautiful statement: “faith acting through love” (Gal 5:6). He also says that faith without love is “nothing” (1 Cor 13:2). The woman loved her daughter and believed in Jesus. Love and faith gave her that boldness to cross the boundaries of gender, religion, and nationality, to come to Jesus and ask Him for help. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:7) and “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). She

perfectly embodies what it means to be a Christian.

Conclusion

The young Chinese girl was finally allowed to receive the Holy Communion, and the celebration ended. I was observing the girl, searching for the signs of hurt and anger, but she looked calm. Apparently, she was not troubled at all. She was happily talking with some people from the church, including the old lady.

To be a Christian is not a trivial matter. The-

re are problems coming from outside and there are problems coming from within our communities. Yet, there is a huge difference between a life in Christ and a life outside of Christ. No wonder that there are more and more “Canaanite women” who, overcoming many challenges, want to join our ranks. They are ready to undergo all sorts of suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom for the sake of their faith in Jesus. They truly believe that only under Jesus’ wings they can find refuge, blessing, healing, and salvation.

Prayer Intentions

- Let us pray for the successful operation of Chen Wei Wei;
- Let us pray for the families of Ms Ya, Xue, Wang, and Zheng; may the good Lord bless them with love, grace, and mercy;
- Let us pray for Denise and her family; may the blessing of God be upon all of them;
- Let us pray for the victims of the earthquake in Yunnan;
- Let us pray for all who travel; may, by the grace of God, they safely reach their destinations;

Biblical Passages we all love

Beginning with this issue of our Newsletter, we will share with our readers the passages of the Bible that touches our hearts. We believe that their message can help all of us in our journey through life.

- Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Is 40:27-31)
- fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (...)
- Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I am the one who helps you, declares the Lord; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. (Is 41:10.14)

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.

New Life Asia Team