



Sept. 9, 2018 No Limits to God's Love Given by Rev. Mattei

In a few moments we'll be praying for people and situations in the world we are concerned about. If we could see the reaction of the people we pray for when things start changing in their lives we would rejoice and be happy for them. I wonder what it is like for them to be the beneficiaries of our prayer from a distance: Jesus is not physically present and yet something happens in their lives: someone's (a church's) faith is intervening in somebody else's life. What do we see going on in our life when we pray for others? Conversely, what changes in us when we hear that people are praying for us? Do we dare asking God for interventions or are we afraid of being disappointed in our prayer? Is it the "How" we pray or is it the "What" we ask we have doubts about? Or is it even the fact *that* we ask? Are we afraid to find out our faith is not strong enough? Or is our faith so confident in our relationship with God that we become Jesus for others.

There are two healing stories in today's [Gospel reading](#). In the first Jesus heals a Syrophenician woman's daughter who is possessed by a demon. In the second Jesus heals a deaf man who had a speech impediment. In both stories there is intercessory prayer: requests for healing are advanced on behalf of those in need by caring people. In the first, Jesus has a strong and harsh reaction to the request; in the second he seems to have learned his lesson and changed his attitude towards the foreign petitioners.

In last week's [Gospel text](#), Jesus challenged the Pharisees' "purity" law and their judgment of those who did not conform to their standards of piety. The question, then, seemed to be: what must we do to be acceptable in the eyes of God (and the community)? What criteria needs to be fulfilled and what standards achieved before people can be loved? In today's gospel the questions get expanded: Is there room in the kingdom of God for people of all nations? Is God's unconditional love available to all or is it limited to the Israelites only? In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus seems to suggest that lineage is not guarantee of election ([Mt 3:9](#)). How can the post-resurrection Church

(who wrote and reflected on the text) respond to the election of Israel and consider the necessity of the mission to the gentiles: are the promises of God available to all? Is God's mission a universal mission? Can the gentiles be saved? Such were the questions of the early Church.

Jesus is not afraid to break social boundaries and expectations to show the unconditional and unchained love of God and gets closer to the untouchables, the impure, the most vulnerable and fragile in society: the women (especially the widows), the poor (especially the orphans), the sick (especially those physically impaired and those possessed by demons). They are so important to God that they become the center of gravity from which Jesus himself operates. In his mind, no law is more important than people. When we are informed of the love of God for all people and we learn how to value and protect the honor and dignity of all people created in the image of God, we realize we are emboldened and empowered to stand for the rejects of society. People are prepared to go to jail rather than to [obey](#) laws and ordinances in opposition to their conscience: see for instance Arnold Abbott's [story](#).

So Jesus heads off into "impure" territory, the gentile region of Tyre. He may not be doing that to prove a point. He is just tired and hopes to get away from where people request his attention. He needs a spiritual retreat and physical rest. But a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit [hears about him](#) and seeks him out. The "word" about Jesus has reached her: mission has begun among the [gentiles](#) and they *turn* to Jesus and trust his power: should they be denied access to God's Kingdom of love just because they are foreigners and belong to another religion or to no religion at all? The disciples had not understood what the miracle of the five loaves and two fish meant: their mind was closed to the mystery of the presence of God ([Mk 6:52](#)); not so the woman's heart who had received the good news in faith. The crumbs the disciples had collected at the feeding of the 5000 have not been received in faith, but it is the woman's faith that allows her to value the crumbs of the bread given for the [children](#).

The woman is not an unintended beneficiary of the mercy of God: her faith earns her a share of the heavenly banquet; her great trust in Jesus bespeaks of her openness to the riches of God. In (the breaking and) the sharing of the heavenly bread (God's providential manna to the people on a journey through the desert), the gentile woman sees the mercy and compassion of God at work. The [word of faith](#) she speaks is the Word that has taken root in her and [produced fruit](#); it's the Word that becomes Bread of [Hope](#) broken for the [hungry](#). A foreigner and a woman becomes example of missionary faith to the disciples!

When we look at an icon of faith such as the Syrophenician woman, we realize she was not concerned about “How” or “What” she asked of Jesus. She displayed confident conviction that Jesus could satisfy her plea. That conviction can only come from a deep understanding of one’s relationship with God, and this produces assurance of firm and unshakable union with God who loves us. This profound faith opens us to generous giving of ourselves.

May we grow in our intimate unity with Jesus, who is more than a miracle worker and a dispenser of favors: he is Word of hope become flesh for us and Bread for the journey. In him we don’t think twice about becoming bread for our neighbors.