

August Word of Life

‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ (Mt 15:28)

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Jesus is making his way to the region of Tyre and Sidon, to a foreign land. It seems that he and his followers are searching for an opportunity to rest at last and maybe also for solitude, silence, prayer, and shelter. Suddenly, they hear the cries of a woman who, like other characters in the gospels, has no name. Her presence disturbs and irritates the disciples who ‘beg’ Jesus to send her away: ‘she comes shouting after us.’ The woman is not blocked by the fact that she is not an Israelite, nor because she is a woman, nor because the Master ignores her. She is a mother, desperate for her daughter ‘tormented by a demon.’ She approaches Jesus with the tenacity of wanting a personal meeting with him and she manages to ‘kneel before’ the Master as she insistently asks for help. Jesus responds with unusual harshness and says, ‘It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.’

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The woman accepts the refusal and she understands that her world is not part of Jesus' primary mission. She accepts that her God is not a machine that dispenses graces, but a father who desires a true relationship that recognises her personal poverty. Aware of this, the woman looks Jesus in the eye, ‘Yes, Lord, yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.’ She puts Jesus - so to speak - with his back to the wall, and he is moved by the humility of those who are content with the crumbs. Even her cries seem to express a faith and she calls him ‘Lord, Son of David!’

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Her great faith is enshrined in the gospels thanks to a few verbs: the woman comes out and goes to Jesus; she calls out; she cries; she asks for mercy; she recognizes Jesus as Lord and prostrates herself before him; she maintains her tenacity and certainty that for the Lord the impossible is possible; she responds to Jesus' harshness with impeccable logic. Motherly love and trust are her strengths. ‘And her daughter was healed instantly.’

This Word is a picture of a person's living faith in action. And, at the same time, it shows the efforts and journey of the early Christian community to which Matthew addresses these writings, as it opens up to the non-Jewish world which both contains and searches for faith.

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As with the Syrophoenician woman, ‘our faith can be challenged by a sudden difficulty, by an unforeseen event that upsets our plans, by a serious illness or by the prolongation of a very

painful situation' ^[i], and, we might add, by the absence of peace in the world, by structural injustices, by a planet that is seriously ill or by conflict in the family or society... And one of our weaknesses might be a lack of perseverance and total faith. 'God allows our faith to pass through difficult and sometimes absurd situations. He wants to purify it, he wants to see if we really know how to abandon ourselves in him, believing that his love is much greater than our plans, desires or expectations.'^[ii]

This happened to Saliba. It seemed he would have to leave his city and his elderly parents in Homs Syria. His father was a glazier and his shop had been destroyed during the war and the city destroyed. Like other young people, Saliba thought he would have to create new opportunities elsewhere but he did not give up. He was just 22 years of age and had the resolve of someone who does not want to run away from helping his people, who are suffering. He took advantage of the opportunity offered to him by a project called RestarT, to open his own convenience store, where his fellow citizens could find cheeses, yogurt and butter made by his mother, as well as pulses, oils, spices and coffee. He already had a refrigerator and a power generator. On days when the convenience store is closed, he and his elderly father distribute baskets of food to families in need.

Edited by Victoria Gómez and the Word of Life team.

^[i] Chiara Lubich, Word of Life, June 1994

^[ii] Ibid