

Homily for today (Thursday, 8 February) / A mai szentbeszed (Csütörtök). Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás!

(Mk7:24-30) Our Lord entered pagan territory in today's gospel, but not to preach. Thanks to Abraham's fidelity, Israel was the only nation privileged to hear the gospel proclaimed directly by our Lord Himself. Instead of publicity, Jesus sought anonymity among the Gentiles so that His disciples might rest from the crowds and profit from His private instruction. Enter the patron saint of Anawim everywhere: the Syrophenician woman in today's gospel, whose little daughter was possessed! So much for anonymity! In Matthew's account, we learn how she kept crying out, "Son of David, help me!" Jesus, for His part, declined to answer her. The disciples understandably misread our Lord's intention so they boldly urged a more direct approach: "Send her away," they said, "for she keeps crying out after us." The apostles' motives may have been culturally conditioned but our Lord's were strictly theological. "I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel," He explained. Undeterred, the woman implored His help once again, this time on her knees.

This incident reminds us of the miracle at Cana when Jesus changed water into wine at His mother's request. Here are some similarities: Both the Syrophenician woman and our Lady are asking on someone else's behalf. Both times our Lord objects strenuously citing a divine decree as the obstacle. To His mother, He said, "Woman, what's this to you and to me? My hour is not yet come." (Jn2:4) To the Syrophenician, He said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." (Mt15:26) Yet, neither petitioner is deterred by an apparent rebuff. On the contrary, both are emboldened, and their confidence pays off. Both times, our Lord makes a dramatic exception to the divine rule. What conclusion can we draw from all this? – That our Lord deals with certain noble souls exactly as He dealt with His immaculate mother Mary. Even in our day, valiant souls appear to be ignored and rebuffed by Jesus. The masters of the spiritual life call this agonizing aridity the 'dark night of the soul.' Throughout our Lord's public ministry, our Lady was seemingly ignored by Jesus. When told that His mother and brethren wished to see Him, our Lord responded, saying, "My mother and brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Lk8:19-21) Why this apparent indifference? – So that Mother Mary wouldn't ever grow complacent the way Eve had; so that our Lady would never say, "Enough!" even if her holiness had already trivialized the sanctity of saints and angels alike.

If such is the case with Mother Mary, why then does our Lord seemingly snub lesser souls? – Because He wishes to purify their faith from pride and ingratitude, whose slightest traces can frustrate mystical union. If there had been any vestige of pride left in the Syrophenician woman, our Lord's remarks would have stymied her. Instead, she prevailed. Why? – Because she was perfectly content with the lowest place. Let others receive entire loaves, she was grateful for crumbs! Had she counted her woes, she would have been paralyzed by self-pity. Instead, she was energized. Why? – Because she counted her blessings: "Lord," she said, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." This gratitude for the smallest crumbs of grace is the science of the saints. St Josephine Bakhita, whose feast we celebrate today, was kidnapped into slavery at 7. She was sold 5 times in her native Sudan and never saw her family again. One master whipped & kicked her into unconsciousness. Another disfigured her with a knife. Both times she was unable to rise from her mat for a month. After being bought by a kind Italian, she was brought to Italy where she was baptized and eventually became a nun. "If I were to meet those who kidnapped or tortured me," she later said, "I'd kiss their hands because if those things hadn't happened, I wouldn't be a Christian and a Sister today." In later years, she became sick & infirm. Nevertheless, whenever anyone asked her, "How are you today?" she would say, "I'm exactly as the Master ordains!" Amen!