

What we have today is really quite extraordinary.

At the beginning, Jesus doesn't seem to be a very nice person. On being presented with a woman grieving for her tormented daughter *he answered her not a word*. At this stage of his ministry Jesus believes that God is sending him *to the lost sheep of the House of Israel*. Not to pagans, not to Canaanites, but only to the children of Israel. It's "*not fair*," he says "*to take the children's food and throw it to the house dogs*".

But the Canaanite woman will not give up. "*Ah yes*," she says, "*but even the house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table*." Jesus' heart is touched. He recognises her faith and her love. *From that moment on*, not only was the Canaanite woman's daughter *well again*, but Jesus' understanding of his own ministry had changed irrevocably – no longer a ministry set in tablets of stone, but a ministry now, set in tenderness and compassion of a human heart, no longer a ministry for just one race or nation but a ministry for the whole of humanity.

So why does Jesus change his mind, rigorously applying the rules one minute and demonstrating compassion the next.

Jesus is showing us how to be human. Jesus is showing us how to be the people of God . We might start off all strict and logical but at some point we must change, we must acknowledge our weakness and we must learn to love those who do things differently from us.

Maybe that's what prayer is; to have a heart that is constantly changing, constantly aware of its own faults and failings, constantly open to the people around us, constantly open to the love of God our Father, leaving behind our own prejudices and pre-conceptions and immersing ourselves more and more in the great mystery of God, immersing ourselves more and more in the mystery of love.

"Just as I am without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me  
And that thou biddest come to thee  
O Lamb of God, I come."

Fr Michael