



[Jesus said,] "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

MATTHEW 15:28

Insider Versus Outsider

Our need to belong often creates community. As nurturing and supportive as communities can be, they can also be exclusive, concerned only with the insiders and marginalizing the outsiders. Today's readings depict something remarkable. We read that foreigners, or outsiders, enjoy hospitality and privilege that one would expect insiders to receive.

The prophet Isaiah states that even foreigners will worship in the temple. This is not a story after conversion to the religion of Israel, but of Israel taking a step toward universality: "My house shall be called / a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7).

The Gospel story recounts a discussion between Jesus and a Canaanite woman. She was doubly marginalized—as an inferior woman and as a despised Canaanite. Yet, her love for her daughter compelled her to approach Jesus, pleading for help—something a

"proper" Jewish woman would never do to a man, nor a Canaanite to a Jew. Many in Israel certainly had a sense of exclusivity, and a disdain for the Canaanites. Those may be evident in Jesus' reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). But we can be sure that Jesus—God's love in the flesh—didn't share his countrymen's disdain for anyone. The woman, having heard that Jesus was a healer, remains undaunted. She crosses restrictive gender and ethnic lines in her search for help. Jesus finally praises her, not for her love, but for the faith that her love engendered. And she was a Canaanite!

—Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

FOR *Reflection*

- ▣ *What groups are marginalized by our society? How open are you to them?*
- ▣ *How welcoming are you to people who are new to your groups?*

