

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Second Sunday in Lent
 March 1, 2026
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Lord, help me.

Are there any of us who at some time in our lives have not questioned whether God answers our prayers?

On those occasions when we have prayed and prayed

But thought we received no answer

When you've earnestly and steadfastly asked God

But nothing ever materialized?

{Did God ever answer Janice Joplin's prayer

"O Lord won't buy me a Mercedes Benz?"}

Well, if you think *you've* asked whether our prayers are answered; put yourself in the shoes of *the woman of Canaan*

from today's Gospel .

She sincerely sought Jesus' healing for her daughter, who was vexed by a devil.

A straightforward prayer from a worried and loving mom for the health of her daughter.

The manner in which Jesus responds to the woman of Canaan is in such stark contrast with all other accounts of His compassionate ministry that we are shocked by the way He treats the woman.

The Jesus we expect to see; the man of love and compassion, the Son of God who came into the world to save us, is missing early in the story.

This Gospel is troublesome and one that commands our time and attention.

We know from other Gospel accounts that Jesus
not only tells us what we need to know,
but He means to change our lives.
He knows that change is most likely to occur
and we are most likely to understand His Word,
when we have to work to find it.

He tests us,
not to see how well we are learning (He already knows that),
but more importantly,
to show us something about ourselves.

Today's Gospel contains three tests.

But before getting into the tests; I've got to tell you a story about
"testing":

A college student took an ornithology course
(that's the study of birds
for those of us who are ornithologically challenged)
thinking it would be an easy way
to satisfy his biology requirement.

He soon learned that he was dead wrong about the class.

His professor was one of the toughest.

When he arrived for the midterm exam,

there were 25 pictures of bird feet tacked to the board.

He opened the exam and it simply said: identify the 25 birds from
the photographs of their feet that were on the board.

The student was furious.

He stomped to the front of the class and confronted his professor
telling him that the exercise was ridiculous
and that he refused to condone it.

The professor told him he would fail the test.

The student stood his ground and said

"Then you fail me".

The professor followed through his treat and asked,

what is your name so I can fail you?
 The boy took off his shoes and socks; rolled his pants to his knees
 and said:
 “You tell me!”

Jesus’ first test in today’s Gospel is silence.
 He gives silence to the woman’s plea.

Silence is something that barely exists in our lives anymore.
 It’s too bad.
 There is great value in silence.
 Our lives today are crammed full of sound.
 Some of it is irritating,
 some noise,
 some entertaining, some soothing
 but we are “silence adverse” in today’s culture.
 We’ve lost the beauty and serenity of silence.

Sometimes it is only in silence
 that we can hear the word of God in our hearts.
 A favorite prayer is from a Psalm and ends with:
 “be still and know that I am God”.

This silence test is one for both the woman and His disciples.
 Let’s see who aces the test and who fails it.

The disciples tell Jesus that this woman is a nuisance.
 She keeps wailing and demanding,
 get rid of her. The disciples fail the test.
 But the woman’s reaction is to pray all the more.
 She prays through God’s silence.
 Exactly as Jesus had planned.

Sometimes we must learn to be persistent in our prayers;
 to endure until the time is right according to God’s will,
 not our own.

Jesus offers the second test: He rejects the woman,
telling her He is come only to minister unto the Jews
and she is no Jew.

We know from the prophets and the Gospels
that Jesus came to save us all.

The rejection is a test. How will the disciples react to Jesus' statement?

Will they be compelled to stand up for the woman,
even if she is a Gentile?

Jesus sometimes uses "deliberately induced frustration" to teach us something.

Sometimes He places obstacles in our path
to force us to struggle to understand His lesson.

Truth discovered after much effort, has a much deeper impact
than truth merely presented.

He tells his disciples to feed 5000 people when they don't have
enough for 50;

He puts them in a boat one day with a huge storm coming up.

Deliberately induced frustration is a powerful tool in the hands of
the greatest master teacher ever.

The question in this second test is this:

Will the disciples see the error of their ways?

Will they see beyond their selfish interest?

As is so often the case with them and sadly too often with us:
not this time.

You can almost feel the disciple gloat

when Jesus tells the woman that He came only for the Jews .

Way to go Lord, get rid of her. High fives all around.

What of the woman? Will she become so disheartened that she
bows her head and slowly slinks back to her stricken daughter?

The deliberately induced frustration finds its mark:

The woman came to Our Lord, knelt at His feet and said a perfect prayer of just three words: “ Lord, help me”.

Instead of lashing out at Jesus for treating her so poorly, she examines herself inwardly and prays all the more. “Lord, help me”. She seeks the Lord’s guidance, “Lord, help me.”

Jesus has made her prove and thus improve her faith. He has withdrawn from her to draw her closer to Him.

Now, the third and hardest test of them all:

Jesus seemingly rebukes the prayer.

Not only that, but He cuts her off

and hurls the worst insult imaginable at the woman.

He equates the woman with the dogs.

You must understand, in the culture of the time and place;

dogs were the unclean scavengers,

the lowest, most despised, of creatures.

They fed on the filth, refuse and the garbage

(which Recology did not collect once a week).

It is one thing for the disciples to mull it in their minds,
that this woman is a nuisance
and things would be easier if she is sent away,
but to hear the words out loud meant the disciples
would face their beliefs.

Would they be moved by the woman’s lament or the tormented
screams of her daughter?

Jesus was testing them.

It was a test of their love.

Would hearing the ugliness of their thoughts persuade them?

Would any of them speak up for her? Would any of them find
charity in their hearts; Christian love for her?

No. Not today. The disciples fail the test again.

What of the woman of Canaan?

Will she finally collapse under the insult and go away? Will she, in anger, chastise our Lord and fight with Him for the awful way He is treating her?

Or will her love for her daughter or her faith in Jesus be so deep that even in the face of the meanest of insults, her love and her give the her the strength to press on.

Her response?

It's unbelievable:

In abject humility and purpose, she says: "Truth. Lord."
Still calling Him Lord, she accepts
that she is the lowest of the low,
utterly devoid of all worth or merit.

"Truth Lord", She says.

But even us dogs, eat of the crumbs of the Master's table. Even us dogs receive the mercy of God.

Do you hear the echoes of the communion liturgy? "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table".

Jesus sometimes exercises those of great faith with great trials.
He tempers us like steel in the fire,
purifies us in the trial of fire
like the jeweler purifies gold in the crucible.

The woman of Canaan perfectly personifies the contrite heart necessary for us to approach God.

She approaches as the lowest of the low,
devoid of any thought of her own merit,
humbly seeking her daughter's spiritual health.

She personifies the words of the Lenten Season collect:

"Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we,
worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy

perfect remission and forgiveness.”

We are prepared for the greatest of God’s mercies when we set aside our notions of entitlement.

The woman of Canaan becomes the model
of exactly the frame of mind, heart and soul of the penitent.
If we could only be more like her in our Lenten devotion,
discipline and meditation.

The test is over. The purpose fulfilled, the mask comes off and the Jesus we know shines through.

“O woman, great is thy faith , Be it unto thee as thou wilt”.

It is no coincidence that this Gospel is presented to us in Lent,
when the season, scripture, the liturgy, the music, the flowers
and the vestments,
call out to us to consider our lives,
our faith and practice,
to atone with God
and become closer to Him in preparation for Easter.

So has God answered our prayers?

Has He tested you and me?

What kind of a student have we been? Did we take the test or did we roll up our pant legs and take off our shoes?

Have we prayed through the silence of God?

Have we, in the silence, heard His voice in our hearts?

Have we struggled with His deliberately induced frustration to discover His truth?

Have we faced His test of love

His test of faith

His test of endurance; has He required that you and I endure and endure until His time is right?

Do we have the patience and the faith to accept His will instead of our own?

And perhaps most important of all; as the woman of Canaan,
can we ignore what we may perceive to be our many merits
can we in abject humility;
and despite all our faults, all our sins and warts,
summon the faith to know and to truly accept His forgiveness
and the love of God?

Are we more like the disciples or more like the woman of Canaan?

It is the penitential season of Lent;

Lord, Help Us.

Lord, help us.

Lord, help us.