

There is 'word-play' in English, and no doubt every language, which depends so much on personal encounter and knowledge of just where that other person is coming from, their class and culture, and don't get me started on all the hurts and ignorance that leave us at the mercy of misunderstanding. One has a sense that Jesus is testing the Canaanite woman and his disciples in his various responses to them in today's passage for it's not only the woman he has in view, he's teaching his disciples too. One is reminded of the parent who's had enough of the children or child dogging their footsteps, demanding this and that, and I'm then reminded of a lovely response of the daughter of one of our meditators to her children when the ice-cream van used to jingle it's way through the streets to attract custom. "When you hear the jingle," she said, "it means it's run out of ice-cream." That's terrible one might say, to tell a lie to keep the children quiet but the humour is in her creativity and the knowledge that she had no money to give and is teaching the children that ice-cream on demand is not their prerogative nor necessarily good for them. Today of course she runs the risk of being arraigned before the courts for lack of care etc! (that's a joke by the way before I too get taken to court) in not immediately responding I wonder if Jesus himself is not tussling with the tension we all might feel when someone asks us for something and we haven't worked out yet what might be best for either party. Today's other readings seem to open the way to a universal Israel in which all are welcome, but there are conditions attached

*"all who observe the sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to my covenant"*

and this is directed at both Jew and Gentile. Jesus may well be saying, look we haven't got our own house in order yet and you want me to go out to others? But she has a better answer than they have – alright you may have the bread but can we not have the crumbs that fall from your table? If only we could see their faces when this is being said. The humour of it. Is Jesus allowed to laugh when he realises he cannot say no to her persistence, to her love, to her need? Sr. Verna Holyhead's commentary on this passage refers to the Benedictine Rule and it's chapter on the reception of guests - all to be accepted as Christ. Now there's irony for you, for in this passage she receives Christ as much as he receives her. It's an interplay, a dialogue a relationship which is being established even as they speak.

When people come to my door I try not to turn them away immediately but to hear at least a little of what they have to say – to test the spirits, to see where they are coming from, to gradually work out what a suitable response might be, a loving response which may be a "yes" or a "no" depending on their real need. This is what I understand by integrity. The children may say it's not fair when they discover later that the ice-cream van had ice-cream

all along but in that instance they had something still to learn about self-restraint and their mother's needs. In this case the learning goes the other way. "It's not fair", Jesus says but then changes his mind when he realises the woman's real need. The lesson to be learned is one of listening.

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