

WOMAN, YOU HAVE GREAT FAITH!

O God, let all the nations praise you! The Psalm response from this Sunday sums up the Holy Spirit's impulse to the universality of the Gospel. Inspired by the Spirit, Isaiah already foresaw, centuries before Christ, this dynamic aperture to the world of God's predilection for Israel. *Foreigners who have attached themselves to the Lord to serve him and to love his name...these I will bring to my holy mountain...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.*

St Paul's reading of salvation history from the perspective of the Jewish "rejection" of the Christ is always fascinating and has caused much discussion concerning the role of the conversion of the Jews in the end times. He seems to read the original missional impulse of the Gospel in terms of the Jewish persecution of "The Way" and to anticipate their eventual conversion to Christ. For God's plan is to show mercy to *all mankind* (Romans 11).

This impulse to universality is seen in the powerful scene of St Matthew's Gospel, which, as in the image above,



reveals Jesus' delayed response to the Canaanite woman of Syrophenicia, who is overtaking the objecting Jewish leaders in her faith in Christ. "Woman, you have great faith", are the words of the Lord to one who, though excluded by the religious elite, is truly received by Christ as a disciple. He had pretended to ignore her at first, only to reveal her faith more clearly to those leaders. She becomes a type of the Church, who is called from any and all corners of the earth to faith. This faith leads to healing; it facilitates intercession for others and by creating a space of receptivity, allows the Holy Spirit to "renew the face of the earth".

True faith in Christ comes from surprising quarters, as the Holy Spirit opens up hitherto closed spaces and works in mysterious ways. Today we need to learn to pray ceaselessly with true faith in Christ and to avoid the temptation to dwell in closed spaces. Debate exists among Catholic and Christian social scientists and philosophers concerning the benefits and disadvantages of taking the so-called Benedict Option (flight from the world into more or less closed communities) over against the so-called Augustinian Option of dwelling in an amongst the secularized world but as the spiritual City of God in and amongst the Earthly City.

In the North American context, Rod Dreyer has been a strong proponent of the former perspective, whilst Jamie Smith and Charles Chaput have published in favour of the second. James Smith is a Calvinist theologian who has read and proposed for necessary reflection the sociology of Charles Taylor, author of the most significant study of secularism in our time, *A Secular Age*. Taylor's researched and studied perspective on secularism provides illuminating reading on the complexity of our time. He argues against the idea that secularism is predominantly and simply the falling away from faith in God and religious practice but is primarily a perspective in which faith is reduced to one option among viable others, some, immanentist, others remaining open to the transcendent. Most illuminating is his historical research revealing that immanentist secularism has its roots in certain trends in Late-Medieval Catholic philosophy.

Such debates are challenged by the Gospel, where we find the faithless Jewish leaders of Jesus's day, who were closed to the transcendent in effect, over against the penetrating faith of the non-Jewish Canaanite woman. It makes us recall the words of Christ, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?". Yes he will, but it might be in strange and surprising places.

The **Assumption of Mary into Heaven** (often shortened to the **Assumption**) is, according to the beliefs of the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Churches and Oriental Orthodoxy, among others, the bodily taking up of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into Heaven at the end of her earthly life.

In the churches that observe it, the Assumption is a major feast day, commonly celebrated on 15 August. In many countries, the feast is also marked as a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church teaches as dogma that the Virgin Mary "having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory". This doctrine was dogmatically defined by Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950, in the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* by exercising papal infallibility. While the Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church believe in the Dormition of the Mother of God (Dormition of the Theotokos or "the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God"), whether Mary had a physical death has not been dogmatically defined.

