Thursday of Week 5 (Mk 7:24-30)

**OPEN TO ALL**

Jesus gets away from the crowd because of the failure of his own people to understand him and because of his tiresome disputes with the Pharisees. He goes off for rest and recollection and dedicates himself to the formation of his disciples. He enters a phase of moving around and takes himself off to the furthermost northern limits of Palestine.

This situation favours his meeting with pagans. This is not part of his personal mission, but it happens spontaneously and immediately, and he is open to it. In this way, he shows his openness towards everyone. He even enters the home of a pagan, which shows that he doesn’t care anymore for the Israelite cult of external purity and racial segregation. He has given that away.

To the pagan woman who asks him to heal her daughter, Jesus expresses a principle that determines his mission. Salvation must be brought first to the members of the house of Israel, then to the pagans who are close to the house. That will be after Pentecost.

So, the woman asks for an exception. Jesus admires her trust, her humility, and her insistence so much that he grants her daughter’s recovery at a distance. The pagan woman is a model for us of trusting approach to Jesus Christ in all our necessities.

The episode was surely consoling to Mark’s readers, who were converts from paganism. The disciples did not forget this episode when Jesus - and the Holy Spirit after Pentecost - sent them “to the whole world” (Mk 16:15).

Jesus is a model of welcome extended to all. We need to foster the same universal mentality in ourselves, so that his Church may be truly “catholic”, that is, as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states: open to all “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of our times, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (*Gaudium et spes*, 1).

Let everything that is positive and genuinely human find a welcome in our hearts, as it did in the Heart of Jesus, and as it does still.