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Gen 2:18-25; Mark 7:24-30

In content and intent, the four Gospels can be described as the original Scriptures recast in the light of Christ. The evangelists created summaries of the life of Jesus for their faith communities to show that he fulfilled the Law and the Prophets and completed God's plan of salvation promised to biblical figures from Adam to Abraham and Moses to David.

We saw earlier how Mark's Jesus is compared to the Creator, restoring the divine image and likeness to the sick and driving out evil spirits. Today's Gospel about the Syrophenician woman is paired by the Lectionary with the Genesis story of the creation of Woman. The encounter between Jesus and a mother begging for her sick daughter reveals an extraordinary woman who matches wits with Jesus and wins her request.

This thematic pairing invites us to compare the first woman, created from the first man to be his helpmate and equal, with the resourceful woman in the Gospels who expands Jesus' understanding of the full range of his ministry beyond the borders of Israel. He learns this from her insistence that God cares for all his children by turning his slur about dogs into an appeal for puppies under the children's table.

She is adamant with the new Adam that God is bigger than he thought. She proves his equal and teaches him something.

Even for Jesus, apparently “it is not good for the man to be alone.” During his ministry, he is partnered with strong women who understand, support and challenge him, including his mother at the wedding feast of Cana, Martha and Mary of Bethany and the irreplaceable Mary Magdalen, first evangelist and the woman who reprises the garden scene in John’s Gospel as Eve to Jesus’ Adam when he awakens from the deep sleep of death at the start of the New Creation. She becomes a type of the church, born from the side of Jesus on the Tree of Life, the cross.

The 1949 film, “Adam’s Rib,” is about the equality of the sexes. A married couple, both lawyers, find themselves facing each other in the courtroom. The comedy showcased two of Hollywood’s biggest stars, Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, who banter their way through a brilliant, fast-paced script loaded with witty takedowns. Imagining Hepburn as the woman and Tracy as Jesus in today’s Gospel is one way to catch the energy of Mark’s story.

The Syrophoenician woman receives healing for her daughter and Jesus hears the Spirit speaking through her about expanding his mission to foreigners. God’s mercy is universal. The Word of God overflows with themes like these in the skillful hands of the evangelists, orthodoxy is revealed by new metaphors and connections, and our minds and hearts are expanded to the margins, where the Holy Spirit is always at work.

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