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A Dominican man, left, and an activist, right, are detained by plainclothes officers with Immigration and Customs Enforcement after an immigration hearing at the immigration court inside the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in New York, on June 6, 2025. (AP, File/Yuki Iwamura)



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August 19, 2026

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This past Sunday (Aug. 16), in the Gospel read in many churches around the world, Jesus comes across as a real jerk. He sounds like President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

The Gospel was [Matthew 15: 21-28](#), the story of the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus pleading for him to heal her daughter who is tormented by a demon.

Jesus at first ignores her, pretends she is not there. But she keeps following him, calling out to him. She ignores the disciples' attempts to get rid of her. They finally ask Jesus to send her away.

He replies that he was sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. " His mission is to Jews, not Gentiles. But the woman keeps coming and begs him, "Lord, help me."

Jesus responds in a very un-Christian manner: "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." In other words, he calls her a bitch.

I prefer to believe that this unflattering story was made up by Matthew. But why would Matthew make it up? Perhaps because he had an important message to teach the early Jewish Christians — and us.

This Gospel story reflects the reluctance of early Jewish Christians to accept Gentiles into the Christian community. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that the

leaders of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, including Peter, were opposed to baptizing Gentiles. Peter changed his mind when he saw that Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. How could he deny baptism to those to whom God had given the Holy Spirit?

Likewise in the Gospel, Jesus at first rejects the Canaanite woman because she is not from the house of Israel. But he changes his mind when he sees how much faith she has. He changes his mind when he sees how much she loves her daughter. The Gospel is telling the early Jewish Christians that, like Jesus, they must change their attitude toward the Gentiles.

Not all Jews were completely negative toward Gentiles. Deutero-Isaiah (or Second Isaiah), the author of chapters 40-55 of the Book of Isaiah, believed that Gentiles could join themselves to the Lord.

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Those who loved the Lord, became his servants and held on to his covenant would be brought by the Lord to his holy mountain, Jerusalem. They will "make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:1, 6-7).

Isaiah tells his people, whether one is a Jew or a foreigner, they will be judged by whether they "observe what is right, do what is just." This was a revolutionary teaching that was not always embraced by the people of Israel.

St. Paul was the leader of the pro-Gentile party among the Jewish Christians. He was disappointed that his Jewish brothers and sisters did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. But his love for them made him willing to be accursed for their salvation.

Paul argues that both Jews and Gentiles have been disobedient to God and need his mercy, so neither should look down on the other.

But Paul would not deny the specialness of the Jewish people. He believed that God made a special covenant with the house of Israel. This covenant is irrevocable. It still stands today.

In the past, most Christians taught that there was no salvation outside their church, arguing that if you are not in my church, you are going to Hell. Some churches still talk that way. They believe that clinging to Jesus means excluding the outsider.

Today, Catholics believe, like Isaiah and Paul, that everyone will be judged by their actions and their love, but that does not mean that we think there is no difference between religions.

We believe that Jesus is God's special revelation, a unique presence of God among humanity; we believe that he is truly the Savior of the world. We also believe that although we are sinners, the Catholic Church is a special community where God's word, sacraments and Spirit are present. We believe that as a church, we have a special responsibility to witness to God's love and to work with others to build God's kingdom of justice, peace and love.

But today, as in the time of Jesus and Isaiah, people do not like foreigners. They are greeted with suspicion and fear.

The Trump administration seems to agree with Jesus before he changed his mind about the Canaanite woman: Foreigners are dogs that should not be fed from the nation's table.

For example, Trump has referred to foreigners as criminals, diseased [people who are](#) "poisoning the blood of our country." He [said of immigrants](#), "No, they're not humans, they're not humans. They're animals."

Likewise, when [Vance argued](#) that charity begins locally with family and fellow citizens, he sounded very much like Jesus saying, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

But that was not Jesus' final word. He changed his mind.

Sadly, too many Americans have not changed their minds. Those who sought refuge from persecution, crime and poverty are being ejected from our country. Programs, like USAID, to help foreigners have been destroyed or gutted. Only scraps for the dogs.

The Scriptures remind us that foreigners are children of God, entitled to our love and respect. When they cry for help, we must follow the example of Jesus and give them aid.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. [View the full series.](#)