



A Prayer for Openness in the Coming School Year

Reader 1: Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we prepare for the opening of the school year, we are filled with many emotions. One of them might be worry about whether we have the time, treasure and talent to do what will be asked of us as individuals, and as supportive members of a faculty. Let us listen and reflect on a time when Jesus' disciples watched as he was approached by a demanding parent, and experienced a surprising result.

Reader 2: A reading from Matthew 15: 21 – 28.

Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Let us take a minute or two of silent prayer and ask that we may be open to the wisdom that this Gospel passage has for us as individuals, and as a community.

Reader 3: Lord, we pray for all the students in our community, and the students who wish they could be a part of our community.

All: Let us remember all the children who are silent, yet needy, like the daughter of the Canaanite woman. Help us to notice them and respond to them.

Reader 4: Lord, we pray for all the parents in our community, those whom we know well and those whom we do not know at all.

All: Let us remember the difficult job that parents have, and that this sometimes makes parents difficult. Give us the courage to listen to all parents, to encounter the blessings that this openness can bring. Help us to desire to build a school community where parents feel welcomed.

Reader 5: Lord, we pray for all teachers and all who work in education, including every member of the (*School Name*) school community. Like the disciples in this story, we sometimes want to push away those to whom we may most need to listen. Give us the openness we need to learn graciously from those we meet.

All: Guide us in wisdom and strength to welcome the marginalized and those whose stories we most need to hear.

Reader 6: Lord, we pray for the leaders of our community. Help us support those that lead by example, by desire and by virtue of the duties they have agreed to assume.

All: Let us remember that like Jesus, our leaders receive constant requests for many things from many people. Sometimes they will have to say no, painful as it may be. Give them the strength and desire to be open to “yes” when it is a reflection of your will for our community.

Reader 7: As we begin our journey through this school year, help us to remember that just like the disciples, we may be asked to go places where we would prefer not to go, and we may have to listen to people we would rather avoid.

All: Lord, we ask you to journey with us as begin the difficult and inspiring work of teaching the students you have sent to us. Let us remember when we were children, and what we needed from the adults around us. We ask all this in Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Follow-up Activity

A follow-up activity for this prayer service is to ask the faculty to imagine with whom they most identify in the passage above when it comes to conversations about including children with disabilities.

Do I feel most like the mother? Am I always begging my colleagues to understand that something needs to be done for children with disabilities?

Do I feel most like Jesus? Are others always asking me to “do something” for children with disabilities – but I wonder how to do this and remain true to my mission?

Do I feel most like the child? I am in need but silent. Maybe I have a family member with a disability, but I don’t discuss this with anyone. Maybe I find teaching children with disabilities to be scary or difficult, but I never say so. Maybe I have a disability, and I do not feel understood.

Do I feel most like one of the disciples? I just wish the whole issue of children with disabilities attending Catholic School would go away. I really don’t want to deal with that.

Once your faculty has had a little time for reflection, ask them to share within a small group of three or four the person in the reading with which they most identified. You can then ask for a group discussion. Realizing that the concerns, problems, fears, hopes and worries that we have are very much like those who encountered Jesus in 1st Century Tyre and Sidon can help us move forward with confidence that God is interested in our feelings and eager to help us work together to meet the needs of our students, their families, and each other.

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