1) Opening prayer
Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 15,21-28
Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he said not a word in answer to her.
And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.'
But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.'
He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.'
She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.'
Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

3) Reflection
• Context. The bread of the children and the great faith of a Canaanite woman is the theme presented in the liturgical passage taken from chapter 15 of Matthew who proposes to the reader of his Gospel a further deepening of faith in Christ. The episode is preceded by an initiative of the Pharisees and Scribes who go down to Jerusalem and cause a dispute to take place with Jesus, but which did not last long, because he,

together with his disciples withdrew to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon. While he is on the way, a woman from the pagan places comes to him. This woman is presented by Matthew by the name of a “Canaanite woman” who in the light of the Old Testament, she is presented with great harshness. In the Book of Deuteronomy the inhabitants of Canaan were considered people full of sins, evil and idolatrous people.

• The dynamic of the account. While Jesus carries out his activity in Galilee and is on the way toward Tyre and Sidon, a woman came up to him and began to bother him with a petition for help for her sick daughter. The woman addresses Jesus using the title “Son of David”; a title which sounds strange pronounced by a pagan and that could be justified because of the extreme situation in which the woman lives. It could be thought that this woman already believes in some way, in the person of Jesus as final Saviour, but this is excluded because it is only in v. 28 that her act of faith is recognized, precisely by Jesus. In the dialogue with the woman Jesus seems to show that distance and diffidence which reigned between the people of Israel and the pagans. On one side Jesus confirms to the woman the priority for Israel to have access to salvation, and before the insistent prayer of her interlocutor Jesus seems to withdraw, to be at a distance; an incomprehensible attitude for the reader, but in the intention of Jesus it expresses an act of pedagogical value. To the first invocation “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David” (v. 22) Jesus does not respond. To the second intervention this time on the part of the disciples who invite him to listen to the prayer of the woman, he only expresses rejection that stresses that secular distance between the chosen people and the pagan people (vv. 23b-24) But at the insistence of the prayer of the woman who bows before Jesus, a harsh and mysterious response follows: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs” (v. 26). The woman goes beyond the harsh response of the words of Jesus and gets a small sign of hope: the woman recognizes that the plan of God being carried out by Jesus initially concerns the chosen people and Jesus asks the woman to recognize that priority; the woman takes advantage of that priority to present a strong reason to obtain the miracle: “Ah yes, Lord, but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27). The woman has exceeded the test of faith: “Woman, you have great faith” (v. 28); in fact, to the humble insistence of her faith corresponds a gesture of salvation.

This episode addresses an invitation to every reader of the Gospel to have that interior attitude of “openness” toward everyone, believers or not, that is to say, availability and acceptance without distinction toward all men.

4) Personal questions

• The disturbing word of God invites you to break open your closeness and all your small plans. Are you capable to accept all the brothers and sisters who come to you?

• Are you aware of your poverty to be capable like the Canaanite woman to entrust yourself to the word of salvation of Jesus.

5) Concluding Prayer

Lord, do not thrust me away from your presence,

do not take away from me your spirit of holiness.
Give me back the joy of your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51,11-12)