

The Book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite widow who finds herself in very difficult circumstances. Her husband has died, her brother-in-law dies, and her mother-in-law whom she loves dearly has decided to return home now that a famine has ended. Rather than stay in the land of her birth, Ruth chooses to accompany Naomi to a foreign land where she is a stranger to the culture. With this choice, Ruth embraces the Jewish faith. “Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die I will die, and there be buried” (Ruth 1:16).

In Bethlehem, Ruth remarries and thus becomes an ancestor of David; she is the great grandmother of David and her name appears in the Gospel of Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus. “Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king (Mt 1:5-6). So why would a foreigner, a Moabite woman, be in the genealogy of Jesus which covers 42 generations starting with Abraham?

Ruth’s conversion “anticipates not only the incorporation of Gentiles into the kingdom of David but also the universal call of the gospel to bring all nations into the family of God” (Hahn 784). The Book of Ruth is noted for a number of themes:

- Filial piety – Ruth was attracted to the faith of her mother-in-law. As Christians, we are called to live out our faith so that others will be attracted to follow Christ. As the saying goes, you are the only bible that some people may read.
- Faith and trust in the Lord – Although initially attracted to the faith by her mother-in-law, Ruth recognizes that at some point Naomi will die. When she converts, Ruth is not making a temporary choice. She is ready to abandon her homeland, become Jewish and never turn back. Ruth exhibits great faith and trust in the Lord.
- The Lord protects widows – Although the death of Naomi’s husband and her two sons creates three widows, Naomi and Ruth’s sorrow gives way to great happiness. As we face loss in our own lives, it is helpful to trust in the Lord that heaven awaits our dearly departed loved ones and that one day we will be reunited in heaven. In the meantime, God invites us to care for the spiritual and corporal needs of widows.
- Ruth’s example prepares the way for Mary – “Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises (CCC 489).

In the words of psalm 146: “The LORD keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free” (6c-7).

Ruth’s wholehearted embrace of the Jewish faith embodies the first and greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). Having left father and mother and the land of her birth, Ruth also embodies the second greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:40). We are invited to do the same: “Teach me your paths, my God, guide me in your truth” (Ps 25: 4b, 5a).