

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Truth be told, she is in no position to ask. The Incarnate Lord traveled through a pagan land, a land that worshipped to false gods. He came first to Israel, but they would not receive Him. So He went to the land of Tyre and Sidon. There, what Israel had rejected, a Canaanite woman would receive. What Israel lost, a Gentile would find.

There, in that foreign land, a woman cried out for His help. She did not merit His help. She did not deserve His help. His initial reaction seems to us to be quite terse, even rude. But when the Word of God accuses, faith agrees. His Words were designed to instill even greater faith in her. His Words were designed to evoke from her a right confession of saving faith, faith that puts aside self and clings to Christ alone.

By His grace, she showed forth that faith. Compare her speech to the proud speech of the Jews – they claimed to never have been slaves to anyone, apparently forgetting the 430 years in Egypt. They proudly claimed to be free, while she gladly allows herself to be called a dog. So she goes where they cannot – through the eye of the needle. Although impossible for her, by God’s grace she enters the Kingdom of Heaven. Their pride keeps them out.

There is a time for Law, and there is a time for Gospel. The Lord’s silence, and the Lord’s Words to the Canaanite woman, are a Divine Example of the application of the Word of God. She is not worthy to ask, He gives no answer. God has never promised to hear the prayers of pagan sinners. Still, she persisted. The disciples bid Him send her away, for they grew tired of her crying out.

But the Lord of the Church never tires of those who seek Him in faith. Still, He answers not her, but His disciples, reminding them of His Mission, the reason for His Holy Incarnation: “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” To fleshly ears His answer seems disconnected to their request. But to faith His answer makes perfect sense. He is about to teach His disciples who His sheep really are, which is to say He is about to teach His disciples, all Jews, who the True Israel is.

“Then she came and worshipped Him...”, St. Matthew writes. She worshipped Him, having received no answer. She worshipped Him, because that’s what faith does. Faith prays to God and awaits His answer, trusting that His will is always best. She worshipped Him, saying “Lord, help me!” At His reply, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs”, most would have turned and left offended. But faith is never offended by the Word of God.

As the Prophet Hosea promised, “And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God.’” His answer grew her faith. She believed that He was the only One who could truly heal, the only One who could command even the demons and they must obey. She believed Him to be, as she had earlier confessed, the Lord, the Son of David, the long-Promised Messiah.

So she answers in faith, accepting His rebuke: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” After Law, she receives His Word of grace: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. It was to her as she desired, for her faith was conformed to the will of God.

And if all we had this morning was St. Matthew’s account of the Canaanite woman, that would be enough for us. The great love of God is manifest clearly in the historical account that the Apostle records.

But in the mercy of God, because of His great love for you, for you there is more. Thanks be to God, as it was with the Canaanite woman, so it is with you. God has used the tribulations and denials of your life to turn you, not away, but rather toward Him.

St. Paul describes what holiness of living looks like: “that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness in Christ ♦Jesus Our Lord.”

And yet with every sin, you have shown not the holiness the Apostle describes, but rather uncleanness. The lust and defrauding of those who do not know God has been manifest also in your life, for even a fleeting lustful thought is sin, and every small falsehood, every “white lie”, is still a lie. In sin, what you have merited from God is the silence the Canaanite woman received, and cries from others that God send you away.

But as the Fathers of the Church wrote, the Lord was silent to the Canaanite woman not that “mercy might be denied, but that desire might be enkindled; not only that desire might be enkindled, but that humility be praised.” And so it is with you. In love, in mercy, God washed away your sin and gave you faith, faith that seeks not self, but Christ, faith that seeks Christ even when it seems impossible.

For with God, nothing is impossible. Just as the Canaanite woman showed herself to be the lost sheep of Israel for whom Christ came, the True Israel, those with faith in Christ, so has God grafted you into His Saving Vine as redeemed branches. In Christ, all your sins are forgiven. He died in your stead. He took up His life that you might have eternal life. For this is the will of God, your sanctification.

In a great Mystery, the Canaanite woman saw what Moses could not. For to Moses God said “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” But the Canaanite woman saw God, the Lord, David’s Son, face to face. She saw God and lived. And in perhaps a greater Mystery, the same God she saw places Himself into your mouth, and pours His shed Blood across your lips. With His Body and Blood, with not the crumbs, but the Holy Meal that comes from His Table, the Lord satisfies you, O Christian, His lost sheep, the True Israel.

God hears your prayers. He knows what you endure. He knows what you ask before you ask it. He bids you pray to Him, pray continually, bringing Him your cares and your worries and your concerns. And He answers you in the way that is best for your salvation. By His Holy

Sacrament He forgives you and makes your faith strong, strong to wait through the periods that seem like His silence, strong to cling to Christ and receive in faith the answer He gives. So it is to you that He says “O Christian, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”

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