

Dearly beloved: Christ is among us!

Today we have heard an amazing encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. While traveling to the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon he is met by a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites were the people who lived in the land of Canaan before the Israelites received it from God as the Promised Land. The Canaanites were not Jews but were worshippers of idols. Even with all of this working against her, the Canaanite woman comes before Jesus, a Jew, and pleads for mercy. She asks not for herself but for her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus brushes her off saying, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Let's look at this a little closer. God chose as His own the people of Israel, the Chosen People of God. God did this not because He loves other nations less but to prepare this one group of people who would be the soil from which the Son of God would come to dwell among us. And only then, when God fulfilled His promise to send the Messiah to the Chosen People, Israel, then the Messiah would bring the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, so that all peoples of the world might be brought to the fullness of life in Christ Jesus. This is of great importance. If we have ever broken a promise to someone or had someone break a promise to us it breaks trust. So the next time we make a promise or someone makes one to us after we or they have broken a promise, will we or they be trusted again? If God didn't fulfill His promise to Israel that He would send a Messiah to them and through them, how could anyone trust that God would be true to His word? Jesus tells the woman that He is doing the Father's work among the Israelites, fulfilling His promise to them first before preaching to the Gentiles.

Even this does not deter her. She is persistent. And Jesus says, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." It sounds like Jesus is putting her down, calling her a dog. How do we interpret such a saying that on its surface seems harsh. The answer lies in how we interpret any difficult passage from Scripture. We must begin with what we know of God as He has revealed Himself. The Son of God comes not to judge the world but that the world might be saved through Him, that all may have life in Him and life to the full. Knowing these words of Jesus gives us the key to interpreting His words here.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was not insulting the woman with his words. He would not have her great excellence of faith hidden. As He has said, "There is nothing covered that will not be revealed and hidden that will not be known." (Mt 10:26) "The Lord ...will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." (1 Corinthians 4:5) It is by his seemingly insulting words that he draws out from the woman he confession of faith, both for her sake and that of her daughter and for the sake of His apostles. The woman is not stung by what Jesus says to her, she does not rebuke Him, she does not give up her quest for mercy. She compares herself to a dog and her request to crumbs and answers Jesus saying, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." It is in the last verse of this gospel passage that Jesus intent is made clear: "'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire' and her daughter was healed from that very hour." Jesus saw deep to her heart, saw her faith, and desired that she speak it and His apostles see and hear how someone, not even a Jew, has such profound faith in Him. The disciples see that great faith is found even among the Gentiles.

Jesus' way of interacting with the Canaanite woman shows us another instance in which greatness of faith is revealed in adversity. The lamp of faith burning under the bushel basket

must be brought out for the sake of the believer and for the sake of others. Looking to the saints, reading their lives, we note that it was often in adversity that they were approved. We read of this in Sacred Scriptures. Saint James writes, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12)

We, like the saints, endure temptations. We shoulder adversities in life whether it be family matters, our health, our job, our own sinfulness. We can look at these trials like the Canaanite woman, not giving up but persevering. Knowing that the Son of God came to be with us, to suffer with and for us. When we or our loved ones suffer the only answer is to look for God, seek Him out even more fervently, as the Canaanite woman did so that we may meet Him, near to us and with us in our sufferings, bearing up the cross with us that we may behold the beauty of His face, know His presence with us holding us up by the palm of His hand even when He seems the furthest away from us. To Him, Who revealed Himself to us and shows His tenderness to us be glory and adoration. Amen.