

Beloved: Christ is among us!

In the Gospel lessons we are given glimpses in the Kingdom of God, that “up-side-down” kingdom in which human values, priorities and sense of justice is turned on its head. These glimpses into the Kingdom show us that human logic or justice is not the reigning morality in that place where the first are last, and the greatest are the ones who serve not those being served.

Jesus travels what was probably the furthest north He traveled in His lifetime. He goes to a place that had a non-Jewish population. Yet it is here, strangely enough, that Jesus is called both Lord and Son of David, titles the Pharisees certainly never used of Jesus, by a non-Jew. This woman isn't interested in what the Pharisees have to say about Jesus, her focus is that she believes He has the power to heal her daughter. It is here in this foreign territory that Jesus says “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24) He may have been sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but it is not Israel which has welcomed Him in faith. However, here a stranger seeks out this traveling healer and Lord. She is not of the house of Israel and she is not lost, for she has found the very person she was seeking. She has found Him and she will not let Him get away.

The woman not only calls Jesus Lord but gets on her knees before him in an act of reverence, again, something that few Jews did in the Gospel. Though Jesus clearly states His mission is to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, this story shows His being welcomed and professed by those not of the house of Israel. The lost are not seeking to be found, but someone not of Israel's house and faith is looking for what God is offering to His people.

Jesus responds to the woman using imagery of the heavenly banquet of God's Kingdom: namely that of food. Jesus uses this imagery of Himself when He told the people “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst... The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’” (John 6:35, 41)

Jesus tosses out to her that He cannot share with her the food that is given to God's people. He can't throw the bread from the children's table to the dogs. Jesus was not insulting her, far from it. By these words Jesus shows what He intended to do from the outset. Jesus spoke to her in this way that she might cry aloud with faith, that all those around would witness her faith. Jesus showed her worthy of a thousand crowns upon her head. It is not that He did not want to give her the gift of healing for her daughter but rather He wanted to reveal the depth of her faith which flourished in her humility.

The woman is not deterred or offended by His comment. Like the centurion who called himself unworthy to receive Jesus in his home, the woman accepts what we see as harsh words from Jesus. Like the poor man Lazarus, she longs for the crumbs from the master's table. Her faith is such that she is willing to accept whatever she can get from Master's banquet in the Kingdom. She is willing even to be a dog accepting the crumbs that fall from her Master's table. She is not demanding to sit at the Master's right and left as some of the disciples did, but her hope is to be allowed to receive what falls from the table on to the floor. Even that will be a blessing from heaven. Being a dog at the Master's banquet table in heaven is still a blessing. Her faith and priorities are straight. She has no claims to sitting at the head table, but she values completely the smallest blessing that might fall her way – even if it is discarded from the Master's table.

Jesus marvels that those not of the house of Israel, those not even being sought by Him, are so eager to benefit from even the crumbs of the Master's table. The Gentile woman recognizes the value of what Jesus is offering and like Lazarus longs for it, even if only a crumb.

She cares nothing for being recognized as somebody, she cares nothing for show, she understands a crumb from the Kingdom is more important than where she might be sitting when it is given to her. Indeed the woman's prayer is heard, all for the sake of a crumb!

She is heard and received by Jesus because of her humble faith. She offered her faith to Jesus with humility and so her faith is accounted not as small but as great. Her prayer was filled with humility, as ours also must be. Blessed Augustine says, "The more humble a person is, the more receptive and full he becomes. Hills repel water; valleys are filled up." Conversely, the more prideful we are, the more full of ourselves we are, there's little room for God to fill us up with His presence. Hills cannot be filled with water. Only lowly valleys, like a deep cup, can receive water. It is only our lowliness in faith, our confession at every moment that all we are and have comes from God and we depend on Him for everything, even our next breath and heartbeat, it is only this humility like the woman that makes our faith great, that makes us humble vessels capable of receiving God within us. Let us know ourselves as neither great nor worthless but confess Jesus as our Lord, knowing that we are dependent upon Him for every good gift, and that in Him we will not be put to shame but we will find in Him mercy and grace and love.