

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today's Gospel is probably one of the most difficult text to preach. This conversation involves Jesus, a Canaanite woman, and the disciples. It is a very disagreeable conversation in which Christ's words seem out of character. The loving, kind, gentle Savior is found in an unusual position. This non-Jewish woman comes to Him begging for mercy - healing for her demon possessed daughter. Jesus says nothing. The disciples get involved. They urge the Savior to send her away because her cries were becoming an annoyance and a nuisance to them. She continues her begging. Christ makes a mission statement about being sent to the lost sheep of Israel. She kneels before Him and continues to beg. Christ then talks about the impropriety of giving the children's food to dogs. The begging mother then identifies herself with dogs and indicates that the dogs are permitted to eat the crumbs which fall to the floor and if that be her portion, she would be satisfied.

It would be much easier to skip this difficult text and move on to tomorrow's gospel concerning another woman who seemingly had an easier go of it with her Son - of course, that other woman of whom I speak is Mary, the Mother of Our Lord. While it would be perfectly appropriate to devote today's message to the Blessed Virgin, it would in a sense be dishonest and unfair to ignore the importance of this unnamed mother and the test that she experienced. Indeed, one might accurately argue that both mothers endured uncommon tests as they interacted with Jesus. But that would be another message for some other day. Today, we shall spend our time looking at this Canaanite woman and the test she experienced. I pray that God the Holy Ghost will be with us as we meditate on "The Test".

The unbelieving world would certainly pounce on this event and come to the stupid conclusion that Christ was a mean spirited man. They would probably conclude that He was some kind of racist whose only interest was Jewish people. Even believers often conclude that Christ put this woman through a vicious test.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Lest we forget, Jesus Christ knew this woman inside and out. He knew her spirit. He knew her need. He knew of her daughter before she even uttered a word. Jesus, lest we forget, had Gentile blood in His veins. We go all the way back to Ruth the Moabitess, who identified with the people of Israel. Ruth is an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Jesus was very aware of His identity with people of all races.

This was not a test for the Canaanite mother. She needed no test. This was a test for the disciples who still needed to master some lessons. The first response of the disciples came after Christ was silent to the cries of this woman. "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." Which disciple uttered this is not revealed to us. It matters not, for they were in one accord on this. In their view, the Lord had gone to the region of Tyre and Sidon for a retreat from the ministry. They felt that He needed to retire and renew His depleted energy. Let us not be too harsh on the disciples, they had good intentions. They wanted to protect Jesus from the relentless press of requests and concerns which the multitudes were bringing to the Lord. Good intentions, but not right. They needed to understand that Jesus Christ is almighty. No request, no amount of petitions overwhelms the Lord or causes Him to become exhausted.

The comment "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" is to be understood as a positive, not a negative. Israel is

here to be understood not as a nation, or an ethnic group, but the whole redeemed people of God is known as God's Israel. When describing Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:16, Jesus said, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." We hear these words as words of reassurance that as He said also in John the 3rd Chapter "whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

But we focus now on the Canaanite mother herself. This poor woman, not unlike Mary the Mother of our Lord, endured much. Very few sorrows surpass that of watching one's child vexed with devils. Some might compare it to the pain many parents today endure as they helplessly watch their children destroy themselves through drug addiction. However this woman's daughter suffered, however the demons manifested themselves in her life and behavior, and however long this affliction had lasted is not revealed. But we do know that this mother knew of but one place to find help and relief - at the feet of Jesus her Lord. Note: She called Jesus "Lord, Son of David". She knew Him to be her Lord and Savior and nothing - the rebuff of the ill-guided disciples, the apparent slight of Jesus Himself - nothing would change the fact that here was help, here was salvation, here was deliverance, here was relief - at the feet of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - Lord God Almighty.

What a powerful lesson this woman brings to us! It could probably be successfully argued that some of these women in the Bible preached more powerful sermons through their lives than the men who get so much attention and press. I suppose the fact that I was raised by two women who are now saints in heaven makes me a bit biased on this issue. Here, notwithstanding we have this unnamed saint of God whose faith will not be moved. She did not appeal to any ancestral roots,

any economic advantage, any laudable good works, any charitable activities. She appealed to the boundless mercy of Jesus, her Lord and Savior. She did not fall victim of the thought that she would be too unworthy to receive mercy. So many think that today. They say to themselves, "How could God love me, after what I have done?" "Why would God bother to help me?" "Surely, there are more important, more worthy people than me." I have personally encountered countless people who think this way - many of them engulfed in the world of drug and alcohol addictions. The Canaanite woman did not succumb to this kind of thinking. While she knew she was unworthy to receive God's mercy, she also knew that Jesus is in the business of delivering mercy to people. Even in the Ten Commandments which we often think of as all law with no evidence of the Gospel in them, these words are recorded in Exodus 20:5,6, "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments." Of course, those last words bring fear to our hearts because we know all too well that we do not keep the commandments - we cannot keep them. But the words "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me" bring us hope and joy. Even our love for Him, as the disciples gradually discovered is imperfect at best. But as the beloved disciple wrote in 1st John 4:19, "we love Him, because He first loved us."

Finally, consider how Christ honored the Canaanite woman. She received an "A" on the test. Nothing that was said or done caused her to fail. "O woman," said Jesus, "great is Thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. You and I have our struggles. I see nothing in the future that would suggest that the struggles we face will go away. The same test is before us. Will we continue steadfast in the true faith - trusting in the mercy

of Jesus when our problems seem to be unresolved?

My closing prayer is a hymn. It is a simple poem written by William H Rathurst in 1831. He was inspired to pen these words by holy apostles, who in Luke 17 Verse 5 said to Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith!" This hymn was last published in The Lutheran Hymnal of 1941,

Oh, for a faith that will not shrink
though pressed by many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
of poverty or woe!

That will not murmur nor complain
beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief or pain
can lean upon its God.

A faith that shines more bright and clear
when tempests rage without;
That, when in danger, knows no fear,
in darkness feels no doubt.

That bears unmoved the world's dread frown
nor heeds its scornful smile;
That sin's wild ocean cannot drown
nor Satan's arts beguile.

A faith that keeps the narrow way
till life's last spark is fled,
and with a pure and heavenly ray
lights up the dying bed.

Lord give us such a faith as this;
and then, whate'er may come,
We'll taste e'en now the hallowed bliss
of an eternal home. Amen.

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The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts
and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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