

Reminiscere 2024

Matt. 15:21-28 (ESV)

“And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.’”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro: A blessed Second Sunday in Lent to all of you, dear ones. Blessings to you on this day in the season of Lent where we, as the people of God, collectively consider our great, dire need for the help of God, and together beg our Lord to remember His mercies and to be gracious to us—to show us favor when, of ourselves, we don’t deserve it because of our great sinfulness. It’s necessary for us together to humble ourselves and become like the Canaanite woman in our Gospel text as we cry out for mercy.

And, dear ones, you don’t need me to tell you that, when viewed from a fallen, worldly perspective, the words and deeds of our Savior in our text seem totally and completely bizarre. Especially for people steeped in a culture of immediate gratification, in a culture that says the single most important virtue is being nice, and one where so many people are in a constant state of agitation, constantly being offended and morally outraged—for people in a culture like ours, the things our Savior says and does in Matt. 15 can seem completely appalling and even grotesque.

But when viewed from the true, divinely-inspired, otherworldly perspective of the Holy Scriptures and the Church—what our Savior does is beautiful and masterful. He shows us that His thoughts are not like our very limited, facile thoughts, nor are His ways like our fallen ways. And the truth is, Jesus would not have us see Him as a cruel, strange Lord Who despises us and is pleased to see us suffer. But He would have us see Him as the very Son of God and the promised Messiah, Who works sometimes very mysteriously to strengthen our faith in Him and, because of His great love for us, to make us more like Him.

Body Paragraphs:

- I. As it happened, our Lord took it upon Himself to venture into the region of Tyre and Sidon—away from Judea and from Galilee where He was accustomed to being. Now He was among the Gentiles, no doubt preaching and healing and extending the kingdom of God to them, and our text says that, of all people, a Canaanite woman came forth—someone who’s descended from the ancient enemies of God’s people in the land of Canaan, where they practiced child sacrifice and all manner of evil—yes, a Canaanite woman began crying out to Jesus on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter—not just once, but the Greek

text indicates she began doing this over and over again.

- a. This is completely surreal.
- b. One might think from a superficial vantage point Jesus, recognizing this, would do the kind thing and help the poor woman and her daughter without the slightest delay. But that, of course, is not what He did. Jesus didn't answer her a word. Think of the sting she felt at His silence towards her, at His apparent rejection of her. Don't we feel this when our prayers seem to go unanswered?
- c. Even Jesus' own disciples pleaded for Him to help her if nothing else just so she'd leave them in peace—but Christ refuses to grant even the petitions of His own disciples. In effect, He bids them be silent!
- d. And as if all of this wasn't enough, our text in English says the Canaanite woman knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me." But the Greek is even stronger—the most literal sense of the verb used here means that she got down on all fours and began kissing His feet, worshipping Him, as she said, "Lord, help me."
- e. I think it's pretty safe to say most people would think if there ever was someone whom the Lord would help before even another moment went by, it was this woman. But just then, Jesus does what would be, from the 21st century American perspective, unthinkable. He effectively calls this woman a dog, that she's unworthy to receive even some bread that should be given to children.
- f. The worldly mind can't take any of this. It's an unbearable affront to our sensibilities. What is He doing? Why is our Lord acting this way?

II. But you must see, dear ones, that our Savior's work is mysterious and He doesn't take exactly the same approach with every faithful believer everywhere all time. But what He does do all the time is to say and do exactly what He needs to to further people in the kingdom of God, in repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

- a. As the sacred scriptures say, "A bruised reed, He will not break; a faintly burning wick, He will not quench." Our Lord doesn't despise Christians with a weak faith. This is most certainly true.

But it's also true that our Lord is very, very pleased when we cling to Him and His promises with fortitude and that we obtain a faith that's stronger than iron, more durable than steel, and it pleases Him when, through trial and testing, He

makes us men of gold when before we were only men of clay.

So times will come for us, as they did for the Canaanite woman, when Christ our Lord sets out about His work of refining us, and especially our faith, like a master craftsman, One Whose knowledge and skills are unmatched and Who displays the highest artfulness and the most quality precision in His techniques.

He knows exactly when and how to use even great evil that befalls us to extract us out of our comfort zone, out of false and misplaced hopes in worldly, temporary fixes, so that we hope in Him more purely and, even more mysteriously, as I said, so that He makes us more like Him.

- b. In the case of the Canaanite woman, Christ applies the heat of a particularly difficult demonic affliction to drive her out of her home and village to come find Him and seek His help publicly and with great courage.

But Jesus saw that if He granted her request right from the start, His divine work of strengthening her faith—purging it of many blemishes and imperfections—this would end prematurely, and ultimately, her faith would be of lesser quality than what would truly please Him most.

So, when our Lord first encounters her faith, having been heated as it were by the fire of a grievous demonic affliction, Christ sees fit to let her faith mingle with a potent, perfectly measured amount of divine silence, and this not to drive her away from Him and silence her, but to draw her towards Him and catalyze even more prayer.

Soon, though, our Lord's disciples—His unseasoned apprentices—began to grow weary and interrupt His mysterious work for their own sake, so Christ put them to silence that they might become better students of His craft.

And then, when the woman felt the heat and pressure the Lord brought upon her, she began to bow down on her hands and knees at His feet, and she pleaded with Him saying, “Lord, help me.”

- i. And let me just say, there may be many brothers among us who might think it'd be a cold day in the devil's lair before they get down and kiss the feet of Jesus while begging Him for help. But the day may well come when the Lord lays on you such pressure and fiery affliction that you're forced down onto your knees in prayer—when prayer is not only what you should do, it's all you *can* do. But besides that, dear ones, you know as well as I do that it'd be far better to bow down and

kiss the feet of Jesus in public a thousand times and then a thousand more than to let your heart bow down to an idol even once without anyone seeing—because God does see, and His opinion of you matters infinitely more than anyone else’s.

- ii. Nevertheless, with the Canaanite woman at His feet begging Him for help, Christ does what would completely consume a faith of lesser quality. He turns up the heat seven-fold as He likens her to a dog and confronts her with her unworthiness, and the end result is nothing less than stunning. She agrees with His judgment of her unworthiness and she uses it to appeal for mercy from Him yet once more.
- iii. It’s as if she said, “Amen, Lord, I am as You say. Your judgment is just, and I have no right to ask for what I don’t deserve, and yet even the most humble and lowly can expect kindness and mercy from Your hand.”
- iv. This woman’s faith is simply dazzling, blinding even. And Jesus answered her like a craftsman marveling at a masterpiece saying, “O woman, great is your faith!” Christ crowns His own work in her as if it were completely her own.
- v. Even the One Who laid the foundation of the earth, Who formed and fashioned all the stars in the heavens, and gave this woman a tiny fraction of the crucible He would endure on the cross for our salvation, even He marveled at what He’d seen in her.
- vi. And before I close, I should say that her response to our Lord is instructive for us when the accusation of God’s Law stings our consciences bringing our sins and unworthiness to remembrance, which can keep us from praying:
 - 1. When it says, “You have acted like swine in your sins, wallowing in your own filth,” dear ones, take up the example of the Canaanite woman and say, “Gracious Lord in heaven, I am a sinner and have truly behaved like swine, though even the prodigal Son, who was numbered among the pigs, even he was received back by His father, was clothed in His love, and feasted at table with Him.
 - 2. So too, when Your conscience accuses You and says, “Your sins cry out to heaven against You with such a loud voice, there’s no earthly hope that your prayers will be heard and

answered favorably by God,” you should say in return, “O Lord, my sins and iniquities certainly do cry out against me with a deafening roar, though even they seem like a whisper to the cry of Christ’s shed blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of all my transgressions, and I know that the cries of repentant sinners for mercy pierce the heavens and the angels fill Your kingdom above with songs of praise at even one sinner who repents of their sin. O Lord, be not deaf to these things.”

- III. Let us then humble ourselves and be steadfast in prayer crying out for mercy. May God grant that we obtain the outcome of our faith, which is the salvation of our souls, and

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.