

**Matthew 15:21-28**  
**“The Great Faith of the Canaanite Woman”**

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.” But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs.” And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

As we’ve seen in previous weeks in the teaching and the life of Christ in the Gospel accounts the Church has given us, and has us consider; all of Christ’s teaching the Apostles have given to us, is focused on helping us understand *what* the kingdom of God is – and *how* to live the kingdom now, that we may live it eternally when we pass from this temporal existence.

As we have learned in the account of Jesus healing of the blind man of Jericho a few weeks ago, and in His confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisee’s last week, the first thing a person has to know in order to find the kingdom of God – is God Himself. That is, who God actually and really is, rather than who we want or need or insist He is. And what we’ve seen over and over again with those who’ve found Him – who recognize God in Christ – are those who accept Jesus’ and John the Baptists teaching of repentance.

What we’ve seen is that repentance is not just the awareness of our sin and sinfulness – but is, in its core, the awareness of our creaturely-ness. That we accept who God is based on the awareness and reality that He *is* God and we are *not* God. And when we realize that He is truly the “I am, who I am” (Exo. 3:14) who is, who He is, and not who we think he is – or *should* be – or *need* Him to be. And in fact, to reject Him as He is, which we do when we do not accept Him as He has revealed Himself in the world (most fully experienced in His Church) is to place ourselves in the place of God. ...Which of course is the essence of idolatry.

Time and again we see people that are repentant recognize him and accept who He is (as God and as the man He is) and respond to Him accordingly. They are healed and they follow Him. And conversely we see those who do not recognize Him because He is not what they were expecting – not what they want Him to be. Some, like the rich young ruler, and the others who fell away after He taught them about eating His body and drinking His blood (from John 6), will simply walk away and look for a God that is more to their liking. Others, like the Scribes and Pharisee’s and leaders of Israel and Judaism, will oppose Him and ultimately kill Him.

In today’s account of Jesus interaction and healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter, we see a wonderful example of the former type – of those who repent and recognize Him and embrace Him. We also see in this account another example of His great love for his disciples – and for us. He will go anywhere, to anyone, and will do virtually everything He can do in order to help us find – and live – the kingdom of God.

As He has in the past as He has gone to Galilee of the Gentiles and to Samaria, so we see He also does in this account, intentionally going to the pagan Philistine cities of Tyre and Sidon. Why is He going there? Or really, a more important and telling question is why He is taking His Disciples there? And why has the Church chosen to take us there in this account?

Jesus is explicit in His conversation with the woman that He has *not* come for her or her people. It requires no interpretation, He is there for the lost sheep of the house of Israel and not the Gentiles. Then is this interaction with the woman a mistake, or oversight? Surely not since the Gospel writers have placed it in all three of the Gospel accounts and the Church has chosen this Sunday to consider it – passing over so many others.

He's there because this woman from a pagan people and pagan land has something that belongs to Him. Something He needs to give to His disciples – or at least give them more of what she has – that she clearly has enough to give away. And I should say what she has to give is not just for the Twelve that were following Jesus that day – but for all those who would be His Disciples in the ages to come. What she has is for us as much as it was for them.

The first and most obvious thing she has is a **faith** that clearly dwarfs theirs. This woman from a pagan land and pagan people, in no less a miraculous way than the blind man of Jericho was able to see Jesus more clearly than the leaders of the Jews, is able to see the true God in this wandering Jewish teacher. The Fathers are unanimous that by addressing Jesus as the Son of David and begging for mercy she was doing exactly the same thing the Church had us look at two weeks ago with the Blind Man of Jericho: seeing the true God, the creator of the universe and all that is in it, **in** this humble, human, male, Jewish man.

She not only had none of the benefit of the Jewish scriptures and prophets (the most recent of which was John the Baptist who physically pointed Him out); she didn't even have what the blind man had in not being even culturally connected to Him. It is doubtful she heard the message of repentance first-hand and perhaps at all. How then can she repent and have such great faith? As with most things, the answer lies in the Scriptures and the worship of the Church: "In Thy light shall we see light." She recognized Him as the source of the light of Her life. The light of her conscience that she followed and clearly loved.

The second thing she has that they need from her is **humility**. She recognizes Him, she knows who He is and she approaches and responds to Him appropriately. Notice how He speaks to her, rejecting her and her people and associating her (and her people) with dogs. That would have been much more offensive to a person of that time than it even is today. In the ancient world, as in much of the third world today, dogs are unclean animals. (Yes they are loving and loyal, but a dog will eat things even a pig or license-plate-eating goat will not eat!)

Notice her response. This woman has no pride. Her love for her daughter has beat the pride out of her! And this love is the basis of her faith as well and the basis of her repentance. St. John tells us in his first epistle (chp.4) that "perfect love casts out fear." She has no fear of embarrassment or even humiliation, no fear of rejection, no fear of punishment or failure. The light of her love has guided her to the source of light, the source of love. ...And in this love of the light, of God, this "perfect love" as John calls it, is the fruit of repentance: perfect faith and humility.

The teaching of the Fathers – especially St. John Climacus (of the ladder) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century is completely clear: the goal and source of our struggle, the ultimate healing and source of our therapy to heal the virtues of the disease of the passions, is love. Love is the end and love is the means. St. John Climacus teaches us that spiritual beings have spiritual vision and are therefore able to see spiritual things. That being the case, they are able to see our souls. This includes not just angels, but fallen angels as well. When our enemies the demons look at us they are able to see our souls. Did you know that? St. John teaches that when they see a soul that is darkened by the fear of the passions – and the source of fear (other than the fear of God) is sin – they attack and enslave.

However when they see a soul struggling in repentance through the light of love and for more light and more love, and for the source of light and the source of love – the perfect light, the perfect love – they leave it alone because as instruments of sin and darkness no one fears the light more than they. At that point they have to attack us indirectly through those around us that are susceptible to them.

Not I want to be clear: humiliation, insignificance, rejection, abandonment, all of these things fear enflames, when they are just feelings are not sin. I'm not saying if you follow Christ and struggle in love you will not feel these things. Jesus as a real and true man experienced these feelings. Feelings are not sinful. It does not become sin, does not become a passion until we believe them, until we accept them as being true. This is why the fathers all say the spiritual battle is for our mind. Once the enemy has our minds – he has our hearts.

Jesus taught His Disciples all this, He lived all this, but they (and we) need to see examples of it. Examples that are so real they not only go outside of our comfort zone – they go outside of our world-view. So he brought these men from the chosen people of God to a woman of a pagan land and pagan people to give them an example of what this love looks like and what this love can do.

And as they learned from Jesus and they learned from those He drew to himself for them at that time: the Roman Centurion, the Blind Man of Jericho, the Syro-Phoenecian woman and this Canaanite woman – let us, brothers and sisters also believe that he drew them to Himself at that time for us today as well. ...For as we say in every service of Him, that, *He is the good God who loveth mankind.*