

Sermon for Lent 2 Reminiscere – Matthew 15:21-28

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region [of Tyre and Sidon] came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’” Where is the woman’s husband? Every daughter has a father—where is he? It seems the woman comes alone—no husband, no mother, no sister, no friend. Where are they? Do they blame her or her daughter for the demon possession? Do they blame themselves? Are they too afraid and ashamed?

She comes to the Lord alone. And He answers her request to heal her daughter not a word. Perhaps she was bold in her first cry, but she is soon put in her place. Not only did she come alone, on top of that, the Lord ignores her. He answers her nothing. He walks on by.

And as for the apostles, they’re really no help. “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” Perhaps she was a nuisance to their comfort, like those television ads with the cats and dogs who’ve been neglected or abused. His disciples just want to forget about the injustices and hardships of the world for a little while, instead of getting their hands and their hearts exhausted by it. Or maybe they’re perplexed by their Lord’s silence. Are they confused by His lack of compassion? Do they want Him to show His power like He did on so many other occasions? Whatever the reason, they intervene, begging the Lord to send her away. But the Lord answers the woman, saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Now, when He finally does speak, it has gotten worse. She had addressed Him as though she were one of the sheep. She calls Him, “Lord, Son of David,” both of which are titles reserved exclusively for those people who are in a covenant relationship with the One True God. This name was only to be used by sons and daughters of Israel, but not heathen gentiles from across holy land borders.

So how does she respond to His slam against her presumption? Does she slink away in hopes that others will forget about it? No. She comes and worships him. Sometimes it’s translated kneel, but literally she falls on her face before Him. She is a beggar and penitent before her King. She will not be driven away simply because she is unworthy.

Remember, her daughter was possessed by a demon. And demons rarely come uninvited. Have you not also dangled your fingers in shark-infested waters with every sin? Have you not also played with fire in your life? Have you not put your marriage and family at risk with gossip, alcohol abuse, pornography, a gambling addiction, or the whole host of other lies that promise fulfillment with no risk to anybody else but you, while in reality leaving you empty and used and at odds with those around you? Repent! You wouldn’t store guns and dangerous chemicals near small children, so why do you risk your own life and the lives of your daughters and sons and spouses by

dabbling in sin? If the demons do not already sorely oppress you and your children, they are nipping at your heels.

The Gentile woman knew this. She says, "Lord, help me." To which He replies, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." More accurately translated, "little dogs." He might well mean "lap dogs" or "house dogs" or something like a Hollywood socialite would carry around in her handbag. Yet, now this begging Gentile woman had her "in." No, she is not a sheep of Israel. No, she is not one of the children. That was presumptuous. But she is a little dog. She belongs in the house. She doesn't want the children's bread. She wants the Master's bread, and that belongs to His pets as well as His children. No, she is not a sheep or a child, but neither is she a pig or wild animal. She belongs in the house. Christ is her Master. He marvels at her faith. He rewards her. Her daughter is healed.

Her faith was great, but greater still of was the object of her faith: Christ. She found in Him the Messiah, the Savior, the Advocate with the Father, the Ransom for the devil, Someone who would send the demons away and provide the bread that gives life. She recognized in Jesus of Nazareth all of these things, while the apostles and those in Israel did not.

So be the Canaanite woman. Throw yourself on the mercy of Christ. Not only can He save you, He already did. He has taken your sins upon Himself. He has suffered the punishment you deserve, in your place, and as your scapegoat. He has declared you righteous and placed His name upon you. He will hold you to His promises.

In Him, you are not a Gentile; you are not a dog; you are not a wild animal. You are His son or daughter. You are a child of God by Holy Baptism into Christ. This is what St. Patrick confessed and what we confess of Andrew and of ourselves today: "I bind this day to me forever, by power of faith, Christ's incarnation, His Baptism in the Jordan River, His cross of death for my salvation, His bursting from the spic-ed tomb, His riding up the heavenly way, His coming at the day of doom, I bind unto myself today ... Against the demon snares of sin, the vice that gives temptation force, the natural lusts that war within, the hostile foes that mar my course; or few or many far or nigh, in every place and in all hours, against their fierce hostility, I bind to me those holy powers."

Your Savior casts out all demons and all sin. So call Him, "Son of David," "Lord," or "King." Call Him "Jesus," because He saves you. He gives you more than bread and more than cake. He gives His risen Body and Blood, His very Self, in the Sacrament, to cure and heal your soul and send the demons away. Here, Jesus removes all the sins that ail you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠