

Sunday of the Canaanite Woman 2012

Today's Reading: Matthew 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Thoughts on the Gospel

No matter what part of the globe one travels (such as France, Greece, Italy, Ethiopia, the United States, Russia, Japan, Egypt, Israel, Spain... and the list goes on), the Orthodox Church can be found there through their Saints who were either born there or gave up their lives for Christ there. It shows how the Orthodox Church is a Church that is universal, worldwide and not restricted to one part of the world. This is because Jesus wants "all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth." (1 Tim. 2:4) It was a prophecy of St. Simeon the God-receiver that was fulfilled (when he said that the Lord would be "a Light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel") and is highlighted in today's gospel reading.

During the time of Christ, Jews and Canaanites did not get along. The Jews believed in the Lord and the Canaanites believed in many pagan gods and idols. They would stay away from each other, fighting against each other in wars and considering each other "unclean". Jesus and His disciples had an encounter with a Canaanite Woman in today's gospel.

Although Canaanites believed in many gods and didn't believe in the God of the Israelites, the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel believed in Christ as "Physician of souls and bodies" and in His power to heal the sick. The Canaanite woman had a daughter who was possessed by a demon and asked Jesus to heal her. First the disciples had their say: Instead of them having pity on this woman and trying to help her, we read that they asked Jesus to "*send her away, for she is crying after us.*"

Jesus then says two very interesting statements: "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" and "*It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*" Does Jesus say this to the woman in pain? Jesus never dealt with pagans (or anyone else, for that matter) in this way. Yet, He does it for a reason: although He

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is filled with mercy and compassion, He is teaching His disciples a lesson. His disciples “failed the test” when it came to mercy, because they didn’t want to help this woman and acted as if they considered this woman a “problem” and not a human being. The Canaanite Woman, however, showed greater faith than any Apostle there: she answers, **“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”** The Apostles failed at the chance to stop adhering to stereotypes and restrictions, the Woman passed the test of faith with flying colours. Jesus answered the Woman, **“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”** At once, her daughter was healed.

This event shows us that God has no limit or restrictions to whom He will love and show mercy. We, too, have a choice when encountering Christ – both through prayer and when we interact with our neighbour. Sometimes we judge as the Apostles did in the gospel reading (and it’s so easy to judge our neighbour – either at work, at school, at home, *anywhere*). Judging is easy; however, asking for God’s help with our whole heart, although we know we are not worthy of His mercy, is reaching the next step in our spiritual journey. When we do this, we know that it is only with God’s help that we can reach holiness and the Kingdom of Heaven.

One final lesson from today’s Gospel: it should be our prayer that St. Demetrios Church and *all Orthodox Churches across the globe* reflect our Saints – for parishioners to be from all ethnic backgrounds. Our Lord is a God for all people and we are all His children.

Let us pray that everyone sees the Truth of the Gospel, praying and loving our neighbour with all our heart and mind in order that all confess God is Trinity and undivided – that God is a God of wonders for all of humanity. God bless!

Discussion Questions:

For Children

1. Why were Canaanites and Jews enemies?
2. What is “idolatry” Why does it go against God’s law? Do you think you see it today?
3. Why is the Canaanite Woman’s faith “great”?
4. Do you think the Apostles were right in trying to ignore the Woman?

For Youth/Young Adults

1. Do you think Jesus’ statements to the Canaanite were directed to her or to the Apostles? Why?
2. We don’t know what happened to the Canaanite later in life. Do you think she would have become a Christian? Why?
3. During the encounter with the Canaanite Woman, were the disciples exhibiting racism (even if they didn’t know they were)? How would you talk to the Apostles to correct them?
4. “God has no passport” and this proves it. What are some ways that you would spread the Gospel (a) to other Orthodox Christians, (b) to non-Orthodox Christians and (c) to non-Christians in search for Truth?