

## Reminiscere, A ✕ D 2010

### Matthew 15:21-28

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 You can learn from this Canaanite woman nearly everything there is to know about the Christian life. Lent is a time for catechesis. Historically, those newly enrolled in the catechumenate spend these 40 days intensely preparing for Baptism or confirmation at the Easter Vigil. Last week they learned and you were reminded that Baptism makes the devil your enemy. He takes aim at those who belong to God, who through Baptism bear the name of the Triune God. This week, the catechumens learn and are reminded that sometimes, God seems like your enemy. That's how it seems hearing of the encounter of this Canaanite woman and Jesus. But appearances are not always what they seem. God is not your enemy.

2 Unless however, you prefer a god of your own creation or you misunderstand the God of all creation, in which case you will find in Him an adversary. If you thought God was something like your grandfather who loved you no matter what, who plopped you on his knee and winked away your pécadillos, you'll be stung by the Jesus you encounter in today's Gospel reading. Apparently, God is not like that.

3 God is like this. When the Canaanite woman came to Jesus, petitioning Him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," Jesus ignored her. The title by which she addresses Jesus is correct. It identifies Him as the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah. But not just anyone may address Jesus as Savior and Messiah. So, when the woman presumes to have a claim to Jesus, He ignores her. Her pleading continues until the disciples have to intervene, "Lord, send her away for she keeps crying out after us." Jesus answers them—not her—but presumably loud enough so the woman can overhear. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Apparently not even the intercession of apostles and saints can bend God's will.

4 Watch and learn, o Christian. When her prayer goes unanswered, does this woman quit praying? When logic and common sense would intervene to say, "God doesn't care about you, stop bothering Him" or "If this is the answer you get, if this is the relief from suffering you get, either there is no God or He is powerless to help," does she give up hope? When God seems callous and unconcerned, does she doubt His promises to the contrary? No, she persists. She came and knelt before Him, saying, "Lord, help me."

5 Certainly Jesus cannot ignore this. She's persistent, and she does what scribes and Pharisees, what the religiously proud of themselves are unwilling to do: she bows her knees. What could Jesus do but grant her humble request. By now the crowd must have grown uneasy. This was becoming quite a spectacle. If she had any respect for herself, she'd have left long, long ago. The nice thing to do would be for Jesus to grant her request. So what is His response? "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." So there she is, on her knees humbly before Jesus, praying not even for herself but for her daughter. Jesus has ignored her and declared that He has not come for Canaanites. But apparently she didn't get the point. She persisted. And so He calls her a dog.

6 All the other lessons you've learned from this woman up until this point—perseverance in prayer, relying on the promises of God, even when contrary to good logic, seeing Jesus as the only source of mercy—pale in comparison with this lesson. She is not offended. She does not leave. She doesn't go back to her Canaanite gods or go church-shopping for someone who uses the Word of God less offensively. She replies, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that

fall from their master's table." She makes no pretensions about being an Israelite. She assumes she has no right to anything Jesus comes to bring. She is happy to be a dog, happy to get even the mere crumbs that fall to dogs, because she knows and trusts that mere crumbs of Jesus' mercy are enough.

7 You deserve nothing. Worse, you deserve hell. The minute you suppose you deserve what Jesus comes bringing you disqualify yourself from receiving it. Christianity is not a matter of what you deserve. You have no rights here, only privileges. Beggars have no rights; they receive what they are given purely as a gift. Unless you like this woman are willing to acknowledge you are nothing, worse than a dog, a sinner who deserves nothing but hell, you won't get the mercy Jesus comes bringing. There's no room for pride, an ounce of self-respect is too much. This is what the Law of God does: it accuses you, humiliates you, exposes you for the sinner you are. Jesus doesn't care about being a nice guy or a winsome fellow. He cares about being your Savior from sin. And not until you realize the gravity of the situation will you trust Him completely for mercy. Repent.

8 "Faith takes Christ captive in His word, when He's angriest, and makes out of His cruel words a comforting inversion...You say, the woman responds, that I am a dog. Let it be; I will gladly be a dog; now give me the consideration you give a dog. Thus she catches Christ with His own words, and He is happy to be caught" (Luther, 325). "O woman, great is your faith." To no one else does Jesus give such a compliment. Faith clings to Jesus when there is nothing else. And it is faith in Jesus—not blood lines or family ancestry—that make a true Israelite. Because of her faith, she is no dog, she is a true Israelite, one for whom Jesus was sent. He was sent to her to answer her prayer for mercy. He was sent to take the sins of the whole world and to die condemned on the cross.

9 God is not your enemy, even and especially when He rebukes you for your sin. Want proof? God allowed Himself to be pinned by Jacob in the wrestling match. He allowed Himself to be caught by the woman in His words; and He allowed Himself to be caught in His love for all mankind, being nailed to a cross. On the cross, when He bore the sins of the world, Jesus became God's enemy. God the Father spent all His wrath on God the Son so that for Jesus' sake, He could be merciful to you. All your unworthiness, all your condemnation is taken away. Jesus came to show you mercy; even crumbs of His mercy are more than enough.

10 You are a dog, a sinner, no more. By God's mercy, you likewise are a true Israelite by faith, a beloved child of God. The same faith Jesus praised in the woman has been delivered to you through Holy Baptism. Great is your faith, faith delivered to you, faith preserved through God's Word and sacraments, faith which trusts in Christ completely for mercy, repentant faith which sees nothing good in yourself. And you feast on far better than crumbs. Your Lord continues to give you His mercy through His very Body and Blood. With Jesus, there are no crumbs. You get His true flesh and blood for the complete forgiveness of your sins. And yet, feast though this is, the Body and Blood of Jesus in, with, and under bread and wine are only crumbs compared to the feast that awaits you at His return.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer