

Lent II

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[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. In this morning's gospel, we read that our Lord had withdrawn to the region of Tyre and Sidon, far beyond the borders of Israel into the Gentile territory.

Matthew 15, 22 tells us, And behold, a woman of Canaan came to that region and cried out to him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely demon-possessed. She was a Canaanite, one of Israel's most fierce pagan enemies. Yet she called him Lord, Son of David. Confessing him as Messiah, despite being completely outside the borders of the covenant. Her cry shows the promise of salvation extending beyond Israel. As Isaiah 49, 6 declares that the Messiah would be a light to the Gentiles.

At first, our Lord's response seems cold. He doesn't answer her. When the disciples urge him to send her away, he says, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[1 : 27] That was a divine order. To the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. St. Paul later records this same order in Romans 1, 16, stating that the gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

For the Jew first, and also for the Greek. This encounter captures the transition from the old covenant to the new.

Under the old covenant, God's blessings were primarily channeled through the nation of Israel. By acknowledging this divine order, the Canaanite woman shows she understands that the Messiah's primary mission was to Israel.

She has the faith to believe that his mercy can't be contained by those boundaries. She doesn't try to bypass the old covenant order.

She simply trusts that God's grace and mercy are abundant enough to include her. The woman didn't give up.

[2 : 38] She came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. And Jesus spoke again. It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

Now, Jesus is setting up a parable of a household here. See, in that culture, dog was a common slur for Gentiles.

But our Lord uses a specific word here that refers to a small pet or a household dog. The kind that waits under the table for scraps.

You see, in a household, there's an order. Children are served first. But the little dogs are still in the house under the table near the master's bread.

So the children of Israel are fed first at the table. But this doesn't mean that Gentiles are to be shut out. The woman's faith is revealed in her response.

[3 : 45] She immediately understood the imagery Jesus was using and responded to him with humility. Verse 27 says, Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

The Canaanite woman doesn't demand a seat at the table or ask for the portion belonging to the children. She understands that even a crumb of power and mercy of Christ is more than enough to heal her daughter.

She humbles herself completely. She doesn't trust in her own merit, but entirely in the overflowing abundance of his grace.

Then Jesus answered and said to her, Oh, woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire. And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Notice that her great faith is inseparable from her complete humility. She was determined because she knew who she had seen, who Jesus was, and that she needed him.

[5 : 03] During Lent, this is the very attitude that we're called to cultivate. Lent is a time when we look squarely at our own unworthiness and the reality of our sin.

We often approach God as if we have a right to be heard or as if he owes us a response on our own timeline. This woman teaches us that true faith begins with acknowledging our unworthiness.

We come to the altar not because we deserve to be there, but because we need the mercy that Christ offers. Like this woman, we come to the altar not because we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.

Like her, we recognize that we have no claim on God's grace. But we also recognize that he is the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.

This is the Lenten posture, a persistent and humble confidence in Christ's goodness and his grace. This woman's faith was great because it was fixed on who Jesus is.

[6 : 34] She believed that he was so full of mercy that there'd be enough left over even for a Gentile like her. At some point, we all find ourselves in a season of life when our prayers seem unanswered.

When that happens, and it will, let's look to the example of this Canaanite woman, not being resentful, but being humble.

The crumbs of God's grace are more powerful than the greatest feast the world can offer. Amen. He who fed the 5,000 with a few loaves has more than enough mercy for every one of us, no matter how far outside the borders we feel ourselves to be.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.