

**REMINISCERE / THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT**

Text: St. Matthew 15:21-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Faith receives what works can never merit, for it is by faith alone that we are transformed. By faith, we are no longer little dogs, but children of God. Thus it is, that we Christians should pray unto our gracious God: *“Thy will be done, O LORD, but give us a blessing according to Your Word.”*

Yes, that is faith, and it is what we should believe, yet so sadly, very often it is not. Our prayer should be that we trust God to be whom He has promised us He will be—gracious and merciful, slow to anger, quick to save, and abounding in steadfast love, loving us as a father loves his dear children.

Such should be our faith and prayer, but more often than not, we accuse God of being just like us—faithless, selfish, small-minded, vengeful, and bitter. Yes, we pray, but in the middle of the prayer, we so often doubt. We doubt that God will hear us. We doubt that He will take time out of His busy schedule to attend to our needs. He is, after all, God. When God takes longer than our expected timeline, we grow impatient. Even when this is not so, our prayers are, more often than not, prayers asking God to conform His will to our will, not our will to His. We are happy to pray, *“Thy will be done,”* just as long as God’s will conforms to our own.

You see, by nature, we are more like the Jews of JESUS’ day than the Gentiles. We have the Word of God and the testimony of the Fathers. We have the Law and the Prophets and even the very Words of JESUS Himself, but so often it seems that we do not hear His Words, or even worse, that we do not believe them.

How else do we account for the decline of those who confess the Christian faith? How else do we account for the abysmal or spotty attendance at God’s Divine Service week after week of those who call themselves Christian, never mind midweek services or Bible Study? How else do we account for the fact that even when the Church begs her members, such begging does not produce enough volunteers to fill council positions; positions that you, yourself created, that we might better accomplish the will of God in this place for our community?

How else do we account for the fact that many of us brought our children up in the Church only to see a large number of them turn their backs on the love of God? How else do we account for the fact that many Christians leave the Church because their pastors preach about sin and the love of God that removes them, instead of making them feel good with schmaltzy stories, empty platitudes, and peripheral piffle, or what they consider more interesting, entertaining, and relevant to their lives and circumstances? And how else is it that the unbelievers outside the walls of our churches will not come in because all they see is hypocrisy? Shame on us! There really is only one answer. We do not believe the Word of God, and not believing the Word of God means only one thing; we believe God is a liar.

But St. Matthew sets before us a very different picture. In our Gospel text appointed for this day, we are introduced to a Canaanite woman—a Gentile who lives outside the established Church. We do not know her name. She is referred to as a dog because she is not from among God’s chosen people, and no one is more aware of that fact than is she. Still, she came in worshipful humility to JESUS seeking crumbs of mercy that fall ignored by God’s chosen people, just as a little dog roots around under the dinner table waiting for small children to drop their food to the floor. It is as though she says to JESUS: *I will be satisfied with the forgiveness that Your children cast off. I know that but a crumb, the most meager gift, from Your table is my salvation. It is more than enough for me. Feed me and save my daughter.*”

We may not know her name, but she knows the Name of her God. She calls Him “*LORD*” and “*Son of David.*” This “*heathen*” woman is more a believer than any Jew and even many who, today, call themselves Christian. She knows JESUS as *the LORD*, the promised Messiah, David’s LORD, and David’s Son. She clings to Him, and she will not let Him go until she receives His blessing. This Gentile, who has neither the Law nor the Prophets, hears the Word of God and believes.

That was the response of the Canaanite woman. She threw herself upon JESUS’ Word even when it seemed harsh. She embraced it, for she knew that real help can come from nowhere else. She believed what she has heard of this CHRIST; that He is gracious and merciful, eager to forgive and restore. She knew that the Son of David has come to seek and to save the lost, and, upon finding them, makes them the true Israel in whom there is no guile. She knew that even a meager crumb from the table of the LORD is her salvation. Just a crumb. It is enough!

In this Canaanite woman, we see what faith is and how faith lives. It is not an opinion based upon observed facts or reason or the senses. It is not a vague hope in an ambiguous future or some fleeting feeling of excitement. It is not an emotional stirring of the heart that is more likely to be gas than God. It is not a false piety that believes God must look favorably toward us due to our pious and holy living. Faith is none of these

things. Rather, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,”* the author of Hebrews tells us, *“the conviction of things not seen.”*

You see, faith believes even when everything seems to speak against it. Faith believes even when God seems to be silent. Faith clings to CHRIST and the Word of God. It clings to the death and resurrection of JESUS, whether or not God’s will conforms to our will, whether or not God seems to hear us. Faith responds in love to God even when it is tired, even when it is pressed for time, even when we think it is inconvenient. For faith knows that while God’s will is not our will, while His way is not our way, His will and way are always best for us. For God knows *“the plans [He has] for you... plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope... [that] you will call upon [Him] and [He] will hear you.”* Faith confesses the truth and embraces the promises of God.

Therefore, such faith prays daily, *“I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins. I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. My LORD’s Name I have not honored as I should; my worship and prayers have faltered. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those whom I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.”* Such faith prays, *“LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* Such faith flees to CHRIST, seeking refuge in His infinite mercy and imploring His grace.

Yes, that is faith, repentant faith. It is a faith that throws itself on the mercy of God’s righteous judgment and claims the promises of His unchanging Word. It confesses its weaknesses and seeks God’s gracious mercy, love, and forgiveness, not on its own merit, but on the merit of JESUS’ bloody death and His triumphant resurrection. It is a faith that trusts God to be whom He has promised us He will be—*“merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”* It is faith that holds fast to God and claims His promised blessing. It is faith that prays with King David: *“Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness’ sake, O LORD.”* This faith prays in repentance knowing that God hears such prayer and forgives our sins and transgressions.

Our LORD is never far from those He loves and calls His own. Just as He did not truly ignore the Canaanite woman and her plea, neither does He ignore you and your prayers. He came down from heaven for little dogs just like you and me. He suffered on the Cross for little dogs just like you and me. Therefore, He hears your prayers and answers every one of them. His Blood cries out from the ground for you. How could JESUS not answer you? It is for this very purpose that He came, to answer your cries for

mercy, to free you from Satan and from yourself, to purchase your salvation, and give to you His righteousness. He paid your ransom and redeemed you from sin, Satan, and the grave. This, He did, not with gold or silver, but with His own precious Body and Blood and His innocent suffering and death. How, then, could JESUS ignore you?

Therefore, you are dogs, no longer. In CHRIST, God has raised up for Himself true sons and daughters of Abraham. In CHRIST, you are forgiven, renewed, and made righteous and holy. JESUS supplies much more for you from His Table than mere crumbs; He gives you Himself, His true Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins. In these, are His goodness, mercy, and love. In these, are your life and salvation.

Even this very day you have prayed, *“Have mercy on me, O LORD,”* and JESUS has heard you. You are healed, your demons cast out, your sins forgiven. In JESUS, you have overcome all that the devil can conceive. Satan, the great accuser, calls you sinner, but JESUS, our LORD and God, whose innocent suffering and death overcomes every accusation from hell, calls you saved.

Come now, to the Table of the LORD, and receive here more than meager crumbs. Receive eternal life and salvation and hear JESUS say, *“O [child,] great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”* For JESUS has forgiven you all your sins.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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