

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

"Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake, O LORD."

When you read today's Gospel text, you can come to the conclusion that God's mercy knows no limits. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, what your condition is, God is merciful, and He loves showing mercy. In fact, at times, you don't even have to be asking for mercy, and God will show it!

Of course, if you look only at the externals of today's text, you might not come to that conclusion. After all, the Canaanite woman approaches Jesus asking for mercy, and He puts her to the test.

- First, she approaches Jesus asking for mercy for her demon-possessed daughter, and Jesus ignores her. It's not that He didn't hear her, but He doesn't respond to her, neither positively nor negatively.
- Jesus' disciples, taking their cue from His silence, bids that she be sent away. Now, He responds: "I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." If anything in today's text would mask God's mercy, this would be it; it seems as if Jesus is saying that His grace and mercy are reserved only for the Chosen Nation, and the lost people of that nation to boot. This woman, being a Canaanite, is wholly an outsider.
- But the woman begs all the more. She calls Jesus Lord, and asks Him to help her. Once again, Jesus masks His mercy. "It's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." It's as if Jesus is repeating Himself, but He throws in a little insult on top of it—Canaanite, little dog; the terms sounded so similar when Jesus said it. Nevertheless, the bread is only for the children, the Children of Israel.
- Then she says it. "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Again, she calls Him Lord—this foreigner, this woman—and acknowledges her "outsidedness." "Yes, I may be a little dog, but I'm only asking for the crumbs. Sure, bread would be nice, but all I need is crumbs. They are more than sufficient." And Jesus praises her faith, telling her that her daughter would be healed.

Can you imagine the looks on the disciples' faces? Shock and awe probably don't begin to describe it.

Having recounted all of that, it does you well to remember that Jesus is the Nation of Israel reduced to one. Everything written of the Nation is fulfilled and exemplified in the person of the Son of God and Son of Mary. So, every expectation of that Nation is done in the person of Christ. One of which is one you sing in the liturgy every Sunday, and which Simeon sang many centuries ago: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32) Jesus is a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles; to this Gentile woman, Jesus was revealed to be the Lord of all—the Lord of life.

So, about that mercy of God...if He delights in showing mercy—in showing abundant mercy—why put this poor Canaanite woman through such a test? Well, bear in mind that Jesus had in mind the entire time exactly what He was going to do. In fact, He had in mind everything that was going to happen that day in the region of Tyre and Sidon. There was something to prove in testing the Canaanite woman's faith.

When God tests someone's faith, it's because He's teaching. Sometimes the one being tested is the one being instructed. Sometimes, God is instructing others.

It's probably safe to say that the woman knew all the right answers. She knew her daughter

was demon-possessed. She knew that Jesus was the Lord, and by calling Him that, she acknowledged that He was the promised Messiah to come by way of the Hebrew people. She knew that Jesus, being Lord, could rid her daughter of the demon. In fact, she even knew that it could be done by a mere word from His mouth—a veritable crumb from the master's table. It's a wonder that Jesus didn't say to her, as He had to another Gentile, "I have not found such great faith in all of Israel." (cf. Matthew 8:10)

So, it would seem that in testing the woman's faith, Jesus intended to teach His disciples. It's only fitting; He's the Master, the Teacher, and they are His disciples, His students. Again, imagine the looks on their faces when Jesus shows the woman mercy and heals her daughter. In their mind, especially given the end-around that Jesus puts her through, she did not deserve God's grace and mercy. She's an outsider—not a Hebrew, not a member of the Children of Israel. On top of that, she's a woman; she shouldn't even be talking with Jesus! But talk she does, and Jesus converses with her, and Jesus heals her daughter.

She demonstrated a greater faith than the disciples did, you could say. Despite the odds, she approached Jesus with boldness, knowing that He could that He would be merciful—faithfully confident that He would be merciful. The disciples figured that she would be sent away as the lowlife, Gentile woman that she was—that "little dog." But God delights in showing mercy—even in giving crumbs to little dogs—and her daughter was healed.

The disciples were to be merciful as Jesus is merciful. Most of them eventually were, after being sent out after Pentecost, but it took a little more instruction. It also took the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It is in Jesus' passion, crucifixion, and rising again to life that God is most merciful, giving more than crumbs to all mankind. For it is there on the cross that Jesus died with the sins of the world, destroying them, removing them from all men as far as east is from the west, and opening the gate to Life for all where all should die for their trespasses and sins. The cross was also the power in the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter—for there was the power of the devil and his demons undone.

Now, risen and ascended, the Church is to continue the mission of Jesus. He has already done the hard part—dying and rising. And by way of Baptism, you have been joined to His dying and rising, for you were drowned at the font, died to all sin, and rose again from those waters a new creation. And so, to His disciples, upon the day of His ascension, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

All nations...that includes you, dear hearers. Whether you consider yourselves at one time a member of the Children of Israel or your heritage is that of the Gentiles, you are part of all nations. Young, old, healthy, infirm, strong, weak, male, female, Jew, or Gentile—God has delighted in showing you mercy, and He delights in your showing of mercy to others as you participate in the activity of the Church in making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching them.

So, are you more like Jesus or like the disciples? It's already been established that you are like the woman. For, like her, you are a beggar before God, seeking but crumbs that fall from His table. And God has delighted in showing you grace and mercy, for He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you on the cross and rise again from the grave. Let me repeat myself: you were joined to His death and resurrection in a font like that one at the back of the church. Remember that you are dust (cf. Genesis 3:19); remember that you are redeemed—you are bought with a price (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20); remember that you are baptized. (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4) Remember also that, in Christ, the light of revelation to the Gentiles, you are a means through which He reveals Himself to unbelievers. Therefore, are you now more like Jesus or like the disciples?

I suppose that can be answered with the following questions:

- Do you delight in the coming to faith of your enemies? If that's a political enemy, then do you, Republican, rejoice over the Democrat who is your brother in the faith, or vice versa? If that's racial, then do you, a Caucasian, rejoice over someone who is brown-skinned who is your brother in the faith? If that's nationalistic, then do you, an American, rejoice over someone who is Mexican, Canadian, or even Russian who is your brother in the faith? Would you speak to a Buddhist, a Hindu, or even a Muslim about their Savior, Jesus Christ?
- Do you delight in showing mercy to those who are different from you? If you are older, are you merciful to the young, and vice versa? If you are healthy, are you merciful to the infirm, and vice versa? If you are strong, are you merciful to the weak, and vice versa? If you are male, are you merciful to the female, and vice versa? In other words, if you are Jew, are you merciful to the Gentile?

Being merciful and gracious is easy to someone who is like you, but it can be difficult and borderline impossible to someone who is different than you, like the Jewish disciples toward the Canaanite woman.

However, with God, nothing is impossible. He is able to show mercy and grace to His enemies. In fact, as I have been saying all along, He delights in doing so. "For God...loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17) His delight is great in showing grace and mercy, that He did so for His own enemies—you. Don't just take my word for it, as St. Paul wrote,

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:6-10)

The world, those without strength, the ungodly, sinners—these terms, as John and Paul used them, encompass all people—you and everyone here, those who are like you and those who are different from you, those you would consider your friends, and those you would consider your enemies. These are all for whom Christ died.

And these terms also include you. You are one for whom Christ died. Remember that you are redeemed—you are bought with a price. Remember that you are baptized! You are one whom Jesus loves. You are one in whom Jesus delights to show grace and mercy. And He has; and since He has, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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