

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Wait! Where is the Jesus we've been hearing about throughout these weeks, the one doing mighty works of healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons, giving sight, loosing tongues, feeding the hungry? What happened to the Jesus who said, "*Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11:28)?

As the Canaanite woman came up to Jesus to plead for His mercy, that Jesus seems no where to be found — so it seems, but it is not true, for we hear at the end that Jesus commends her faith and grants her prayer: "*O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.*" And her daughter was healed instantly."

Jesus did, however, use this occasion as an opportunity to teach His disciples a bit about salvation, namely that the Lord's saving work would extend to all nations, but that His salvation would come by way of the seed of Abraham. Remember the Lord's promise: "*in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. 22:18). And St. Paul reminds us that the Lord here is talking about the Christ. (Gal. 3:16).

The woman in our text does indeed heed Jesus' invitation to come to Him. Whether she had heard about that or not, we don't know, but she does seem to know about Jesus. She called Him "*Lord*" and "*Son of David.*" She was a Gentile woman, a Canaanite. You remember the Canaanites, the ancient enemy of Israel. The Lord had called for them to be driven from the promised land. He didn't want their false gods corrupting Israel.

But this woman, though a Canaanite, was no false believer. She trusted that Jesus was the Christ, and that He could deliver her daughter from the demon that possessed her. Through her the disciples were not at risk of being led into idolatry; rather, here was an opportunity to witness her great faith and to teach them about a salvation and a righteousness that comes from faith.

"*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon,*" is the woman's prayer. Jesus remains silent. He doesn't answer it right away. The disciples got involved. "*Send her away, for she is crying out after us.*" Jesus doesn't answer their request either. He dismissed their request with an: "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*" "*Lord, help me,*" she pleaded on her knees. This time Jesus dismissed her request, saying: "*It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*"

Again, all this seems so uncharacteristic of Jesus. It seems harsh. We expect harsh treatment toward the Pharisees. Just a bit earlier Jesus indeed chastised them, calling them out for their unbelief, saying that their "*hearts were far from Him.*"

But Jesus' words to this woman were not intended to be unkind, harsh, or cruel. He was not testing her, but teaching the disciples, and through them, us. The salvation that Jesus came to fulfill would indeed be for the whole world. That salvation would include Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. Under Jesus there would be no distinctions of ethnicity or nationality or language or race (Rev. 7:9), for we "*are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28).

That's what was so offensive to me about what happened last weekend in Charlottesville, VA.

I'm sure you were all as appalled as I was at that young man, who used his car as a weapon in the manner promoted by ISIS, killing that young woman and injuring many more. That was simply evil, and we should all condemn it.

And as much as I despise the vile and angry words of separatism, and race superiority, and the chanted Nazi slogans, and condemn them as sinful, I agree with groups like the ACLU that those neo-Nazis and Klansmen and racists had a constitutional right to vomit out those things. Churchly people whose 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment religious rights are being sorely tested in these latter days should stand up also for citizen's 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment's speech rights when they are being challenged, even when we loathe what they are saying—and I hope you do.

But as a Christian, I was offended that these groups were saying their deplorable things (and eventually engaging in violence) carrying around shields with crosses on them. Everyone knows that the cross is a Christian symbol; it has been in common use for over 1,500 years. And the cross is not a symbol of separatism but of unity; it's a symbol of our oneness in Christ Jesus, our one baptism uniting us to the death and resurrection of our one Lord. And although Constantine went forth with the vision of a cross in his eyes, and the words "in this, conquer," the cross is not intended as a symbol of violence towards others, but of the violence perpetrated on our Lord as an expression of God's love toward us, forgiving the world's sins by Christ's crucifixion, that we might go forth in love toward others.

These contemptible groups have other symbols: the Nazi swastika, the Confederate Battle flag. Let them use these symbols. I just wish that they would leave the cross out of it. For Jesus was not advocating separatism when He said, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.*" Rather He was teaching the disciples that the divine plan of redemption would come through this one nation. Jesus was teaching them that He was sent to the Jews when the time was right to redeem the world from the guilt and condemnation of the law. Jesus was sent that He might "*suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the*

*scribes and be killed*” (Matt. 16:21). Jesus was sent to them that by *“their rejection”* the world might be reconciled to the Father. Jesus was sent to the children of Israel that the promise given to the man of faith, Abraham, might be fulfilled, that all nations would be blessed in Christ.

The Canaanite woman, too, was a woman of faith; she responded with faith. *“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”* She could live with His answer, for she knew who this Master was, and she knew that the crumbs from His table could fill twelve baskets full. *“O woman, great is your faith!”*

So, today, through this Gentile woman, Jesus gives us a foretaste of something greater, something accomplished by Jesus through the disobedience of the lost sheep of Israel, something that had been promised to the Gentiles through the prophet Isaiah — that *“the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, ... these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer ...”* — something that would soon be proclaimed to Gentiles everywhere — *“Go and make disciples of all nations,”* yes, even the Gentiles, *“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 28:19). Paul, the *“apostle to the Gentiles,”* was sent to graft wild Gentile branches onto the Root of Jesse, the *“Deliverer ... come from Zion ...”* (Rom. 11:26).

But though He came from Zion, He came not just for Israel, but for you, Abraham’s offspring by faith (Gal. 3:29). The disciples didn’t always get that right away. It took Peter a while to come to understand that *“God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him”* (Acts 10:34-35). That’s what makes the good news of Jesus so good: that He gives salvation to *“everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek— [like this Canaanite woman; like you]. For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’”* (Rom. 1:16-17); that you Gentiles have been grafted by Holy Baptism onto Jesus, united with Him in a death like His that you might be united with Him in a resurrection like His. You, too, are heirs according to promise.

So that, finally, having accomplished your redemption, Jesus now invites you to the Master’s table as His dear children, not to receive the crumbs left for dogs, but to feast on His very own body and blood sacrificed for you. Come, eat and drink and be forgiven, be strengthened by this food that endures to eternal life, and live in the joy of your salvation.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.