

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (REMINISCERE)

ANNO ⁂ DOMINI 2022

The sermon text for *Reminiscere*, the Second Sunday in Lent, is the Gospel lesson from Matthew 15, where we find Jesus withdrawing from the Pharisees and scribes, who were opposing Him, to the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory. “And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ But He did not answer her a word” (vv. 22-23a).

He was silent. Yes, this woman was a Canaanite, descended from one of Israel's most ancient enemies. Yes, her daughter was suffering from a demon, a spiritual enemy. But just listen to her confession! “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” She asks Jesus for mercy, believing that He can help. She addresses Him as “Lord,” confessing His divinity. She calls Him by His messianic title, “Son of David.” She doesn't even ask for herself! Not for food or for money, but only for the sake of her daughter, who is suffering. It's the perfect confession.

And Jesus ignores her. “He did not answer her a word.” Those are troubling words. They're confusing and, frankly, not very Jesus-like. Why didn't He answer her? Not long ago, we heard Matthew's account of the centurion who came to Jesus with a similar request, appealing to Him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And did Jesus ignore him? No! In fact, He didn't even wait to be asked, but straight up *volunteered* to come and heal his servant (8:5-7). And now, suddenly, He's giving the cold shoulder? And for someone who confesses and believes all the right things about Him?

We sympathize with this woman, because we've all been there. We've experienced what she experienced. We, too, have called upon the Lord our God and received no answer but silence. Yes, we are Gentile sinners, who were once enemies of God. Yes, we have dabbled in the demonic, giving in to the temptations of the evil one. But we also believe in God's promises. We believe that He can help, that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, who overcame death and the grave. We confess His divinity, acknowledging Him to be no mere mortal, but the eternal Son of God, who has redeemed us from every evil. We worship Him as King, who lives and reigns to all eternity, working all things together for the good of those who love Him.

So, why do those promises so often seem to be absent from our lives? If Jesus has power over sin, death, and the devil, why do sin, death, and the devil continue to exist? Why does our flesh remain weak, our adversary active, and death an ever-present

reality? If Jesus is Lord, why does life feel like losing? Why do so many despise preaching and God's Word? Why is the truth so easily deserted for the so-called "different gospels" of our time? If Jesus is King, where is the good we were promised? Where is peace? Where is the God who said, "I will fight for you" (Deut. 1:30)?

"But He did not answer her a word." And the Canaanite woman, she had a choice. She could either give up and go home, or press on, believing what she had heard about Jesus (Mark 7:25).

Jacob had a similar choice to make in today's Old Testament lesson. Jacob had tricked his twin brother Esau out of both his birthright and his blessing. Esau had therefore threatened to kill Jacob, forcing Jacob to flee. Later, when Jacob decided to return home, he heard that Esau was coming out to meet with four hundred men, and he was afraid. But God had promised him, saying, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Genesis 28:13-15). What Jacob was seeing with his own eyes did not seem to match that promise. Esau was coming, and Jacob had cried out, saying, "O Lord...Please deliver me" (Gen. 32:11). But God did not answer him a word; He was silent. So, when a man wrestled with Jacob that night, and that man turned out to be God, Jacob had a choice: give up and give in to fear and despair, or hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught. By grace, he held firm, and God changed His name to Israel, "God-striver," because he had striven with God and with men, and had prevailed.

That's exactly what's happening to the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel. It's a test. We already know from her perfect confession that she has great faith. But how perfect is it? When the going gets tough, will she give up? If God is silent, will she surrender?

Maybe you've never thought about giving up, or maybe you've just never told anyone. But it's not as uncommon as you think. Life is hard, and so is being a Christian. Jesus never mixed any words about that. "In this world you will have tribulation," He said (John 16:33). You will suffer. And God will appear to be silent. He won't act right away or in the way you might expect. But that doesn't mean He's not listening. That doesn't mean He's not full of compassion. You *know* what you've heard about Jesus. You *know* who He is and what He's done. You *know* that He died on the cross for your sins and that He claimed you as His own in your Baptism, giving you the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. So, even if everything else in your life, everything you experience, is telling you the opposite, don't trust it. God's Word is truth.

Think of Noah, who spent 100 years building the ark before the flood waters came (Genesis 7:6; 8:13). Or Abraham, who waited 25 years for his son Isaac to be born (Genesis 12:4; 21:5). Or the Children of Israel, who groaned for 430 years because of their slavery (Exodus 2:23). Or Christ, who suffered six long, excruciating hours on the cross, crying out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). But the flood waters did come. Isaac was born. Israel was rescued. And Christ has been raised.

"Therefore," writes the author of Hebrews, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:1-2). There is joy set before us, as well, eternal life, which God has promised to all who believe, and not just once, not just for a time, but "the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13). The one who is not deterred by silence, who does not fall away on account of tribulation, but holds firm, refusing to let go, insisting that Christ be true to His Word.

"Lord, help me," the Canaanite woman said in response to Jesus' silence. "Help me like I know you can. Help me, *because* of who I am, because you came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Help me, not because I've earned it, but because of *who You are.*"

That's what today is all about. *Reminiscere* means "Remember," and it comes from the first words of the Introit: "Remember Your mercy, O LORD, and Your steadfast love, for they have been from of old" (Psalm 25:6). When God is silent, we do not give up, but we hold God to His Word. We remind Him of His promises. We remember ourselves what God has done and how He is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

"More than that," as we read in today's Epistle, "we rejoice in our sufferings" (Romans 5:3). We do not see them as proof that God is *against* us, but since we have been justified by faith, forgiven on account of *Jesus'* blood and righteousness, we know that God uses suffering to produce endurance in us, to build character, and to fill us with hope, which, as Paul writes, "does not put us to shame," because it's hope in *God*, and God is faithful. He will not keep silent forever. He will answer. He will prove the faith of His own.

"Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (Matthew 15:28). Her faith was

great for two reasons: first, she knew who she was, a sinner, a dog at the master's table; and second, she knew who Jesus was, a kind and compassionate Savior.

We may not see everything we hope for in this life. There are plenty of examples of that in the Bible, as well (Hebrews 11:13-16). We may not make a full recovery, or successfully resist every temptation, or inspire everyone we meet to believe in the Gospel. We live in a fallen world, after all, and the whole creation waits eagerly for redemption (Romans 8:23). But God is good. He hears the cries of His people. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble," He says, "I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

In the words of St. Paul, then, "let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, *if we do not give up*" (Galatians 6:9). Press on, dear Christians. Remember the promises. Hold Christ to His Word, and do not keep silent. You are baptized. You have been justified through faith. You have peace with God. Don't let Him forget it.

In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria