

Reminiscere
St. Matthew 15:21-28
February 25th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Great Is Thy Faith

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, ‘O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.’ And her daughter was healed from that hour.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Consolation of the sorrowful and the Strength of the weak, may the prayers of them that in any tribulation or distress cry unto Thee graciously come before Thee, so that in all their necessities they may mark and receive Thy manifold help and comfort; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

During the Lenten season we spend a significant amount of time reflecting upon the Ten Commandments and what is required to keep them. In our reflection upon just what is exactly required in the Law of God, we come to the realization that not only do we fall far short of keeping these Commandments, but we see just how full of sin we are. We are attacked on every side by our own sin and sinfulness that exists in this world. We are attacked from within and without by our sin and sinfulness in this world. We are attacked inwardly and outwardly by the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. This is the knowledge that we receive from our contemplation of the Ten Commandments and their requirements. In short, we come to see that we are sinners; beggars before God’s throne of grace who are in deep and utter need of a Savior.

This is why today we are presented with the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter is grievously vexed with a demon. This Syro-Phoenician and her daughter represent us. The Syro-Phoenician woman (referred to as the Canaanitish woman in our Gospel text) represents our inward struggle over sin and temptation. She is attacked by the devil, the world, and her flesh, by witnessing the destruction that the demon does to her daughter. She is like us in that inwardly, by temptation and trial, and the sorrows of this life, we are attacked by the “unholy trinity”: the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. It causes us great pain to not only see the corruption of this world (especially after we have reflected upon the Ten Commandments and we see not only our own corruption, but just how corrupt this world is), but it also causes us great pain and sorrow to see those we love and all people in this world trapped in a life a sin and shame.

Therefore, in our pain and sorrow, just like this Syro-Phoenician woman, we cry out to our Lord God; we cry out to our Lord and Savior, *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.”* But just like with

this woman, at times our Lord appears to us to be giving us the cold shoulder; at times He appears to be ignoring our pleas and cries for help; at times He appears to be lending a deaf ear to our cries for mercy and help. This is another reason why we have in this second week of Lent, on *Reminiscere*, we have this narrative of the Syro-Phoenician woman, for she is an example of faith and endurance in the midst of trial and temptation. When our Lord seemingly rebuffs hers; when it seems to everyone that our Lord is ignoring her and that He has no desire to help; when even the Apostles become so frustrated with this woman's pleas that they begin to beg the Lord to send her away—even in the midst of all of that persecution and trial—she does not waver in her faith. No! Rather it appears that she grows stronger in her faith and in her cries for help.

Oh, that we would all possess such faith as this woman! Oh, that we might remain as faithful and persistent in our prayers when we are faced with our Lord's apparent silence! Truly this is great faith and worthy of all praise, for she does not waver even in the midst of trial and terror from on all sides: from the demon which possesses her daughter, from our Lord's silence, from the reaction of the Apostles. Despite all this she remains diligent in her prayers and her cries for mercy. In fact, when she is being rebuffed by the Lord, she cries out all the more, and louder.

This woman provides an example to us of how we in this life are attacked outwardly by the devil, the world, and our flesh. But in this life, we are also attacked inwardly by guilt, by shame, by depression and sorrow. This inward assault of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh is shown us by the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter, who is grievously vexed with a demon.

The devil has corrupted her daughter. Just imagine what pain and angst this causes this mother. She had to witness the spiritual destruction of her daughter because of the evil effects of the demon who attacked her daughter from within. Ultimately there was nothing that she could do—no word to be spoken, no medicine to take, no worldly wisdom to be sought out—that she could use to fix this. There was only One Person Who could help: the Lord, the Son of David, Who could cast out this demon from her daughter and save her little girl.

When sin is not held back or beaten down by our daily contrition and repentance—our daily living out of our Holy Baptism—it grows and festers in us. And when sin, or even certain sins, are allowed to remain unchecked by reflection upon the Ten Commandments and by daily contrition over those sins, and repentance, which desires to not only admit that it is a sin, but desires to amend one's sinful life, it causes us great spiritual harm; it is as if we are possessed by a demon which will not release us, especially when we give in to the sin, and lie to ourselves by either saying that our sinning does not really matter, or worse, that such behavior, thoughts or words are not sin at all, but are pleasing to God. As is the case with many people in this world, even among those who call themselves Christians.

No! Sinful behavior is not pleasing to God, but it is pleasing to the world and our own flesh. And the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh lie to us and convince us that what we are doing is loving and peaceful, and what God really wants. All of this is a lie! God did not save us so that we might go on sinning; to keep on breaking His Law. He saved us so that by the preaching of the Word and the receiving of the Blessed Sacraments He might impart into us His Holy Ghost, Who will destroy that which is evil within us and create in us a new and obedient spirit willing to do the Lord's will through faith. However, when we sin, especially when we sin willingly and openly, we drive the Holy Ghost far from us.

Therefore, because in this life we are attacked both inwardly and outwardly—we are attacked in our conscience over our sins and in seeing the destruction that our sin and the sin of world around us causes—the question is often asked, "What are we to do?" Today, we are given an answer. Do not waver in your faith that God will rescue you. If you struggle with a certain sin, you know the one, the one that no matter how hard you seem to try, you keep on falling into that sin, then remain as persistent

as this Syro-Phoenician woman was in her pleas to the Lord + Jesus Christ to be merciful to her. You also be persistent in your prayers for the Holy Ghost to perform His good work of cleansing you and making you a new and obedient child of God. Moreover, be persistent in your hearing of the Word of God, and in your reception of, and living in, the Blessed Sacraments, for it is by the means of grace that the Holy Ghost performs such a good work in you—driving out Satan, sin, and the desires of the flesh and the world.

The same is true for this evil world with its blatant disregard and mockery of the Word of God, and all things holy and pleasing to God. We must ever be diligent to continue to cry out to our Lord God to have mercy upon this world; to have mercy upon all those who are trapped in sin; to have mercy upon all those who are grievously vexed with a demon by the lies of the devil, the world, and their own flesh. Even as this Canaanitish woman did on behalf of her daughter. We must remain persistent even when it seems that our cries for mercy fall upon deaf ears, even when it seems that we are all alone, and that nobody hears our cries. It is here that our Lord desires to prove and test our faith; it is in these moments where our Lord desires us to forsake all hope in your own striving or believing or doing, and cling to His power and authority alone.

For what does the Lord say to the woman, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs.” In other words, we are not worthy of anything for which we pray (just as we learn in the explanation of the Lord’s prayer). But what is the woman’s response? “Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” In other words, she confesses her unworthiness and confesses that even a crumb from the Master’s table is sufficient to relieve her pain and suffering. Oh, what great faith!

And notice, that our Lord in His power and authority does not need to go see the daughter to drive out the demon, but He simply says, “O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was healed from that hour.” What great power and authority He has over the devil, the world, and sinful flesh! Simply by His Word He drives out all evil from this woman’s daughter; her daughter grievously vexed with a demon is cured and relieved by the Lord’s great command. How much more will our Lord, being here in His state of humiliation, heal us and all those who suffer on account of sin in this life and world now when He is in His state of exaltation, sitting at the right hand of the God the Father?

Our Lord suffered and died for just such a woman as this Syro-Phoenician. He suffered and died for just such sinners as you and me. For He knew that by our own working and doing we are unable to free ourselves from sin, we are unable to keep the Law perfectly as it requires, and that we deserve eternal death and damnation on account of our manifold sins and trespasses. But in His mercy, He came to Earth to take on the flesh that we bear, to live in the world that we live in, and to take on the devil in his own arena by fulfilling the strict requirement of the Law and suffering and dying on our behalf, all so that He might defeat the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh once and for all.

Therefore, when we cry out to our Lord and Savior for His help, He willingly and gladly helps us, even if it seems for a time that our cries are falling upon deaf ears. He will in His great mercy and through our persistent faith and prayers grant us freedom from our sins. Therefore, let us be content with the crumbs that fall from our Master’s table, and come and enjoy those crumbs of our Lord’s Body and drink the drops of our Lord’s Blood in bread and wine, and receive the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, Who will create and sustain in us new and pure hearts, which produce fervent love toward God and our neighbor, and let us never stop imploring our Heavenly Father and His Son through the Holy Ghost, that He might draw this world out of the power of the devil, and illumine it with the Light of Christ. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!