

II Lent 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*I Thess. 4.1-8 St. Matt. 15.21-28*



Let's imagine it's dinnertime and we're all around the table enjoying our meal. Fido gives us that "puppy-dog" look, hoping someone will give him a scrap of food. Then a piece of prime rib is accidentally or accidentally-on-purpose dropped to the floor. Fido scores big time!

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples are leaving Jewish Territory on their way to Tyre and Sidon, coastal cities in present-day Lebanon about 125 and 140 miles respectively northwest of Jerusalem. To get there, Jesus and his disciples have to travel through Cana, non Jewish Territory. The Canaanites are the original inhabitants of this area.

With one exception, the Greek word *kuon* is translated "dog" in the New Testament and refers to a wild ravenous dog...think "junk yard dog"...territorial...aggressive...potentially dangerous. A *kuon*...dog...was unclean because it hung around garbage dumps. Jews often called non-Jews like the Canaanites...*kuons*...and considered them so unclean just being near them made them ritually unclean.

Along the way Jesus and the disciples meet a Canaanite woman. She asks Jesus to show her mercy and heal her daughter, who has a demon and is in a terrible condition. Jesus initially ignores her cries for help. The disciples are annoyed by the noise she is making and ask Jesus to send her away. Jesus tells the woman he is only sent to the lost sheep, the people of Israel.

Our brave and determined mother is not put off by Jesus' apparent dismissiveness. She falls down at his feet and begs him to help her. What Jesus says next seems cruel. He tells the woman it isn't right to give the children's food to dogs. But the Greek word translated here as "dog" isn't *kuon*, it's *kunarion*..."little dog", "pet dog" or "puppy"...think Fido. It is the only place *kunarion* appears in the Bible and it gives a completely different meaning to what Jesus is saying.

Jesus tells the desperate mother his first mission is to his own people...the Jews. God sent him to do this work and he can't ignore his responsibility to his own people. Our Canaanite mother acknowledges this in her response. She calls Jesus "Son of David"...she knows he is

the Messiah, and as a non-Jew she has no legitimate expectation Jesus will help her. What our brave mother says next is remarkable. She tells Jesus even *kunariion*...“a doggie”...gets to eat scraps of food that fall from the dinner table. Jesus tells the woman she has great faith...not just faith...but great faith...and she can go home knowing her daughter has been healed.

Jesus often tested the people who came to him for help. He always intended to heal people who asked for help. What he wanted was a show of faith. He wanted to hear people say they actually believed he could and would heal them. The Canaanite mother risked public humiliation by even talking to Jesus. But she wasn't going to let social norms and religious barriers stop her from asking him to heal her daughter. Jesus wants us to show the same kind of dynamic faith the Canaanite mother showed when we are sick or just having a bad day.

Jesus never neglected his first mission to his own people...the Jews. But the Bible clearly shows he also broke down many barriers. He healed the government official's son who was near death. He healed ten men with a skin disease...and one was a Samaritan...the only who returned to thank Jesus for healing him. He talked with a Samaritan woman at a well at a time Jewish men didn't talk to women they weren't related to...especially non-Jewish women. Jesus gave her the Good News about eternal life...and she began to spread the Good News herself.

We can learn a lot from the Canaanite mother. Jesus shows us that God's love, compassion and mercy are universal and not restricted to one area or one group of people. Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus reached out to the marginalized and disenfranchised and this had a profound change on their lives and others. God's love is transformative.

Our Canaanite mother was persistent in her prayers and we need to be as persistent in our prayers even when faced with overwhelming adversities and challenges. In today's Collect we ask God to *“keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls”* and to *“defend us from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul”*.

We're asking God to send his Holy Spirit to transform our lives and heal our minds, bodies and souls. We're about to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Sacrament of the Altar...and not in just a symbolic way. What we are receiving here today is not table scraps!

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