

Start with song about Joseph (on Dictaphone)

Today, I'm going to focus on our gospel reading (Matt 15:21:28), but I would like to say a few words about our OT reading.

I wonder how many of you have done/or said something to someone and later realize that you have to 'eat humble pie'. Hopefully, we all know the story of Joseph and his siblings. In our reading today, Joseph reminds them and us that, ultimately, nothing happens without God's divine approval. Just as God shut the mouths of the lions in the den, so God can shut the mouths of those who want to spread gossip and malice. Just as God protected Shadrach Meshach and Abednego from the effects of the flames in the furnace, so can God protect us from the effect of things that are designed to hurt us.

This is not fatalism but divine realism. Joseph was a divine realist. He knew and accepted that eventually everything will work out for the good of himself and God's people.

This is why even though his brothers were dismayed at his presence he could honestly say to them 'God sent me before you to preserve life'... to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God' (Gen 45:5b, 7-8a)

So, remember that in **all** things and at all times God is working **in and through you** to bring about ultimate good, for in his time, God does make all things beautiful. ...Now to our gospel reading...

Jesus may have stayed for some time in the Jewish region of Gennesaret on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee (14:34), but he now explicitly withdraws to Gentile territory, to the infamous cities of Tyre and Sidon.

His first encounter in this Gentile region is with a Canaanite woman. She comes to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" {This woman, a "Canaanite" (i.e., a pagan non-Jew) demonstrates familiarity with Jewish messianic tradition by calling Jesus "Son of David" and she pleads for his merciful,

miraculous ministry of exorcism for her daughter}. A temple dedicated to Eshmun, a god of healing, was located three miles northwest of Sidon. It is highly likely that this woman was familiar with the pagan deity, but Jesus' reputation has preceded him, and she comes instead to Jesus for healing for her daughter.

Jesus does not reply to the woman's cry for help, which the disciples take as his way of refusing the woman's request. So they urge him to "send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

The disciples perhaps remember Jesus' charge that included the directive about not going to Gentiles but only to the lost sheep of Israel (cf. 10:5 – 6). Indeed, in this Gentile region Jesus maintains his commitment to fulfill that mission for which he was sent as he says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (15:24).

Jesus comes as the Suffering Servant to save all Israel. Jesus must first go to Israel in fulfillment of the promises made to the nation (cf. Isa. 53:6 – 8)

so that the Gentiles themselves will glorify God for his promises made to his people (cf. Rom. 15:8 – 9).

But this woman's great need to have her daughter healed causes her to be persistent, which is a sign that she knows that Jesus certainly can come to her aid. She kneels in humble obeisance before Jesus and calls him "Lord" a second time as she seeks his help (Matt 15:25). But Jesus still maintains his commitment to his mission to Israel as he replies, "It is not right/fair to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." The "children's bread" emphasizes the care that God promises to provide for his covenant children, Israel. As a metaphor, "dogs" is a humiliating label for those apart from, or enemies of, Israel's covenant community (1 Sam. 17:43; Ps. 22:16; Prov. 26:11).

The woman continues the metaphor but uses it to emphasize that dogs too had a caring relationship with "their master." Most dogs at this time were non-domesticated, living in squalor, running the streets, and scavenging for food (Ps. 59:14 – 15). Some dogs were trained for guarding flocks (Job 30:1) and humans (Isa.

56:10; Tobit 6:2; 11:4), but they were not normally brought into the home. However, some were more domesticated as household watchdogs, and they were fed in the house (cf. *Jos. Asen.* 10:13).

This perceptive woman, who has already confessed Jesus as the messianic Son of David, now presses Jesus by calling on the extended blessings promised to the Gentiles. Although Israel receives the primary blessings of the covenant, Gentiles also were to be recipients of blessing through them (Gen. 12:3; Matt. 1:1; 8:5 – 13). The woman draws on that promise to seek the aid of Jesus the Messiah.

She understands the program of God to go to Israel first but she persists, realizing that despite the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles God ultimately desires to bring healing to all people. By addressing Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, she was also acknowledging Jesus is the master of all, who will care for the needs of all, whether Jews (“children”) or Gentiles (“dogs”). Her response is called by Jesus an exercise of “great faith,” which is

rewarded by having her daughter healed that very hour (Matt 15:28).

God responds to true faith. The privileged people of Nazareth did not respond in faith and so could not receive Jesus’ healing ministry (Matt 13:58). But this Gentile woman has an openness to Jesus that allows his healing ministry to operate. Here we understand that faith is essentially accepting the revelation and will of God as one’s own reality and purpose for life.

The “greatness” of faith points to the fact that such an unlikely person — a Gentile woman living outside of Israel — demonstrates one of the clearest understandings of God’s salvation-program and Jesus’ participation in it. This is another incident where exorcism is called “healing” (cf. Matt 12:22 – 23) and is a continuation of the confirmation of Jesus’ messianic ministry.

By healing this Gentile woman’s daughter, Jesus demonstrates that he also has an eye on the ultimate in-gathering of all peoples (Matt 8:5 – 13).

True faith in Jesus as the messianic inaugurator of the kingdom of God is a requisite for all people, whatever their race, nationality, or gender. Great faith does not imply a large quantity but rather an immovable steadfastness in trusting God's Word and will against all odds and circumstances.

Jesus' compassionate care is available to all who take his Word and will as their reality and purpose for life. This wonderful story of the persistent mother instructs and reminds us that Jesus always responds to those who have the courage to come to him with their need.

So, as we come to communion this morning I pray that we may bring our concerns with us and ask Jesus to feed us and, as it were, fix that which needs fixing within and around us. Amen.