

**Jesus, the Canaanite Woman, and the Dogs
(20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)**

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7—The Gentiles in the New Temple

1. Temple in the Old Testament: Gentiles excluded (cf. Deut 23:1-3)
2. Prophecy of the future age of “salvation” (56:1)
3. Foreigners: will be brought to the Temple to “minister” as priests! (56:6-7)
4. New Temple: “a house of prayer for *all peoples*”

Psalm 67—O God, Let All the Nations Praise You!

1. May God be known “among all nations” (v. 2)
2. Let the “nations” or “Gentiles” (Hebrew *gōyim*) praise you! (v. 5)

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32—Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles

1. Paul: the “apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13)
2. Israel: the “gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (11:29)

Matthew 15:21-28—Jesus and the Canaanite Woman

1. Tyre and Sidon: Gentile cities in Phoenicia (north of the holy land)
2. Canaanite Woman:
 - a. Sidon: first born son of Canaan (Gen 10:15)
 - b. Canaanites: pagan peoples; idolatry, immorality, Baal worship (cf. Wis Sol 12)
 - c. “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David”
(Greek *eleēson me, kyrie*) (Matt 15:22)
3. Jesus’ 1st Response:
 - a. Silence: He “did not answer her a word”
 - b. (Note: he does *not* “send her away” as the disciples request!)
 - c. Sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 28:19-20; Rom 1:16)
4. Her 1st Response:
 - a. Honor: She came and “knelt before him” (Greek *proskyneō*, also “worship”)
 - b. Prayer: “Lord, help me!”
5. Jesus’ 2nd Response: you don’t feed the dogs before the children
 - a. “Children” = the Israelites
 - b. “Dogs” = the Gentiles (cf. Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15, dogs = sinners)
6. Her 2nd Response: even the “dogs” eat scraps from the “master’s table”!
7. Jesus’ Final Response: “Great is your faith!”; daughter “healed instantly”

St. John Chrysostom: The Canaanite Woman—An Example of Patience in Prayer

Have you understood? When the disciples entreated him the Lord put them off, but when the woman herself cried out begging for this favor he granted it. And, at the beginning, when she first made her request, he did not answer, but after she had come to him once, twice, and a third time, he gave her what she desired. By this he was teaching us that he

had withheld the gift not to drive her away, but to make that woman’s patience an example for all of us. (John Chrysostom, *Homily on Phillipians* 1:18, 12-13; trans. in E. Barnecutt, pp. 116-117).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Why is Isaiah’s prophecy of a New Temple with Gentiles chosen as first reading for this Sunday (Isa 56:1-7)? Is God’s plan from the beginning to eventually include “all peoples”?

2. What did you think of this story before learning about the Canaanites? Did you think Jesus’ response to the woman rude? Demeaning? Does the Jewish background help make sense of their exchange?

3. What can this story teach us about the importance of (1) taking our petitions to Jesus directly and (2) perseverance and patience in prayer? Do you ever feel like God is ‘putting you off’?

For Further Study

1. Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Image, 2009), See the articles on “Canaan” (pp. 135-36) and “Dog” (p. 222) for helpful background to this week’s Gospel episode. The *Catholic Bible Dictionary* is an excellent resource that gives lots of helpful background on cultural elements in the Bible that need explaining. Highly recommended!!
2. Edith Barnecutt, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year A* (New York: New City Press, 1992), 116-17.