

## II LENT 2018

### SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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Desperate mother with sick child first gets ignored...then insulted...but she wasn't going to take "no" for an answer. She was persistent...and clever!

Dogs are mentioned 41 times in the Bible...as dirty animals to be avoided...because they were scavengers...hanging around garbage dumps...eating food people threw away. The fortunate dog taken in by a family got fed table scraps.

We have a different attitude about dogs today...at least in the Western world. For the dog lovers in the Parish..."puppy-dog eyes" causes us to go to the box of treats or arrange for a scrap of meat to mysteriously fall on the floor. Of course, our canine friends respond with copious tail wagging.

In Jesus' time dogs were considered unclean animals. Even today in many parts of the Middle East...dogs are not kept as pets...they roam the streets and are dealt with like most people deal with rats. To call someone a dog is a great insult.

Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs. The Canaanites were Gentiles and the original inhabitants of the Promised Land. The Canaanite mother in the Gospel was not going to let her social status...she was an outcast...stop her from asking Jesus for help...even when he turns to the disciples and says it's not right to give good food to dogs.

Is this the same Jesus who never said "no" to anyone who asked for his help? Jesus never intended to make the Canaanite mother feel worse than she already felt because her daughter was sick. He always intended to help her and heal her daughter.

Our Canaanite mother is clever...she doesn't argue with Jesus...she reasons with him. She acknowledges dogs aren't worth much...but even they get to eat the scraps of food that fall from their owner's table. Having settled the matter of dogs getting fed table scraps...our Canaanite mom gets what she asked for...Jesus heals her daughter.

Jesus said his mission was primarily to his own people...the Jews. But he never let social norms stop him from helping people considered low-life and unclean. Like the government official with the sick servant...he healed the Canaanite mother's daughter from a distance. His compassion and healing gifts for the Canaanite mother and others who didn't have the right pedigree...ultimately speak to his redemptive work...it's universal in scope.

Jesus was testing the Canaanite mother...her persistence in asking Jesus to help her and her unwillingness to back down even when she was insulted...was a profound demonstration of her faith. She publicly showed what she already believed about Jesus...he could and would help her. Jesus wanted his disciples to learn from her...and to begin to understand the salvation he offers is available to everyone.

The Gospel doesn't record any further dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite mother. He assures her that her daughter is well again...that's all she needs to hear...she doesn't ask for details. She returned home...knowing she did the right thing for her daughter...and knowing Jesus was the source of healing.

Jesus wants us to respond to him with the same kind of faith the Canaanite mother showed. We should never be afraid to ask God for help in getting our sometimes messy lives in order. We need to be persistent in our prayers...fully confident that our prayers are answered..."yes", "no", "wait for a while"! We need to show God we truly believe Jesus can and will help us work our way through seemingly impossible situations.

Lent is a time for renewal and to take Jesus up on his invitation to come to him with our cares and worries...however great or small. When we feel the burdens of everyday life are just getting us down...when things get a bit overwhelming...he invites us to come to him and get refreshed.

And that's no table scraps!

