

**HOLINESS**  
**SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN**  
*Humility and Persistence*

January 29, 2012  
17th Sunday after Pentecost  
Revision C

**Gospel:** Matthew 15:21-28  
**Epistle:** 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1

Today’s Gospel lesson is used in the West either at about this time of year (leading up to Lent and Easter) or in mid August. Today’s Epistle lesson is not used at all in the Western lectionary for Sundays.

**Word Study: Holiness vs. Uncleaness**

There are a number of different words in the Greek New Testament that speak of holiness and sacred things versus uncleanness, defilement and contamination. Table I lists some definitions of Greek words. There are five root words listed that have different forms (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) and different connotations (the state of, the quality of), etc. To get a practical understanding of these words, let us look at how the root word is used in the New Testament.

Hagios is used as the name for the Holy Spirit (*Hagion Pneuma*). The Lord Jesus is referred to using *hagios*: “...the holy (*hagion*) thing being born (of Mary) will be called Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Some other uses of *hagios* are as follows:

<b>Holy Thing, Person</b>	<b>Some References</b>
The Holy Prophets	Luke 1:70, Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:2
The Holy Apostles	Ephesians 3:5
The Holy Scriptures	Romans 1:2
The Holy Angels	Matthew 25:31, Acts 10:22
Jerusalem (The Holy City)	Matthew 27:53, Revelation 11:2
New Jerusalem (The Holy City)	Revelation 21:2, 10; 22:19
Mosaic Law (the Holy Covenant, The Holy Commandment)	Luke 1:72, 2 Peter 2:21, Romans 7:12

**Table 1**  
**Greek Words Describing Holiness & Defilement**

Greek Word	Definitions	Reference # in Strong's Dictionary
<b>Hagios</b>	the saints or the sacred ones	40
Hagiazo	to purify, make holy	37
Hagiasmos	purification, state of purity	38
Hagion	a sacred thing	39
Hagiotēs	state of sacredness	41
Hagiosune	quality of sacredness	42
<b>Akathartos</b>	impure in the demonic sense	169
Akathartes	state of impurity	168
Akatharsia	quality of impurity	167
<b>Koinos</b>	common	2839
Koinoo	to make common	2840
<b>Miahino</b>	to contaminate	3392
Miahsma	contamination, the effect	3393
Miahsmos	contamination, the act	3394
<b>Moluna</b>	to make black, to soil	3435
Molusmos	a stain	3436

Quite opposed to *Hagios* is the word *Akathartos*. While *Hagios* is used for the Holy Spirit, the most prolific use<sup>1</sup> of *Akathartos* is for “unclean” spirits (*akatharton pneuma*) that Jesus, the Twelve, the Seventy and others cast out of people. *Akathartos* is also used together with other words such as adultery, fornication, greediness, lewdness, covetousness, etc. For example:

- “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsia*) lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, etc.” (Galatians 5:19).
- Those alienated from God because of hardness of heart have “given themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness (*akatharsias*) in greediness” (Ephesians 4:19).
- “But fornication and all uncleanness (*akatharsia*) or greediness, let it not be named among you” (Ephesians 5:3).
- “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness (*akatharsian*), passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).
- The ungrateful, who professed to be wise and worshipped creation, “God gave them over in the desire of their hearts to uncleanness (*akatharsian*) to dishonor their bodies among them” (Romans 1:24).

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:1, 12:43; Mark 1:23-27; 3:11, 30; 5:2-13; 6:7; 7:25; Luke 4:33-36; Luke 6:18; 8:29; 9:42; 11:24; Acts 5:16, 8:7; Revelation 16:13, 18:2

Not as commonly used is the word *Moluno*, which comes from the Greek word meaning black, and therefore means to blacken or make dirty. It's only used four times in the New Testament; once in our Epistle reading (2 Corinthians 7:1). The other three uses are 1 Corinthians 8:7, Revelation 3:4, 14:4.

The Epistle reading starts off with a series of contrasts:

righteousness	lawlessness
light	darkness
Christ	Belial
believers	unbelievers
temple of God	idols

What is Belial? Belial here is a word borrowed from Hebrew meaning worthless. It is used a number of times in the Old Testament as “son of Belial” or “man of Belial” usually translated “worthless one” or “worthless man”. But it goes deeper than just worthlessness. Solomon referred to a man of Belial (Proverbs 6:12) as one who devised evil continually, and spoke of seven abominations that the Lord hates that were characteristic of the men of Belial. (Proverbs 6:16-19):

1. Haughty eyes
2. A lying tongue
3. Hands that shed innocent blood
4. A heart that devises wicked plans
5. Feet that run to evil
6. A false witness who utters lies
7. One who spreads strife among brothers

These characteristics go deeper than just worthlessness; they're of demonic origin and imply *akathartos*. David stated that the only way to deal with men of Belial was with iron and the shaft of a spear (2 Samuel 23:6-7), probably because they can't be trusted to follow orders. What agreement can Christ possibly have with Belial?

Paul makes these contrasts to say that we are the temple of the Living God (2 Corinthians 6:16). He then quotes from Ezekiel 37:26-27, which in turn refers to the restored Kingdom of God that lasts forever. “I will dwell in them” as one dwells in a Temple (v.16).

John Chrysostom comments<sup>2</sup> on this as follows: “Do you bear God within you and yet run to them (lawlessness, darkness, Belial, etc.)? God, who has nothing in common with them? And in what way can this deserve forgiveness? Bear in mind Who walks and Who dwells in you”.

Continuing with the Old Testament Temple analogy, Paul quoted from Isaiah 52:11, which contains mixed images from the restored Old Testament Kingdom and the future coming of the Kingdom of God in glory. Referring to the contrasts (Christ - Belial), Paul used the Isaiah 52 passage to encourage the Corinthians to “come out from among them and be separate. Do not

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<sup>2</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, vv. 15-16.

touch anything unclean (*akathartos*, i.e., *demonic*) and I will receive you” (v.17). Paul is not re-imposing the Mosaic Law rituals regarding washings; he is warning against something sinister involved with being unequally yoked (v.14). Verse 18 follows with a loose paraphrase of 2 Samuel 7:14, which speaks of the close relationship between King David and the Lord.

Paul concludes “let us cleanse (*katharia*, the opposite of *akathartos*) ourselves from all filthiness (*moluno* or blackening, staining) of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (*hagiosune* as in the saints, *hagios*, and the Holy Spirit, *Hagion Pneuma*) in the fear of God” (7:1). Chrysostom pointed out that Paul did not say to avoid intermixing with unbelievers, but to avoid being yoked with them.

Another example of cleansing of heart and soul in order to appear before God is the example of Israel at Mt. Sinai. To prepare to hear the words of the Law spoken by a Holy God, the people needed to prepare to become a kingdom of priests by:

- Washing their clothes
- Fasting from sex
- Consecration by Moses

Anyone, man or beast, that touched the holy mountain that the Lord God came down on was to be put to death (Exodus 19:10-15).

“Cleansing” is amplified by the Apostle John (1 John 2:4-6, 3:1-3): “He who says he abides in Him ought to walk as He walked” (1 John 2:6). This world does not know us because it didn’t know Him (1 John 3:1, John 1:10). That’s why we separate ourselves. The world won’t have anything to do with us; we’ll just get blackened or dirtied by the world.

While we are in the world, we, like Christ and the Holy Spirit, are not of the world. We are made holy or sanctified (Greek: *hagiazō*) by the Word (Greek: *logos*) which is Truth (John 17:14-19). By contrast, what the world offers is lawlessness, darkness, worthlessness, and delusion. Ezekiel puts it this way: “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (Ezekiel 36:24-25). The whole point of the Mosaic Law’s focus on clean vs. unclean was not to exclude Gentiles but to focus on holiness and avoid the filthiness of demons and idols. Seen in this light, the Mosaic Law really makes sense.

Paul concluded this section with the encouragement to perfect holiness in the fear of God (7:1). Since we are in the world, but not of the world (John 15:19, 17:14; 1 John 4:4-6, 3:1), seeking holiness is a continual process. John Chrysostom comments<sup>3</sup>: “Yet he (Paul) is not content with this, but adds, ‘Perfecting holiness in the fear of God’. For to avoid touching unclean things does not thereby make you clean, but something else is needed for becoming holy: earnestness, heedfulness, piety. And he well said, ‘In the fear of God’. For it is possible to perfect chasteness, not in the fear of God but for vain glory”.

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<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIII, v. 18.

***SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN***  
***Humility and Persistence***

January 29, 2012  
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**Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 (Mark 7:24-30)**

So how badly do we want to pursue holiness? One theme for today’s Gospel lesson is Desire. How far are we willing to go to pursue the things of God? This Gospel Lesson is commonly used in the West in mid-August for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

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The Gospel lesson begins with Jesus passing through Tyre and Sidon – He had gone there for this purpose -- where a Gentile women (a Syro-Phoenician woman) started crying out after Him, “Have mercy on me!” She had a daughter who was demon possessed (the daughter had an “unclean”, i.e. *akathartos*, spirit<sup>4</sup> according to Mark 7:25) and begged Jesus to help her. Jesus responded with what may seem to us as coldness; the exchange occurred as follows:

<b>SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN</b>	<b>JESUS’ RESPONSE</b>
Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David	No answer
Have mercy on me (shouting)	I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel
Lord help me (bowing down)	It is not proper to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs
Yes, Lord, but even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their master’s table	Great is your faith; be it done for you as you will

**What is Christ Doing?**

Our inclination is to recoil: What is the Lord doing here? John Chrysostom stated<sup>5</sup> that Jesus did not speak to the woman in insult and He was not trying to get her to grovel. In calling her out, He revealed the treasure laid up in her. Jesus, who knew the woman’s heart, spoke as He did to reveal both the woman’s faith and her humility. Both are precious in the sight of God. Her faith was displayed through her persistence; her humility, through her willingness to ask for mere crumbs.

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<sup>4</sup> See Mark 7:25, which is a parallel account of the same events.

<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, [Homilies on Matthew](#), LII, 3.

“Jesus made her faith clear; and as in the case of the Samaritan woman (John 4:16-26 ), He showed how not even upon reproof does she desist. He did not want that so great virtue in the woman should be hidden. Not in insult then were His words spoken, but in calling her out, and revealing the treasure laid up in her.”

Chrysostom also stated<sup>6</sup> that by our own diligence, it is possible (1) that the unworthy can become worthy. (2) That God approves more when called on by ourselves than by others in our behalf. (3) That God often delays the giving, not from the wish that we should be utterly perplexed, or to send us out with empty hands; but in order that he may become the author of greater good things to us.

“The woman of Canaan had come to Christ praying on behalf of a daughter possessed by a demon, and crying out with much earnestness, ‘Have pity on me, Lord; my daughter is badly possessed by a demon’ (Matthew 15:22). This woman was a Gentile, and outside of the Jewish commonwealth. What else was she than a dog, and unworthy of receiving her request? Jesus said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread, and throw it to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). But, all the same, from her diligence, she became worthy. Not only did he admit her into the nobility of children, dog as she was; but also he sent her off with glowing praise saying, ‘O woman great is your faith; be it done to you as you desire’ (Matthew 15:28). Now when the Christ says, ‘Great<sup>7</sup> is your faith’, we don’t need to seek any other demonstration of the greatness of soul which was in the woman. From her diligence the woman, being unworthy, became worthy!”

“We can learn from this also that we accomplish our wish by calling on him by ourselves more than by having others do so for us! She cried out, and the disciples said to Him, ‘Send her away, for she cries after us’ (Matthew 15:23). To the disciples he said, ‘I was not sent, except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’. But when she had come to him by herself and continued crying, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table’ (Matthew 15:27), then he granted the favor, ‘great is your faith; be it done to you as you desire’. When the disciples were entreating him, he repelled; but when she who needed the gift herself cried out, he assented!”

“In the prelude of her request he answered nothing; but when she had come to him three times, then he granted the request. From this we learn that He had delayed the giving, not that He might repel her but that He might display to us the woman’s endurance. If He had delayed in order that he might repel her, He would not have granted it even at the end. Since He was waiting to display to everyone her spiritual wisdom, on this account he was silent. If He had granted her request immediately at the beginning, we would not have known the woman’s virtue. The disciples said, ‘Send her away, for she cries after us’. But the Christ said, ‘You hear a voice, but I see the mind; I know what she is going to say. I choose not to permit the treasure hidden in her mind to escape notice; I am

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<sup>6</sup> John Chrysostom, Homily Concerning Lowliness of Mind, 12.

<sup>7</sup> There was only one other time when Jesus noted someone with great faith: the Gentile centurion who asked Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant (Matthew 8:5-10).

waiting and keeping silence in order that having discovered it, I may lay it down in public, and make it clear to everyone.”

### **The Humility of the Canaanite Woman**

Chrysostom continued by pointing out<sup>8</sup> that Jesus had called the Jews “children”, while the woman referred to them as “masters” (Matthew 15:26-27). In her humility, she agreed with the Lord when He referred to her as “a little dog” (Matthew 15:26), saying “Yes, Lord” (Matthew 15:27).

Comparing her to the Jews, Chrysostom said<sup>9</sup>, “Hear the proud language of the Jews: ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone’ (John 8:33) and ‘We have one Father - God’ (John 8:41). But not so this woman; rather she calls herself a dog and them masters; so for this she became a child. What then did Christ say? ‘O woman, great is your faith’. With this intent did Christ put her off, for He knew what she would say. For this He (at first) denied the grant, that He might exhibit her high self-command. For if He had not meant to give, neither would He have given afterward”.

Jesus taught persistence in prayer on other occasions also. For example, the Lord gave us the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2-13), then used the illustration of a friend knocking on his neighbor’s door at midnight. The neighbor wouldn’t open the door because of his friend, but he would because of his friend’s persistence. This is also illustrated in the parable of the tenacious widow who persuaded an unrighteous judge to give her justice through her persistence (Luke 18:1-6).

Jesus pointed out other examples of great humility, such as the Centurion with the sick servant. At the request of the Jewish Elders, Jesus began to go to the Centurion’s house, but the Centurion sent word that he was not worthy for Jesus to enter under his roof and requested that Jesus heal from a distance (Luke 7:1-10). The woman with the hemorrhage also had great humility, desiring only to touch the hem of Jesus’ garment (Luke 8:43-48). Similarly, Photina of Samaria (the woman at the well) was not put off even though Jesus rebuked for her adulterous life (John 4:16-26). Not only did she respond by bringing the whole town out to hear Jesus speak, but she became known in the Early Church as “equal to the Apostles” for her evangelism in Carthage and Rome.

### **We Need to Ask if We Want to Receive**

The Syro-Phoenician woman was made stronger by being forced to be persistent. It is similar for us. If we always got everything we wanted right away, we’d never learn to be persistent in our faith. By being persistent and humble in our prayers, our faith will increase also.

John Chrysostom compared<sup>10</sup> the persistence used by His own mother to the persistence

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<sup>8</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LII, 3.

<sup>10</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXII, 2.

used by the Canaanite woman. From this we learn that persistence in asking the Lord can be very beneficial.

“Why then after He had said, ‘My hour has not yet come’ (John 2:4), and given her a denial, did He do what His mother desired? He wanted those who opposed Him, and who thought that He was subject to the ‘hour’, to have sufficient proof that He was subject to no hour. Had He been subject to temporal things, how could He, before the proper ‘hour’ was come, have done what He did? He also did it to honor His mother, that He might not seem entirely to contradict and shame her that bore Him in the presence of so many. He also did it that He might not be thought to lack power, for she brought the servants to Him.”

“Similarly while He said to the Canaanite woman, ‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26), He still gave the bread, considering her perseverance. In his first reply, He said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15:24); yet even after saying this, He healed the woman’s daughter. From this we learn, that although we may be unworthy, we often by perseverance make ourselves worthy to receive. For this reason Jesus’ mother stood by, and openly brought the servants to Him, that the request might be made by a greater number; and therefore she added, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (John 2:5).

Chrysostom also went into detail<sup>11</sup> from the Scriptures on why we can always ask of God. If the Syro-Phoenician woman can ask, so can we. As a Gentile, it was not appropriate for her to ask favors of a Jew; but that didn’t stop her. Even if we feel that God is our enemy – for some righteous reason – that shouldn’t stop us either. He looks more at our disposition than at what we deserve.

“God wants us to ask things of Him, and because of this accounts Himself greatly bound to us. He alone, when the request is made, counts it a favor. If He should see us pressing earnestly in making our request, He grants favors even if He hasn’t received anything in the past from us in the way of prayer. But if we ask sluggishly, He too keeps on making delays; not through unwillingness to give, but because He is pleased to have the request made on Him by us. For this cause He told us the example of that friend, who came by night, and asked a loaf (Luke 11:5-8); and of the judge that did not fear God, nor regard man (Luke 18:1-8). He didn’t just use similitudes, but signified it also in His very actions, when He dismissed that Syro-Phoenician woman, having filled her with His great gift (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30). Through her He signified, that He gives to them that ask earnestly even the things that don’t pertain to them. ‘It is not good’, said He, ‘to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). He gave all that, because she requested of him earnestly. By the Jews He showed that to those that are careless, He doesn’t give even their own. Accordingly they received nothing, but lost what was their own. The Jews, because they didn’t ask, didn’t receive even their own; the Canaanite woman, because she assailed Him with earnestness, had power to obtain even what pertained to others, and the dog received what was the children’s. So great a good is earnestness in prayer! Though we are a dog, yet being earnest, we shall

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<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XXII, 7-8

be preferred to the child who is negligent. Don't say, 'God is my enemy, and He will not listen'. He will immediately answer us, when we continually ask him, if not because we are His friend, yet because of our asking. Neither our enmity, nor the unseasonable time, nor anything else becomes a hindrance. Don't say, 'I am unworthy, and do not pray'; for such was the Syro-Phoenician woman too. Don't say, 'I have sinned much, and am not able to entreat Him whom I have angered'; God doesn't look at what we deserve, but at our disposition. If the ruler that did not fear God, nor regard man, was overcome by the widow (Luke 18:1-8), much more will He that is good be won over by continual asking."

"We may not be His friend; we may not be asking as children; we may have devoured our Father's substance, and have been a long time out of sight; we may be without honor, we may approach Him angrily; only be willing to pray and to return. We shall receive everything, and shall quickly extinguish the wrath and the condemnation."

"But some say, 'I do pray, and there is no result'. Do we pray like the Syro-Phoenician woman, the friend that came late at night, the widow that was continually troubling the judge, and the son that consumed his father's goods? If we prayed like these, we would quickly obtain. Though we have been defiant toward Him, yet He is a Father; and though He has been provoked to anger, yet He is He fond of His children. One thing only does He seek, not to take vengeance for our insults, but to see us repenting and asking Him. All we need is a beginning; if we give it a little spark, we kindle a full flame of benefit. He is not bothered because He has been insulted. If we, who are evil, grieve on account of our children when they annoy us; much more does God, who cannot so much as suffer insult. We love by nature; He is kindly affectionate beyond nature. He said, 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you'" (Isaiah 49:15).

"Let us therefore draw near to Him and say, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' (Matthew 15:27). Let us draw near 'in season, and out of season'; or rather, one can never draw near out of season, for it is always seasonable to approach God. Since He desires to give, it is always seasonable to ask. Since breathing is always in season, so prayer is always in season. Just as we need this breath, so we also need the help that comes from Him; and if we are willing, we shall easily draw Him to us."

### **To Receive Mercy, We need to be Worthy of It**

Worthiness to receive the mercy of God implies a coming to the Faith. This is not a cut-and-dried legalistic process, but it depends on a relationship with God. The Canaanite woman came to this relationship, and Jesus cleverly brought out the best in her.

Athanasius of Alexandria stated<sup>12</sup> that the Canaanite woman's experience with Jesus was one of coming to the Faith. That is, she was an unbeliever when she came, but she came to Faith as a result of Jesus' rebuttals.

"When Jesus called all men to him, He said, 'If anyone thirsts, let him

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<sup>12</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, VII, 7.

come to Me and drink'. He spoke of the faith without which a man cannot receive such food; 'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (John 7:37-38). To this end He continually nourished His believing disciples with His words, and gave them life by the nearness of His divinity. But to the Canaanite woman, because she was not yet a believer, He didn't grant even a reply, although she stood greatly in need of food from Him. He did this not from scorn, far from it; for the Lord loves men and does good to them; and on that account He went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon (where the Canaanite woman lived). He did this because of her unbelief, and because she was of those who didn't have the Word. He did it righteously; for there would have been nothing gained by her offering her supplication before believing, but by her faith she would support her petition. 'He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him'; and that 'without faith it is impossible to please Him' (Hebrews 11:6). That she was before this an unbeliever, one of the profane, He shows, saying, 'It is not good to take the children's bread, and to throw it to the little dogs' (Matthew 15:26). She then, being convinced by the power of the Word, and having changed her ways, also gained faith; for the Lord no longer spoke to her as a dog, but conversed with her as a human being, saying, 'O woman, great is your faith!' (Matthew 15:28) Since she therefore believed, He granted to her the fruit of faith, and said, 'Let it be to you as you desire'. Her daughter was healed from that very hour'" (Matthew 15:28).

John Chrysostom noted<sup>13</sup> the distinct advantage of continuous prayer and continuous asking. Many barriers have been overcome with continual prayer, including the Canaanite woman's Gentile background. This applies to all of us, whether we need a little or a lot.

"Prayer is a mighty weapon if it is made with suitable mind. To learn its strength, continual asking has overcome shamelessness, injustice, savage cruelty, and overbearing rashness. Jesus said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said' (Luke 18:6). It has overcome sloth also; what friendship did not accomplish, this continual asking did. 'Although he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend; yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs' (Luke 11:8). Continued diligence made the Canaanite woman worthy when she was unworthy. 'It is not good', Jesus said, 'to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs'. 'Yes! Lord!' She says, 'yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table' (Matthew 15:26-27). Let us apply ourselves to Prayer. It is a mighty weapon if it is offered with earnestness, without vainglory, and with a sincere mind. It has turned back wars, it has benefited an entire nation though undeserving. 'I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning', He said, 'and I have come down to deliver them' (Acts 7:34). It is itself a saving medicine, and has power to prevent sins, and to heal misdeeds. In this the desolate widow was diligent, continuing night and day in supplications and prayers (1 Timothy 5:5). If then we pray with humility, smiting our breast as the publican, if we utter what he did, if we say, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner' (Luke 18:13), we shall obtain

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<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXVII, 9.

everything. For though we are not publicans, yet have we other sins as great as his.”

“Don’t tell me, that you have gone wrong in some small matter. A man is equally called homicidal whether he has killed a child or a man; so also he is called overreaching whether he overreaches in much or in little. Remembering injuries done to us too is no small matter, but is a great sin. It is said, ‘the ways of those who remember wrongs lead to death’ (Proverbs 12:28 LXX). ‘He that is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment’, and he that ‘calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell fire’ (Matthew 5:22). We sometimes partake of the tremendous mysteries unworthily; we envy, and we revile. Some of us have often been drunk. Each one of these things, by itself, is enough to cast us out of the kingdom, and when they come all together, what comfort shall we have? We need much penitence, beloved, much prayer, much endurance, much perseverance, that we may be enabled to attain the good things which have been promised to us.”

Chrysostom also noted<sup>14</sup> that we may have mercy awaiting us, but we need to “unlock” it by prayer in asking for it, like the Canaanite woman and the servant who owed 10,000 talents.

“If God does anything in mercy, prayer contributes greatly to it. Paul attributed his salvation to His mercies: ‘The God of mercies’, he says, Himself ‘delivered us’ (2 Corinthians 1:9-10); but here to the prayers also. On him too that owed the 10,000 talents He had mercy after he fell at His feet (Matthew 18:24-27); ‘being moved with compassion, He loosed him’. To the Canaanite woman, it was after that long attendance and appeal of hers, (Matthew 15:22-28) that He finally granted the healing of her daughter, even though of His mercy He healed her. Thus we learn that even though we are to receive mercy, we must first make ourselves worthy of the mercy; for though there is mercy, yet it seeks out those that are worthy.”

Chrysostom further noted<sup>15</sup> that by the time that Paul wrote to the Philippians (c. 62 AD), the roles had reversed and the Jews were now the “dogs”, while the Gentile Christians were the children of God. “Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers; beware of the <sup>16</sup>mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:2-3)

“Paul says to the Philippians, ‘For me to write the same things to you *are* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe’ (Philippians 3:1). ‘Beware of the dogs’. But who does Paul style ‘dogs’? There were at this place some of those, whom he hints at in all his Epistles, base and contemptible Jews, greedy of vile lucre and fond of power, who, desiring to draw aside many of the faithful, preached both Christianity and Judaism at the same time, corrupting the Gospel. Since they were not easily discernible, therefore he says, ‘beware of the dogs’; the Jews are no longer children. At one time the Gentiles were called dogs, but now the Jews

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<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, II, 5.

<sup>15</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, X, v. 1.

<sup>16</sup> The Greek word is *katatome*, meaning loosely an incision, which was a pun and a play on words with *peritome*, meaning “circumcision”. The Church was now the true *peritome*, while the Jews were something else that dealt just with the flesh, and had no spiritual dimension to it.

are. Why? The Gentiles had been strangers both to God and to Christ; but the Jews have become this now. Paul shows their shamelessness, violence, and their infinite distance from the relationship of children. That the Gentiles were once called ‘dogs’, hear what the Canaanite woman says, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table’ (Matthew 15:27). But the Jews do not have even this advantage now; dogs are at the master’s table looking for crumbs, the Jews are aliens and separate, where Paul said, ‘Beware of the evil workers’ (Philippians 3:2). They work, he means, but for a bad end; it is a work that is much worse than idleness, plucking up what is laid in goodly order.”

### **Why Was Jesus Sent Only to Israel?**

We might have a problem with Jesus’ statements that He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. To us this may seem unfair that He did not come for all mankind at the beginning. We need to see this in the perspective of all that He did in the Old Testament. Israel was supposed to be the Light of the World, a city set on a hill to bring all the Gentiles to knowledge of the Kingdom of God. But they weren’t doing this! Jesus’ mission was as He described to the Chief Priests and elders in the parable of the landowner, who planted a vineyard and leased it to vinedressers. Jesus came as the Son of the Landowner to collect the fruit of the vineyard, but the vinedressers killed Him. The Chief Priests then pronounced their own fate when Jesus asked them what the Landowner would do to them (Matthew 21:33-45). Jesus’ mission was finished with the Crucifixion (John 19:30); after that He sent His disciples to the Gentiles (Matthew 28:19). Jerusalem and everything in it was utterly destroyed by 70 AD.

John Chrysostom put into perspective<sup>17</sup> how Jesus was waiting until after the Crucifixion before sending His disciples to the Gentiles. He was waiting for the Jews to reject Him finally and completely. He recognized the desire of the Gentiles to approach, but He was holding back.

“Jesus said a number of times, ‘My hour is not yet come’. What did He mean? He had said, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans’ (Matthew 10:5), thus cutting away all excuse of ignorance from the Jews; He had restrained His disciples. When the Jews continued disobedient, and the others desired to come to Him, ‘Now’, He said, ‘it is time to proceed to My Passion, since all things are fulfilled. If we were to continue to wait for those who are disobedient and not admit these Gentiles who desire to come, this would not fit with our tender care’. Since then He was about to allow the disciples to go to the Gentiles after the Crucifixion, and beheld the Gentiles springing on earlier, He said, ‘It is time to proceed to the Cross’. He would not allow them to go sooner, that it might be for a testimony to the Jews. Until the Jews rejected Him by their deeds, until they crucified Him, He wouldn’t say, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19). Instead He said, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles’, and, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matthew 15:24), and, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs’ (Matthew 15:26). But when they hated Him, and so hated as to kill Him, it was superfluous to persevere while they

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<sup>17</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXVI, 2.

repulsed Him. They refused Him, saying, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (John 19:15). Finally He left them, when they had left Him. Therefore He said, ‘How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!’” (Matthew 23:37)

Chrysostom noted<sup>18</sup> how truly amazing it was for the Gentiles to come to Christ in massive numbers. Because of what their religious background had been, this was what no one expected.

“It is a thing indeed worthy of our amazement: the Jews were nurtured in knowledge of the prophetic books, and heard Moses every day telling them concerning the coming of the Christ, and the other prophets afterwards. Moreover they saw Christ Himself daily working miracles among them, giving up His time to them alone, not allowing His disciples to depart into the way of the Gentiles, or to enter into a city of Samaritans, nor doing so Himself. Everywhere He declared that He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5). How, I say, while they saw the signs, heard the Prophets, and had Christ Himself continually reminding them, could they make themselves once for all so blind and dull, as by none of these things to be brought to faith in Christ? Those of the Gentiles had enjoyed none of these things; they had never heard the oracles of God, not so much as in a dream. Ever ranging among the fables of madmen (for heathen philosophy is this); having ever in their hands the silliness of their poets; ever nailed to stocks and stones in worshipping idols; they didn’t possess anything good or sound in doctrines or in conversation. Their way of life was more impure and more accursed than their doctrine. When they saw their gods delighting in every kind of wickedness, worshipped by shameful words, and more shameful deeds, they reckoned this festivity and praise; moreover when their gods were honored by foul murders, and child-slaughters, how should not they emulate these things? Still, fallen as they were as low as the depth of wickedness, all of a sudden, as by the agency of some machine, they have appeared to us shining from on high, and from the summit of heaven”.

Speaking to the Gentiles in Ephesus, Paul stated, “You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14). Chrysostom noted<sup>19</sup> that this had been the plan all along; there was no change to the purpose of God. This is all attributed to the foreknowledge of God.

“Note how on all occasions Paul takes pains to point out, that it is not the result of any change of purpose on the part of God, but that these matters had been thus modeled from the very first. We are in no wise inferior to the Jews in this respect; in consequence, Paul does everything with this view. How then is it that Christ Himself said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?’ (Matthew 15:24) And again to his disciples, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans’ (Matthew 10:5). Paul himself says, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you

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<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, IX, 1.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, II, v. 11.

first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13:46). These expressions are used with this design that no one may suppose that this work came to pass incidentally. 'According to the purpose', Paul says, 'of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will' (Ephesians 1:11). That is to say, He had no after workings; having modeled all things from the very first, thus he leads forward all things 'according to the counsel of His will'. So that it was not merely because the Jews did not listen that He called the Gentiles, nor was it of necessity, nor was it on any inducement arising from them."