

SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN
Humility and Persistence

February 1, 2009
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision B

GOSPEL LESSON: 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?

The Gospel lesson begins with Jesus passing through Tyre and Sidon where a Gentile woman (a Syro-Phoenician woman according to Mark 7:26) 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 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:

SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN	JESUS’ RESPONSE
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

Our inclination is to recoil: What is the Lord doing here? John Chrysostom stated that Jesus did not speak to the woman in insult and He was not trying to get her to grovel. In calling her forth, He revealed the treasure laid up in her (Homily LII on Matthew 15). 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.

Chrysostom continued by pointing out that Jesus had called the Jews “children”, while the woman referred to them as “masters” (vv26-27). In her humility, she agreed with the Lord when He referred to her as “a little dog” (v.26), saying “Yes, Lord” (v.27).

Comparing her to the Jews, Chrysostom said, “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 said Christ? 'O woman, great is your faith'.

With this intent did Christ put her off, for He knew she would say this. For this did He (at first) deny the grant, that He might exhibit her high self-command. For if He had not meant to give, neither would He have given afterward" (Ibid).

Jesus taught persistence in prayer on other occasions also. For example, in Luke 11:2-13, the Lord gave us the Lord's Prayer, 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 was not put off even though 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.

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.

HOLINESS

October 8, 2006
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision C

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. UNCLEANNESS

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:

HOLY THING, PERSON	SOME REFERENCES
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

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TABLE I
Greek Words Describing Holiness & Defilement

GREEK WORD	DEFINITIONS	REFERENCE # IN STRONG'S DICTIONARY
HAGIOS	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
AKATHARTOS	impure in the demonic sense	169
Akathartes	state of impurity	168
Akatharsia	quality of impurity	167
KOINOS	common	2839
Koinoo	to make common	2840
MIAHINO	to contaminate	3392
Miahsma	contamination, the effect	3393
Miahsmos	contamination, the act	3394
MOLUNA	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 use¹ 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).

¹ 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):

- Haughty eyes
- A lying tongue
- Hands that shed innocent blood
- A heart that devises wicked plans
- Feet that run to evil
- A false witness who utters lies
- 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 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” (Homily XIII on 2 Corinthians 6).

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

touch anything unclean (*akathartos*, i.e., *demonic*) and I will receive you” (v.17). Paul is not reimposing 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. As Ezekiel put it: “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: “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” (Ibid).

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