

Matthew: 15:21–28

From Catena Aurea:

21. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

JEROME. Leaving the Scribes and Pharisees and those cavillers, He passes into the parts of Tyre and Sidon; that He may heal the Tyrians and Sidonians; And Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. lii.) It should be observed, that when He delivered the Jews from the observance of meats, He then also opened the door to the Gentiles, as Peter was first bidden in the vision to break this law, and was afterwards sent to Cornelius. But if any should ask, how it is that He bade His disciples go not into the way of the Gentiles, and yet now Himself walks this way; we will answer, first, that that precept which He had given His disciples was not obligatory on Him; secondly, that He went not to preach, whence Mark even says, that He purposely concealed Himself.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Evangelist says that she was a Chananæan, to shew the power of Christ's presence. For this nation, which had been driven out that they might not corrupt the Jews, now shewed themselves

wiser than the Jews, leaving their own borders that they might go to Christ. And when she came to Him, she asked only for mercy, as it follows, She cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, Lord, thou Son of David.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. in quædam loca, xlvi.) Note the wisdom (ΦιλθσόΦιαν) of this woman, she went not to men who promised fair, she sought not useless bandages, but leaving all devilish charms, she came to the Lord. She asked not James, she did not pray John, or apply to Peter, but putting herself under the protection of penitence, she ran alone to the Lord. But, behold, a new trouble. She makes her petition, raising her voice into a shout, and God, the lover of mankind, answers not a word.

JEROME. Not from pharisaical pride, or the superciliousness of the Scribes, but that He might not seem to contravene His own decision, Go not into the way of the Gentiles. For He was unwilling to give occasion to their cavils, and reserved the complete salvation of the Gentiles for the season of His passion and resurrection.

JEROME. The disciples, as yet ignorant of the mysteries of God or moved by compassion, beg for this Chananæan woman; or perhaps seeking to be rid of her importunity.

AUGUSTINE. (de Cons. Ev. ii. 49.) A question of discrepancy is raised upon this, that Mark says the Lord was in the house when the woman came praying for her daughter. Indeed Matthew might have been understood to have omitted mention of the house, and yet to have been relating the same event; but when he says, that the disciples suggested to the Lord, Send her away, for she crieth after us, he seems to indicate clearly that the woman raised her voice in supplication, in following the Lord who was walking. We must understand then, that, as Mark writes, she entered in where Jesus was, that is, as he had noticed above, in the house; then, that as Matthew writes. He answered her not a word, and during this silence of both sides, Jesus left the house; and then the rest follows without any discordance.

CHRYSOSTOM. I judge that the disciples were sorry for the woman's affliction, yet dared not say 'Grant her this mercy,' but only Send her away, as we, when we would persuade any one, oftentimes say the very contrary to what we wish. He answered and said, I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

JEROME. He says that He is not sent to the Gentiles, but that He is sent first to Israel, so that when they would not receive the Gospel, the passing over to the Gentiles might have just cause.

JEROME. And He adds of the house of Israel, with this design, that we might rightly interpret by this place that other parable concerning the stray sheep.

CHRYSOSTOM. But when the woman saw that the Apostles had no power, she became bold with commendable boldness; for before she had not dared to come before His sight; but, as it is said, She crieth after us. But when it seemed that she must now retire without being relieved, she came nearer, But she came and worshipped him.

JEROME. Note how perseveringly this Chananæan woman calls Him first Son of David, then Lord, and lastly came and worshipped him, as God.

CHRYSOSTOM. And therefore she said not Ask, or Pray God for me, but Lord, help me. But the more the woman urged her petition, the more He strengthened His denial; for He calls the Jews now not sheep but sons, and the Gentiles dogs; He answered and said unto her, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and give it to dogs.

JEROME. The Gentiles are called dogs because of their idolatry; who, given to the eating of blood, and dead bodies, turn to madness.

CHRYSOSTOM. Observe this woman's prudence; she does not dare to contradict Him, nor is she vexed with the commendation of the Jews, and the evil word applied to herself; But she said, Yea, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. He said, It is not good; she answers, 'Yet even so, Lord;' He calls the Jews children, she calls them masters; He called her a dog, she accepts the office of a dog; as if she had said, I cannot leave the table of my Lord.

JEROME. Wonderful are shewn the faith, patience, and humility of this woman; faith, that she believed that her daughter could be healed; patience, that so many times overlooked, she yet perseveres in her prayers; humility, that she compares herself not to the dogs, but to the whelps. I know, she says, that I do not deserve the children's bread, and that I cannot have whole meat, nor sit at the table with the master of the house, but I am content with that which is left for the whelps, that through humble fragments I may come to the amplitude of the perfect bread.

CHRYSOSTOM. This was the cause why Christ was so backward, that He knew what she would say, and would not have her so great excellence hid; whence it follows, Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee according to thy will. Observe how the woman herself had contributed not a little to her daughter's healing and therefore Christ said not unto her, 'Let thy daughter

be healed,' but, Be it unto thee according to thy will; that you may perceive that she had spoken in sincerity, and that her words were not words of flattery, but of abundant faith. And this word of Christ is like that word which said, Let there be a firmament (Gen. 1:6.) and it was made; so here, And her daughter was made whole from that hour. Observe how she obtains what the Apostles could not obtain for her; so great a thing is the earnestness of prayer. He would rather that we should pray for our own offences ourselves, than that others should pray for us.

JEROME. And the daughter of this Chananæan I suppose to be the souls of believers, who were sorely vexed by a dæmon, not knowing their Creator, and bowing down to stones.

JEROME. Wonderful change of things! Once Israel the son, and we the dogs; the change in faith has led to a change in the order of our names. Concerning them is that said, Many dogs hare come about me; while to us is said, as to this woman, Thy faith hath made thee whole. (Ps. 22:16.)

GLOSS. (non occ.) And if the Lord delays the salvation of a soul at the first tears of the supplicating Church, we ought not to despair, or to cease from our prayers, but rather continue them earnestly.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 18.) And that to heal the Centurion's servant, and the daughter of this Chananæan woman, He does not go to their houses, signifies that the Gentiles, among whom He Himself went not, should be saved by His word. That these are healed on the prayer of their parents, we must understand of the Church, which is at once mother and children; the whole body of those who make up the Church is the mother, and each individual of that body is a son of that mother.

HILARY. Or, This mother represents the proselytes, in that she leaves her own country, and forsakes the Gentiles for the name of another nation; she prays for her daughter, that is, the body of the Gentiles possessed with unclean spirits; and having learned the Lord by the Law, calls Him the Son of David.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

15:21 Going to Tyre and Sidon

The Mother of the Gentiles.

Epiphanius the Latin: After our Lord departed from the Jews, he came into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. He left the Jews behind and came to the Gentiles. Those whom he had left behind remained in ruin; those to whom he came obtained salvation in their alienation. And a woman came out of that territory and cried, saying to him, "Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David!" O great mystery! The Lord came out from the Jews, and the woman came out from her Gentile territory. He left the Jews behind, and the woman left behind idolatry and an impious lifestyle. What they had lost, she found. The one whom they had denied in the law, she professed through her faith. This woman is the mother of the Gentiles, and she knew Christ through faith. Thus on behalf of her daughter (the Gentile people) she entreated the Lord. The daughter had been led astray by idolatry and sin and was severely possessed by a demon. Interpretation of the Gospels 58.

He Withdrew to the Region of Tyre and Sidon.

Augustine: She was apparently not from the people of Israel, from whom came the patriarchs, the prophets and the parents of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh; from whom came the Virgin Mary, who brought forth Christ. Clearly this woman was not from that people but from the Gentiles. For, as we read, the Lord withdrew into the regions of Tyre and Sidon; and then the Canaanite woman, having gone beyond those borders, insistently sought help to heal her daughter who was beset by the devil. Tyre and Sidon were not cities of the people of Israel but of the Gentiles, although they were close to that people. She therefore cried out, eager to get help, and kept insisting. But she was ignored, not that mercy might be denied but that desire might be enkindled; not only that desire might be enkindled but, as I said before, that humility might be praised. Sermon 77.1.

15:22 A Canaanite Woman Cries Out to Jesus

The Gentiles Cry for the Son of David.

Hilary of Poitiers: To grasp the inner motive of the Canaanite woman for obtaining what came to pass, we must reflect on the impact of her words. There is a firm belief that there was and still is in Israel a community of proselytes who passed over from the Gentiles into the works of the law. They had left behind their previous life and were bonded by the religion of a foreign and dominating law as though from home. The Canaanites were inhabiting the lands of present-day Judea. Whether absorbed by war or dispersed to neighboring places or brought into servitude as a vanquished people, they carried about their name but lacked a native land. Intermingled with the Jews, therefore, these people came from the Gentiles. And since a portion of those among the crowds who believed were proselytes, this Canaanite woman most likely had left her territory, preferring the status of a proselyte—that is, coming out from the Gentiles to the community of a neighboring people. She was appealing on behalf of her daughter, who was a type for all the Gentile people. And since she knew the Lord from the law, she addressed him as Son of David. For in the law, the king of the eternal and heavenly kingdom is referred to as the “rod out of the stem of Jesse and the son of David.” This woman, who professed Christ as both Lord and Son of David, did not need any healing. Rather, she was begging for help for her daughter—that is, the Gentile people in the grips of unclean spirits. On Matthew 15.3.

From That Region.

Chrysostom: Mark says that Jesus was not able to escape notice after he had come into the house. But why did he go away to these parts of the region at all? When he released them from the observance of food laws, then he finally also opened a door to the Gentiles as he proceeded on the road. This anticipates the similar act of Peter, who first received a command to put an end to this law and then was sent to Cornelius.

But if anyone should say, “Why then does he allow this woman to approach him when he says to the disciples, ‘Do not go in the way of the Gentiles?’” We first note that he himself, being who he is, was not, strictly speaking, required to obey the command that he gave to the disciples. We observe, second, that Jesus was not going there to preach. This is the very point that Mark implies when he says both that Jesus hid himself and that he could not escape notice. The fact that he did not run to them first was consistent

with the order of the tasks set before him. In exactly the same way, driving away people who were coming to him was unworthy of his love for humanity. For if one should pursue those who are trying to escape, much more should one not try to escape those who are pursuing. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 52.1.

15:23 Jesus Ignores the Woman

Send Her Away.

Epiphanius the Latin: Therefore this woman besought the Lord on behalf of her daughter, the church of the Gentiles. "But he did not answer her a word." It was not that the Lord was unwilling to heal her but that he might reveal her great faith and humility. Then the disciples were moved to mercy and pleaded with the Lord, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." But he answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Now he said this to the crowd of Jews that they might have no excuse on the day of judgment, when they might pretend to say, "He wanted to come to the Gentiles rather than to us." Interpretation of the Gospels 57.

15:24 Only to the House of Israel

I Was Sent to Israel.

Hilary of Poitiers: The Lord remains patiently silent, reserving the privilege of salvation for Israel. And the pitying disciples join in a plea. But he, holding in his hands the secret of his Father's will, answers that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. It thus became absolutely clear that the daughter of the Canaanite woman represented a type of the church when the woman kept asking for what was bestowed upon the others. Not that salvation was not to be imparted also to the Gentiles, but the Lord had come to his own and among his own, awaiting the first fruits of faith from those people he took his roots from. The others subsequently had to be saved by the preaching of the apostles. And so he said, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The Gentile people are dubbed with the name of dogs. But the Canaanite woman is saved because of her faith. Certain of the inner mystery, she responds by talking about crumbs that fall from the table, to be eaten by little dogs. The disparagement of "dogs" was mitigated by the blandishment of a diminutive name. On Matthew 15.4.

Unwilling to Give Detractors an Opportunity to Accuse Him.

Jerome: Jesus did not say this to accord with the pride of the Pharisees or the arrogance of the scribes but lest he seem to contradict the instruction he had earlier given: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans.” For he was unwilling to give his detractors an opportunity to accuse him and was reserving a fully accomplished salvation for the Gentiles at the time of his Passion and resurrection. The disciples, yet unaware of the mysteries of the Lord or having been moved to mercy, beseeched the Lord on behalf of the Canaanite woman (whom the other Evangelist calls a Syro-Phoenician). Or else they wanted to be rid of this importuning woman, for she repeatedly called upon him loudly, not as though he were a kind but an austere physician. Commentary on Matthew 2.15.23.

The Lost Sheep.

Augustine: A question arises here on that point: How is it that we have come from the Gentiles to the sheepfold of Christ if he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? What is the meaning of this puzzling dispensation? The Lord knew why he came—certainly to have a church among all the Gentiles—and he yet said that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel? We accordingly understand that he had to manifest in due sequence to that people first the presence of his body, his birth, the display of miracles and then the power of his resurrection. It had thus been predetermined from the beginning, such and such had been foretold and fulfilled, that Christ Jesus had to come to the Jewish people and to be seen and killed and to win for himself those whom he knew beforehand. The Gentiles were not to be condemned but to be winnowed like grain. A multitude of chaff was there, the hidden dignity of grain was there, burning was to take place there, and a storehouse to be filled there. In fact, where were the apostles if not there? Where was Peter? Where were the rest? Sermon 77.2.

15:25–26 Giving the Children’s Bread to the Dogs

A Strange Transformation.

Epiphanius the Latin: Then, in face of the Jews who were rejecting him, this Gentile woman asked him to heal her daughter. But the Lord turned a deaf ear to her. She fell down at his feet and adored him, saying, “Lord, help me.” The Lord then said to her, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” What have the Jews to say to this? Plainly he implied that they were children and called the Gentiles “dogs.” The woman agreed, saying to the Savior, “Yes, Lord.” That is to say, I know, Lord, that the Gentile

people are dogs in worshiping idols and barking at God. "Yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." In other words, you came to the Jews and manifested yourself to them, and they didn't want you to make exceptions. What they rejected, give to us who are asking for it. Knowing the importunate faith of this woman, our Lord said, "O woman, your faith is great! Let it be done for you as you desire." Faith accepts what work does not merit, and through faith the Gentiles were made children out of dogs. As the Lord spoke through the prophet: "In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people' it shall be said to them, 'Sons of the living God.'" On the other hand, the unreceptive Jews were made loathsome dogs out of children, as the Lord himself said in his Passion through the prophet: "Many dogs surround me; a company of evildoers encircle me." Interpretation of the Gospels 58.

15:27 Even the Dogs Eat Crumbs

Crumbs from Their Masters' Table.

Chrysostom: See her humility as well as her faith! For he had called the Jews "children," but she was not satisfied with this. She even called them "masters," so far was she from grieving at the praises of others. She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Behold the woman's wisdom! She did not venture so much as to say a word against anyone else. She was not stung to see others praised, nor was she indignant to be reproached. Behold her constancy. When he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs," she said, "Yes, Lord." He called them "children," but she called them "masters." He used the name of a dog, but she described the action of the dog. Do you see this woman's humility?

Then compare her humility with the proud language of the Jews: "We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man." "We are born of God." But not so this woman. Rather, she calls herself a dog and them masters. So for this reason she became a child. For what does Christ then say? "O woman, great is your faith."

So we might surmise that this is the reason he put her off, in order that he might proclaim aloud this saying and that he might crown the woman: "Be it done for you as you desire." This means "Your faith, indeed, is able to effect even greater things than these. Nevertheless be it unto you even as you wish." This voice was at one with the voice that said, "Let the heaven be," and it was.

"And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Do you see how this woman, too, contributed not a little to the healing of her daughter? For note that Christ did not say, “Let your little daughter be made whole,” but “Great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire.” These words were not uttered at random, nor were they flattering words, but great was the power of her faith, and for our learning.

He left the certain test and demonstration, however, to the issue of events. Her daughter accordingly was immediately healed. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 52.3.

15:28 Be It Done as You Desire

Her Daughter Was Healed Instantly.

Augustine: See, brothers, how in this woman who was a Canaanite—who came from the Gentiles and represented a type (namely, a figure of the church)—how her humility is highly praised. Indeed, the Jewish people, as castigated in the Gospel, were puffed up with pride because they were chosen to receive the law, because the patriarchs proceeded from that people, the prophets appeared and God’s servant Moses performed great miracles in Egypt, which we hear about in the Psalms. He led the people through the Red Sea with the waters receding, and he received the law, which he gave to the same people. These were the grounds for extolling the Jewish people. Because of that pride, they were unwilling to respond to Christ the author of humility, the restrainer of swellheadedness, the physician God who, because he was God, became man that as a man he might know himself as man. What great medicine! If this medicine does not cure pride, what could possibly cure it? I do not know. God became a man. He put aside his divinity. That is to say, in a certain measure he kept out of sight—he hid what was his own, while it was evident what he had taken upon himself. He became a man, even though he is God. Yet man does not yet recognize that he is a man, that he is mortal; he does not recognize that he is weak, a sinner, sick, and that being a sick person, he should seek a physician! What is even worse, he sees himself as being healthy!

Because of this, that people did not draw near—that is, because of their pride. And they were called from the olive tree—that is, from that people begotten of the patriarchs—broken natural branches (namely, Jews by right, barren in the spirit of pride). And in that olive tree a wild olive shoot was grafted. This wild olive shoot represents the Gentile people. But the apostle says that the wild shoot was grafted into the olive tree but the natural branches were broken. They were broken because of pride; the wild olive shoot was grafted in because of humility. The woman manifested this humility, saying, “Yes, Lord, I am a dog. I

desire crumbs.” Jesus found favor also with the centurion, who had this humility. After he asked the Lord to cure his servant, the Lord said, “I will come and cure him.” He responded, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. I am not worthy that you should come under my roof.” He did not receive the Lord under his roof; he received him in his heart. The more humble a person is, the more receptive and full he becomes. Hills repel water; valleys are filled up. What did the Lord reply, after the centurion said, “I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof”? He said, “Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith”—that is, among those people to whom I have come, “I have not found such faith.” What is the meaning of the word such? So great. In what way great? To say the least, great in humility. “I have not found such faith”: like a grain of mustard seed—the smaller it is, the more potent it is. The Lord therefore grafted the wild olive shoot into the olive tree. He did this when he said, “Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” Sermon 77.11–12.