**Canaanite Woman**

**January 31, 2022**

**By Fr. Terenti Wasielewski**

Today’s gospel of the Canaanite Woman is one that signals to us that Lent in approaching. We are at the end of the Nativity festal period and now we are beginning to hear important words that point to the great fast. The first was contained in the gospel a few weeks ago in the gospel of the Sunday after Theophany when we heard “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. We can interpret this as a call for us to be ready to prepare ourselves to enter the great and solemn 40 days. Just as Christ went into the desert for 40 days, fasted to prepare for his ministry, and was tempted by the devil, so we too must go to that desert, that 40 day period and turn our lives around.

The Greek Church always reads this gospel the Sunday before the 3 pre-lenten preparation Sundays and the Russian tradition always reads Zaccheus prior to the three pre-lenten Sundays.

So what is it about the Canaanite woman and Zaccheus that the church deemed important to place them here at this time in the church cycle. One common theme that runs through these two gospels is that both of these individuals have a true desire, persistence and an abundance of faith in the Lord. The Canaanite woman wasn’t going to let Christ leave without healing her daughter. “We have all had the experience of being ignored, left out, and made to feel that we weren’t included or recognized by others.  Whether at school, among friends, at work or wherever, that can be painful, no matter what our age or life circumstances.  No one likes to be rejected or overlooked.   But sometimes, what seems to be rejection really isn’t; sometimes it is testing and preparation for a deeper relationship in which we learn more about ourselves, our neighbors, and God. “

The Canaanite woman was persistent and she finally convinced Christ of her seriousness by giving him words of wisdom-- words of wisdom that were filled with humility. Imagine the Canaanite woman following Jesus and pleading with him to heal her daughter. She wasn’t willing to give up her plea to him until he did something to help her. That desire was so great that many of us cannot fathom how great the woman had for her daughter. “The Canaanite woman is a tremendous model for us as Christians, for we so easily give up on the Lord and on ourselves.  We are tempted to think that we are who we are, that there is no point in trying to change, and that even God can’t heal and transform us, but here is a clear example that faith and persistence wins out.”

Her statement “even the dogs eat the crumbs from their master’s table” is absolute and true humility. If you traveled through the middle east or been around someone from there and you have a dog, you will soon realize that dogs and animals in general are not regarded as part of our families but are considered low forms of life. Whenever I brought my dog to work or walked her on the street, I had to be careful not to let her get close to some people of non-western cultures, particularly from the middle east or developing countries. If I was on the street, some would change direction and even tell me to stay back. One woman told me that if she touched a dog she would have to go through a cleansing ritual.

So you can then realize that for the Canaanite woman to make such a statement she is demonstrating to Christ that she is completely humble, a woman full of faith in Christ and that she recognizes her status as a gentile. Because of this dialogue she has with Christ, Christ is impressed with her faith and humility and he decides to heal her daughter at that very moment.

What we need to remember is that desire and persistence drives us to do something.Desire is the starting point of all achievement, not a hope, not a wish, but a keen pulsating desire which transcends everything**.**(Napoleon Hill)

If we really want to go to the Super Bowl we will have a strong desire and persistence to spend the money for the tickets and to fly there. If we want a beautiful new look in our living room we desire to go out to Stickley Furniture and buy a new couch and chairs. If we want salvation in the eternal kingdom, we desire to follow the commandments of the Lord. In other words, the foundation to anything we want to do in life is that we first need to desire it and then if we persist we have a better chance getting what we want.

On Wednesday we will celebrate the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple which is the last feast in the Nativity season. Simeon the righteous elder waits for the Messiah. He is in old age but he persists because the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he will not die until he sees the messiah and that he can present Christ in the temple as was the custom with all children 40 days after their birth. The patience of the Canaanite woman and of St. Simeon was rewarded, for both received the Messiah with faith—in other words, their persistence and desire changed their lives. In the same way, if we have this same desire and persistence, our lives can also be changed.