



My Beloved Ones,

This week, we read in the Gospel of Matthew of a Pagan woman from the land of Canaan, whose distress at her daughter's demonic possession is so great that she cries aloud to the Lord, "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David...*" (Matthew 15:22) As observant Jews, the Disciples are uncomfortable that a pagan woman is shouting at them. They tell the Lord, "*Send her away, for she is crying after us.*" (Matthew 15:23) If their treatment seems cruel remember that the people still held that the Messiah was to restore Israel, not to concern Himself with Pagans.

They have forgotten the Old Testament Scripture that St. Paul recites in this week's Second Epistle to the Corinthians, "*I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (2 Corinthians 6:16). Even though the Son of God "lives in them and walks among them" they remember only the Lord's command to "*...come out from them and be separate from them... and touch nothing unclean*" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Jesus sees their mistake, but he knows he must show them why they are wrong.

He explains to the Woman that He was sent only to the House of Israel—yet she only begs more. And so, he says to her, as a Jew would to a Pagan, "*It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*" (Matthew 15:26) Christ says this, not because He believes it to be true, but because He knows the sin of pride that dwells in His Disciples' hearts: they believe they are God's children, and that she is a dog. Most people would become angry or turn away in sorrow. Yet she so loves her daughter, and believes in Christ, that she humbles herself. "*Yes, Lord,*" she says, "*yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.*" (Matthew 15:27) She demonstrates that despite the fact that she is a pagan, the only necessary thing is to seek our Lord as daughter or son would come before its father.

Truly, as Orthodox Christians, we approach the coming Triodion & Great Lent as a time when we choose to voluntarily struggle with our own passions. The truest way that we will overcome them, is to behave like the Canaanite Woman. She understood that both she and her daughter were made in the image and likeness of God, and we are all the temple of the living God. Therefore, we must come before the Lord in a spirit of repentance and love. Only then will we be worthy to hear as the woman did before her daughter was healed, "*...great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.*" (Matthew 15:28)

**+ALEXIOS**

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