

Homily August 16, 2020

Tyre and Sidon.

Earlier in this same gospel, Matthew (11:21-23), Jesus declares, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgement than for you... And as for you, Capernaum: 'Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.' For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."

Several year ago, I was able to take a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When a tour-guide took us to Capernaum, there was a sign over the road saying it was Jesus' home. By that - it referred to the amount of times Jesus is reported to have been at Capernaum. He treated it as a base of operations. Capernaum was a town on the Sea of Galilee. During a prayer time of the pilgrimage, a member of the group spoke affectionately about how hard it would be to count the number of miracles and healings and teachings Christ performed in this area.

Chorazin and Bethsaida were nearby towns. In Luke, Bethsaida is identified as the town outside of which the Feeding of the Five-thousand took place. In other words, multitudes had experienced Jesus.

And yet there was exhibited heard-heartedness and unrepentance. And so Our Lord compares Tyre and Sidon.

Most of us know about Sodom.

Tyre and Sidon - they were cities to the northwest of the area called Galilee. They were on the seacoast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were gentile, pagan

territory. Tyre and Sidon were cities against which Ezekiel (Chapters 26-28) pronounced God's judgment.

In Chapter eleven, Our Lord says Tyre and Sidon would respond better to Him than God's people. In today's Gospel passage, in the fifteenth chapter, His words prove true.

A Canaanite woman comes to Him.

All the readings for this Sunday speak of God's all-inclusiveness.

- In Isaiah: "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"
- The refrain for Psalm 67 is: "O God, let all the nations praise you!"
- In Romans: Paul, Apostle to the gentiles, says that everyone is now disobedient - and now all may be shown mercy
- And here in Matthew: A Canaanite woman with a possessed daughter receives her request.

The Old Testament is full of examples testifying that God formed Israel not in order to give up on everyone else. God revealed Himself to the Hebrew people in order that through them the world would be drawn to God. Jesus is the Christ - the Messiah, the long awaited anointed one. Though there was always some expectations that He would restore Israel to its past greatness, the greater witness of salvation history was that the restoration was for all Humanity.

Today we see a hint of what Christ would do by His Cross and Resurrection. In the midst of a provincial expectation of the Savior, the Christ enters pagan territory. In front of disciples who had not yet fully grasped the immenseness of Jesus, a woman who did not even belong to the lost sheep of Israel is a reminder that she, and all the gentiles, are members of the lost and fallen children of Adam and Eve.

This woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon, this Canaanite woman - is us. Or at least she is what we can see ourselves to be. In our baptism into Christ we have been grafted as branches onto Christ the Vine. We are adopted Children into God's family.

Too often if we imagine God is treating us as dogs receiving the table scraps we get angry - even as we receive even more than what we are asking for. We might at times suggest, or admit, that we deserve nothing. After all - we are saved by Grace. God's love transforms us.

This Canaanite woman who knew she had no reason to expect anything from the Hebrew who was standing before her - especially if He was the Messiah - stayed the course.

She is the embodiment of some of Our Lord's parables in Luke's gospel: The friend who repeatedly knocks at another friend's door in the middle of the night to get bread for a friend who has just arrived at his home; and the widow who nags the unjust judge.

If she can do this - we who receive so much can also persist in our prayers, and be grateful of Jesus' friendship instead of taking Him for granted and finding some reason to be offended that we don't receive more.

This Canaanite woman is us. Or she is us at our best. She is us as we can be. She comes to Christ and engages in a conversation. She persists. She invests herself in speaking not at Him but with Him. That means she listens. She reveals herself to Him. And lets Him reveal Himself to Her.

Let us not fall victim to the excuse that we don't have to speak to God of our plight and our need and our wants because He is supposed to already know us through and

through. Of course He knows us fully. But are we willing to spend time with Him? Daily? In Prayer? And here?

His presence around Tyre and Sidon ended up being an invitation to others - others who were much more far removed from Him than the lost sheep of Israel. He invites us to a relationship with Him. That means we need to engage. Not because of Him but because that is how we are made. Which of us can be close to family or friends if we just say they know we love them already? Time is part of the package. Time is precious. And therefore time needs to be spent regularly and often with our loved ones.

And the first of our loves is Love Himself.

Thank God that all of us gentiles-and-now-heirs can learn to approach Christ, and stay with Him, as the Canaanite Woman from Tyre and Sidon did.