

Dear Friends,

Would you say that you don't have a racist or prejudice bone in your body? If so, then you may find the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman in today's gospel disturbing.

Jesus is outside Jewish territory. It's time for some quality time with his disciples that he might prepare them for the reality of the cross. He has information to share with them away from the clamoring of the crowds.

A woman with a seriously ill daughter heard of Jesus' reputation and began following him after learning he was in town. At first Jesus pays no attention to her. The disciples, on the other hand, are embarrassed by her. They want him to send her away. At first we might expect Jesus to respond much like he did to the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" (Mk. 10:51a). But he doesn't. Though he might have felt compassion towards her, it's not revealed immediately. Instead he responds, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" It's like hearing a clerk in a store respond to an inquiry with, "*Sorry, not my department.*" The woman isn't discouraged; Jesus, on the other hand, seems to add insult to injury, equating her and her Gentile daughter with dogs, a reference to anyone who wasn't a Jew. Quick to respond, and filled with concern for her daughter, the woman has the presence of mind to remind Jesus, "*. . . even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.*"

What great faith she displayed. She began by calling Jesus "*Lord*" and "*Son of David,*" and ended with unwavering persistence. She trusted that Jesus could do what she had heard he had done elsewhere and would do it because of the compassion she knew was his hallmark. Jesus does not disappoint.

Jesus knew his death was near. He also had more to teach his disciples. A major lesson was that God's plan of salvation is expansive. All are welcome in the house of God; as the Lord declares through the prophet Isaiah in our first reading, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*" (56:7). What better way for Jesus to teach this lesson to his followers than in foreign territory and with a woman who represents one of Israel's oldest and most despised enemies?

We may not consider ourselves to be prejudice, but we could probably identify times when we have treated others as if they were less than us because they didn't possess a quality or characteristic we believe important. At times we may have categorized people because they were different from us, thereby treating them as inferior. Thankfully God doesn't measure people by our standards but welcomes all who seek to know him and do what is right and just. May we do the same.

Peace and blessings,
Fr. John