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I was reminded last week that in St. Luke's account of the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness the episode ends with the words, *and when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time*. The Church Fathers, the great theologians of the Early Church, write that the opportune time was during Jesus' crucifixion. However, we might wonder if that opportune time was not in this morning's Gospel. A Canaanite woman of Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile woman, comes to Jesus begging that He heal her daughter *who is grievously vexed with a devil*. This is the King James Version's way of saying that her daughter is possessed, badly possessed. We have seen the Exorcist and any number of horror movies; we have seen how Hollywood portrays exorcisms in a dramatic and exaggerated fashion. But the exorcism in this morning's Gospel is far from a horror movie. Jesus simply reveals the mother's faith, and says *O woman great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt*. Jesus heals the daughter, exorcising the demon from the daughter not in a dramatic Hollywood way with spinning heads and beastly sounds, but from a distance. There is no battle between Jesus and the forces of evil, He simply says the word and the daughter is healed. So much, for that *opportune time*.

The modern hearer of this Gospel lesson is thrown off not just by an undramatic exorcism but by Jesus seemingly demeaning the poor mother. Some might be startled that Jesus just called this woman a dog. Given the context, that Jesus had just had an encounter with the Pharisees in which He explained that ritually washing one's hands did not make one spiritually clean or holy, He broadcasts that this woman of faith is a gentile. He had just condemned the Pharisees as the blind leading the blind. And then this Canaanite woman comes to Jesus who in the eyes of the Pharisees; as a Canaanite, as a gentile, as a woman, whose daughter is possessed, was the living embodiment of spiritual blindness. And yet Jesus sees in her a remarkable faith, faith that was far greater than the faith of the Pharisees. To reveal her faith to the pharisaic onlookers Jesus speaks in a kind of riddle, *I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, and when she came and worshipped Him He said to her a riddle, *It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs*. We would expect this woman to leave Jesus in a rage, having been deeply offended. But she possessed an overwhelming faith in Jesus and profound humility, and she persisted in begging Jesus to come and heal

her daughter and so she answered, *Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*

Her daughter was healed not because she replied to the riddle correctly, but because of her great faith, her profound humility, and her persistence in asking Jesus for a miracle. Humility is the virtue that God loves and the devil hates. St. Augustine even says it is the foundation for all the other virtues. He also writes, *it was pride that changed angels into devils, it is humility that makes men as angels.* It was her humility which allowed her faith to grow and deepen to such a level that it put the Pharisees and the religious experts of the day to shame. The Pharisees were proud of their religion believing all its ritual acts, of washing their hands and keeping their distance from gentiles, made them holy and closer to God. Yet Jesus shows us in this morning's Gospel that the opposite is true, that outward rituals are meaningless if it is not an act of true worship to God.

This is an important reminder for us this Lent, that we are not called to be modern day Pharisees but that we should take this humble and faithful Canaanite woman as our role model. She shows us that the kind of cleanness and holiness that St. Paul refers to in the Epistle is not ritual cleanness but the kind of cleanness that comes from humble repentance, from confessing our sins, and persistent prayer. We know we cannot keep Lent perfectly; we know that what we try to give up or take on this Lent cannot save us. But our Lenten task is clear, to cast out unchastity, and all excessive desire for this world's goods, by the discipline of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Let us approach this task with the same humility, faith, and perseverance the Canaanite woman displayed in today's Gospel. We must know ourselves well, trust fully that God will perform his promises, and persist even when God seems to resist our urgent requests. Then God will answer our prayers, but we must have faith that all He must do is *speak the word only and my soul shall be healed.*