

Epistle and Gospel Sermons for the Second Sunday in Lent

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Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

from Luther's *Church Sermons*

Source: Martin Luther, "First Sunday in Lent," from John Nicholas Lenker, *Luther's Epistle Sermons - Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost*. Vol. II. Three Volumes. (Vol. VIII of *Luther's Complete Works*). (Minneapolis, MN: The Luther Press, 1909), pp. 145-149. "Translated with the help of others by Prof. John Nicholas Lenker."

Exhortation To Holiness

1 Thess 4:1-7

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in

any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

1. This lesson is easy of interpretation. It is a general and earnest admonition on the part of Paul, enjoining us to an increasing degree of perfection in the doctrine we have received. This admonition, this exhortation, is one incumbent upon an evangelical teacher to give, for he is urging us to observe a doctrine commanded of God. He says, "For ye know what charge [commandments] we gave you through the Lord Jesus." Whatever Christians do, it should be willing service, not compulsory; but when a command is given, it should be in the form of exhortation or entreaty. Those who have received the Spirit are they from whom obedience is due; but those not inclined to a willing performance, we should leave to themselves.

2. But mark you this: Paul places much value upon the gift bestowed upon us, the gift of knowing how we are "to walk and to please God." In the world this gift is as great as it is rare. Though the offer is made to the whole world and publicly proclaimed, further exhortation is indispensable, and Paul is painstaking and diligent in administering it. The trouble is, we are in danger of becoming indolent and negligent, forgetful and ungrateful – vices menacing and great, and which, alas, are altogether too frequent. Let us look back and note to what depths of darkness, of delusion and abomination, we had sunk when we knew not how we ought to walk, how to please God. Alas, we have forgotten all about it; we have become indolent and ungrateful, and are dealt with accordingly. Well does the apostle say in the lesson for the Sunday preceding this (2 Cor 6, 1): "And working together with him we entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain, for he saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee."

3. In our present lesson he treats chiefly of two vices: unchastity, which is a sin against oneself

and destructive of the fruits of faith; and fraud in business, which is a sin against the neighbor and likewise destructive of faith and charity. Paul would have every man keep himself chaste and free from wrong against every man, pronouncing the wrath of God on offenses of this character.

4. It was a fact reflecting much credit and honor on the Thessalonians in contrast to the Corinthians and the Galatians, that they continued upright in doctrine and true in the knowledge of the faith, though perhaps deficient in the above-mentioned two self-evident features of Christian life. While it is true that if sins of immorality are not renounced God will punish, yet punishment in such cases is for the most part temporal, these sins being less pernicious than such gross offenses as error in faith and doctrine.

5. Paul, however, threatens such sins with the wrath of God, lest anyone become remiss and indolent, imagining the kingdom of Christ a kingdom to tolerate with impunity such offenses. As Paul expresses it, "God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification [holiness]." The thought is: Unchastity does not come within the limits of Christian liberty and privilege, nor does God treat the offender with indulgence and impunity. No, indeed. In fact, he will more rigorously punish this sin among Christians than among heathen. Paul tells us (I Cor 11, 30) that many were sickly and many had succumbed to the sleep of death in consequence of eating and drinking unworthily. And Psalm 89, 32 testifies, "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod."

6. True, they who sin through infirmity, who, conscious of their transgressions, suffer themselves to be reproved, repenting at once – for these the kingdom of Christ has ready pity and forbearance, commending them to acceptance and toleration (Rom 15; Gal 6, 1; 1 Cor 13, 7); but

that such vices be regarded generally lawful and normal – this will not do! Paul declares, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And he speaks of "how ye ought to . . . please God." His thought is: Some consider these sins a matter of little moment, treat them as if the wind blew them away and God rather had pleasure in them as trivial affairs. But this is not true. While God really bears with the fallen sinner, he would have us perceive our errors and strive to mend our lives and to abound more and more in righteousness. His grace is not intended to cloak our shame, nor should the licentious abuse the kingdom of Christ as a shield for their knavery. Paul commands (Gal 5, 13), "Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh"; and Peter (1 Pet 2, 16), "As free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants of God."

7. Paul, following the Hebrew way of speaking, has reference to chastity where he says "your

sanctification." He terms the body "holy" when it is chaste, chastity being, in God's sight, equivalent to holiness. "Holiness," in the Old Testament, is a synonym for "purity." Again, "holiness" and "purity" are regarded as the same thing in First Corinthians 7, 14: "Else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."

8. The nature of the holiness and purity whereof he speaks he makes plain himself in the words: "That ye abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor." The apostle does not here prohibit matrimony, but licentiousness, and unchastity outside the marriage state. He who is careful to keep his vessel – his body – chaste, who does not commit adultery and is not guilty of whoredom – this man preserves his body in holiness and purity, and properly is called chaste and holy. The same thought is borne out in the succeeding verse:

"Not in the passion of lust [in the lust of concupiscence], even as the Gentiles."

9. The Gentiles, who know not God, give themselves up to all manner of uncleanness, or disgraceful vices, as Paul records in Romans 1, 29-31. Not that all gentiles are guilty in that respect. Paul is not saying what all heathen do; he merely states that with the gentiles such conduct is apparent, and quite to be expected from people "who know not God." Under such conditions, one allows the sin to pass unreprieved, as does Paul himself. Notwithstanding he censures them who consent to sin of this character when knowing better, and who do not restrain the evil-doers. Rom 1, 32. But in the case of Christians, when

any fall into such sin they are to be reprovved and the sin resisted; the offense must not be allowed to pass as with the gentiles. In the case of the latter the lust of concupiscence holds sway; no restraints are exercised and the reins are given to lust, so that its nature and passion are given free expression, just as if this were a provision of nature, when the fact is it is a pest to be healed, a blemish to be removed. But there is none to heal and deliver, so the gentiles decay and go to ruin through evil lust. "Lust of concupiscence" would be, with us, "evil lust." The conclusion is simple:

"That no man transgress and wrong his brother in the matter."

10. In other words, that no one take for himself what belongs to another, or use the property of another for his own benefit, which may be done

by a variety of tricks. To "defraud in any matter" is to seek gain at the expense of a neighbor. On this latter subject much has been written

elsewhere, particularly in the little treatise on Merchants and Usury, showing the great extent to which extortion is practiced and how charity is

rarely observed. It is on this topic that Paul here would fix our attention.



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Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent - Matthew 15:21-28 from Luther's *Church Sermons*

Source: Martin Luther, "First Sunday in Lent," from John Nicholas Lenker, ed., *Luther's Church Postil - Gospels - Epiphany, Lent and Easter Sermons*. Vol. II. Five Volumes. (Vol. XI of *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*). (Minneapolis, MN: Lutherans In All Lands, Co., 1906), pp. 148-154. "Translated now for the first time into English, with introduction, Walch's *Analyses* and Bugenhagen's *Summaries* by Prof. John Nicholas Lenker, D.D."

The Faith of the Syrophonecian Woman

Matt 15:21-28

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

1. This Gospel presents to us a true example of firm and perfect faith. For this woman endures and overcomes in three great and hard battles, and teaches us in a beautiful manner the true way and virtue of faith, namely, that it is a hearty trust in the grace and goodness of God as experienced and revealed through his Word. For St. Mark says, she heard some news about Jesus, Mk 7,25. What kind of news? Without doubt good news, and the good report that Christ was a pious man and cheerfully helped everybody. Such news about God is a true Gospel and a word of grace, out of which sprang the faith of this woman; for had she

not believed, she would not have thus run after Christ etc. In like manner we have often heard how St. Paul in Rom 10, 17 says that faith cometh by hearing, that the Word must go in advance and be the beginning of our salvation.

2. But how is it that many more have heard this good news concerning Christ, who have not followed him, and did not esteem it as good news? Answer: The physician is helpful and welcome to the sick; the healthy have no use for him. But this woman felt her need, hence she followed the sweet scent, as is written in the Song

of Solomon 1, 3. In like manner Moses must precede and teach people to feel their sins in order that grace may be sweet and welcome to them. Therefore all is in vain, however friendly and lovely Christ may be pictured, if man is not first humbled by a knowledge of himself and he possesses no longing for Christ, as Mary's Song says, "The hungry he hath filled with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away," Lk 1, 53. All this is spoken and written for the comfort of the distressed, the poor, the needy, the sinful, the despised, so that they may know in all times of need to whom to flee and where to seek comfort and help.

3. But see in this example how Christ like a hunter exercises and chases faith in his followers in order that it may become strong and firm. First when the woman follows him upon hearing of his fame and cries with assured confidence that he would according to his reputation deal mercifully with her, Christ certainly acts differently, as if to let her faith and good confidence be in vain and turn his good reputation into a lie, so that she could have thought: Is this the gracious, friendly man? or: Are these the good words, that I have heard spoken about him, upon which I have depended? It must not be true; he is my enemy and will not receive me; nevertheless he might speak a word and tell me that he will have nothing to do with me. Now he is as silent as a stone. Behold, this is a very hard rebuff, when God appears so earnest and angry and conceals his grace so high and deep; as those know so well, who feel and experience it in their hearts. Therefore she imagines he will not fulfil what he has spoken, and will let his Word be false; as it happened to the children of Israel at the Red Sea and to many other saints.

4. Now, what does the poor woman do? She turns her eyes from all this unfriendly treatment of Christ; all this does not lead her astray, neither does she take it to heart, but she continues immediately and firmly to cling in her confidence to the good news she had heard and embraced concerning him, and never gives up. We must also do the same and learn firmly to cling to the Word, even though God with all his creatures appears

different than his Word teaches. But, oh, how painful it is to nature and reason, that this woman should strip herself of self and forsake all that she experienced, and cling alone to God's bare Word, until she experienced the contrary. May God help us in time of need and of death to possess like courage and faith!

5. Secondly, since her cry and faith avail nothing, the disciples approach with their faith, and pray for her, and imagine they will surely be heard. But while they thought he should be more tenderhearted, he became only the more indifferent, as we see and think. For now he is silent no more nor leaves them in doubt; he declines their prayer and says: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This rebuff is still harder since not only our own person is rejected, but the only comfort that remains to us, namely, the comfort and prayers of pious and holy persons, are rejected. For our last resort, when we feel that God is ungracious or we are in need, is that we go to pious, spiritual persons and there seek counsel and help, and they are willing to help as love demands; and yet, that may amount to nothing, even they may not be heard and our condition becomes only worse.

6. Here one might upbraid Christ with all the words in which he promised to hear his saints, as Mt 18, 19: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them." Likewise, Mk 11,24: "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them;" and many more like passages. What becomes of such promises in this woman's case? Christ, however, promptly answers and says: Yes, it is true, I hear all prayers, but I gave these promises only to the house of Israel. What do you think? Is not that a thunderbolt that dashes both heart and faith into a thousand pieces, when one feels that God's Word, upon which one trusts, was not spoken for him, but applies only to others? Here all saints and prayers must be speechless, yea, here the heart must let go of the Word, to which it would gladly hold, if it would consult its own feelings.

7. But what does the poor woman do? She does not give up, she clings to the Word although it be torn out of her heart by force, is not turned away by this stern answer, still firmly believes his goodness is yet concealed in that answer, and still she will not pass judgment that Christ is or may be ungracious. That is persevering steadfastness.

8. Thirdly, she follows Christ into the house, as Mark 7,24-25 informs us, perseveres, falls down at his feet, and says: "Lord, help me!" There she received her last mortal blow, in that Christ said in her face, as the words tell, that she was a dog, and not worthy to partake of the children's bread. What will she say to this! Here he presents her in a bad light, she is a condemned and an outcast person, who is not to be reckoned among God's chosen ones.

9. That is an eternally unanswerable reply, to which no one can give a satisfactory answer. Yet she does not despair, but agrees with his judgment and concedes, she is a dog, and desires also no more than a dog is entitled to, namely, that she may eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the Lord. Is not that a masterly stroke as a reply? She catches Christ with his own words. He compares her to a dog, she concedes it, and asks nothing more than that he let her be a dog, as he himself judged her to be. Where will Christ now take refuge? He is caught. Truly, people let the dog have the crumbs under the table; it is entitled to that. Therefore Christ now completely opens his heart to her and yields to her will, so that she is now no dog, but even a child of Israel.

10. All this, however, is written for our comfort and instruction, that we may know how deeply God conceals his grace before our face, and that we may not estimate him according to our feelings and thinking, but strictly according to his Word. For here you see, though Christ appears to be even hardhearted, yet he gives no final decision by saying "No." All his answers indeed sound like no, but they are not no, they remain undecided and pending. For he does not say: I will not hear thee; but is silent and passive, and says neither yes nor no. In like manner he does

not say she is not of the house of Israel; but he is sent only to the house of Israel; he leaves it undecided and pending between yes and no. So he does not say, Thou art a dog, one should not give thee of the children's bread; but it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs; leaving it undecided whether she is a dog or not. Yet all those trials of her faith sounded more like no than yes; but there was more yea in them than nay; aye, there is only yes in them, but it is very deep and very concealed, while there appears to be nothing but no.

11. By this is set forth the condition of our heart in times of temptation; Christ here represents how it feels. It thinks there is nothing but no and yet that is not true. Therefore it must turn from this feeling and lay hold of and retain the deep spiritual yes under and above the no with a firm faith in God's Word, as this poor woman does, and say God is right in his judgment which he visits upon us; then we have triumphed and caught Christ in his own words. As for example when we feel in our conscience that God rebukes us as sinners and judges us unworthy of the kingdom of heaven, then we experience hell, and we think we are lost forever. Now whoever understands here the actions of this poor woman and catches God in his own judgment, and says: Lord, it is true, I am a sinner and not worthy of thy grace; but still thou hast promised sinners forgiveness, and thou art come not to call the righteous, but, as St. Paul says in I Tim 1, 15, "to save sinners." Behold, then must God according to his own judgment have mercy upon us.

12. King Manasseh did likewise in his penitence as his prayer proves; he conceded that God was right in his judgment and accused himself as a great sinner and yet he laid hold of the promised forgiveness of sins. David also does likewise in Ps 51, 4 and says: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight; that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." For God's disfavor in every way visits us when we cannot agree with his judgment nor say yea and amen, when he considers and judges us to be sinners. If the condemned could do this, they would that

very moment be saved. We say indeed with our mouth that we are sinners; but when God himself says it in our hearts, then we are not sinners, and eagerly wish to be considered pious and free from that judgment. But it must be so; if God is to be righteous, in his words that teach you are a sinner, then you may claim the rights of all sinners that God has given them, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Then you eat not only the crumbs under the table as the little dogs do; but you are also a child and have God as your portion according to the pleasure of your will.

13. This is the spiritual meaning of our Gospel and the scriptural explanation of it. For what this poor woman experienced in the bodily affliction of her daughter, whom she miraculously caused to be restored to health again by her faith, that we

also experience when we wish to be healed of our sins and of our spiritual diseases, which is truly a wicked devil possessing us; here she must become a dog and we become sinners and brands of hell, and then we have already recovered from our sickness and are saved.

14. Whatever more there is in this Gospel worthy of notice, as that one can obtain grace and help through the faith of another without his own personal faith, as took place here in the daughter of this poor woman, has been sufficiently treated elsewhere. Furthermore that Christ and his disciples along with the woman in this Gospel exhibit to us an example of love, in that no one acts, prays and cares for himself but each for others, is also clear enough and worthy of consideration.



Gospel Sermon for The Second Sunday of Lent

Reminiscere

Matthew 15:21-28

from Luther's *House Sermons*

Source: Martin Luther, "Reminiscere," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year*. Volume 1. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 360-370. Translated by Rev. E. Schmid, A.M. Professor in Capital University.

Matt. 15, 21-28. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

This is a precious Gospel. It has been assigned to this Sunday, as others were, because it contains an account of the casting out of a devil. The intention was thus to admonish people to become pious, and to confess their sins. ...

This Gospel means no such farce and child's play. It contains an important and difficult lesson, showing how faith, in agony and adversity, pleads its cause before God, from which we should learn not to be deterred by any obstacle from coming to Him with our cries and petitions, even if He Himself should at first say nay. This struggle we experience particularly in the perils of death, the

devil being busy to stir up within us terrible thoughts, as if God our Lord had rejected and forsaken us. Dark and lowering clouds then hang over us, so that the bright sun with its rays is totally obscured, and awful night overwhelms us with multiplied distress.

This struggle is portrayed in the woman of our text. The person and all attending circumstances are of the most unpromising kind. The first unfavorable circumstance is the fact that the woman is of heathen birth, no child of Abraham, nor of his lineage; and therefore, being a stranger, she has no right to ask any favors here. This she

knew, and it would have been no wonder if this fact had prevented her coming. She might easily have been led to think: Why shall I go, and what shall I ask ? It is all in vain. I am a heathen and foreign woman; He is a Jew, and one sent unto the Jews.

I very much doubt whether we would overcome such obstacles as this; we would succumb to them, and give up our prayer. It is no trifling matter when conscience appears with its charges and tells us: What are you about ? You have not the right to pray, as you are not Christ's disciple; let Peter and Paul pray to God; these He will hear, but not you. You have no faith; perhaps you are not one of the elect, and surely unworthy to come before God with your petitions. With thoughts like these the devil can bring us to despair ; for indeed the obstacles are great.

When thus perplexed let us look for encouragement upon this woman, and learn to conduct ourselves as she did. The difficulties in the way do not appall her; she keeps only in view the object of her coming, and forgets that she is a heathen and He a Jew. Her confidence and hope in Christ are so great that she never doubts His condescension. Her faith cancels the fact that she is a heathen. One without faith would never have acted thus, but would have concluded: It is of no use to present my request before Him; I am in the clutches of the devil beyond all hope; let His own people come to Him; them will He hear, but not me. Whoever has no faith is utterly unable to pray. The woman is not vexed with doubts as to her privilege of coming to Christ: she does not spend the time in debating the question, whether she dare come or not; she simply starts upon her way and comes.

It is surely a severe and dangerous affliction when the devil prompts the heart to despair of the mercy of God, to refuse to pray to Him, yea, rather to be ready to curse Him, and to think that all is lost and damnation sure. Such wicked thoughts deter an inexperienced heart from prayer and throw it into despondency.

This story is therefore of great value for us, and written on our account, so that we might know how to meet the enemy when he comes and says: "You are no Christian, your prayer is in vain. Mind not such insinuations, but answer boldly: I care not who I am. I know that I am a sinner, but I also know that Christ my Lord is holy, ever just and merciful. Therefore I will call unto Him without hesitation and think of nothing besides; I have no time to debate, whether I am one of the chosen or not. This much I know: I need help, and on that account I come, humbly seeking it.

If we are thus disposed in mind, we follow the example of our Gospel aright. The woman was a heathen, and, aware of that, she had to conclude that she did not belong to the chosen people; she swallows, however, contentedly this big and bitter morsel, still praying unto Christ with much earnestness. Go and do likewise; say: O Lord, here I come, in want of everything. Give me what I need through Thy Son, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Such a struggle of faith, and wonderful exhibition of its nature, is manifested in this heathen woman.

We are told that she cried out: "O Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." This was an humble and reverential appeal, full of earnestness and faith. She confesses in these words her faith in Christ as the Savior of the world, whom God has sent. She reminds Him of His office and relates to Him her sorrow: "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Christ heard her complaint, but answered not a word. This was the second rebuff for her, which was plainly intended to remind her that she was a Gentile and not entitled to a portion of the heritage of the people of God. She follows Christ with her request, but He is silent and pays no attention to her. Surely, a reception well calculated to shake the strongest confidence. Why should she not have thought: I was mistaken; He does not help, nor is He merciful unto all, as I supposed ? I see now that He hears but a favored few, and looks not to the existing misery of the suppliants coming to Him. But the poor woman is not yet hopeless of success. See what happened next.

The disciples, weary of her entreaties, are inclined to mercy sooner than Christ. They regard His behavior as harsh and relentless, wherefore they begin to interfere in behalf of the woman: O Lord, Thou seest how meekly and earnestly she supplicates Thee; hear her, and grant her prayer, else she will not desist from it. Indeed, a valuable example to show us how we ought to be instant in prayer.

Taulerus in his writings remarks that we should desist from our prayer. By this he means that when we have prayed often and earnestly we may, for a time, leave off with our petitions, having full faith however that God has heard our prayer and will in the proper season grant it. But it would certainly be wrong to teach people to refrain from prayer; this neglect comes of itself too soon and too often. This example also instructs us not to leave off with our prayer, but to continue in it, without considering whether we are good or bad, deserving or not. We need help and cannot postpone our petition. Every obstacle thrown in the way of our supplication should only prove an incentive to a still more earnest and incessant continuance in it.

Now comes the third trial for the woman, when Christ says: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." With these words He also rebukes the disciples; for He will neither hear them nor the woman. She might now have thought: He is indeed inexorable, and listens neither to those in want nor to those who intercede in their behalf. And, in fact, we nowhere else find Christ resisting so persistently as here. But the woman is not dismayed; she clings to Him with pertinacity, and is not checked in her prayer even by this third repulse.

When her clamor and the intercession of others seem to be of no avail, she even comes into the house, as St. Mark relates. An impudent woman, forsooth! She runs after Christ in the streets with her cry, and when He enters the house to escape her notice, she follows Him and casts herself at His feet. But all this is written for our instruction and consolation, that we should know that Christ

is well pleased with such obstinate persistence in prayer.

Still, the Lord is not yet ready to yield, as she desires. He answers the woman: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." If Christ had spoken such words to me, I would have turned and left Him, thinking it useless to ask Him any more, since He seems determined not to grant the request. For, indeed, it was a most severe saying, and enough to crush the poor woman. He tells her that she is a heathen and therefore no heir, and then in addition calls her a dog. This is worse than if He had simply called her a heathen, and is equivalent to the declaration: Thou art a child of the devil in every respect; begone, I will have nothing to do with thee. Indeed, a most appalling trial! If St. Peter or St. Paul spake such a word to me, I would be frightened to death. What can it mean, that Christ Himself thus speaks to the woman?

Just here we notice the beauty and excellence of this example; for we learn from it the mighty strength of faith. Faith takes hold of Christ's words, even when they sound harshly, and changes them into soothing expressions of consolation. The woman replies to this harsh saying: Thou callest me a dog; I will not gainsay it; take me as a dog, and treat me as one, if it so pleases Thee. Give the bread to the children, and seat them at the table; I ask no such favor; only permit me to pick up under the table the crumbs which the children have dropped, and which they do not miss, and I will be content. She thus overcomes Christ with His own words, and by accepting the position of a dog she obtains the privileges of a child. What can He now see, the merciful, compassionate Jesus? Forced by His own words, He yields. O, that we would force Him in a similar way; He is ever willing that it should be done!

This most glorious and peculiar struggle of faith is narrated to us that it might be a bright example for all. Never should we turn from the Lord, though He calls us dogs or heathens. Dogs must have masters and food, and the heathens must have a God.

The Lord is overcome by this untiring supplication and unwavering faith. He answers: O woman, all these refusals and rebuffs thou hast successfully sustained and repelled; it shall now be unto thee as thou desirest. Christ is Himself astonished at this example of faith. He had seen how easily the Jews were offended, when He told them they must partake of His flesh; but this woman, in her faith, clings to the hope that He is the Savior and Helper, in whom she firmly trusts.

Here we find the reason why Christ assumed the appearance of harshness towards the woman. His repulsive treatment of her did not proceed from an unfriendly disposition towards the Gentiles, but it was His purpose to test and make manifest the faith of this woman, so that the Jews, who were the children of His kingdom, might learn from her, a heathen, how to believe in Him, and what confidence they should have in Him. He is so well pleased with the whole conduct of the woman that He can no longer withhold His mercy and kindness, but tells her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." She asked but the favors extended to dogs; He gives her much more. He not only cures her daughter, but offers to grant unto her whatever she may ask, and thus ranks her among the seed of Abraham. Her faith is the source of all her blessings; through faith she is no more a dog or a heathen, but a holy woman and a beloved child. Such example teaches us that we should continue steadfast in our supplication, though God may for a long time defer His acquiescence in our demands, firmly believing that at the proper time, and in the proper manner, He will pronounce His yea to our prayer. All that is required is not to become weary nor hopeless in our petitions, but to trust faithfully in Him and His providence. Other examples teach us the same lesson. Joseph continued in his prayer to God for help thirteen entire years; yet, the more he prayed the worse his condition seemed to become. Christians have the same experience in our times. They come unto God with their prayer for assistance, yet, after a long time has elapsed, there is still no change for the better. On the contrary, they experience with Joseph that affairs become worse and worse. If Joseph had obtained an immediate response to his

prayer, Jacob his father would have been saved much anxiety, but Joseph himself would have remained a simple shepherd. By the long continued delay of the fulfillment of Joseph's prayer it came to pass that God made him ruler over all Egypt, so that he became a great blessing, not only during the seven years of famine, but also in the government of the State and the Church. Egypt and the surrounding countries were thus benefited.

God pursues the same course with us. He may for a long time refuse to hear our prayer, or may answer with a nay; but if we faithfully persist in our request He will finally drop the no and make it yes. His word cannot lie: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

Our reason cannot understand such a delay and is offended at it; it expects an immediate fulfillment of the request. But it is wrong to be thus offended. We must not be dismayed if God answers not according to our wishes, even if one year, or two or three years pass by ere they are fulfilled. Above all things we must see to it that hope and faith in His promises are not lost from our hearts; in the end He gives us much more than we had ever dared to ask. This was the experience of the woman; yea, if she had asked for still more than she did, He would also in the end have granted it.

God teaches us that it is not well, at all times, immediately to grant us our request. He does this in times of imminent peril. If we fall into the water, or are in battle, He does not tarry with His help, but straightway comes to our relief. But wherever a delay is practicable, it is the will of God that we should learn to wait and to exercise our faith in prayer, as the prophet Habakkuk says: "Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Thus the Lord tarrys at the present day, and permits [unbelievers] to rage against us. We cry unto Him and lament, but He heeds not our prayer and permits us to be down-trodden as though we had no God. But it will not always be thus. Let us therefore entertain no doubts; Christ our Lord, and God His Father in heaven, mean to say yes to

our prayer in the end. This we believe most assuredly, in spite of all delay and the devil's maliciousness.

God will surely be merciful unto His Church, and rescue her from her enemies when she crieth unto Him. He has already determined upon this, for He says: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Why then should we doubt or fear? We ought firmly to believe that God will answer our prayer favorably, in spite of our unworthiness, if we but faithfully continue to implore Him.

Thus we see that this narrative presents a most excellent example of true faith, how it must be applied and how it will finally triumph over all adversities. The woman does not permit even

Christ Himself to deprive her of the belief that He would hear and help her.

This occurrence is also a source of great consolation to us when we are disturbed by the thought of our wickedness and unworthiness, which indeed will trouble us during our whole life, often to the detriment of our faith. If Christ had looked more upon unworthiness and merit than upon the great misery of the woman, He would not have helped her; but His compassion prompted Him to afford relief. He will be merciful and ready to help us if we but come unto Him with our sorrows, and trust in Him with a believing heart. May God in mercy strengthen us, that we may be able to do this,—that we may depend entirely upon His word and promises, and thus through faith in Christ be saved for evermore! Amen.

