

Second Sunday of Lent
Matthew 15:21-28

Why does God not answer when we cry out to Him? Why does He not answer our prayers?

We probably understand, most of us, that we cannot have every little thing we want in life. But when we bring before God that which really matters, what we really need to live, and be happy in life - how can He not answer? When we see those things approaching and actually appearing which cannot but destroy life completely for us, or for someone we care about, and we cry out to Him who has promised that He will hear - why does He remain silent?

Certainly it was no trivial matter the Canaanite woman brought to our Lord Jesus. *Have mercy upon me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon!* And yet, as we hear it, *He did not answer her a word.*

The way our Lord Jesus comes off in what we hear today, it really does not correspond to the way we have learnt to think of Him, does it? We have been taught to see Him as accepting of all, embracing all, asking nothing, demanding nothing, correcting no one; whereas in what we hear today, He comes off as uncaring, unloving, untouched at the agony of a desperate mother and her child.

All the more unsettling must it be to us, the attitude we observe with our Lord Jesus in what we hear today toward the Canaanite woman, because we know how easily He could have done for her as she desired. Had we not heard so often what we hear today, we would have expected that He would do so right away, would it not? For we have heard so often that that was what He would usually do.

Even the disciples were disturbed; although it seems they were more disturbed by having a heathen woman disturbing them than they were by the apparent unloving attitude of our Lord Jesus. They did not care about her much more than He seemed to: *Send her away, they said, for she keeps shouting at us.* It seems that they were completely in tune with His sentiment when He did answer: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Many are disturbed today by the unloving attitude of the Church, or at least that of some Pastors. How can they not understand the agony of being told that the way you live is not good and right and pleasing to God, that you cannot have a wedding in Church, or be allowed to commune without repenting, without changing your ways?

How can they not understand that some of those who want to live in a manner different than what Holy Scripture teaches as good and right *really* want to live that way, and will not be happy if they have to change their ways? Why can those who want to have sexual relations outside of marriage not be allowed to do so, or those who want to have sexual relations with someone of their own sex, without rebuke? Why do we as His Church not just give the world what it wants, so that it will leave us alone and not cause problems for us; or better yet, so that those who will not be Christian, and will not live a Christian life, will nevertheless, perhaps, want to be part of our congregation and add to our numbers, and, more importantly, to our finances?

The answer to this is that God cares more than we do about those who have gone off from His ways, and those who have never come to know His ways; and therefore He commands His Church and His Christians to care, also. Therefore was it that at first He did not answer the Canaanite woman a word. Therefore is it, also, that He so often does not answer us when we cry out to Him, even about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life: because He has more to answer than we really want to hear; and this is because He has more to give than what we ask.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel!, our Lord Jesus said when the disciples asked Him to get rid of the heathen woman who was shouting at them. Well, actually, she was shouting at *Him*; but to them it seemed that she was shouting at *them*, and that was what bothered them the most.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel! It might be that we share the sentiment; still, it seems to us that we would be better off, as a church, if we were more accommodating to those who do not know the Word and will of God the way we do; *if we know*, that is. In fact, it might seem to us that the reputation of the Church depends upon it, and the continued existence of our congregation.

And even if we do understand the sentiment, that *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel!*, still we do not understand that He so often does not answer *us* when we cry out to Him, even about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life. For we are not lost, are we? We are good Christians. We go to Church; perhaps we even do so often. And we believe in God. And we basically live good and decent and Christian lives. So why does not answer us? Why does He not do to us as we desire? Why does He not protect us, or those we care about, at least from all *real* harm and danger?

It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs!, our Lord Jesus said to the heathen woman who was crying out to Him. After all, He was only sent to the lost children of Israel. And to give to the heathens what God intended only for His own would be as to take the bread your children need and feed it to undeserving animals instead.

And she said: *Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.* In other words, she acknowledged that she was utterly undeserving of what she asked of Him.

And by acknowledging this, she showed herself to actually be a sheep of Israel. She showed herself to belong to the true people of God, the Church He makes Himself of those of all tribes and tongues and types, who seek their salvation in His goodness and mercy alone. She showed that she had taken the lesson to heart which He taught her, so as to acknowledge that anything He would give to her would be given out of His goodness and mercy, and for no other reason whatsoever.

She had learnt the lesson our Lord Jesus would teach her; she embraced the faith He wished to work in her; the faith which He Himself would work in all His lost and beloved children. *O woman, great is your faith!*, He said. *Be it done for you as you desire.*

This is the lesson He would have us learn, also. And that is why He so often does not answer us when we cry out to Him, even about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life; for He has more to give than what we ask.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel! We might understand that sentiment only too well. Obviously unbelievers are not entitled to that to which I am entitled, being that I am a good Christian, that I believe in God, and perhaps even go to Church. perhaps often, and try to lead a good and decent Christian life. But to me He should give what I need to live and be happy in life.

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel! Well, if we understand that sentiment only too well, we do not understand Him at all; then He has more to answer than what we really want to hear.

Our doubt and despair when He does not answer when we cry out to Him, even about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life, what that reveals is that we are indeed lost; or rather, that we would be, were He to deal with us according to our own goodness and godliness. It reveals our unbelief, that we do not trust Him to know what it is that really serves us well, nor to make all things well and do right in all things, in His own way.

It reveals our ungodliness, that we are not content to submit to His will and receive from His goodness whatever He will give to us; that we seek not *His* will, but rather our own. And it reveals our arrogance, that we are not aware that we are entitled to absolutely nothing from Him; that we have earned nothing with Him, nothing other than eternal death and damnation; that whatever good He does for me, *He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, as our Catechism says it, without any merit or worthiness in me.*

Our doubts and despair demonstrate that we are still subject to the oppression of the prince of demons; that his evil lie still holds sway in our hearts and minds, that we are alike to God in knowing good and evil. And from this oppression is it that He will deliver us, so that we might know in even greater fullness the truth about ourselves and our sins and shortcomings, our dependence upon His goodness and our need for His mercy, and, even more importantly, that we may see just how good He is, how great His goodness, all in order for us to be led into the faith, and preserved in the faith, and have life and salvation in Him.

Therefore is it that He so often does not answer us when we cry out to Him, even about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life; because He has so much more to give than what we ask, even when we cry out to Him about that which we really need to live, and be happy in life.

Therefore is it that He continues to speak that Word with which He has already answered; that Word which is His answer to all distress and danger, and even to death, of how the Son of God has suffered for us sinners, and died for us, under His own judgement of eternal death against all sins and shortcomings of ours, against evil and ungodliness and impurity in our hearts and minds, and in our lives.

He has Himself borne the fullness of sufferings and sorrows for us in order that we might be with Him for ever in His eternal life, where there shall be no more suffering, no more sorrow, where He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and fill all things with Himself and His goodness and His glory.

The Son of God has borne the fullness of suffering and sorrow to give us place with Him. And the Word which is His answer to all distress and danger is His promise that we have a place with Him who suffered and died in our place, in His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life. This Word He wants us to hear and believe, that we may not be lost to Him.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. *Amen.*