

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)

The theme of Epiphany: IX became man, showing God’s glory as the only begotten Son of the Father – full of grace and goodness. Now during Lent this becomes even more obvious, because our Lord IX shows us to what great lengths his love for us goes. He goes all the way – the entire distance. He suffers, is crucified and dies for us and our salvation. **He shows us God’s love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!**

This is God’s good story and you are part of it. You too have been saved by IX through Baptism. You know and love your saviour. You come to St.Paul to hear his gracious voice declaring peace, receiving his merciful forgiveness in various forms, because you trust, that God is rich in sharing out his abundant mercies through his manifold gospel in his means of grace, so that you will again depart in peace, go your way joyfully until that day comes, when he will finally carry you all the way home.

However it could be, that you came today, because you are in trouble, perhaps even suffering terribly. Well, then this gospel is especially for you, because it illustrates the healing and liberating mission of our Lord perfectly. We heard of this Canaanite woman, a mother, who loves her daughter dearly and would have her enjoy God’s richest blessings and graces more than anything. Just like the parents of Lindsey Vonn or all those other Olympians. They would want the very best for their children. Not necessarily win a gold medal, but be healthy, happy and enjoy this God given life. It’s natural for mothers and fathers, isn’t it? If their kids suffer, they suffer. Just ask the parents of those hurt kids in Florida. They surely know, what it means to suffer terribly.

The mother in today’s story is like that. She’s going through deep waters. Her daughter is severely troubled. She’s in the power of a godless demon. That’s bad news. Seriously. That’s about as bad as it gets – worse than any illness or shortage we may suffer. It says: “She suffers terribly” – and that’s probably putting it mildly and very abbreviated. All the mother can do is call out: ***Kyrie eleison! Lord – have mercy.*** Just as we do at the start of every divine service. Lord have mercy on us poor, miserable sinners – caught up in all sorts of nasty nets and hurting bonds and snares.

But here's a snag. There normally is, because we're no longer in paradise. People outside of paradise are troubled and accosted by sin, suffering from its consequences even if they're Christian and no longer captive to it. People outside of paradise don't have a right for happiness and flourishing success anymore. They're in a situation – and that's because they're suffering the consequences of original sin, no longer automatically at peace with God, but rather in constant rebellion against God's holy will and trying to get by as if there is no God. Here in our gospel this sinful snag is that she is a Canaanite woman. She's not part of God's people – at least if you follow the letter of the law. She's from the pagan world outside and beyond the godly borders, outside the holy confines of God's loving focus, which has marketed a inside and outside. At least for now! The time being – there in Israel 2000 years ago. We know IX came to change all that and bring us all back home – Jews and gentiles!

That goodwill of God, who wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth shone through here and there even in the OT. And that Canaanite woman probably knew as we very well know, that pagans come running anyway and throughout the ages! Back to Papa! Because they know of home, sweet home. Again and again there are those, who hear, believe and trust that our salvation comes from the God in Israel and from the holy of holies right there in Jerusalem. The wise men from the east are a telling example, camels from Saba and princes from afar of how this multiplies in the NT age, but it was so from the start. Think of **Naaman, that Syrian**, who comes to get healed from leprosy, or the **city of Nineveh**, which comes to repentance after the preaching of Jona; that widow of Sarepta, the mother of first bitterness then happiness - Ruth, the prostitute Rahaab and all the rest of these OT saints from outside the natural bloodline of Abraham, but akin to his faith and trusting in the coming Messiah, the promised saviour. I think, that's what this Canaanite woman had heard and why she comes running to Jesus too. Striving from outside to the inside. Motivated by the Holy Spirit himself. For it is He, who calls, leads, brings and keeps us with Jesus Christ in true faith. That's why she peppers him with her pleas and prayers: **Lord, help me!**

But Jesus doesn't answer her one word. That's just bad news. No gospel in that. Worst case scenario. If God doesn't answer, doesn't hear our prayers, hides his face, doesn't talk, withholds his gracious presence – then we are lost, left to our own demise, out in the sticks,

dark shadows of death, calamity and despair, gnashing of teeth, great pain and suffering. Paradise lost! Hopeless. Many holy saints have gone through this. Most prophets and godly kings like David had to go through this kind of school and experience. Remember Elijah, Job, Jeremiah – suffering loss, rejection and persecution innocently leading up to that suffering servant in Isaiah 52-53, which sounds like a description of IX passion. He the one, who suffered vicariously for us, patiently like a lamb led to the slaughter, obedient unto death and dying on the cross, crying out with Psalm 22: “O Lord my God, why hast thou forsaken me!” Doing that all for us and our salvation!

This Samaritan woman goes through this dark vale and cheerless course. Alone with her terrible suffering, helpless, hopeless and nobody cares. Even the disciples just want to get rid of her. What is she to us? This outsider, this foreigner, this godless heathen. Out and gone with her. Yet, she doesn't relent, but continues: **Lord have mercy!** How long will you hide your face from me? Remember your promises from of old: Call upon me in times of trouble and I will hear you and you shall praise me! (Ps.51,15) Knock and it will be opened. Ask and it will be given. Remember, who you are? You are the saviour of the world – not just of these few disciples, this handful of apostles, this remnant of Israel, but of all people, nations, languages and tribes. **Nobody is put to shame, who puts his trust in you!** Isn't that how your psalms teach us all to pray? See, how she argues and struggles with God – using his own word against him.

Oh, but Jesus is not done with her yet. He seemingly pushes her down further away still, bullying her deeper down into the dumps: It's not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs! Ouch! That's not just tough toffee, hard to chew, more like a stick to whip her with. This would have gotten him expelled from any public forum. Calling a woman, who is suffering terribly – a dog! That's bad. That's way beyond the boundaries of common decency and basic respect. Still, Jesus is Lord. He calls the shots and sets what is right, meet and salutary. He does what it takes. He draws the lines as they are and describes the harsh realities of our lives outside of paradise. Doesn't sugar-coat anything. Due to our fall into sin, because we turned our backs onto God, we've gone to the dogs – like Lazarus. Or the pigs and swine as in the case of the lost son. IX makes it clear, that it's only by grace and mercy, that people get back to the father and home, sweet home. God grants saving faith – where and when it pleases him

in those, who hear his word. We've got not right to demand it. We've got no way to create this for ourselves. We got no means to force our way in. It all depends on his grace, goodwill and mercy. Thank God in IX he has shown us the door, the way, the truth and the light!

So, the woman in terrible suffering is not put off. She does not argue with IX, her Lord and God. She acknowledges his judgement, "Who am I to argue with God?". She agrees to all of it, accepts it and goes on: "**And yet, and yet ... the dogs also eat from the scraps that fall from the Lord's table!**" Wow. Amazing. What courage, trust, creativity and super response of a living faith! Truthfully, that's the work of the HS. This kind of faith is not humanly possible, yet with God all things are possible. And the HS moves this woman to not give up, but keep trusting faith and she confesses fittingly: Lord, of course, you are right. Of course, you are not compelled whatsoever to help me, but remember your abundant goodness, remember your table is set with good things and your cup of salvation overflows with abundant mercy. I am perfectly content with but a few scraps from your opulent wedding feast, a few drops of your healing blood. **Just speak one word and your servant will be healed!** For you are the one, who feeds 5k with just a few buns and fish, you change water into the best wine for a magnificent nuptial celebration, you heal blind, lame, deaf and dumb as if it's the most natural thing to do and have proved mastery over the devils, evil spirits and all the demonic forces and satanic ilk. For you it will be just so easy to have mercy on me and help me. Lord, please take note of me and my daughter not for our righteousness sake, but because of your overwhelming goodness, mercy and love. We don't deserve to ask, but help because you are who you are – lord and saviour, good shepherd, light in the dark, true Physician, liberator and benefactor, protector of the poor, homeless, foreigners, widows and orphans, Immanuel, Lord of hosts, very God of very God – one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. You only are our help and refuge in present trouble!

Jesus relents at last, praises her trusting faith, acknowledges her tenacity and delivers her from the great suffering, helps and liberates her with a simple sentence: "**Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.**" And her daughter was healed at that moment. Oh, how blest it is to know: Jesus sinners does receive! He hears our prayers even as we cry: **Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy.** He hears us – not just by chance, but of course. Amen.