

## 17th Sunday After Pentecost

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David” (Matthew 15:22)

Dear brothers and sisters, the Canaanite woman mentioned in today's Holy Gospel was a pagan, and her daughter was seriously ill. But, as we see, she did not turn to the pagan gods as did her countrymen, but came to Jesus Christ because she had heard about His miracles. She approached with great faith and firm hope, begging Him to have mercy on her motherly grief, so that she would not have to watch her daughter suffer. Yet the Lord did not immediately listen to her prayer. Nonetheless, the Canaanite woman persisted with great patience. She kept calling out and did not depart from his presence. Finally, eager to be rid of this nuisance, the disciples asked Him to listen to the prayers of this grieving mother. After a rather severe test, the Savior praised her with the words, “‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed from that hour” (Mt 15:28).

At that time period, there were certain national characteristics that affected the relations of the Jews with the Canaanites. These two peoples had been at war with each other for centuries. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the inhabitants of the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon were “our universally recognized worst enemies.” Therefore, the Jews saw in the Canaanite woman a representative of a hostile nation. The religious practices of the Canaanites, as well as the Phoenicians who lived in the lands of Tyre and Sidon, were considered barbaric even among pagan peoples. When Alexander the Great laid siege to the Phoenician cities, the locals sacrificed children, beseeching their gods for military victory. It must have seemed strange to the Jews of that time that in a country where children were burned alive as sacrifices that a woman would beg for the healing of her daughter.

But let's look at our own prayer. Is it similar to the prayer of the Canaanite woman? How many times do we pray inattentively at home and in the Church, without even thinking about what we are asking for. With our mouths we whisper a prayer, but our thoughts are somewhere else. Let us remember that the Lord does not hear prayer from the mouth, but from the heart.

In Ukraine, we tell of a mother who had a son who became not only a doctor but a famous surgeon. Although he had been brought up in the Christian faith as a child, he later lost his faith and apostatized from the Church. His mother prayed incessantly for many years for his conversion, but it seemed that these prayers were in vain. But it so happened that she became seriously ill and had to undergo surgery. Her own son operated. During the operation, he saw that he could not save his mother's life, but noticed that his mother, even though under anesthesia, was whispering something. He listened intently to her words, from which he

understood that she was praying and sacrificing her life to God for the conversion of her son.

Tears welled up in his eyes, and a strange change took place in his heart. God's grace was working in him—and he himself began to pray, begging God that his mother would come to her senses for a moment and that he could tell her that the Lord had heard her prayer.

A miracle happened: the mother opened her eyes, looked into her son's own teary eyes and heard his words in full consciousness: "Mother, I believe, I believe in God as you taught me." A slight smile appeared on the mother's lips and soft words: "May God bless you, my son. Now I can die in the hope that we will see each other again." And so she passed away. And the son became a believer and practicing Christian. But this had taken a lot of time; it had taken the long prayer of a good mother, so that only at death did her prayer bear a hundredfold fruit.

Very often we are convinced that after each long prayer, sooner or later, Christ's words are fulfilled: "Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Mt 7: 7). Such constant, persistent prayer is the requirement of daily life and the guarantee of success. It is the guarantee of our salvation according to the words of Christ: "Whoever endures to the end will be saved" (Mt 10:22).

One father came to the priest for advice and immediately launched into a long complaint that his son was disobedient and unwilling to study. The priest asked the father, "Tell me, how exactly have you tried to get him to reform?" The grieving father replied: "What haven't I done? I locked him in the basement, didn't let him eat, even beat him. But nothing has helped." Then the priest asked, "Tell me, how did you try to teach him to pray? Do you pray with him?" The father waved his hands and signaled no. Then the priest replied, "My good man, it seems that you have worked only on his body, not on his soul. From now on I advise you to pray with him." The priest's advice soon proved its merit, and this son reformed and grew up to be a worthy man.

The story of Jesus' healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter reminds us that God is generous in His gifts and always gives us more than we ask of Him—if we place all our hope in Him and trust in His will. The woman's triple conversion to Jesus is the path of her threefold spiritual growth: strengthening faith, affirming hope, and inflaming love for God. This spiritual growth does not happen in one moment. Jesus leads each person to Him gradually, in accordance with each person's openness to God.

Dear believers, today we witness how the Lord rewarded a Canaanite woman for her sincere, humble, enduring prayer. May our prayer be like her prayer, and in all things let us place our hope in God's mercy.