



My Beloved Ones,

This week, we experience a kind of foretaste of Triodion. Though this three-week preparatory period for Great Lent does not truly begin until next Sunday, this week's commemoration of the Canaanite Woman helps to reflect upon the strength and persistence that we will need to journey through the 40 days of Lent.

We read in the Gospel of Matthew of a Pagan woman from the land of Canaan, whose distress at her daughter's demonic possession is so great that she cries aloud to the Lord, "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David...*" (Matthew 15:22) Though we might not understand it now, Jesus is travelling through the pagan region of Tyre & Sidon. As observant Jews, it makes sense that the Disciples would be uncomfortable—and now a pagan woman is shouting at them.

It is for this reason, they tell the Lord, "*Send her away, for she is crying after us.*" (Matthew 15:23) If their treatment seems cruel remember that the people still held that the Messiah was to restore Israel, not to concern Himself with Pagans. Jesus sees their mistake, but he knows he must prove to them why they are wrong. He does this, by testing the woman. He explains that He was sent only to the House of Israel—yet still she begs more. And so, he says to her, as a Jew would to a Pagan, "*It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*" (Matthew 15:26) Christ says this, not because He believes it to be true, but because He knows the sin of pride that dwells in His Disciples' hearts: they believe they are God's children, and that she is a dog.

Most people, were they in her position, would become angry, or turn away in sorrow. Yet so great is her love for her daughter, and her belief in Christ, that she instead humbles herself. "*Yes, Lord,*" she says, "*yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.*" (Matthew 15:27) She demonstrates that despite terrible trials and pain, the only necessary thing is to hold fast to our Lord as a source of comfort and strength. Even when we think our brought to a lowest point, we cannot turn away from God, but we must instead approach Him with renewed prayer.

Truly, as Orthodox Christians, we approach the Triodion & Great Lent as a time when we choose to voluntarily struggle with our own passions. The truest way that we will be to overcome them, is to keep our eyes focused, not on what others do or say (like the whispers of the Disciples), but on God. Only then will we be worthy to hear as the woman did before her daughter was healed, "*...great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.*" (Matthew 15:28)

**+ALEXIOS**  
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