

Children learn early on exactly how to gain approval from others, even from the family pet. A surreptitiously executed hand off of a scrap of meat under the dining room table, I quickly discovered, worked wonders for my relationship with our family dog, Sonya. I desperately wanted to be her favorite and perhaps unwittingly at first, I discovered a way. It wasn't just dinner, she like to share lollipops with me to, taking turns licking the candy. Please do not ask- I can neither explain nor defend my actions!

As she grew along with me, I soon learned that such behavior was not appropriate, and yet I still smiled when she would sneak under the table, conveniently parking herself by my feet. Today's Gospel has a most unusual image, that of a Canaanite woman in effect comparing herself to a pet, a little household dog (puppy really) who at least is able to eat scraps that fall from the table.

Essentially, the image here refers to the salvific plan of God in which the food of Divine Revelation is shared first with the Jews, and only later with the Gentiles. Jesus first refers to the Jews as lost sheep, and the use of such animal imagery was common. Church teaching has been clear on this point: "The Jewish faith...is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant...for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."¹ God remains faithful to our ancestors in faith, the Jewish people who were "the first to hear the Word of God."²

The Canaanites dominated the Near East beginning 4000 years ago, building cities in what is present day Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and even Syria. Tyre and Sidon are familiar biblical Canaanite towns.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph # 839

² See *Roman Missal*, Good Friday 13: General Intercessions, # VI.

In today's Gospel Jesus seemed to limit his mission to Israel alone: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In a 2006 General Audience, Pope Benedict XVI addressed this passage and tried to expand upon its significance. The words of Jesus...:

"...should be understood in the light of his special relationship with Israel, the community of the Covenant, in continuity with the history of salvation...the initial restriction to Israel of his mission and of the Twelve thus becomes an even more effective prophetic sign. After Christ's passion and Resurrection, this sign was to be made clear: the universal character of the Apostles' mission was to become explicit.³

In our second reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul tells the people of Rome that the call of God to them is irrevocable. God is not going to reverse His call, nor are the gifts of God being re-called. There are times in which we must make a final decision, from which there is no turning back. When you hit the send button on the computer, there is a sense of finality about it.

Persistence. Perseverance, stick-to-it-ness. These are lessons of today's Gospel. How quickly people tend to give up. If a kid sits on the bench, he'll quit. A grade of "B" stands for "Bad" in too many student's minds, when it is above average.

You will notice however that Jesus did not directly commend the woman for perseverance. Instead he said, "O woman, great is your faith. Let it be done for you as you wish." He commended a higher virtue. Where the apostles saw nagging, he saw supernatural faith.

We must steadfastly remain committed to what we know to be good and right. What is worth steadfastly holding on to today? First, the family dinner table. Do not give in too easily to eating on the run.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience of 22 March 2006

Engaging one another in conversation is priceless; protecting that daily check-in time with the children and teenagers.

Secondly, Sunday as a day of worship, rest and relaxation. Being protective and persistent in protecting the Lord's Day will yield great dividends. It is not a day like other days. For families with school age kids, what about a "No TV on School Nights" rule? Is that considered too old-fashioned? I hope not. Set times for study foster good habits, discipline and the realization that we all have expectations to which we must attend.

The Canaanite woman in today's Gospel exhibited tremendous discipline and persistence. She cries out, "Lord, help me," but when rebuffed by the apostles, continues in perseverance. She was always respectful and polite, and in the end her persistence finally won her a hearing. God's love will have no end; He is not taking back the offer because by His crucifixion, death and resurrection, he has won for us our redemption, paving the way for our salvation.

God's love is definitive, all encompassing, and He is not pulling back that love. We may pull away, but He will not. He offers His love freely to all; we must accept it in our hearts and live this call by an active life of faith and trust in God. I close with these words from Psalm 117: *O Praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim Him, all you peoples. Strong is His love for us, He is faithful forever. Alleluia*