

HOW BLESSED AM I!

I cannot express with words the gratitude to God and to you for the kindness and compassion you have shown me since the sudden death of my brother Tim. You have no idea what it means to me and my family to be surrounded by such care and to know we are buoyed up by your prayers for us and Tim, which we know God hears. How blessed I am to be at this parish.

THERE ARE NO SCRAPS AT GOD'S TABLE

Today's gospel (Mt. 15: 21-28) leaves every hearer answering the question "Did Jesus really say that?" in response to his reference of the Canaanite woman's request that he heal her non-Jewish daughter's demonic torment. "It is not right to take the food of the children and feed it to the dogs." (Jesus' PR people probably had a stroke when he said that.) Scholars are all over the place on this passage.

Some see the event as Jesus moving from understanding his ministry from being just for the Jewish people and for all people. In Matthew's gospel, at least to this point, Jesus has been preaching to the Jews alone. However, that does not mean that he does not see his mission excluding Gentiles. In fact, in Mt 8: 5-13, Jesus heals the child of a Roman centurion who certainly was not a Jew. I am not sure that one can say this is where Jesus' understanding of whom he is saving is expanded.

Other scholars maintain that Jesus, sharing in our humanity in all things but sin, may have had certain bigoted attitudes, and so the comment that the Canaanite woman being equivalent to a dog was a manifestation of this bigotry. The problem with this theory is that Jesus had laid down the Golden Rule and the greatest commandment and the explanation of our neighbor being not the person who is like us, but rather the person in need in the story of the Good Samaritan with the hero of that parable being a non-Jew assisting a Jew, no

less. The problem with the two opinions mentioned above is that they only hold together if you look at the story in isolation from the rest of Matthew's gospel, as well as those of Mark, Luke and John. Each of the Gospels were written after the earthly life of Jesus, and the authors clearly write with the whole picture of Jesus in mind.

The position of a number of scholars is that Jesus speaks precisely this way to draw the attention of the disciples who could easily be bigoted, as shown by their desire for Jesus to get rid of her. Maybe they were threatened by her presence in their midst. Jesus uses this encounter so that the woman's persistent faith is what matters, not what nationality or religion is on her driver's license. (Camel driver, that is!) Does not he who knows the human heart so well, know that a mother will not settle for the answer of *No* after the first failed attempt for her suffering daughter's request. The woman is not there to engage in theological discussion in defense of her worthiness, she is there to get this Man of God to heal her daughter, and she believes (and is right) that persistence will pay off. In short, Matthew uses the event to show that the work of salvation is for EVERYONE, not just a elite few. The "scrap" thrown to the "dog" is exactly the same as his healing power poured on all who will accept it. Grace is grace, period. There is no premium grace or economy grace; it is all 100% love of God in action in our lives.

The question we might ask ourselves is how we view others? Do we think that because we are Catholic we have first class seats and after we are cared for, then God will care of others? It is not how Christ sees the picture, and he sees it most clearly. Rather, Christ feeds and heals us so that we may be strengthened and nourished to bring the banquet of his love to the EVERYONE in the world. For Jesus, and therefore, for us, there are no dogs except those with four feet and a tail.