

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

Last week, in the gospel for Invocavit, we saw Christ wrestling and grappling with Satan and emerging victorious. We saw Christ as our example, our hope, and our champion in the battle with Satan. Today we are to ponder another struggle of the Christian life, not one against the forces of darkness, but against God himself.

For it is certainly true that God battles with His saints. It is often thought of that conversion, that is the Christian life is like a boat in a harbor after being caught in a storm while out at sea. That now the Christian is finally safe and needs not fear shipwreck. This is a dangerous deception and lie. Now the real battle begins!

Christ says “strive to enter through the narrow door” not meaning merely at conversion, but with the whole Christian life until death, this is the narrow way that we must strive for.

The Canaanite woman is the perfect example of this. For she in her faith is not afraid to wrestle and contend with God, she does not presume his mercy and grace based upon who she is, but upon who God is and holds him accountable to his word and promises.

How has she come to this great faith? She is one of two mentioned in the entire scriptures that Christ commends for having “great faith”. Simply put, she had heard the word of God. Although she lived in the midst of a pagan, heathen world. She is from the land of Tyre and Sidon, a place ripe with demonic worship and false Gods. And yet through the preaching of the prophets, she a gentile, was given faith in the promised Savior of the World, so that when the news of Christ comes to her she has no doubt that this Jesus is the promised Messiah.

One might think that Her difficulties are over. Here is the Christ! Here is her hope! Wouldn't we expect Christ to treat this woman tenderly and graciously? But what do we hear? We hear that now she has come to faith, and a heavy cross is laid upon her. Her daughter is tormented by a demon, and yet Christ comes to her as an adversary. To the one who calls out “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David” He does not come with grace and comfort but He does not answer her a word.

And when He finally does speak what does He say? It is not “your faith has healed you” or “a word of comfort but “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. See how he attacks her! How Christ attacks His own Christians. And again she says “Lord help me” and He crushes. “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” He not only refused the prayer but did it in such a way as to express nothing but wrath and contempt.

But do not lose heart. For Christ does not engage us in battle and struggle without cause and to harm us. He attacks us so that we might overcome Him. For the woman is indeed victorious. Through patience and humility, ardent prayer, and a faith that holds firmly to God's word despite its experience and the feelings of the heart, she overcomes Christ. She acknowledges the truth of His words when she says “yes, Lord”, she acknowledges that she is unworthy and does not deserve anything other than eternal death, she cannot claim the right of a child” but she also takes Christ at His word adding “Even the Dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table” acknowledging and recognizing He does not call her a child of the devil but a dog, and even the dog can expect from His master a scrap of grace and mercy.

And this is how Christ desires to be overcome by His Christians. He cries out “O woman, great is your faith!” As if to say I have been bested, and conquered let it be done for you as you desire.

If God wrestles with Christians through affliction, poverty, sickness, death of a loved one, disgrace, or any other tragedy do not think as the rest of the world does. Do not think “what have I done to deserve this? Why must I experience evil while others more wicked than I are happy?”

No, Christians patiently carry their cross and think it could be far worse, we deserve hell, and pray without ceasing and take refuge in God's word that “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline”¹ and “For those who love God all things work together for good”².

¹ Revelation 3:19

² Romans 8:28

And if things become worse instead of better do not give up praying. Seize the word of God and hold it before your eyes. “Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out”³.

By this you will conquer God, the temptation will be removed and the light of grace and joy once more is given. God desires to be conquered but He does not make it easy. He afflicts and wrestles with His Christians so that they might be drawn unto Him and cling with renewed strength to His Word and His promises.

Have we not experienced the same today? Have we at times like this Canaanite women implored with God, wrestled with God? And which of us has not come through victorious? Who among us has been conquered by God and left in despair? Maybe you are wrestling with Him now but know this, He desires your victory.

Sadly, many Christians think that because Christ is for us, because Christ preaches pure grace it is a restful and comfortable life. No, learn instead that it is a continual struggle, not only against sin, death, and the devil but against God himself. Whoever does not engage in this struggle every day makes Christianity into an empty pretense. It is a difficult thing that Christ says “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many will seek to enter and will not be able”.⁴ If many of those striving will not enter, what will happen to those who do not strive for it? To those who seek comfort and ease?

Grab hold of Christ. Like the Canaanite women hold him to your word. Fight like Isreal who wrestled with God and refused to let Him go unless He blessed him. Do not let the sweet enticing world rock you to sleep but struggle ever more fervently. You will not regret it. For when you leave the battlefield of this world behind you will hear your Lord say “You have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed”⁵. Enter into the joy of the Lord.

✠ In Jesus’ name. Amen. ✠

³ John 6:37

⁴ Luke 13:24

⁵ Genesis 32:28