

## Bishop's Reflection – 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday

When the Israelites took the land from the Canaanites in the days after their 440 years of Egyptian slavery, the Canaanites continued to live among the Israelites for over 1600 years. When the Israelites prospered, as in the days of King David and King Solomon, the Canaanites prospered, and when the Israelites experienced a downturn in their fortunes, the Canaanites suffered a proportional downturn. The Canaanites were like the proverbial household dogs underneath the Israelite dining room table, and the image enjoyed widespread recognition.

In a day and age when we are becoming more sensitive to race relationships, this same reference to dogs, when talking about people, may well be off-putting. Let's face it, many Christians object to the term "sheep", also referenced in today's Scripture. How dare Jesus use such a hurtful expression when referring to the woman. How dare he belittle an entire people.

We take offense, even when there was no offense taken. We stand aghast, when the Canaanite woman takes it all in stride and uses the same image to drive home her point. Whereas we may take offense at the slightest obstacle put into our spiritual path, she proves her faith in the God of Israel by her persistence in her supplication.

Scripture also tells us of the many times the Israelites were tempted away from following the One True God to worship the gods of the Canaanites and the surrounding nations. These were periods in their history when, not faithful to their true identity, they struggled and experienced great hardship. We, too, need to be clear on our role in the world. As Christians, we are called to be faithful to who we are as followers of Christ, functioning as leaven amidst the dough.

In a day and age when true faithfulness to one's faith tradition is not as highly valued as days gone-by, the world is in desperate need of an example. We might be surprised at the amount of people who expect it of us, even if they themselves are not quite there themselves. The fact that we are faithful to prayer, community life, charitable works and outreach to the various needs in our area and throughout the world, can serve as a blessing for others and for the world.

Countless are the blessings that have flowed from the gathering of Christians around God's altar. From the foundation of the first universities, public schooling and hospitals in Europe to countless spiritual consolations and beliefs that have seeped into the modern mindset. Countless, too, are the blessings that flow from the Mass and the many devotions, prayers and sacrifices, that flow from the Christian community's presence in the world. Many crumbs continue to fall from the table of the Lord, crumbs that are multiplied to feed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish.

Not everyone is ready to sit around the table of the Lord; many may not understand its true importance. But it is important that we do, that we believe in the power of prayer, the importance of the community coming together around the Lord, and the needs that are met each time we call upon the Lord. Only then will others, who are looking for somewhere to turn, like the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel, may be given the hope and the help that they need. "Be merciful on me, Lord... my daughter is tormented by a demon." "Be merciful to us, O Lord, (also) for our world is in need of healing. We come to you, not only on behalf of ourselves, but of our neighbours. Please listen to our prayer, and may the faith we profess, and the Mass we offer, become a blessing to the people of the world."