

PARISHES OF  
**ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH**  
**AND**  
**SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW**  
**WEEKLY REFLECTION**

**Sunday 12th April 2026 2nd Sunday after Easter**

**Err.... How can Jesus have said that? (7):**

***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel"***

St Matthew (15:22-28) [also Mark (7:24-30)] recounts an incident between Jesus and a Gentile woman. She begs Him to cast out a demon which possessed her daughter. His answer is: *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel"*. The woman persists and He answers: *"It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"*, to which the woman replies: *"....even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table."* At that point Jesus grants her wish and her daughter is healed.

The passage, although it has a good ending, appears to (i) challenge our understanding that Jesus came for all, Jews and Gentiles alike, and (ii) put into Jesus' mouth unpleasant words, comparing Gentiles to dogs.

The New Testament has a number of references to the Jews being the first people to whom Jesus' mission was aimed. An example is: *"These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles....but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'"* (Matthew 10: 5-6). The Jewish people are the historic chosen people of God, the guardians of the Old Testament. As a Jew Jesus comes first to His own people as Messiah and Saviour. As His ministry develops, it becomes apparent that it is for all: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19) and *"...Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus though the Gospel"* (Ephesians 3:6).

The context, that Jesus' ministry was first to be for the Jews, is important. The Canaanite woman herself understood and did not challenge this statement. She asked for His healing mercy and He gave it. Some interesting features may be noted. First, Canaanites were Israel's traditional enemies; the region was associated with Baal worship. Secondly, the woman refers to Jesus as *'Son of David'*, the Jewish Messianic title. She thus shows faith in that belief and that Jesus is the Messiah – Jesus' response is: *"O woman, great is your faith! Be it done as you desire."* Thirdly, Jesus had deliberately gone to non-Jewish territory (*"He withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon"*). Was He looking to break down traditional barriers, seeking faith among the pagans? He had previously healed the Gentile centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) saying: *"..not even in Israel have I found such faith."*

That still leaves the apparent harshness of Jesus referring to Gentiles as 'dogs'. Some argue that the term is a diminutive, like a reference to a pet dog. In any event, it is hardly a compliment. The term was seemingly one commonly used at the time by Jews of Gentiles. Two points may be made. First, the language would have been familiar to the woman and may not have sounded as severe to her as it does to our modern ear; she did not appear surprised or put off by it. Secondly, Jesus may have been testing her faith. As one commentator writes: *"He cannot be understood as intending to justify or sanction the use of such terms.... He meant to try her faith. As if he had said, "You are a Gentile; I am a Jew. The Jews call themselves children of God. You they vilify and abuse, calling you a dog. Are you willing to receive of a Jew, then, a favour?"* Is a possible further alternative that it was banter in which both joined with a smile on their faces?

Stephen S.