



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA
PARISH OF ST. VASILIOS, BRUNSWICK, VICTORIA

SUNDAY
29 JANUARY 2017
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PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 29 JANUARY—4 FEBRUARY 2017

SUNDAY 29 JANUARY	17th Sunday of Matthew, Matt. 15: 21-28 • 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
MONDAY 30 JANUARY <i>Synaxis of the Three Hierarchs</i>	• 7.00 am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY <i>The Meeting of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ</i>	• 7.00 am Orthros and Divine Liturgy



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WORDS FROM THE CHURCH FATHERS

Consistently pray in all things, so that you might not do anything without the help of God ... Whoever does or busies himself with anything without prayer does not succeed in the end. Concerning this, the Lord said: "Without Me you can't do anything".

(John 15:5)

- St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 2.94, 166

Give your intentions in prayer to God, Who knows everyone, even before our birth. And do not ask that everything will be according to your will, because a man does not know what is profitable for him. But say to God: Let Thy will be done!

For He does everything for our benefit.

- St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 47

Fr. Athanasios
and
Fr. Ephraim

are available
at the Church

every Monday to Friday
between
4.00 and 6.00pm

for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

THE CHILDREN'S WORD Presvytera Alexandra Houck, myocn.net

Have you ever wanted something so much that you asked your parents for it again and again? Maybe it was a toy for Christmas or for your birthday. Maybe it was just a special meal or a treat. When we really want something, it's hard to give up when somebody tells us "no."

In today's Gospel reading, we hear the story of the woman who was asking Jesus to heal her sick daughter. This woman was from Canaan, so she probably was a pagan (she believed in false gods). Also the Canaanite people had been enemies of the Jews for a long, long time. So when she came to Jesus asking Him for help, His disciples told her to go away. Jesus even told her "no" at first.

But this woman really wanted something. She wanted her daughter to be well! So it was hard for her to give up. Even though she didn't worship the God of the Jewish people, she knew Jesus could heal her daughter. Jesus told her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you want." Our Lord healed the daughter right away. He knew she believed. He knew she had strong faith. And He knew she was an example for us all!

SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

At the heart of prayer is persistence. Today's Gospel passage (Matthew 15:21-28) illustrates the extent to which a person will go to secure what he/she needs from a beneficent, all-loving God. Jesus has withdrawn to a distant land (the only instance in the Gospels where he is outside Jewish territory) just prior to the epic of His passion and death. He is approached by a Canaanite woman whose ethnic background is repulsive to a faithful Jew. Furthermore, she makes a request of the stranger that He deliver her daughter from demonic possession. The daughter is broken. The mother seems desperate. The Apostles are annoyed at the woman's insistence. At first blush, Jesus appears indifferent and seemingly ignores her. But the rest of the story needs telling.

That Jesus was moved with compassion for this troubled woman there is no doubt. There were, however, obstacles. She was Gentile and a Canaanite (Phoenician). The Lord proclaims that He has been sent to the children of *Israel* and it is unseemly to take the children's bread and throw it "to the dogs." The needy woman was not at all deterred by the Lord's apparent harshness: "...but even the dogs get their share of the crumbs which fall from the master's table." This was enough for the Lord. It was an implicit act of faith. It was an assent to His perceived power as a healer and sovereign over nature. The passage does not tell us that the woman converted to Judaism. It simply reveals that the personal power emanating from the Christ of God was enough to move her heart to submission. What began as a conversation between strangers and sworn rivals, where she addressed Jesus as *Son of David*, ended in an exchange of tender hearts wherein she addressed Him as *Lord*.

One of the seminal lessons in the passage from St. Matthew is the *indomitable persistence* of this mother. Her daughter's soul is at stake. The power of evil has captured her and stubbornly will not relent. Imagine this frantic mother – faced with the impending and painful loss of her child. Nothing can stop her in her quest to bring wholeness to her child and to snatch her offspring from the destructive power of the prince of darkness. It was that single-mindedness, that exclusive focus that drove her to seek out the rabbi from Israel. He, perhaps, was her last and only chance.

What does this mean for us? Most likely we don't always get it right when we pray; thus Jesus' instruction to be persistent in praying—keep asking, don't stop searching, continue with your knocking. In fact, ultimately what is most important for us is not necessarily that we receive what we ask for or find what we search for or walk through the door we're knocking on. No. Rather, what is ultimately most important is that we, like the frantic mother, discover an intimacy with the Lord by persisting in our prayer.

We come to realize that it's about relationship with Christ and basking in and valuing that relationship more than everything or everyone in the world. Prayer is being known by and knowing our God of love as our Father, our Messiah and our Holy Spirit. In the intimacy of prayer, we not only commune with God the Creator of the universe; we also bear our deepest secrets to Jesus our most Trustworthy Friend and Brother; and we are graced with the presence of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and reassures us of the promise that we are forgiven. With this gift of intimacy with God through persistent prayer God sometimes gives us the spiritual hug we need when we're lonely or rejected; or the state of joy by simply being alive; or the courage required to face a situation of conflict at home, on the job, or in school. Another way of stating it is that through the gift of intimacy with God; we come to see our wealth is not in what we do not have; rather, it is in what we already have been given.

Never stop praying! God has made the first move towards us in unbridled love. He is there, in our hearts, waiting for us to go after Him, to chase Him, to seek him out, to pursue Him as one pursues a lover. It is there that words mean little. It is in that place that our needs take second place. *What is important in being persistent with the Lord is the persistence itself.* The frantic mother kept after Christ. She ignored the disciples' advice to leave Jesus alone, to leave them alone. Her persistence became her act of belief in the Son of God and Lord of history. She had no guarantee that her efforts would produce the desired end. It didn't matter. There was a little girl at home whose very survival was linked to the ability the mother had to seek out the Christ and beg his healing.

So it is with us. With our own multitude of prayerful requests, some acute, others less important, we must persist. God is never deaf. God does not ignore his children. God answers us in His wisdom and gives us what we need. The important thing is that we never give up or become discouraged. Remember the parable of the Canaanite woman – her persistence brought her into intimate union with the Christ of God. That intimacy awaits us as well. To Him be glory unto ages of ages. Amen!