



## Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 18—24 February 2024

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| <b>SUNDAY 18 FEBRUARY</b> | <b>17TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW</b> , Matthew 15:21-28<br>• 7.30am<br>Orthros and Divine Liturgy |
| <b>SUNDAY 25 FEBRUARY</b> | <b>GOSPEL READING:</b> Luke 18: 10-14<br><b>EPISTLE READING:</b> 2 Timothy 3: 10-15        |

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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.

### St. Peter of Damaskos: We should give thanks to God . . .

"We should give thanks to Him, as it is said: 'In everything give thanks' (I Thess. 5:18). Closely linked to this phrase is another of St. Paul's injunctions: 'Pray without ceasing' (I Thess. 5:17), that is, be mindful of God at all times, in all places, and in every circumstance. For no matter what you do, you should keep in mind the Creator of all things.

When you see the light, do not forget Him who gave it to you; when you see the sky, the earth, the sea and all that is in them, marvel at these things and glorify their Creator; when you put on clothing, acknowledge whose gift it is and praise Him who in His providence has given you life. In short, if everything you do becomes for you an occasion for glorifying God, you will be praying unceasingly. And in this way your soul will always rejoice, as St. Paul commends (cf. I Thess. 5:16)."

- St. Peter of Damaskos, "Book I: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge,"  
*The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 3)*

### Prayer is the most important thing Saint Ephraim of Katounakia

All the Holy Fathers cry out that the most important thing in the life of every Christian is prayer.

Do you want to put your life in order? Pray.

Do you want to be saved? Pray.

All prayers are good and holy, but noetic prayer is the queen of them.

*"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."*

From this little but all-powerful prayer, the Holy Fathers were set in motion and became shining stars of the church.

Say this little prayer unceasingly as much as you can, day and night, and it will teach you that which you desire, that which you do not know.

Get going with this little prayer!

-The "Jesus Prayer": 11 quotations from the Saints by Orthodox Witness



## 17th Sunday of Matthew, Matthew 15:21–28

*“But he answered her not a word”*

The meeting of the Lord with the Canaanite woman offers a description of perhaps every person's meeting with God, and in particular it teaches us how to confront God's silence in prayer.

In various ways and for various reasons, we have all departed from the path of salvation and have become like Gentiles in the sense that we feel distanced from God. Perhaps we can even say that we have left various openings for the devil in our hearts, and that, instead of the peace of virtue, it then gives birth to sinful actions and thoughts which trouble and torment us, so that the words of the Canaanite woman also apply to us: “my daughter is badly possessed by a demon”.

The woman cried out with the prayer “Have mercy on me, O Lord”, “but he answered her not a word”. How many times haven't we experienced the same thing? We pray, we seek, we ask, we cry, but the Lord answers us not a word.

Of course, many times he does answer; it's just that we don't accept the answer or aren't listening. Sometimes the answer is no. As St James the Apostle says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to squander it on your passions” (4:3). However, many times the Lord does not answer us, because we aren't yet ready, and this is the case in today's Gospel reading.

The Canaanite continues to cry out, and the Lord's disciples implore him to give her some kind of answer to stop her shouting. But the Lord answers and says, “I was not sent except to the sheep, the lost of the house of Israel”. Here, the Lord is of course referring to the order in which salvation would come to the world: the first Covenant and the Law had been given to the Jews, and therefore he had to go “first to the Jew”, as St Paul says, “and then to the Gentile” only after the Covenant and the Law had been fulfilled (Romans 1:16).

This is the primary meaning of what Christ says here, but I would say that there is also a much more basic notion that relates to what we're talking about today. The Lord says that he has come for Israel. What does Israel mean? In Hebrew, the word 'Israel' means the one who struggles with God. It's the name that in the Old Testament was given to Jacob when he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord out in the desert for an entire night until dawn. The Angel “saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him”, but Jacob didn't let him go. The Angel said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The Angel blessed him and said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Gen. 32).

To be of the house of Israel, then, means to have persistence in prayer, to not give up the struggle until you have received the blessing of God. This is why, when the Lord says that he has come only for the house of Israel, the Canaanite woman, who up until this point had only shouted from afar, draws near, “she came and kept on making obeisance to him, saying, ‘O Lord, help me’,” as if to say, “I will not let you go unless you bless me”.

Seeing her persistence, the Lord gives her an opportunity to display the second element of true prayer. He says to her, “It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the little dogs”. These are harsh words, but the woman is not offended. Not only is she not offended, but she accepts this description — the dogs symbolise the spiritual impurity of idolatry, and of sin more generally — and she replies: “Yes, Lord...but even the little dogs eat from the little crumbs which fall from the table of their masters”.

Above all else, pride is the thing that prevents us from hearing God answering us during prayer, and from receiving what he wants to give us. And so, it was this expression of deep humility on the part of the Canaanite woman that finally allowed the Lord to tell her, “O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be to thee as thou wilt!”

Furthermore, the Lord had spoken of bread, but the woman spoke of little crumbs, as if to say, ‘I may not receive all that I want, or in the way that I want, I will be satisfied with whatever you, O Lord, choose to give me’. In other words, “let Thy will be done”. And as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel reading, if we are faithful in little things, God will set us over great things. And so, the Canaanite woman received not just the little crumbs, but the great thing that she had asked for, “and her daughter was healed from that hour”.

Therefore, next time our prayer is met by silence, let us remember the Canaanite woman. Let us not ask why God does not answer, but let us ask why we are not ready to hear him.

*Fr Kristian Akselberg*

<https://www.standrewsgreekorthodoxcathedral.co.uk/>