



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



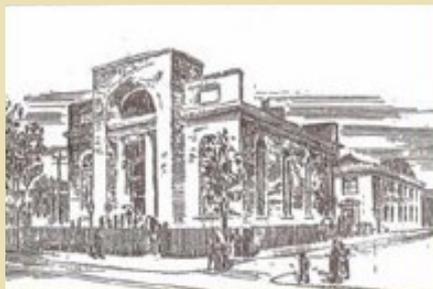
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CHURCH BULLETIN

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The 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Reading Matthew 15: 21-28



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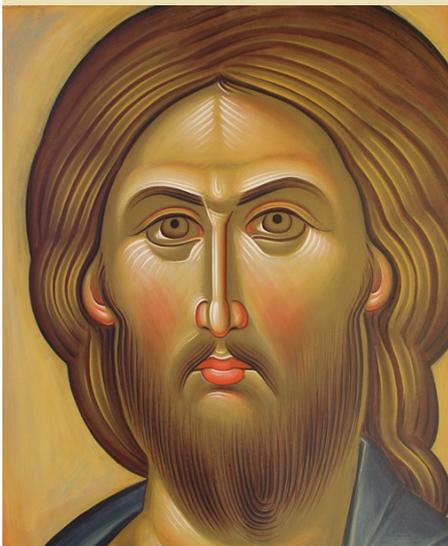
At that time, Jesus went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But Jesus did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of

the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And Jesus answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

Apostle Reading 2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1

Brethren, you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore "come out from among

them, and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." And "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.



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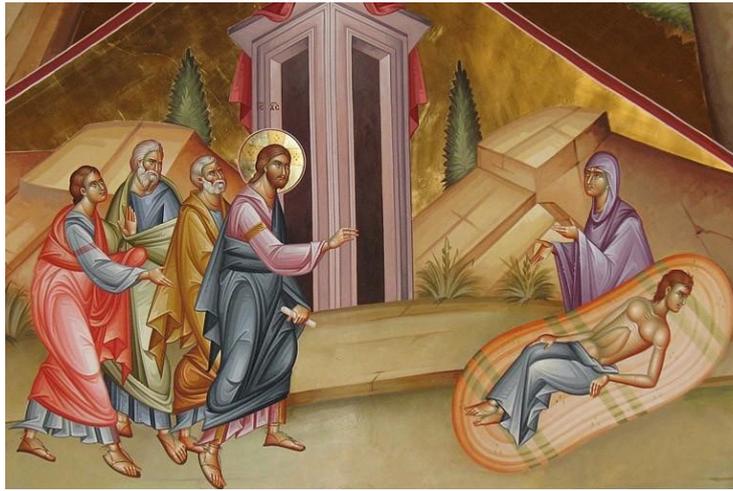
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Synaxarion Sunday February 14, 2021
(The 17th Sunday after Pentecost):
Holy Venerable Auxentius, Abraham and Maron of Syria

On the Sunday of the Canaanite Woman

The Gospel always gives us a glimpse into Christ's Great Good Heart. The Lord reveals to us His Father's gracious will to heal and save all of creation by living among us an incarnate life and demonstrating in living color what it is that the Holy Trinity desires.

The disciples reveal their impurity of heart by condemning the Syro-Phoenician Woman. They did as their upbringing taught them. The woman was not only acting im-



properly by approaching the Lord as she did, she was a Gentile and doubly to be avoided. Jesus at first was silent which probably pleased them, but obviously they hoped for a stern rebuke since they asked for it by name saying, "Send her away". And when Jesus made his famous reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel the disciples must have been overjoyed! At last Jesus was standing up for his heritage! His next remark I am sure sent them into paroxysms of delight. "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

In this Jesus sought to reveal two things: one tragic and one divine. He made an example of both the disciples and the Woman; the disciples for their cruelty and lack of faith and the Woman for her humility and spiritual beauty. Her reply echoes forever as an example of pure love, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." "Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.'" You see, the only thing that matters is humility. It doesn't matter who or what you are, or what you have done, humility opens the floodgates of divine grace.

What does this say of us? What lesson is here for us? This Gospel points to the way of life that pleases God. Not the way of the disciples dictated by fear, bigotry and hatred. These are indicators of sin, sure signs that self-interest is the motive. The way of the Syro-Phoenician Woman pleases Jesus, the way of extreme humility and love. In her there is not one ounce of self-interest. Her ego has been destroyed. The great enemies of ego are faith and love. She approaches the Lord without regard for social convention, begs him for help, accepts his rebuke with a display of unprecedented faith, calls herself a dog (a great insult in Middle Eastern culture) and this Jewish man she names "Master".

How can we know we are on the right track? Humility and love. It is simple, "They will know we are Christians by our love." But it must be humility and love in its most

radical form extending even to our enemies, to those who abuse us and wish us harm, which is no small task.

Olivier Clement explains it like this: "The key to spiritual progress is, therefore, evangelical love for one's enemies. This is first of all – something very simple, but very difficult – the refusal to judge, the refusal to assert oneself in despising or condemning others. Only such an attitude of mind brings detachment and

peace. The rest is secondary."

All that our Lord did and said was for love. His Great Good Heart was always open. Is it not obvious that everything we do must be for the love of God and our neighbor? Without humility of heart we cannot love. We must first realize that our neighbor is "Christ with us" and then our actions will take on a holy character. We will seek all means possible to lift up the other, to bring joy, peace and comfort to the other, to humble ourselves before the other as before the Lord Himself. Anything other than that is born of pride and self-interest, the two progenitors of all evil.

It has been said recently by some that our community is, perhaps, a little too welcoming, a little too friendly. But how can a community following the example of Christ be too friendly? We could not possibly "out-friendly" Jesus who died for all of us "while we were yet sinners" and the Father who makes the sun to shine on the good and the bad alike. I reject the idea of exclusion just as Jesus did who broke down those walls every time he spoke to a woman, or ate in the house of sinners, or saved an adulterous woman from death, or reached out his hand to heal on the Sabbath Day, or told a parable featuring a Gentile, or touched an unclean leper, or drank water from Jacob's well from the hand of a Samaritan who was also a woman and a sex addict, who healed the favorite servant of the Centurion, who spoke out against the pride of the self-righteous religious, who challenged the Pharisees and stood up for those they condemned. He was the One who lifted Zaccheus, cared for this Syro-Phoenician Woman, healed the woman with the issue of blood and the Blind Man on the road to Jericho, forgave Peter after he betrayed Him, restored the Apostles who forsook Him in the garden, encouraged the sorrowing Thomas who was honest enough to express his doubts, elevated Paul the murderer of Christians and asked God's forgiveness for all those who contributed to His crucifixion and those of us who still do. The truth, the bottom line, is that if we are not people-friendly to a fault

We are to lift one another up, not tear one another down. The Lord warns us not to try and separate the wheat from the tares. He tells us not to extinguish a smoldering reed. We must be very careful that in our zeal we do not place barriers between ourselves and God by causing others to suffer.

The truth is that we have little time in this life to spare. The call to purity of heart demands that we concentrate our spiritual efforts daily, even, as St. Paul writes, "incessantly". It is so easy to get trapped in personal delusion and get side-tracked into counterfeit forms of spirituality.

Elder Sophrony writes, "Do not let the things of this world disperse your energy. Concentrate all your attention on, devote all your energy to, a life which corresponds to the spirit of the Gospel commandments. Let us keep control over our mind in the face of the distractions of the exterior world. Without ascetic effort, our mind will never be able to remain constantly in God. It is from now, in this life, that we must learn to dwell in God, just as our spirit will dwell in God after our death."

Holy Orthodoxy is the repository of the most amazing treasures. I sincerely wish I had time to share with you the things I have learned in just the past few days, surprising and utterly transformational things, but it will have to wait for another time, but let me end here saying that love, true, evangelical, radical, Christ-like love is the only sure sign that God is present with us and is the greatest form of ascetical labor. We cannot abandon this path at St. Mary's, chosen long before I ever came here, without betraying Christ. This way was chosen by the good-hearted people who founded this parish and the godly priests who served her. It was chosen long before I came here and will last long after I am gone.

Fr. Antony Hughes



HOLY TRINITY's Liturgical Schedule from February 14 to February 21, 2021

Sunday February 14 (17th Sunday after Pentecost - of the Canaanite Woman):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:00 am - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Sunday February 21 (33rd Sunday after Pentecost - of the Publican and Pharisee):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:00 pm - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Coffee hour



Exactly How to Pray

Brothers and sisters, today we have a perfect example of how to pray. Several things that this woman of Canaan did that we must do if we are to pray, even though she was not of the children of Israel, being from a pagan land, but she knew something about Jesus. That means that she cared, and that means she thought about things.

Many of us Orthodox know very little about our faith. Here a pagan rebukes some of us, because she was not of the household of God, and she yet had enough intelligence to call Him "Son of David." That is a term for Messiah, and although He was not her Messiah yet, since she was not of the household of Israel.

This is one of the things that we must have when we pray. We must know who God is. And that's not something simple. We can say, oh, yes, I know who God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; I say it in the Creed. No, we don't know Who God is. We know Who God is when we become like Him. That's when someone truly knows someone, when they become like them, when they emulate them.

Since God is love and we do not love with completeness, we cannot say that we know God. Since the Son of God became Man and humbled Himself, even to death on the Cross, we can't say that we know humility. So we cannot say that we truly know the Son of God.

If your prayers are to be fruitful, brothers and sisters, *they must be joined with morality*; they must be joined with *becoming* something, becoming what God has intended us to be and that is: perfected. We cannot know Him, or bear to be in His presence unless we struggle for perfection. So that is the first and foremost thing.

If you don't try to live a moral life, your prayers will not be fruitful. I'm not saying to stop praying. Sure, keep praying. But don't expect God to reach out to you and answer your prayers if you are not struggling to reach out to Him. And not through prayer, I mean, but through your living your life in a Christian way.

So this is the first thing we must do. We must know

God. And we can't pretend that we know God. We know



that we don't fully know Him because of our sins. *So any good prayer is preceded by and accompanied with and followed by the struggle against sin.*

Now, this woman came to Jesus with her daughter having a demon. I think a lot of people have demons today but we don't know it. The demons are a little more subtle or we're just much more foolish, and we ascribe all kinds of scientific reasons for people's behavior. In the past, people knew when people had demons. Now, I guess,

we're a little smarter, or so we think.

So the woman's daughter had the demon, and she wanted the daughter to be healed. She was from a benighted land, a land of paganism. A lot of demons there and a lot of people are demonized in those lands. Of course we shouldn't consider that our land is really much different than a pagan land. Look at the things that our society considers important. They're things the pagans considered important too.

So this woman goes to Jesus and she prays simply. She just says, "Lord, have mercy." That's all. She explains very, very briefly: "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." That's all. That is all you need to do.

You don't have to come up with any kind of extremely creative prayer. You don't have to be eloquent. You don't have to cover everything.

If you're going to surgery, you don't have to pray for the nurses and the doctors and the instruments and the autoclave all to be in good working order. All you need to do is pray for God to have mercy. That's all. And that's what this woman did.

The simpler your prayer is, the more powerful it will be, because pure prayer is not from words. Pure prayer is from the soul communicating with God, and that is always done without words. That is done in a language that we do not know, in words that cannot be uttered. So keep your prayer simple and intense.

So what did she do? She asked for mercy. He completely ignored her. And here we see another very important part of prayer that we fail in continually. And that is: *Be persistent*. Be persistent even in the face of rejection.

He completely ignored her. And here we see another very important part of prayer that we fail in continually. And that is: *Be persistent*. Be persistent even in the face of rejection.

I'm sure that she knew He heard her. She was close enough, but He didn't even respond. So we must be persistent even when it seems as if God does not hear, or when it takes a long time for that which we are praying for. In fact, some of the things that you pray for will take a long time, even a lifetime, because you should be praying for perfection; you should be praying for complete change in your soul, and that is happening moment by moment and will not happen all at once.

So the woman is following after Jesus, calling out, "Lord, have mercy. My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." And finally the apostles are tired of it, so they say to the Lord, "Send her away for she keeps crying after us." The Lord was waiting for this.

And then He stopped and then He said to her — or said to them, but in her hearing, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel." He goes on and says, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." The dogs, meaning the unwashed, the unbelievers, the pagans, in this context, all that were not Jews.

And what does she say? This gives us another way that we must pray. When you pray, you might be answered in a way that you don't like. or sometimes will you not hear any answer at all. So she heard herself called a dog. It appeared that He was not going to listen to her. So she told Him something very profound: "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

So she heard God's words and *mixed them with humility*, and God responded to her and said, "O, woman, great is thy faith. Be it done to thee even as thou wilt." And then her daughter was healed immediately. Her daughter was healed because of: Her persistence, her knowledge, her humility and her simplicity.

This is the way we should pray, and this is why our prayers are so fruitless for us many times. Because we don't do one of these things.

We must know God. To know God we must live like Him. The God-Man showed us how to do it. It's all in front of us, but we have to make the effort. To know



God is not only struggling and doing the Commandments but learning of the Commandments. They're all in the Scripture. Every page is about Jesus Christ. Every page is about the sweet Commandments of God. So we are without excuse if we do not know them. And we are without excuse if we do not struggle to follow them. This is foremost the thing that we must do if we expect the Lord to hear our prayers.

We also must be persistent in our prayers, to continually ask the Lord for help, and we must pray simply. Part of the reason why we must be simple is because it's very difficult to be persistent and to be eloquent. How are you going to do that? Over and over, come up with some new way to ask the Lord for all you need is mercy? No. It is better just to pray with simplicity and persistence AND in the context of struggling to live a Christian life.

This woman is a great example of faith to us and should be a rebuke to us because we don't live this way.

We are of the household of God, so by that context, by extension, we're of that household of Israel. We are the children that

should have the Master's food, and yet we live in such a way that we have very little of this food. Not that it's not given to us. It's all available. But because we don't take it, because of the way we live and our distractions and our false priorities and our laziness and our lack of knowledge and all the rest of it.

Every single one of us, right now, in this room, every single one of us has something we really need, that we know we need, things that we really care about and are vexing to us. Loved ones that need help or something in our life that is amiss, or perhaps just a burning in our heart to know God more intimately. The only way this is achieved is by prayer such as this: Simple, persistent, knowledgeable and humble.

May God help us to pray like the woman of Canaan.

Amen.

Fr. Seraphim Holland

