



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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Approaching God Like the Canaanite Woman
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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

There are many different teachings regarding how to approach God in prayer. In certain circles outside of Orthodoxy, there's a name-it-and-claim-it understanding of prayer, believing that if you come to God with a request confident that He'll give you what you want, He will. Others think that since God already knows what we need or want, there's no point in asking Him repeatedly. Still others ask for God's help repeatedly in a certain matter, but eventually give up hope and stop asking. None of these ways are correct. Today's gospel teaches us how we should come to God in prayer: with faith, humility, and unceasing supplications.

Today's gospel begins with Christ leaving the land of Gennesaret to the outskirts of Israel, the region of Tyre and Sidon, which was filled with Gentiles. Knowledge of His teaching and miracles seem to have preceded Him, because a Canaanite woman cried to Him, "Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David!" For what is she asking mercy for? "My daughter is severely demon-possessed," she says. She asks God to have mercy on her by

healing her daughter. Let this be a message to us who practice saying the Jesus prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” By asking God to have mercy on us, we shouldn’t solely be thinking of ourselves; we should be asking for his mercy on behalf of those around us.

Christ’s response to the Canaanite woman is shocking. After she shouts out loud so that He can hear her, refers to Him with the messianic title “Son of David,” has a serious plea about her daughter being demon-possessed, the text says that Jesus answered her not a word. In essence, he ignored her. Others in a similar circumstance might have gotten angry with Him, and sought for healing elsewhere. That is not how this woman responds. In her great love for her daughter, and desperate for her healing, she puts her pride aside and, in humility, continues crying out to Christ for his mercy. Her persistence in her plea is noticeable because she begins to get on the nerves of the disciples to the point where they urged Christ to send her away.

Finally, after her many pleas and cries, Christ gives her a harsh word, comparing her to a dog who doesn’t deserve the food you would give to a child. What rejection this is! It’s such a harsh saying that it feels worse than being ignored. And yet in her great humility, and faith that Christ could help her, she states that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters’ table. It is her faith, humility, and ceaseless supplications, that leads Christ to remark on the greatness of her faith and to heal her daughter.

This wonderful story should be in our minds when we come to Christ in prayer, in our private prayers as well as at church. The liturgy is purposeful in its overall design. It proclaims our faith, the prayers recognize our humility, and we unceasingly beg for God’s mercy. Listen closely to the prayers that a priest prays during liturgy, and you’ll hear the humility that he offers these prayers with. And how many times does the deacon or priest say, “In peace, let us pray to the Lord?” After the first time this is chanted, the wording is changed to “again and again, in peace, let us pray to the Lord,” and it is chanted numerous times. The liturgy’s approach to God mimics the way that the Canaanite woman approached God.

This Canaanite woman is the perfect example of how we should come to God: with faith, humility, and unceasing supplications. This is how the liturgy is set up. This is how our lives should be set up, saying at least our morning and evening prayers, as well as prayers throughout the day, even if it’s as short as the Jesus prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. God is the source of our healing and salvation, just as He was to the daughter who was demon-possessed. Let us see the Canaanite woman of today’s gospel as an example of how to approach God in prayer.

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