

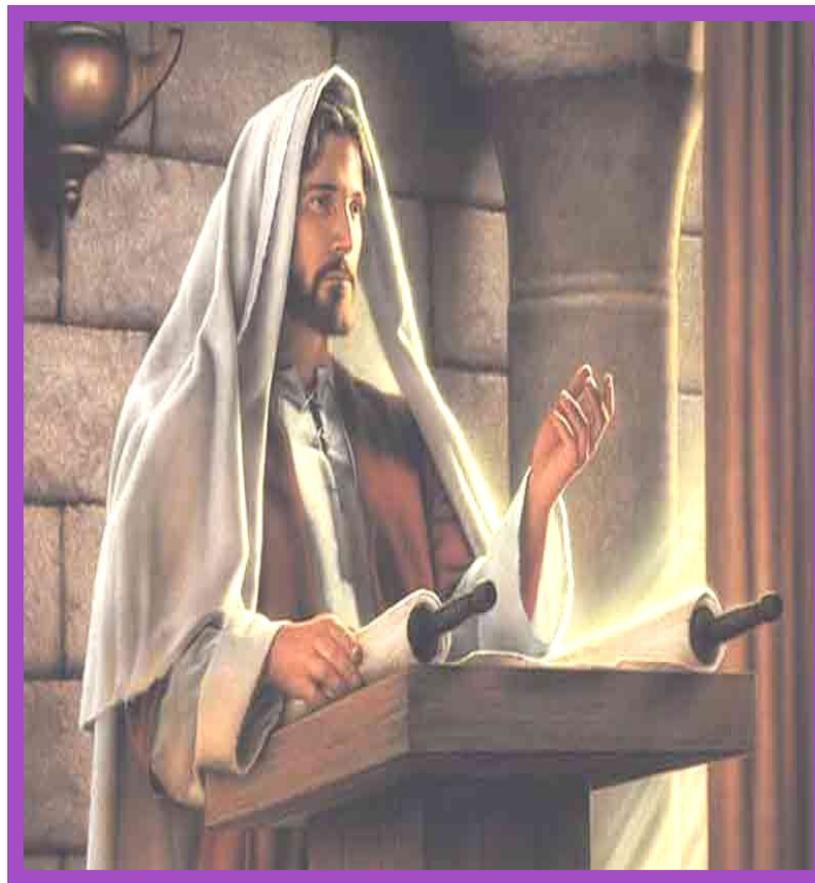
holy house for those who dwell here; that they may learn the way of holiness. The multitudes in the streets teach us that the Church must speak judgment in quiet; and with uplifted voice She cries: 'Take thought for your life.' The Cross with arms outstretched, has compassion on its adorers. The Exalted and the Most High inclines His ear to our

prayer, and the Angels of His mercy visit us one by one. Let us, my brethren, with our whole heart, give thanks for all these things. For it is through prayer that all graces work in us. We are *inexcusable* (Rom. i. 20); but God is just. We are all sinners; our Creator is pure and free of all fault. We are evil to one another; but our Maker is merciful. Glory be to Him Who in His mercy bears with us who rebel against Him.



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**SERMON ON
ON EARNEST PRAYER
FROM THE FATHER'S OF THE CHURCH
116 - 1**



JESUS, OUR FIRST PREACHER!

20TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Based on the Divine Office-Douay-Rheims Version

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Commentary on the Gospel of John 4: 46-53

by: Saint Ephraim, Deacon and Doctor of the Church

Mercy comes down from on high. Let us all turn our eyes on high. From the heaven of heavens comes salvation. Let us give thanks to Him Who dwells in Heaven. In one of his psalms, David spoke words that sum up the whole of prayer; *To thee have I lifted up my eyes; who dwellest in heaven* (cxxii. 1). And He humbled himself, that we like Him should humble ourselves. As the eyes of servants turn continually towards their masters, to see, should they be sad, that they also may appear dutiful and sad. Should they be joyful, their servants also appear joyful. Again David speaks, and adds a phrase like the one that preceded it: *As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress*: so that, if she is happy, she may cheerfully approach her. But should her mistress be sad, her maid creeps away in fear and hides herself; and where she sees her gloomy and severe, she flies from her anger: *So are our eyes unto Thee, the Lord our God*.

I cannot, David is saying, exult and rejoice before Thy face, till Thou hast mercy upon me: for I see that Thou art angry. Let us recall to mind these words of David, and let us meditate upon them within us, and let us say: *Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us*.

But since we know not how we are to pray, in accord with the will of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us through David how we are to pray to Thee. Therefore, my brethren; you who are listening to me, let us be pupils of David. For if he does not teach us, and if we do not heed his teaching, all the prophets and apostles will not avail to persuade us. In this time of sadness we all grieve under the rod of an angry God, until he shall again rejoice us Who now chastise us. We shall not rejoice with a full heart, until the anger of God has turned away from us. Let us therefore stand in earnest prayer before the Most High, Whose Throne is in the heavens. Since *he looketh upon the earth*; let us be in fear of Him Who looketh down on us. Let us not assemble together in a careless manner in His holy house, to stand in

His Presence: for he is not pleased with the careless, but with the efforts of those who love Him.

On a day appointed for prayer, let your prayer not be disturbed. Do not neglect prayer in order to go out in the streets to talk and argue. And should some one come to chatter with you, be wise; bid him be silent, saying to him: 'Today we are supposed to pray; we must do what is imposed on us.' Praying and disputing in talk, what, I would like to know, have they in common? Petition and deception: it would be strange that these two should be heard together. Fasting and loud talk; that these should be associated, I find astonishing. And that charity and wantonness should be associated, I find astonishing. And that chastity and wantonness should be found together would amaze me.

It is not becoming, O prudent man, to pray with a double mind; nor that we should divide our heart, keeping one part for the Church, another for the street. Who can deceive God, *Who searcheth hearts*? And who shall hide his thoughts from Him Who knows all things that are hidden? Who shall give his mind to good and evil thoughts, thinking that no one will know of them? That you should pray, and then go out to talk and argue; that is a very foolish thing to do. To talk and argue, coming at the same time to worship God; that is the doing of the foolish of heart.

Without health of body, material things are of no benefit to you. Without streams of prayer, what you have sown will not be watered. Without the help of prayer you shall not reap what you sow. Without the mercy of the Creator, there can be no good, no blessing. Be earnest then in prayer, and your barns will overflow. Winter and summer be earnest in prayer; for winter and summer prayer is necessary for us. Winter reminds us to pray, that we shall not want for the dew and the rain. Summer urges us to pray, that our fields and our barns may be blessed. The day cries to us: Give thanks to Him Who gives rest to the weary. He has made a