

Dear Friends,

Yesterday I suggested that we might read St Mark's Gospel as part of our Lenten devotions. To read the Gospel is to enter in a special way into the presence of God, for, as St John's Gospel reminds us, Jesus Christ *is* the Word of God, God's own self-expression, and the Gospels are human words designed to bring us to hear and to perceive *the* Word.

So it is good for us to approach the reading of the Bible, and especially of the Gospels, as an act of prayer. Here, then, are two prayers that we can use in connection with our Gospel reading. The first one may be familiar – it is the prayer that is said by the priest before the Gospel reading at the Liturgy, and if you follow the Liturgy with a book you will certainly have seen it there. The second comes from the ancient Liturgy of St James, and is the prayer appointed for reading after the Gospel. The Liturgy of St James is not very often nor widely served in the Orthodox world today, but it is still part of our Tradition. (The curious can find a modern celebration of it, mainly in English, here: <https://youtu.be/ENgVnc5L2Oo>)

May God enlighten each one of us as we read, and bring us together into the presence of the Light of the world.

With my love to you all,

Fr Ian

A PRAYER BEFORE READING THE GOSPEL

Master, Lover of humankind, make the pure light of your divine knowledge shine in our hearts and open the eyes of our mind to understand the message of your Gospel. Implant in us the fear of your blessed commandments, so that, having trampled down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual way of life, thinking and doing all things that are pleasing to you. For you are the illumination of our souls and bodies, Christ God, and to you we give glory, together with your Father who is without beginning, and your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

A PRAYER AFTER READING THE GOSPEL

You have made your divine and saving words resound for us, O God; enlighten the souls of us sinners to understand the things that have been read, so that we may be seen to be not only hearers of the spiritual songs, but also doers of good deeds, maintaining a faith without pretence, a life without blame, conduct without reproach, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom you are blessed and glorified,

together with your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.