

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
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ELEVATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

14 September 2014

Repose of St. John Chrysostom (407). Monk Martyr Macarius of Dionysiou (Mt. Athos—1507). Monk Martyr Joseph of Dionysiou (Mt. Athos—1819).

FIRST ANTIPHON

My God, my God, look upon me; why hast Thou forsaken me? The words of my transgressions are far from my salvation. Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not. But Thou, the praise of Israel, dwellest in the sanctuary. (R.):

Glory... Now and ever... (R.):

SECOND ANTIPHON

O God, why hast Thou cast us off forever? Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old. Refrain: O Son of God who wast crucified in the flesh, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

This is Mount Zion wherein Thou hast dwelt. (R.):

God is our King before the ages: working salvation in the midst of the earth. (R.):

Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

THIRD ANTIPHON: TROPARION OF THE CROSS

The Lord is King, let the people rage; He is seated upon the cherubim,
let the earth be moved. TROPARION OF THE CROSS

The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people.
TROPARION OF THE CROSS

Let them give thanks to Thy great Name, for it is holy.
TROPARION OF THE CROSS

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy!
Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead,
who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!

TROPARION OF THE CROSS (Tone 1): O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance. Grant victory to the Orthodox Christians over their adversaries; and by the power of Thy Cross preserve Thy habitation.

Glory ... Now and ever ...

KONTAKION OF THE CROSS (Tone 4): Thou who wast raised upon the Cross of Thine own will, O Christ our God, do Thou Thy compassions upon this Thy new commonwealth named after Thee. Gladden with Thy sovereign might our most Orthodox hierarchs, and vouchsafe them victory over every false teaching; and as Thy help in war may they possess the weapon of peace, the trophy invincible.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Exalt the Lord our God. The Lord is King; let the people tremble!*

From Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

(1 Cor 1:18-24) Brethren, the word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did

not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

From the Gospel according to Saint John

(John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30-35) At that time, the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death. And they came to Pontius Pilate saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no crime in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die, because He has made Himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where art Thou from?" But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to Him, "Wilt Thou not speak to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to release Thee, and power to crucify Thee?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over Me unless it had been given you from above. When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called "The Pavement", and in Hebrew, "Gabbatha." Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed Him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led him away, and He went out, bearing His own Cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew "Golgotha." There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the Cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Now standing by the Cross of Jesus were His mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother, and the Disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the Disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the Disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now fulfilled,

said, "It is finished"; and He bowed His head and gave up the spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true.

A WORD ABOUT THE CROSS OF THE LORD

We read in Genesis 2:9 that "The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. *In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*" It is clear, from what Scripture says later on (Gen 2:17 and 3:3) that the tree in the middle of the garden is the tree of knowledge; and yet, the tree of Life seems also to lie close by (Gen 3:22). Saint Ephrem the Syrian, drawing on older traditions, views Eden as a mountain (as the prophet Ezekiel had already said! See Ezek 28:13-14), with the tree of knowledge at the midpoint to the top of the mountain. The tree of knowledge is, thus, a sort of guardian or test on the spiritual path leading to the tree of Life.

The text of Genesis calls for an interpretation that moves beyond the letter. For instance, "tree" and "fruit": what tree was the tree of life? What kind of fruit does it make? Certainly not an apple, and also not any other fruit. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is ... well, Knowledge! Complete knowledge, perfect knowledge, knowledge such as only God has. Similarly, the tree of life gives Life: divine life, life such as only God has, eternal life! The tree of Life is placed on top of the mountain of Eden, and it is hidden, as it were, by the tree of Knowledge (indeed, the readers are told about it, but neither Adam and Eve, nor the serpent seem to know of any other forbidden tree that the tree of knowledge).

According to the teaching of the Church Fathers, Adam would have received access to the tree of knowledge—and then, would have learned about and received access to the tree of Life—if only he would have trusted God and cultivated obedience. We read that the fruit of the tree of Knowledge "was desirable for gaining wisdom" (Gen 3:6). But Scripture also tells us that "the beginning of wisdom is fear of God" (Prov. 9:10). But Adam and Eve decide to put their trust in the serpent. Severing their relation with God means that the human potential for acquiring eternal life is never realized, and *human life becomes mortal*.

Genesis 2 speaks to us, in the simplest language possible, about the fundamental question of our existence: if God has "brought us from non-existence into being," as we

proclaim in Liturgy, and has carefully endowed us with his gifts, how is it possible that we find ourselves marching, day after day, towards decay and death? The answer is that we have forsaken the path God laid out (first, taste of the trees of virtues, then from the Tree of Knowledge, eventually from the Tree of Life), and cut ourselves off from true Life Paradise, choosing mortality instead.

In paradise of old, the wood stripped me bare, for by giving its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the tree of the Cross that clothes mankind with the garment of life has been set up in the midst of the earth, which is filled with boundless joy (from the Canon of the Elevation of the Cross, Ode III)

God, however, does not change his desire to share his Gift with us. And since humankind no longer has access to Paradise, He will plant the Tree of Life right here, in the midst of our cemetery-like fallen world. As a hymn of the church says, **“No longer are we held back from the tree of life, now that we have Thy Cross as our hope, O Lord: Glory to Thee, O Lord!”** We are called to recognize the very Tree of Life under the image of the Cross, and to taste from Life by receiving “with fear of God, with faith, and love” the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, we are made once again partakers of the Fruit of Life, the Bread of Life (John 6:35), the Water of Life (John 4:14), the New Wine (Mat 9:17): **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”** (John 3:16).

Of course, the Tree of Life—the Cross—has been planted in a *fallen* world, among God’s *hostile* and *rebellious* children. The Cross is, therefore, a stumbling block, a sign of contradiction, something that many reject. Saint Paul writes in this respect: **the word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing . . . Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Greeks.**

We see God’s gift for us hidden in this in humane instrument of torture, the cross; and the fruit of Life gushing forth from the broken side of the Crucified One (John 19:34). And despite all rejection and ironies, despite our own sinfulness, which robs us of credibility, we believe and confess that before us is the power and wisdom of God. The the Apostle said it clearly: **the word of the Cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God . . . to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks it is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God!**

Until the Lord comes again, those who draw near to the Cross in this age receive from it the nourishment of the age to come and become incompatible with the ways of what Christ called “this sinful and perverted age.” We have received the commandment to take up our cross daily, if we want to be counted among those who worship God in spirit and truth. Some worship money, some worship sex, some worship power, some worship violence—and they make themselves idols to embrace. As for us, we worship

the God who made us and promised us eternal Life, and we bow down before the icon of the Tree of Life, the life-giving Cross:

Come, faithful, let us fall down in worship before the life-creating Tree on which Christ, the King of glory, stretched out His hands and raised us to the ancient bliss ... (Hymn at the Doxology, Matins of the Elevation of the Cross).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** please join us in praying for children, teens, and teachers, as they begin a new year of Sunday school. First meeting of Sunday school is next Sunday (9/21)!
- **Next Saturday, 9/20, 5:30-6:30pm:** Bible Study (Luke 6:46-49, the wise and the foolish builders).
- **Supporting our Seminarian:** if you can, please make a donation—however small or large—today or on the next two Sundays, to help our seminarian, Ignatius Green, pay the tuition for his last year of seminary. For this special collection we are using the white box “for needy people” at the entrance into the church.
- **Saturday, 10/25: Rummage and Cookie Sale.** Volunteers are needed for baking cookies, and for set-up, clean-up, and the day of the sale. For any info on the Rummage and Cookie Sale, please contact Seba Michaels (724.285.1540).

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Ron (upcoming surgeries), Angelica (Georgia’s mother), Christine (Abraham), Luke (Dollie's grandson), Norma, Richard (Michaels), Victoria (Frank’s mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna’s mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean) Shea and Katie, Timothy and Carolyn – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Metropolitan Philip; Elena; Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia's father-in-law), Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed’s uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna’s grandfather), Joseph (Rose’s father), Fred (Dollie’s uncle), Bob (Diane’s father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham’s mother).