

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001

PASTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur

CONTACT: 724.287.6983 (church); 412.390.8208 (priest);

E-mail : frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Sunday After the Elevation of the Cross.

18 September 2011

Martyr Ariadne of Phrygia (2nd c.). Martyrs Sophia and Irene of Egypt (3rd c.). St. Eumenes, Bishop of Gortyna (6th c.); New Martyrs Castor of Alexandria, Prince Bidzini and Princes Elizabar and Shalvi, of Georgia (+1660).

LIVING: Diane, Abie (Abraham), Sula, Bill, Norm, Fran, George (Botsis), Dolores (Sipos), Leatrice (Totin), Dolores (Bingham), Angelica, Karyn, Brian, Maria, Marius, Justin, Sara, Miguel, Christine, Eduard.

DEPARTED: priest James, Lance, Nancy, Petruța, Peter, Michael, William, Mariana, James, Mary Ann, Michael.

FIRST ANTIPHON

*It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! **R.:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!*

*To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! **(R.:***

*Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him **(R.:***

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"!

For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:)

Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (R.:)

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

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ! Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 5): Let us believers praise and worship the Word, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation; for he took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh, to suffer death, and to raise the dead by his glorious Resurrection.

TROPARION OF THE CROSS (Tone 1): O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance, and to Thy faithful people grant victory over their enemies; and by the power of Thy Cross preserve all those who honor Thee! everlasting.

Glory... TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY (Tone 4, Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

Now and ever ... KONTAKION OF THE CROSS (Tone 4): Do Thou, Who of Thine own good will was lifted up upon the Cross, O Christ our God, bestow Thy bounties upon the new nation which is called by Thy Name; make glad in Thy might those who lawfully govern, that with them we may be led to victory over our adversaries, having in Thine aid a weapon of peace and a trophy invincible.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

*Prokeimenon: O Lord, how manifold are Thy works!
In Wisdom hast Thou made them all. Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

*The Reading is from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians
(Galatians 2:16-20)*

Brethren, we who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law; because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I show myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Saint Paul's theology is quite complicated. Even his apostolic colleague, Saint Peter, wrote about him that "his letters contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). Difficult as they are, however, we cannot bypass Paul's letters.

This passage is responding to the charge that eliminating some of the Old Testament legislation in favor of Christian freedom would encourage libertinism. Indeed, this is what many of the early Christians of Jewish descent were thinking: if you do away with the Law and emphasize only Christ, you are making it very easy for people to fall into immoral behavior—and thus you are making Christ an instrument of sin! In reply, the holy Apostle affirms that being "in Christ" implies a high level of morality; for a Christian, however, to strive to attain God by following the Law, is a terrible rejection of God's providence that the Law should be surpassed and absorbed by Christ.

St. Paul is thinking of Christ as the living Law of God, the Law-made-flesh. The law that Moses received on Mount Sinai (the ten commandments, the commandments regarding the worship of God, and the host of commandments regulating everyday life in Israel) were meant as a preparation for the coming of Christ. Once the fullness of God has come among us as a human being, however, the commandments of the Law no

longer retain their complete validity. For instance, the ten commandments are contained in and surpassed by the “new commandment” that we love each other; the tent of meeting and, later, the Temple, is contained in and surpassed by new true temple of God: Jesus Christ; as for dietary laws and other such regulations, they are relative now, and subservient to fostering our life in Christ.

To live in Christ means— for Saint Paul just as for today’s Gospel—to be crucified with Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” That is, to become gradually, step by step, similar to Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in the New Testament we find a vivid comparison: it is as though the life of a Christian would consist of becoming an icon of Christ. With every step of our life, we draw the lines, we add the colors, we shape our being such that it would reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ “who loved me and gave himself for me.”

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mark 8:34-38; 9:1)

The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and lose his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

The feast of the Elevation of the Cross—which commemorates the finding of the true cross on which Jesus Christ had been crucified in Jerusalem, in the early fourth century—is celebrated every year on September 14, which almost always is a weekday. Nevertheless, the Sunday before and the Sunday after

the feast are both revolving around the Cross of our Lord, its theological and spiritual meaning, and its implication for our daily lives as Christians.

Today's Gospel text has a clear, even blunt, message: to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, means to follow and imitate Christ—and this necessarily includes the central element of Christ's earthly life, the crucifixion. But what exactly does it mean, "to deny oneself", "to take up one's cross," and "to lose one's life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel"? Obviously, "taking up one's cross" means getting ready to be crucified—but not in the sense of imitating Jesus *physically*. Rather, we can think of this as an exchange: letting go of the *me*-centered life, and becoming instead *Christ*-centered, like the Theotokos; letting go of the fallen life of Adam and Eve, and starting to live in relation to the source of true life—Christ; letting go of the grim news that we are born only to die, and embrace the Good News (the "gospel") that we are called to become children in the Kingdom of God, to be raised from the dead and to forever advance in love and knowledge of God. This is why "losing one's life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel" is, in a way, "investing" our life in God, so that we may regain it back as eternal life. It is similar to the way in which we "lose" our bread and wine for the sake of the Liturgy, and receive it back transformed by the Holy Spirit into food for eternal life.

By the same token, not "investing" our life in Christ—refusing to deny our life, refusing to lose it for Christ—we find our life rotting away pointlessly, and we lose everything we thought we possessed.

Put this way, who wouldn't want to lose one's life for Christ? Who would not trade "our" life for the free gift of "resurrected life" that the Christ is offering? After all, if it is *free* it is truly *good* news! And yet ... In practice, it seems that letting go of our lives and embracing Christ is unbelievably hard. To be frank, being a Christian is not easy: forgiving is not easy, and asking for forgiveness is even harder; loving those who hate us is not easy; being merciful to those who do not "deserve" it, and leaving all judgment to God—all of this is easier read or written about than actually practiced. All of this is the crucifixion that we are called to experience in our lives: crucifying the "old man" (our fallen, sinful habits) so that we may enter the resurrected state of the "new creation" (Gal 6:15) and be children of God.

Today's Gospel is not an easy one to hear. It comes with a terrible warning about the choice we are making. When we live without God, when we refuse to "deny" and "lose" our life in exchange for Christ's very life in us, our existence remains sterile, unsatisfying, pointless: an absurd joke ending,

inevitably, with death. In the end, as Christ says, you may gain this or that thing—perhaps even gain the whole world—but your life will be lost.

The tone of the Gospel then becomes harsh: “whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father.” We might ask: isn’t it below God to answer tit for tat? Can’t God save all of us, despite everything? But God, because He is a good God, made us free—free even to reject him. And if I am ashamed of Him, if I refuse His gift, if I shut Him out and cling to a dead life without Him, God will have to allow me the freedom of my choice—eternally. By contrast, those who take up their cross by entrusting their life to Christ, will receive their own selves back, refreshed, restored, and resurrected in the Kingdom of God.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Saturday, 24 September: Vespers 6pm, followed by Intro to Byzantine Chant.

Saturday, 25 September: meeting of the parish council

Donations for the Chalice: We need to replating our larger chalice, in preparation for our patronal feast of St. Anthony (Jan 17). This is our common cup, to which we are all called to “draw near in fear of God, with faith and love.” As a symbol of that unity and equality, we are collecting no more than 5 dollars per person.