

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT ("Sunday of the Precious and Holy Cross")

15 March 2015

TONE 7—Martyrs Agapius, Publius (Pausis), Timolaus, Romulus, two named Dionysius, and two named Alexander, at Caesarea in Palestine (303); Hieromartyr Alexander of Side, in Pamphylia (270-275). Martyr Nicander of Egypt (ca. 302).

FIRST ANTIPHON

The light of Thy Face, O Lord, is marked upon us. Thou hast given a sign to those that fear Thee, so that they may flee from the bow! (R:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast given an inheritance to those that fear Thy Name, O Lord. (R:) Glory... Now and ever... (R:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God; let us worship at His footstool! (R:) Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! God, our King before the ages, has worked salvation in the midst of the earth. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth. (R:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

VARIABLES FOR TODAY'S DIVINE LITURGY

- Instead of "Holy God" we sing "Before Thy Cross we bow down..."
- Instead of "We have seen the true light" we sing "O Lord, save Thy people..."
- Special hymn to the Theotokos: "In thee, O full of grace, all creation rejoices"

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 7): Thou didst shatter death by Thy Cross, Thou didst open paradise to the thief; Thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment-bearing women into joy. And didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim a warning, that Thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world great mercy.

TROPARION OF ST ANTHONY THE GREAT (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.

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!

KONTAKION OF THE FOREFEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 8): To thee, the Champion Leader, do I offer thanks of victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror; but as thou that hast that power invincible, O Theotokos, thou alone can set me free: from all forms of danger free me and deliver me, that I may cry unto thee: "Rejoice, O Bride without Bridegroom."

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance! Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord, O my God.

The Reading from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 4:14-5:6) **BRETHREN:** we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God; let us therefore hold fast our confession! For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every High Priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a High Priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee"; as he says also in another place, "Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek!"

We continue to read from the Epistle to the Hebrews, a dense and complex portion of the New Testament. From the wealth of today's reading, let us keep our minds and hearts focused on this wonderful affirmation: **We do not have a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

Indeed, this is the absolute newness that the Christian faith brings into the world: God willingly tasted of our human existence—even our *fallen* human existence! He became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones; he experienced all our basic physical reality (birth, growth, hunger, thirst, pain), as well as our way of reasoning and feeling emotions. And most important of all, *He came to die our death*. In short, God knows us intimately now, not only as the Creator but also as one of us. This is why Jesus Christ is the perfect “bridge” between humanity and God, the ideal High Priest.

We receive this message today as a word of encouragement. As one of the prayers before Communion puts it, “O Lord, my God, my Creator and Deliverer, nothing is hidden from You—not a teardrop, nor even part of a teardrop.” He knows us, our suffering, and our weakness. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading from the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mk 8:34-9:1) **The Lord said: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? What could one give in exchange for his life? Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” He also said to them, “Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the Kingdom of God has come in power!”**

The Gospel text appointed for feasts of the Holy Cross (like this third Sunday of Lent) 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 *I*-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. The feast of the Annunciation, which we will celebrate soon, offers a perfect model: *Behold the servant of the Lord: be it done unto me according to Thy word!*

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.

Put this way, who wouldn’t want to lose one’s life for Christ? Why not trade in “our” life for the free gift of “resurrected life” that the Christ is offering? This sounds exciting, but it is, frankly speaking, very difficult. Forgiving, also asking for forgiveness, loving those who hate us, being merciful even to those who do not “deserve” it, and leaving all judgment to God—all of this is the

crucifixion that we are called to experience in our lives. And because it is not easy, the text also presents us with “the carrot” and “the stick” ... First the carrot: crucifying the “old man” (our fallen, sinful habits), we enter the resurrected state of the “new creation” (Gal 6:15) and become children of God. As for the stick: 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, ending with death. 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

Today, March 15: General parish meeting. We need to vote in two new members of the council, discuss the budget, talk about possible changes in the way we support our parish financially, and discuss the future of our parish (stay, merge, move?). Remember the word of the Lord: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones” (translation: don’t skip the meeting, these matters are also part of our responsibility as Christians).

- **Wednesday, 3/18, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Andrew’s)
- **Wednesday, 3/25, 6 PM:** Feast of the Annunciation (Sts Peter & Paul)
- **Wednesday, 4/1, 6 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Anthony’s)

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma, Bill and Ann, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, 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, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean); Yvonne (Ben’s mother); Josephine, Timothy, Olga, Wesley, Christina and Dustin (relatives of John and Julie Smolen); Diane.

Catechumens: Ron, Timothy & Caroline; Shea & Katie – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Rick, Phyllis (Seba’s husband and sister), Angeliki, Metropolitan Philip, 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), Alfred.

ADORATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

- The censer is placed next to the table for the festal icon (displaying the Holy Cross). The priest takes the Holy Cross into the Holy Altar.
- After censuring the Cross, the priest starts the procession, preceded by the altar boys.
- The procession exits the altar and goes around the Church as in the Great Entrance. The choir sings "**Holy God. . .**" (repeat as necessary).
- When they reach the table for the festal icon, the priest, facing East, intones: "Wisdom! Let us attend!" and places the Cross on the table.
- The priest then censes the Holy Cross from the four sides around the table while singing "**O Lord save Thy people ...**" (once); the choir repeats the hymn (twice), while the Priest censes the iconostasis and the faithful.
- The priest (once), then the people (twice) sing "**Before Thy Cross we bow down in worship, Master, and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify,**" making a prostration.