

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PASCHA ("Thomas Sunday")

19 April 2015

TONE 1—*Martyrs Christopher, Theonas, and Anthony, at Rome (303); Ven. John of the Ancient Caves in Palestine (8th c.); Hieromartyr Paphnutius of Jerusalem (9th c.); St. Tryphon, Patriarch of Constantinople (933); Ven. Simeon of Philotheou (Mt. Athos—16th c.).*

FIRST ANTIPHON

Shout with joy to God, all the earth; sing to His Name, give glory to His praises.

Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

Say to God: How awesome are Thy works; let all the earth worship Thee, and sing to Thee. (R.:) Glory ... Now and ever ... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

May God have mercy upon us, and bless us, and may He cause His face to shine upon us, and have mercy upon us. *Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia!* That Thy way may be known on earth, Thy salvation among all nations. (R.:) Let the people give thanks to Thee, O God, let all peoples give thanks to Thee. (R.:) May God bless us, and may all the ends of the earth fear Him. (R.:) Glory ... Now and ever... *O Only-Begotten Son and Word of God ...*

THIRD ANTIPHON

Christ is risen ... (English, Greek, Romanian, Slavonic) with the following verses:

- Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered, let those who hate Him flee from before His face.
- As smoke vanishes, so let them vanish; as wax melts before the fire.
- So let sinners perish before the Face of God, but let the righteous be glad.
- This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

In the gathering places bless ye God the Lord from the springs of Israel. Son of God, who art risen from the dead, save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia!

TROPARION FOR THOMAS SUNDAY (Tone 7): Whilst the tomb was sealed, Thou, O Life, didst shine forth from the grave, O Christ God; and whilst the doors were shut, Thou didst come unto Thy disciples, O Resurrection of all, renewing through them an upright spirit in us according to Thy great mercy!

KONTAKION OF PASCHA (Tone 8): With his searching right hand, Thomas did probe Thy life-bestowing side, O Christ God; for when Thou didst enter whilst the doors were shut, he cried out unto Thee with the rest of the Apostles: "Thou art my Lord and my God!"

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Great God is our Lord and of great power! Praise the Lord, for He is good.*

The Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles

(Acts of the Apostles 5:12-20) **In those days, many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured. Then the high priest rose up and all his companions, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and, filled with jealousy, laid hands upon the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night, the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out, and said, "Go and take your place in the temple area, and tell the people everything about this life."**

We are reading today about the earliest Christian community, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, the book that we started reading at Pascha. Saint Luke speaks extraordinary events: angelic apparitions, miraculous healings, mass conversions; and, on the other hand, fierce opposition to the Good News that the Apostles are spreading. On a human level, the cause of this opposition is a petty one: **"the high priest rose up and all his companions ... and, filled with jealousy, laid hands upon the apostles and put them in the public jail."** This envy of the public success of the apostles recalls the envy that possessed the Pharisees when they saw that the people were deserting them to go after Jesus (John 12:17-19). However, this is only the surface of a much deeper resistance.

On Pascha night we heard that "[the Word of God] **was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**" Note this phrase: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." It is not that Jesus was a Jew and was rejected by his Jewish compatriots. The Evangelist emphasizes that the entire world, *the cosmos*, although made and sustained by the Logos (the Word or Power or Mind of God) failed to recognize and embrace the Logos-*become-flesh*, Jesus Christ. In other words, there is a fundamental and deep-seated resistance to the intimate presence of God at the heart of things and in our very hearts; it is the continuation of that original rejection of God that we call "the Fall"; and all of us, descendants of Adam, find it rooted in the depths of our inner being.

The Resurrection is not simply a coming-back-to-life, a resuscitation. Unlike Lazarus, who was brought back to life, but later died, Christ is risen from the dead *never to die again*. The Resurrection is rather the undoing of the Fall, the healing of the disease of God-rejection that we inherit from Adam, the beginning of a *new kind* of life. How this new, resurrected life looks like we see, for now, in Christ; yet we will follow, too. At the moment, we are already Christ's, but not yet risen with Him; still mortal, but already tasting from the fountain of immortality (as we sing about the Eucharist), as we anticipate our coming resurrection.

If we judge ourselves descendants of the apostles, we receive the same call as they did: **"Go and take your place in the temple area, and tell the people everything about this life."** This means that we should learn about this new life by living it, and that we should spread the Good News first and foremost by embodying it.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint John

(John 20:19-31) On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be to you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be to you! As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be to you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name!

The "doubting" of the Apostle Thomas is not so much a personal weakness, as much as the (very honest) expression of the fundamental difficulty everyone and anyone has in encountering the risen Christ. Mary Magdalene met the risen Christ and mistook him for the gardener (John 20); two other disciples conversed with the risen Christ for some two hours and failed to recognize him (Luke 24); when Christ presented himself to the apostles, it took them a long time to abandon the idea that it was a ghost (Luke 24).

When Thomas encounters him, he tries at first to verify by touching the risen body of Christ. And Christ does not deny him his "proof"; he invites him to touch and see and believe. We don't know if in fact the Apostle managed to complete his physical investigation before recognizing the divine Presence with all his heart and mind: **"My Lord and my God!"**

As for us, although we have been singing and proclaiming “Christ is risen!” throughout the night of Pascha, the resurrection is bound to remain beyond the grasp of thought or words. And if we think that the apostles might have had the advantage of “seeing” the Resurrected One, we know now that meeting the risen Christ has always and will always be difficult. The reason is that the resurrected state is something beyond the confines of the fallen reality in which we function; it is, Saint Paul tells us, “a mystery” (1 Cor 15:51).

Today’s Gospel encourages us with these words: **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!”** This concerns us directly; we are those who have not seen, yet believe.

Or, in other words, we do not see physically, but see through faith. Our vision is shaped, first, by the Divine Liturgy, where we “taste and see” and then, after receiving the Eucharist, proclaim “we *have seen* the true light!” The outer liturgy shapes us and enables us to engage in the inner liturgy of the heart, the life of individual prayer “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts” (2 Peter 19:1). The end is that we, too, with the apostles may say that *we have seen the Lord*.

As beginners on this journey into God, we start with the confession of the Holy Apostle Thomas—**“My Lord and my God!”** —and with the full assurance that the risen Lord is with us directing our every step on the way.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next Sunday: 40-day memorial for Fr. Hopko, Cristian (Andronic), and Emil (Cristina’s uncle).

Wednesday, April 22, 6:15-8pm: dinner and fellowship in Cranberry (114 Buckingham Trail; 724-742-9663.). We will be reading and discussing a brief text written by a recent saint, Elder Porphyrios (+ 1991). The text is available on the parish website (under “Announcements”).

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: pr. Paisius; Ed (upcoming heart surgery), 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); John and Julie (Smolen); Dennis, Vincent, Roy and Laura, Danny, Danny, Cathy (relatives of John and Julie); Diane; the Beckers, newly chrismated.

Ron, catechumen; Shea & Katie – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Timothy (John and Julie Smolen’s nephew); priest Thomas (Hopko); Emil (Cristina’s uncle), Cristian (Andronic); Rick, Phyllis (Seba’s husband and sister), Angeliki, 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.