

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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AFTERFEAST OF THE LORD'S ASCENSION

24 May 2015

TONE 6—*Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. Ven. Simeon the Stylite (the Younger) of the Wonderful Mountain (596); Martyrs Meletius the General, Stephen, John, and those with them who suffered in Galatia (138-161); Vincent of Lérins (445).*

FIRST ANTIPHON

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with songs of rejoicing!

(R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth! (R.:)

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain! (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who didst ascend in glory from us to heaven, as we chant unto Thee: Alleluia! God is known in her palaces, when He undertakes to help her. (R.:) For behold, the kings of the earth assembled, they came together. (R.:)

Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)

THIRD ANTIPHON

TROPARION OF ASCENSION (see below) with the following verses:

- *Hear these words, all you nations; give ear, all you that dwell upon the earth.*
- *My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall bring forth understanding.*
- *I will incline my ear to a parable, I will open my riddle on the harp.*

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 RESURRECTION (Tone 6): When Mary stood at Thy grave, looking for Thy sacred body, angelic powers shone above Thy revered tomb. And the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led Hades captive and wast not tempted thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst give life to the world, O Thou, Who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE ASCENSION (Tone 4): Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, and gladdened Thy disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing they did become confident that Thou art truly the Son of God, the deliverer of the world!

TROPARION OF THE HOLY FATHERS (Tone 8): Thou, O Christ, art our God of exceeding praise, who didst establish our holy Fathers as luminous stars upon earth, and through them didst guide us unto the true faith: O most merciful One, glory to Thee!

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (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.

KONTAKION OF ASCENSION (Tone 6): When Thou hadst fulfilled the dispensation for us, and united earth to heaven, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God. In no way wast Thou parted from those who love Thee, but Thou didst remain with them, saying: "I am with you and no one will be against you!"

FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: PSALM 68 (67)

Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; and let them that hate him flee from before his face. As smoke is driven away; as wax melts before the fire. ... A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation ... You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious ...

We recognize the opening verses of Psalm 68 (or, in the Orthodox Bible, Psalm 67): "Let God arise!" We sing these verses during the entire Easter period, from Pascha until Ascension. And then, at Ascension, we focus on another verse: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive." Christ has, indeed, ascended on high; but what does it mean that "He led captivity captive"? We sing something similar at Pascha: "Christ is risen from the dead *trampling down death by [his] death*"—Christ has "killed death," He has freed us from the grip of the evil one. So also here: "He has led captivity captive" means that He has annulled our captivity, He has set us free.

But this verse presents a problem. The psalm reads: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts from people, even from the rebellious," while Saint Paul quotes it at Ephesians 4:8 in a significantly different version: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." Well, why the difference? And what is this verse about, anyway?

Early Christian tradition understood Psalm 68 as foreshadowing the Ascension of Christ. He defeated our enemies—the evil one, who had held us captive; it is His Resurrection that shines like fire, and makes these enemies melt like wax; and He has ascended, taking spoils (as it were) from the captors of humankind. What spoils? Humanity itself! Christ has plundered hell and emptied the tomb.

But this conqueror distributes the spoils he takes: Christ ascends to God in order to send us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We will understand more about this when we celebrate the Giving of the Spirit, Pentecost.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our Fathers. Thou art just in all Thou hast done.

From the Acts of the Apostles

(Acts 20:16-18, 28-36) In those days, Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to

care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

We hear today the words Saint Paul addressed to "the elders of the church": words of advice from one who knew the crucial importance of the ministry of a priest or bishop. **"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.**

Obviously, the job of the "overseer" is not simply one of administration! Saint Paul speaks of the *Holy Spirit* assigning certain individuals to that ministry. Nor is the community ("the flock") simply an association of pious individuals. The very existence of the Church is the work of God, who has established it "with the blood of His own Son." Consequently, this flock is a community of people who have responded to God's call and become collaborators with Christ, allowing Him to complete His work of salvation in them.

Finally, the Christian life is nothing but the continuation of Christ's life in us and among us. This is not only a matter of fidelity to some lofty ideal, but the way to make life truly beautiful and meaningful; in short, one who practices generosity, forgiveness, and love is the first to benefit from it: **It is more blessed to give than to receive!**

The words of Jesus Christ about the joy of giving are not recorded in the Gospels; Saint Paul must have learned them from the first eye-witnesses of the Lord. He quotes them not as something new and unknown, but as a saying that was quite familiar to the Christians in Ephesus. Let it then become a saying familiar to us as well: if we are living as brothers and sisters, taking care of each other, in turn forgiving and asking forgiveness, comforting and being comforted, it is because, as our Master said, **"You're far happier giving than getting!"**

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

From the Gospel according to Saint John

(John 17:1-13) At that time, Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee, since Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given Him. And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do; and now, Father, glorify Thou Me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made. I have manifested Thy Name to those whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. Now they know that everything that Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for I have given them the words which Thou gavest Me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from Thee; and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the

world but for those whom Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine; all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name, which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. While I was with them, I kept them in Thy Name, which Thou have given Me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.”

We meditate today on Christ’s ascension to heaven—that is, on Christ’s “entry into glory.” On the one hand, we may say that there is nothing new or extraordinary to the fact that the Son should share the glory of the Father! Indeed, we confess that He became human without thereby forsaking or diminishing His divinity; and we confess that He is now returning, as the Gospel says, “**to the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made.**”

On the other hand, however, there is something entirely new! This new and extraordinary reality is that the One who ascends *is fully human*, not only divine. He takes into the presence of God—into God’s very glory—the humanity He shares with us. As such, He truly is our representative, our forerunner, going to prepare a room for us in the Kingdom of our Father: “**If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be**” (John 14:2-3).

But to us, in the meantime, it feels as though we are orphaned, or widowed, or left behind by our closest friend: we are on earth, He is in heaven. The Lord knew this well, and His prayer to the Father is precisely for us: **And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name.** And to His disciples and to us, He spoke these words of reassurance: “**I will not leave you orphans**” (John 14:18). One of the hymns of Ascension, the kontakion, also proclaims: “Thou wast in no way parted from those who love Thee, but Thou didst remain with them, saying: ‘I am with you and no one will be against you!’”

How it is that we are not orphaned of the presence of God, and “left behind” we will understand better at Pentecost. For now, let us note that “being kept in God’s Name” (that is, abiding in the presence of God) is measured by a very visible and concrete indicator: **Father, keep them in Thy Name *that they may be one, even as We are one.*** In other words, we abide in God to the extent to which we, the Church, mirror the unity of love that constitutes the very glory shared by the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: pr. Paisius; Stelian (Cezar’s father); 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; Tim and Caroline (Becker). Ron, catechumen; Shea & Katie, Garrett & Autumn – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Patrick (Rose’s brother); Hieromonk Roman (Braga); priest Thomas (Hopko); Emil (Cristina’s uncle), Cristian (Andronic); Timothy (John and Julie Smolen’s nephew); 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.