

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

28 June 2015

TONE 3— Translation of the feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (June 29); Holy and wonderworking unmercenary doctors Cyrus and John (412); Paul the Physician, of Corinth.

FIRST ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can cause all his praises to be heard? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

Let them praise the Lord for His mercies, and for His wonderful works to the children of men. (R.:) O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead: save us who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"! Let them exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. (R.:) The eyes of the Lord are upon those that fear Him, upon those that hope in His mercy, to hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose the sons of the slain. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)

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 2): When Thou didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell with Thy Godly power. And when Thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of Heaven did cry aloud unto Thee: O Christ, Thou giver of life, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF STS PETER & PAUL (Tone 4): Foremost of the Apostles and teachers of the world, intercede with the Master of all that He grant peace to the world and great mercy to our souls.

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 ORDINARY SUNDAYS (Tone 4): Undisputed intercessor of Christians, the mediatrix who is unrejected by the Creator, turn not away from the voice of our petitions, though we be sinners. Come to us in time with aid, as we cry unto thee in faith; for thou art good. Hasten to us with intercessions O Theotokos, who dost ever intercede for those who honor thee.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth. The heavens show forth the glory of God.

The Reading is from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians

(2 Cor 11:21-12:9) Brethren, whatever any one dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He Who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands. I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Saint Paul seems to be affirming two contradictory things: on the one hand, he “boasts” of some extraordinary spiritual experiences—visions, ascensions to heaven—and on the other hand he explains that such experiences are not what a Christian should be hunting for.

The context here is very important: other preachers were carrying out a deceitful mission among the Corinthians, and were denigrating the apostle Paul, claiming that he lacked the necessary spiritual authority because he didn't possess extraordinary "spiritual gifts." In reply Saint Paul notes: "I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord." He then proceeds to speak of being taken up into the highest heaven and granted visions and mysteries impossible to put in human words. We can see that he feels compelled and is uneasy, because he talks about these experiences in the third person ("I know a man in Christ"), even though he is actually talking about himself. In short, Paul is saying: if that is what you want—a "superpowers competition"—then let me tell you that the things I have received from God dwarf anything you can come up with!

However (and this is crucial!), Saint Paul also says that such boasting is foolish. Christ did not come to rid us of all weakness, to make us healthy, happy, rich, and famous. A quick look at the apostle suffices: he was in constant danger, often arrested and beaten up, and sometimes escaping narrowly (as we read today: let down in a basket through a window in the wall!); his health was not the best, he couldn't see well, and his opponents—who claimed to be highly "spiritual" Christians—were mocking him. And yet, it is in Paul's weakness and humility that Christ displayed his power and wisdom.

In fact, this is what the Apostle teaches: faith in Christ is not about boosting our ego by using religion to "improve" ourselves, but about leaving aside all excuse and relying, joyfully, on God's mercy.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew

(Mat 16:13-19) At that time, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His Disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven."

Today, as we celebrate the holy apostles Peter and Paul, we are asked to start afresh with the very beginning of the journey: faith. More precisely, we must learn and relearn, again and again, *how to believe*.

As the good pedagogue He is, the Lord is asking two questions of his disciples; the two questions come quickly one after the other, gently and effectively leading the disciples closer to the truth. "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" is the first question. And the second, "But who do you say that I am?" The answers are at first a random selection of more or less plausible answers: Jesus, "some say" is perhaps a prophet, perhaps the famous Elijah or the great Jeremiah, perhaps John the Baptism returned from the dead. With these answers we are moving towards the truth, because Jesus is, indeed, a larger-than-life, extraordinary person, a holy man, one who speaks with power, one who shakes his listeners awake and aware of God. Once here, the disciples need a "fine tuning" of their vision, so that they may see and understand who it is that they have before their very eyes. And the Lord provides them with another way of approaching the truth, by asking them to search with the help of another question: Who do *you* say I am? *You*—who do *you* think I am? As they are forced to grapple with the difficult task of speaking of their own convictions, the disciples become silent. Then Peter bears witness to that which God has revealed to him: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Together with the Holy Apostles Peter, we make this confession of faith every time we approach the chalice. Let me rephrase the question: *Who do I think Jesus is? What do I think I am about to receive at Holy Communion? What am I doing in church? What do I think I have found?* The answer to this question

is not some neutral report about what people generally believe about Jesus; it is rather an answers which requires us to take a personal stance, to commit ourselves entirely to this truth.

The truth we confess and gradually learn to experience in Church is not something that we can consider from a distance. To say that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into this world for our salvation, implies that our very life is involved in this truth. This is what Christ is teaching his apostles, and this is the kind of truth we, as members of the *apostolic* church of Christ believe and confess: a living truth, a saving truth—ultimately, we do not speak *about* Jesus, but bind ourselves in faith and love to Christ himself, who is the Truth.

Had the Church been a pious club held together by certain dogmas and moral norms, it would long have ceased to exist. But Peter's confession is not a piece of ideology, it is a commitment to Christ, an act of life. It is with this kind of faith that the Apostles have conquered the world, despite countless sufferings—just consider the opening lines of today's Apostle reading; it is this kind of faith that gives a glimpse of heaven, even while on earth, and offered the Apostles a concrete foretaste of eternal life even while they were put to death. It is this kind of faith that constitutes the very foundation of the Church: **on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

- **Today:** memorial for departed members of Dollie's family
- **Ignatius and Amy:** our seminarian starts his last year in the Fall, with a student loan to pay for tuition and living expenses. However, the summer is a time of financial distress, and whatever help we can offer is very important. Whether you have pledged some help or not, please be generous to this family of four!
- **Same-sex marriage is now legal in the U.S.** This makes what Orthodox call "marriage" even more different from what society calls "marriage." For us it is a specific mode of living out our Christian life: a union between one man and one woman, which offers the grace-filled context for our growth in friendship and love, for bearing and rearing children, and for working out our salvation. But we cannot teach others how to live their lives by relying on physical, economic, legal, or political coercion, and we should not expect society and its laws to protect and foster a Christian life. Just as we do not expect commercial Christmas to help us celebrate the Nativity of the Lord, so also we do not learn about marriage from the world but from Christ and his apostles. If we are to function as "light of the world," we can only win people over for our understanding of marriage by *being* better spouses and parents, and by a treating those around us who think and live differently than we do in a way that is worthy of Christ. No whining, no cynicism, no victimization, certainly no violence: rather, as the Lord said, "be shrewd like the serpents and pure like the doves!" (Mat 10:16).
- Fr Bogdan will be at the Parish Life Conference in Long Island, NY, July 1-3.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: pr. Paisius; Sue (Stacey's mother); 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: Abie; Patrick (Rose's brother); Josephine (Julie's sister); 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.