

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

7 August 2016

TONE 6— Afterfeast of the Transfiguration. Martyr Dometius of Persia (363). Hieromartyr Narcissos, patriarch of Jerusalem; Venerable Theodosios the New of the Peloponnesos; Nikanor the wonderworker of Mt. Kalistratos.

FIRST ANTIPHON

*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. **Refrain:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! *Thou art girt about with power, and Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment. (R.:) The mountains shall rejoice at the presence of the Lord, for He cometh; yea, He is come to judge the earth. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)**

SECOND ANTIPHON

*The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God! **Refrain:** Save us, O Son of God, Who wast transfigured on Mount Tabor, who sing to Thee. Alleluia. His foundations are in the holy mountains. The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. (R.:) Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. (R.:) Zion is our mother, a man shall say, and such a man was born in her; and the Most High Himself hath established her. (R.:) *Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)**

THIRD ANTIPHON

TROPARION OF THE TRANSFIGURATION with the following verses:

- *Of Thy mercies, Lord, will I sing for ever.*
- *The heavens confess Thy wonders, Lord, and Thy truth the congregation of saints.*
- *Blessed is the people that knows jubilation; in the light of Thy Face shall they walk, and in Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day long.*

LITTLE ENTRANCE

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

TROPARION OF THE 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 TRANSFIGURATION (Tone 7): Thou wast transfigured on the Mount, O Christ our God, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners; through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

TROPARION OF 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.

KONTAKION OF TRANSFIGURATION (Tone 7): On the mount Thou wast transfigured, and Thy Disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; that, when they should see Thee crucified, they would know Thy Passion to be willing, and would preach to the world that Thou, in truth, art the Effulgence of the Father.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance. Until Thee will I cry, O Lord my God.

The Reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans

Rom 15:1-7 **Brethren: we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult Thee fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together, with one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God.**

Saint Paul was a realistic teacher and pastor. He knew well how weak his disciples were. Above all, he knew that by ourselves, without being part of a living community, our life in Christ is near impossible: we are in danger of forgetting why we are on the way, of losing sight of where the road is leading us, and of losing the hope and the joy that sustain us on our journey in Christ. Saint Paul speaks of the Church as "Body of Christ": members of the Body need each other and must care for each other.

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak—especially since those who today are "strong" may be "weak" tomorrow! And "live in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus:" note that Saint Paul mentions "accord" with Christ in the same breath as "harmony" with one another. We are, in a way, like the spokes of a wheel: the closer the spokes come to the axis of the wheel, the closer they are to each other.

Finally, a very weighty statement: **Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God!** The key lies in the second half of the sentence, so let's read it as follows: "Since Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God, welcome also each other!" This "glory" is more than some vague "honor": "the glory of God" is Scripture's language for the presence of God in creation—God's grace, God's light, God's energy, God's creative and sanctifying power.

Saint Paul says that we have been received into the glory of God. How did we get there? We didn't "get there" ourselves, we didn't "make it": we were received. Remember: no one has ascended to heaven; the only one who knows the way from earth to heaven and into the presence of God, knows how to guided and care for his followers and friends, the only one who has the keys to open for them the gates of the

Kingdom, is the one who humbled himself to make the journey from there to here, from heaven to earth, from the glory of God into the mortal human existence.

In short: It is Christ who grants us access into the glory of God. But how do we go about following him and entering? There is one condition: that we should welcome others, just as we have been welcome. In doing so, we actually begin to enter ourselves.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew

Mat 9:27-35 At that time, as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud: "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When He entered the house, the blind men came to Him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread His fame through all that district. As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to Him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.

It is striking that even in the presence of obvious encounters with God, people are still able to play blind, deaf, and dumb. The Lord heals two blind men and a mute. The reaction of the "professional theologians": they deny the obvious work of God, and accuse Jesus of being in league with evil spirits. More important is the reaction of Christ: he went on teaching, preaching, and healing every disease.

As always, the Gospel calls for us to place ourselves in the story: do we want to be like the blind men, who beg for and receive their healing? Are we like crowd, cheering on whatever and whomever has power and success? (the crowds are amazed now, when he is "impressive" because of his miracles, but as soon as he starts to look weak, they will abandon him and ask for his crucifixion).

The question is: *what do you want?* You can find much to criticize about the bishops, the priests, the monks, the nuns, the Church administration, the hymns, the books, the music, the length of the services, etc, etc, etc. But maybe you want to be healed. If so, then follow the blind men who receive their sight, and recognize Christ for who he is; and imitate the dumb man, who is freed from dark oppression, and can speak. We are even given the words to express ourselves: "Have mercy on me, Son of David!"

All of this is available to us—if that is what we are seeking. The Gospel of the Kingdom, the good news that God is with us with his grace and love for mankind, is still being preached. And Christ does not disdain our diseases or infirmities; it is up to us, however, to acknowledge them and ask for healing.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

The Gospel of Matthew calls the Transfiguration of Christ a "vision": **Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.** A vision of what? A vision of who? And why this vision? The tradition of our Church gives a variety of answers, all complementary, and all acknowledging the overwhelming greatness of this mystery. Thus: the display of supernatural light revealed to the disciples something about Christ's divine identity, so that even when we behold the Crucified One we should not forget that He is the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8); the luminous vestments of the Lord represent the many layers of his divine and human reality, as disclosed to us in the many layers of the Scriptures; the blinding appearance of the Transfigured One sets before us the image of our glorified state in the age to come; the light that shone to the three disciples is the deifying divine energy, that is, God-as-He-gives-Himself.

We shouldn't forget, however, that the Transfiguration is not only a "vision" (Matt 17:9) that the disciples have of Christ, but, so to speak, a vision of a vision: a vision granted to Moses and Elijah, witnessed by the disciples. When Moses requested to see the glory of God more intimately (Exodus 33) on Mount Sinai, God replied: "You shall not be able to see my Face, for no man shall see my Face and live ... You shall see my hind parts; but my Face will not appear to you (Exod 33:20, 23). Some early Christians interpreted this to mean that the vision face to face, refused to Moses, was being postponed for a later time. This is the view that was enshrined in the hymns of the Orthodox Church:

He who once spoke through symbols to Moses on Sinai, saying, "I am He-who-is" was transfigured today upon Mount Tabor before the disciples (Vespers of Transfiguration, Apostichon).

The message is clear: Moses appears with the Lord on Tabor because He-Who-Is, the Lord who had revealed Himself on Sinai, had promised the prophet a more perfect vision of God! "He-Who-Is," the self-designation of God when he spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14), is precisely the "definition" given of Christ in all icons—be it of the baby in the arms of the Theotokos, or the Lord as Teacher, or the Crucified, Risen, or Transfigured One: "He-Who-Is" (or, in a different rendering, "The Existing One"), Christ our Lord ..." is also what we hear the priest proclaim at the closing of Vespers.

A final word on the Troparion of the feast: "When, O Christ our God, Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, Thou didst reveal Thy glory to Thy Disciples in proportion as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting light also enlighten us sinners ...". This is not about some past event, but is sung about the "body of the Lord" that we must learn to discern (1 Cor 11:17) when called to approach the chalice "with fear of God, faith, and love." We are called to draw near the Lord, the very Lord who spoke on Sinai, so that we may partake of the same vision as Moses, the Apostles, and all the saints, and join in their confession: we have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Kingdom!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today: memorial for Elena (Silviu's mother) and 6-week memorial for Iosif (Cristina's father);

Next Sunday, 8/14: memorial for Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy).

SINGING: With Steve no longer leading the singing we need to "close ranks," sustaining each other in communal singing, and invest more time and energy in rehearsals.

Cranberry offering: A basket for freewill offerings to our Cranberry outreach is placed next to "People in Need" box at the entrance to the church. We are trying to offset the 10% loss that the Cranberry group incurs by sending their Sunday collection to St. Anthony's (we give 10% of all incoming money to the Archdiocese).

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Linda (Melissa's mother – car accident); Job; Tina (John & Julie's daughter); Ann; Mary Ann (Jean's daughter); Dottie; Stelian (Cezar's father); Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma, George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Jim, Tony, Samantha, Luke (relatives of Dollie's), Norma, Richard (Johns), Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Karyn, Fr. Ignatius and Amy, John, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei, John, Janet, Christy (relatives of Jean); John and Julie (Smolen); Dennis, Vincent, Roy and Laura, Danny, Danny, Cathy (relatives of John and Julie); Diane; Shea and Katie; Tim and Caroline (Becker); Tina. Garrett & Autumn, Benjamin – seeking the true faith.

DEPARTED: Iosif (Cristina's father); Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy); Richard (Minto) from Sts Peter and Paul; Bill; Dolores (Bingham), Diane (Georgia's sister); Gladys (Smolen); David (Steve's father-in-law); Donald (Norma's brother); William (Fr. Paisius's father); Craig (Jean's son-in-law); Abie Abraham; Patrick (Rose's brother); Josephine (Julie's sister); Cristian (Andronic); Rick, Phyllis (Seba's husband and sister), Angeliki, Joe and David Sipos; Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle); Lance; Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother), Alfred, Stormy (friend of Ron's).