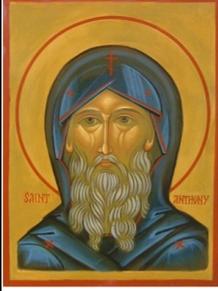


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
www.orthodoxbutler.org

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TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (Sunday of the Forefathers)

11 December 2016

TONE 8—*Ven. Daniel the Stylite of Constantinople (489-490). Ven. Nikon the Dry of the Kiev Caves (Near Caves—12th c.). Martyrs Mirax, Acepisus and Aithalas, of Egypt (7th c.). Ven. Luke the New Stylite of Chalcedon (ca. 970-980).*

FIRST ANTIPHON

It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High!

Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! *To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! (R.:) Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)*

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! Refrain: Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! *For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)*

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 8): From the heights Thou didst descend, O Compassionate One, and Thou didst submit to the three-day burial that Thou mightest deliver us from passion. Thou art our life and our Resurrection: O Lord, glory to Thee!

TROPARION OF THE FOREFATHERS (Tone 2): By faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers, when through them Thou didst betroth Thyself aforetime to the Church from among the nations. The Saints boast in glory that from their seed there is a glorious fruit, even she that bare Thee seedlessly. By their prayers, O Christ God, save 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 FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 3): The Virgin cometh today to the cave to give birth, ineffably to bring forth the Word eternal. Therefore, rejoice, O world, at the message; with the angels and shepherds, give glory to Him Who shall appear by His own will as a young child—He Who is from eternity God.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers.
Thou art just in all that Thou hast done to us!*

From the Epistle to the Colossians

(Col 3:4-11) **Brethren: when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man, but Christ is all and in all.**

Today's Epistle speaks about cutting out anger, malice, lies, slander, foul talk, all manner of sexual impurity, and greed. We all know pretty well that these vices estrange us from God and His Kingdom. If there is something surprising, it is that Saint Paul adds a special note to greed or covetousness: he says that it is a form of idolatry. *Idolatry?* Indeed! Greed is idolatry because it is a twisted emotional attachment—an addiction—to material possessions.

It is natural to seek personal security and a place, a status, in society. But *covetousness* means that we abandon ourselves and our aspirations for trust and security to "having" all kinds of earthly possessions. In short, it means believing that security and "being someone" comes from *having stuff*, and lots of it. With this attitude we make money into a god and sell ourselves into slavery to this god. And Christ warns us at: "**No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money!**" (Mat 6:24). The same applies to all other vices. Therefore, Saint Paul writes, we must put away all these evil masters: anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, and all the rest.

Let us now turn to what being a Christian means, according to the Apostle. It is not simply doing certain things and abstaining from others. If we avoid cursing, lying, and slandering, it is not merely because they are "not nice" or "bad for society." Christian morality is not about keeping a certain set of rules, but about exercising here and now "the life of the age to come" that we confess in the Creed). The life of the age to come is, in fact, communion with Christ Himself. That is why, being with Christ in the age to come is possible only if we practice living "in Christ" *in this age*.

Note the wording of the Apostle: "**when Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**" In other words, when Christ appears in glory, either He will be the very content of our lives, or we will find ourselves outside of the life of the Kingdom. It is for this reason that our day-to-day existence matters tremendously: either we struggle to make Christ's life our own, anticipating the full glory of the Kingdom to come, or we are increasingly sabotaging our chances in the age to come.

Our life in Christ is a return to true humanity. With his becoming man (as we celebrate at Christmas), the Word of God has taken on our human nature and healed it. What is more, this renewed humanity is not His personal privilege, but a gift He shares with us: “**Christ in all!**” Christian morality means, therefore, to give ourselves and all our life to Him, “trading in,” as it were, our fallen humanity for the life of the “new Adam.” In the words of the Apostle, “**put off the old nature with its practices** (anger, malice, lies, slander, foul talk, sexual impurity, etc) **and put on the new nature renewed after the image of the Creator.**”

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke

(Luke 14:16-24) Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, ‘none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

To speak of God’s call addressed to the estranged humanity, the Church uses the image of a rich banquet, with food and drink and much rejoicing. As we hear on Pascha night: *Rejoice today for the table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!* Let us summarize today’s Gospel: a “great dinner” is organized; the dinner is free; “everything is ready”; “many” are invited (and it turns out, in the end, that *everyone* is invited).

The parable also portrays the petty excuses that humanity makes when receiving this call. By contrast with the greatness of the person organizing the banquet (the Evangelist Luke says it was “a great dinner,” while Matthew 22 speaks of a *king* and a *kingly banquet!*), the magnitude of the celebration, and the attention devoted to sending out the invitations you, the response is embarrassing. People make their excuses arguing (unconvincingly) that they have to attend to various less pressing and much less important duties.

In its original context, those who first receive the invitation represent the people of Israel; the second group—the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—to whom the call goes out afterwards, are the nations, the pagans. In the life of the Church, however, the parable also speaks about God’s *ongoing* work of calling home his estranged children –*with fear of God, with faith and love, draw near!* – and about our *ongoing* work of receiving God in our lives, and *ongoing* work of drawing near to God in the banquet of the Church – *of Your mystical supper receive me today, O Son of God!*

How do we respond to God’s invitation? And if we already have responded and taken the first step (some of us by our baptism as children, others by joining the Orthodox Church later in life), how do we live out this fellowship with Christ?

A Christian life is not easy. Saint Paul describes it as an ongoing work of “putting off the old nature with its practices, and putting on the new nature.” The journey is hard, the world is full of

snares, and we are flawed creatures. And yet, we draw strength by reminding ourselves that we are at the Lord's Table, called by a good and generous Lord to share in the light of His goodness. *Christ is among us! He is and ever shall be!*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today, 12:30pm-1:30pm

LEARNING ORTHODOX THEOLOGY FROM THE HYMNS OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
Presentation followed by Q&A

Next Sunday (December 18): meeting of the parish council with Fr. Anthony Yazge (Dean of W. Pennsylvania), Fr. Paul Abernathy, directory of FOCUS Pittsburgh, and Tom Wolenski, head of the Cranberry mission steering committee. Meetings of the parish council are open to all parishioners. This meeting will continue discussing the plan proposed by Fr. Bogdan, Fr. Yazge, and Bishop Thomas, (1) to move the parish of St. Anthony's to Cranberry, merging it with the Cranberry mission, and (2) to use the existing facilities to open a Butler chapter of FOCUS (a pan-Orthodox ministry which provides action-oriented and sustainable solutions to poverty in communities across America).

Friday, 23 December:

10 AM: Royal Hours of Nativity, followed by confessions and visitations

6 PM: Advent Compline, followed by confessions

Saturday, 24 December:

5:30 PM: Matins and Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Lord's Nativity, potluck dinner.

Sunday, 1 January: Feast of the Lord's Circumcision and Saint Basil the Great

9 AM: Festal Matins; **10 AM:** Divine Liturgy

Note: we will not be at St. Anthony's, but at Sts. Peter and Paul!

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Mark (Maura's cousin); Job; Maura; Christi, Janet, Ann; John and Mary Ann (Jean's relatives); Stelian (Cezar's father); Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma; George (Georgiades), Christine (Abraham), Marion and Jim Raimondi (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 (expecting); Christine, Phoebe, Tina. Garrett & Autumn, Benjamin – seeking the true faith.

DEPARTED: Diane and Angeliki (Georgia's sister and mother); Iosif (Cristina's father); Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy); Bill; Dolores (Bingham); Gladys (Smolen); David (Steve's father-in-law); Donald (Norma's brother); 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); Joe and David Sipos; Glenn (Jean's grandson); Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Leatrice (Totin); Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle); Lance; Bob (Diane's father), Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother).

Dear St. Anthony Parishioners,

Please read this entire letter; it concerns everyone who wishes to continue worshiping as part of St. Anthony's Orthodox Church. Parts are taken from Parish Council members who contributed comments.

At our Parish Council meeting last Sunday after Liturgy, Father Bogdan proposed to begin a process of relocating our Parish to Cranberry Township to merge with the Cranberry mission effort there by sometime next year with actions being taken immediately after Pascha. We will need for anyone and everyone to be sure to understand the reasons for his proposal and to voice comments, if any.

Father indicated that Bishop Thomas and Dean/Father Yazge are on board with this idea. There are many details and an understanding of the feasibility is yet to be addressed, but Father feels it is his pastoral duty and in our best interest for the continued sustenance of the Parish. His concern is the existence of the three Orthodox parishes in Butler, all declining in attendance and headed toward an inevitable merger at some point in the future, but, by that time, with loss of St. Anthony's as an independent Parish. They propose St. Anthony's retain the title of the Church building but allow it to be used for a local Pittsburgh FOCUS effort. The church building and facilities proper would stay as is to be used for various prayer gatherings led by Priests or Deacons under the auspices of FOCUS which is supported by all jurisdictions.

At a meeting of the Cranberrites after their Liturgy on November 13, Father proposed making a continuing commitment to Cranberry so it would not die. He suggested his serving in each location on alternate weeks. I voiced my concern at that meeting that loss of continuity of our priest would hasten the demise of St. Anthony's. Since then, Father, the Dean and Bishop Thomas have developed the idea of relocating us altogether which he proposed to the Parish Council last Sunday. There would be a transition period where the Cranberrites would attend Liturgy at our Church and we would attend in Cranberry on alternating weeks.

In my view, it gets down to the question: Who is the Parish here to serve? If it is us who are here now then we should stay, even though, as it appears, our net attendance at Liturgies, Vespers and Parish meetings is declining. Based on the current conditions, it would seem that the Parish will merge with the others and possibly cease to exist some years in the future. We also potentially have some daunting maintenance expenses in the next few years that may cause us to take on some debt, though, so far, our financial contributions have remained stable irrespective of the sporadic attendance.

Then again, there is great value in a small group of folks in Butler worshiping God. What will the builders and founders of our church think of the current parishioners being removed from their church?

If our responsibility is to the larger community and to future generations, then we may have an obligation to do what is necessary to sustain St. Anthony's as a Parish, regardless of location and brick & mortar building, and to keep alive the promise of a new Parish in Cranberry.

Relocation, however, is also fraught with complications as any development in Cranberry Township is expensive and would require a sufficient commitment of all members, new and old, to be sustainable. At the moment, I do not see the way forward for that, though Father has asked the Parish Council to work with Cranberry to find a way forward for the relocation.

Also uncertain, is the final authority on this. If it is Bishop Thomas and he insists on the relocation, he would have the authority to pull our antimension if we decline to comply with his directive. This will need to be clarified.

Father is gathering more details at this time and will convey them to all of us soon.

We need to hear from everyone who has an opinion as this greatly impacts the way we worship. Feel free to comment or question in a reply to all, or only to me, or only to Father, or to Father and me or to a Council member, whatever you feel comfortable with. As we have had difficulty in getting Parish attendance in meetings that concern the entire Parish, we will try this first. If enough folks would commit to a Parish gathering, we can also do that. Or even a phone conference if more folks would like that.

Please pray for wisdom for all those involved and that we will focus on the love of Christ during this process.

Frank Harrison
President of St. Anthony's parish council
December 18, 2016

December 18, 2016

Dear friends,

I have reopened the discussion about moving St. Anthony's to Cranberry, as I think we now have a unique window of opportunity. For the past two or three years I've been saying that maintaining three struggling parishes in the Butler/Lyndora area is financially and administratively crippling and untenable in long run. The situation seems to be designed for minimal efficacy on all levels: we have three poorly attended Vespers and Matins services, three struggling choirs, three separate and uncoordinated Sunday Schools, missionary efforts, and charity endeavors; three separate bake sales, limited by a shrinking "workforce". But, leaving "efficacy" aside, it is my *pastoral* responsibility to tell you that, if we continue along the same path, we reduce the impact of the larger Orthodox community by keeping it divided (this, of course, applies to all three churches!) and we fail to do our best for those who will be here after us.

About a year ago we began a missionary and pastoral outreach in Cranberry. The input from both priests who are helping me with the mission is that there is, indeed, not only a real need but also great potential in Cranberry. From now until Pascha, with help from Frs. Yazge and Roeber, we can offer Liturgy there twice a month. This actually does not offer enough stability and predictability, but it is something. However, after Pascha this help will stop. What to do to make sure Cranberry has a chance to develop? While keeping three churches in Butler makes no sense today, there is a clear need and potential for a church to grow and develop in Cranberry; but the latter needs something that only the relocation of St. Anthony's can offer: the regular and constant presence of a priest, and a measure of institutional and communal coherence and stability. Bishop Thomas, Father Yazge, Father Roeber, as well as the head of the Department of Mission and Evangelism, Fr. John Finley, are all of the opinion that we should move St. Anthony's to Cranberry. This is also how I see things. I am convinced this is good for us and good for Cranberry, and that we now have a unique opportunity to ensure that our parish survives and thrives as St. Anthony's in Cranberry.

An important part of the plan would be keep the buildings, and especially the church. I would like the parish to retain ownership but to use these as a Butler chapter of FOCUS (this is a pan-Orthodox ministry, which exists in Pittsburgh, in Beaver Falls and in other locations, and is dedicated to providing help in areas of great poverty). Although regular Sunday services would take place in Cranberry, the church would remain the property of Saint Anthony and function as a chapel for various prayer services, confessions, baptisms, funerals, etc. A FOCUS chapter would bring together the larger Orthodox population in service to the community, in a manner that *does indeed* make a difference. FOCUS Pittsburgh would offer the necessary training and assist in planning (Fr Paul Abernathy estimates this takes a few months up to a year); the manpower would be drawn from the local Orthodox community (the core group is usually about 20 committed persons: I think we can find them among the three churches); funding is attracted by fundraising (for which, he said, "there is a method" which is part of the training) and there would also be cooperation with other charitable organizations in the area. If it worked in the poorest area of Pittsburgh and in Beaver Falls, it should be possible in Butler.

Nothing will change from now until Pascha. But we need to come to an agreement about the necessary steps after Pascha. I am encouraged by the fact that (1) there is consensus among the pastor (me), the Dean, the Bishop, and the Department of Mission and Evangelism; (2) there is serious potential and enthusiasm in Cranberry. We resolved that on Sunday December 18, the parish council would like to meet with the Dean, Fr. Anthony Yazge, Fr Paul Abernathy, and Tom Wolenski, the head of Cranberry's steering committee. The Dean will provide the Bishop's perspective; Fr. Abernathy will speak about FOCUS; Tom will present the current realities and short-term possibilities for Cranberry.

Discussing the relocation of our parish to Cranberry causes all of us, especially those who have for decades been founders and/ or benefactors of this community, great anxiety and pain. I would not even think of bringing up this subject if I wasn't convinced, as the pastor of St. Anthony's, that it is truly necessary. This is not an administrative necessity to be imposed by the clergy on the people, but a spiritual necessity stemming from our commitment to the spiritual reality of the Church. Priests are assigned to a parish and, if necessary, removed by the bishop; but the relationship between the parish community, their priest, and the bishop is (on the human level) a continual exchange of caring and trust.

It is my responsibility to lead the flock of this parish by serving it in a Christlike manner. Regardless of the place in which we are worshipping, I remain committed to serving you. Even if St. Anthony's relocates to Cranberry, I will continue to come up to Butler from time to time. I am not going away and not leaving anyone behind. I ask you to not stay home, leave, or lose heart. If you consider me your *pastor* (which is Latin for "shepherd"), please understand that it is my duty to lead in the right direction—especially now that there is consensus with the Dean, the Bishop, and the Department of Mission and Evangelism—even if the path appears difficult.

My hope is that we write to the Cranberry group to assure them that we are committed to supporting them in their efforts; and to invite them to join Saint Anthony's with the assurance that we are seriously considering relocating; and perhaps propose that, from now until Pascha, we find opportunities to worship together, meet and get to know each other.

I remind you of the important meeting next Sunday (December 18th) and ask that we all keep each other in prayer.

In Christ,
Father Bogdan