

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
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SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 29 January 2017

TONE 7—*Translation of the relics of St. Ignatius the Godbearer; New Martyr Demetrios of Chios (1802). New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia (under Communist rule). Martyr Romanus and his companions, in Samosata (297). Martyr Silvanus, Bishop of Emesa and his companions (312).*

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 7): Thou didst shatter death by Thy Cross, Thou didst open paradise to the thief; Thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment-bearing women into joy. And didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim a warning, that Thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world great mercy.

TROPARION OF ST. IGNATIUS THE GODBEARER (Tone 4): By choosing the Apostles' way of life, thou has succeeded them on their throne. Inspired by God, thou didst find the way to divine contemplation through the practice of virtue. After teaching the word of truth without error, thou didst defend the faith even to the shedding of thy blood. O holy martyr among bishops, Ignatius: entreat the Lord our God to 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 OF THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST (Tone 1): Thou, O Christ God, Who by Thy Birth, didst sanctify the Virgin's womb, and, as is meet, didst bless Simeon's arms, and didst also come to save us; preserve Thy fold in wars, and confirm them whom Thou didst love, for Thou alone art the Lover of mankind.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Make your vows to the Lord your God! In Judah God is known.*

The Reading is from Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians

(2 Cor 6:16-7:1) Brethren, we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God!

Saint Paul is quoting the Scriptures and understanding them in a new way, applying the revelation of old to the realities of his day. In this, he actually follows in the footsteps of the great prophets of Israel. We read that "God was walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8)—meaning that Paradise is, essentially, the presence of God. Later, when God chooses Israel as that portion of humanity which may welcome the presence of God and act as a priest among the nations, the Book of Leviticus has God declare to Israel, "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). Later still, as Israel was to return from the Babylonian slavery, the prophet Isaiah recalled their leaving the slavery in Egypt and wrote: "Depart, depart, go out, touch no unclean thing" (Isaiah 52:11).

Saint Paul sees the Christian Church—Jews and non-Jews alike—as following Christ in our new Exodus: from estrangement to reunion with God, from sinfulness to deification, from mortality into the risen life of Christ. Looking back to the Law and the Prophets, the Apostle exhorts us: **Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God!**

But how realistic is the command that we "**cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit**"? How can we "**make holiness perfect**"? If you think this is just a radical expression of the Apostle, remember the similar words of the Divine Liturgy: "the holy things are for *those who are holy!*"

God seems to require *the impossible!* True. But it is also true that if we are thinking of God "over there" making such requirements of us "over here"—well, then we are misunderstanding our faith. Let us start with the Orthodox confession of faith: "God became man, so that man may be deified." He did not simply order us to "be like God," but rather came among us, became one of us, so as to lead the way to God; and He sent the Holy Spirit to "dwell in us" and assist us on the way.

It is true that the Liturgy proclaims "the holy things are for the holy"; but we also hear at Liturgy, "*You – God – are our sanctification.*" And the Apostle begins by telling us that we are temples

of the living God, and that God lives and moves in us. Not some lofty *concept* of God or some pious emotions, but the living God, the fire unconsumed who comes to purify, enlighten, and transform us.

Yes, God demands the impossible. But He is himself at work in us, to make the impossible possible—to cleanse us from every defilement of body and spirit” and to perfect His holiness in us. The point is simply to allow Him to live and move in us. And the first step is to receive the gift of God Himself given to us in the Holy Eucharist: *Receive the Body of Christ, taste the fountain of immortality!*

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

(Matt 15:21-28) At that time, Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

This is a difficult Gospel: Christ first ignores the woman begging for help; He even ignores the pleas of the disciples; He then says that His ministry is only for Israel, not for pagans. Finally, He even insults the woman: "it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

But we know from the witness of the Gospels that Jesus had mercy on those who approached Him. We also know that He was concerned not only with the sons of Israel, since He said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice" (John 10:16). And we know that He was always particularly caring and gentle in His interaction with women (remember the woman caught in adultery: He does not shame her by looking at her when she was most likely half-naked).

All of this leads us to understand that what is going on is a testing of sorts, an exam. A hard exam, which the Canaanite passes with flying colors: she continues to ask, full of faith, despite all the setbacks; she does not give up, she does not become bitter or cynical, she does not respond with insults of her own. She is humble, acknowledging her lowly status ("Yes, Lord, but even the dogs ..."). And she does all of this out of love, because she is not begging for herself but for her daughter!

The Lord's response is unique. "O, woman!" he addresses her. This exclamation the Gospels reserve only for her. And then, "**great is your faith!**" Nobody ever received such congratulation from the Lord. Finally, "**Be it done for you as you desire!**" Not "according to your faith" (as the Lord addresses several others), but "as you desire". The message is, of course, the same. And yet, this expression, "as you desire," bespeaks a special intimacy. The Canaanite woman *already* receives that which the Lord promises His disciples for the *future*: "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 16).

Today's Gospel also teaches an important theological lesson. As Orthodox we do not say that "now," in this age, is the time for toil, and "then" or "there" in the afterlife, the time to collect the reward. We believe, rather, that faith bridges the gap between seen and unseen realities, making us contemporaries of the saints from all times and places, and *citizens of the age to come*. The saints always say that, if we live with God and in God, entering the depths of faith, the realities of the age to come become present to us here and now. This is why miracles are not arbitrary and bizarre events

that twist the laws of nature as we know it, but glimpses here and now of the future “normal”, when we all share the glorious state of the Risen Christ.

Perhaps these are dizzying heights for us, who are mere beginners and too often lukewarm in our faith. Nevertheless, we have the encouraging example of the Canaanite woman, who gained access to spiritual heights by her courageous humility. Let us learn from her how to say and mean, **Have mercy on me, O Lord!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Many thanks** to all for a wonderful feast of Saint Anthony last Sunday—especially to those who have worked very, very hard to plan and “execute” everything, setting up, cleaning up, cooking, practicing and singing, etc. The food was abundant and delicious, as befits a true feast; and we received solid nourishment—good to chew on during the upcoming Lent—from Fr. Silviu Bunta.
- **Thursday February 2** is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Even though we would normally celebrate with Vespers Liturgy on Wednesday evening, Fr. Bogdan is unable to leave Pittsburgh that evening. Anyone who can attend the service at Sts Peter and Paul are encouraged to do so; our parish will have to wait until next Sunday and only then have festal Vespers, Matins, and Liturgy.
- **Next Sunday (January 29):** one-year memorial service for Iosif, Cristina’s father. The Bucurs will bring koliva and prepare a meal.
- **HOUSE BLESSINGS:** In the Orthodox tradition we “extend,” as it were, the blessing of Theophany to all areas of our lives by asking the priests to visit and bless our homes with holy water. If you wish to schedule a visit, please email Fr. Bogdan (frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org).
- **CRANBERRY OUTREACH MOVING TO A NEW HOME!** Beginning today our mission outreach will gather for Sunday worship at **Old St Kilian’s, 205 Clark Street, Mars, PA 16046.**

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Daniel (Sipos); Kent (Jean’s husband); Mark (Maura’s cousin); Maura; Christi, Janet, Ann; John and Mary Ann (Jean’s relatives); Stelian (Cezar’s father); Seba, Lisa, and Sam (Michaels), Norma; 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: Job; George (Georgiades); Diane (Georgia’s sister); Iosif (Cristina’s father); Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy); Richard (Minto) from Sts Peter and Paul; Bill; Dolores (Bingham); 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), Joseph (Rose’s father), Fred (Dollie’s uncle); Lance; Bob (Diane’s father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham’s mother).