

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

12 March 2017

TONE 5—Commemoration of Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessalonica Synaxis of the Venerable Fathers of the Kiev Caves Lavra. Ven. Theophanes the Confessor, of Sigriane (818). Righteous Phineas, grandson of Aaron (ca. 1500 B.C.). Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome (604). Ven. Simeon the New Theologian (1021).

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, 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 ...)

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 THE RESURRECTION (Tone 5): Let us believers praise and worship the Word; coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation. For, He took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh to suffer death; and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

TROPARION OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS (Tone 8): O Star of Orthodoxy, support of the Church and its teacher, O comeliness of ascetics, and incontestable champion of those who speak in theology, Gregory the wonder-worker, the pride of Thessalonica and preacher of grace, implore thou constantly for the salvation of our souls.

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 THE FOREFEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 8): To thee, the Champion Leader, do I offer thanks of victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror; but as thou that hast that power invincible, O Theotokos, thou alone can set me free: from all forms of danger free me and deliver me, that I may cry unto thee: "Rejoice, O Bride without Bridegroom."

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *O Lord, Thou will preserve us and keep us from this generation. Save me, O Lord, for the godly man hath disappeared.*

From the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 1:10-2:3) **"At the beginning, O Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment. You will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end."** But to what angel has He ever said, **"Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet"**? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the message, declared by angels, was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard Him.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a very difficult text. Nevertheless, if we heard this reading today, we are called to take with us as much as we can of its message. One of the memorable passages is the following: **To what angel has God ever said, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet"**? Indeed, to sit at the right hand of the king, for people of that time, meant to share the king's authority; thus, to sit at the right hand of God means to share His divinity. And even the highest angels remain, still, creatures, radically different from the Creator.

With Christ, however, things are different. He shares in God's reality in a way that is not true of even the highest of angels. In him the prophetic verse from Psalm 110:1 (**"Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet"**) finds its fulfillment. Indeed, He is truly divine, just as much divine as the Father is: *true God of true God*.

Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord is a serious matter. "Lord" is an exclusive title for God. If, then, we acknowledge His divinity, we also acknowledge that we find ourselves face-to-face with His message—a message, as we read today, **"declared at first by the Lord, and attested to us by those who heard Him."** Let us take to heart the Apostle's advice and not neglect or despise the words of our eternal life, coming from the Lord Himself; let us not miss out on **"such a great salvation"** as He has in store for those who give ear to his call.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mk 2:1-12) At that time, when Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and He was preaching the Word to them. And they came, bringing to Jesus a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic – "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all. So that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

A well-known Gospel story is recounted here. A paralytic brought to Jesus receives his healing almost instantaneously, in a spectacular manner ("all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"). No less impressive is the fact that he also has immediate knowledge of what people are "reasoning in their hearts"—"immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves ..." And who is it that knows our heart—our hidden inner selves—even more intimately than we know it ourselves?

Christ's adversaries ask themselves "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They decide from this that Jesus is blaspheming, since He cannot possibly be who He says He is; later on, when faced with the reality of so many undeniable healings and miracles, they grant that something happened but accuse Him of being possessed and working with the power of demons. We, however, understand that Jesus Christ heals and forgives because He is truly God. And because He is truly God He shows us the true Image of God: what else does God desire but our healing and return to fullness of Life?

But it is also important to pay attention to another very significant detail of the story. **Today's Gospel offers us a beautiful image of what the Christian community should be.** Note the relationship between the paralytic and the four men who bring him in on a pallet. Undoubtedly, these are real friends, ready to go to any length for their afflicted friend. After making their way through the massive crowd (surely not an easy task) and realizing that it was simply impossible to advance an inch further towards Jesus, they even "**removed the roof, ... made an opening, and let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.**"

These four have not left their neighbor behind in hopes of "finding God": that kind of seeking for God would have been spiritual delusion. What enables them to find the true God, is, rather, precisely the dedication with which they take their paralytic friend to Jesus. When they have finally managed to present the paralytic to the Lord, the Evangelist writes the following: "**And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven!'**"

Note: “**when Jesus saw *their* faith!**” The Lord always emphasizes the importance of faith; only this time it is the faith *of the others* that saves the paralytic.

Christianity “by oneself” is a fiction, and can be a dangerous delusion (I owe this insight to a blessed monk!). If we are to be saved, we are saved by cooperating with God’s grace and in relation to others; it is only sin that is strictly “individual.” Indeed, the Church strives to embody the model set forth in today’s Gospel. Through fasts and feasts, we are journeying, we praise God, we commit to God ourselves and each other, we give thanks, and we draw near the chalice in faith and love. In short, we are exercising ourselves into becoming “we”: the Body of Christ made up of many members, and are learning to call God not only “my God” but “our Father.”

We exercise this manner of existence—being joined together as members of the Body of Christ—when we gather *as the Church*, when we fast *together*, pray *together*, and are *together* called to receive Communion. When our sins and failings estrange us from the Body, we repent—individually—in order to return to fuller communion in Christ. These are the words the priest speaks at Confession: “*Show mercy now on Your servant, and grant to him/her an image of repentance, forgiving all his/sins, whether voluntary or involuntary. Reconcile and unite him/her to Your Holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord!*”

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TODAY: GENERAL PARISH MEETING!

- **Sunday, 19 March, 4 PM:** Lenten Vespers at the Orthodox Mission in Mars/Cranberry (Old St. Kilian's Church, 205 Clark Street, Mars, PA). **Homilist:** Fr. Paul Abernathy (FOCUS). Middle Eastern Lenten meal to follow the service.

LITURGIES OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS:

- **W, 3/15, 6:30 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (Cranberry/Mars mission).
- **W, 3/22, 6:30 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (St. Anthony's)
- **W, 3/29, 6:30 PM:** Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts (Sts Peter & Paul and Cranberry/ mission)

ANNUNCIATION (Sts Peter & Paul): **Sat, 3/25** (9 AM Matins, 10 AM Liturgy). After the service, Fr. Bogdan will speak about the similarities and differences between the Christian and Muslim understanding of the Annunciation.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: presbyter Vasile; Venetia (Chrissi's mom); Newborn Lydia May (Cole); Daniel (Sipos); Kent (Jean's husband); 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); Derek; Christine, Phoebe, Tina. Garrett & Autumn, Benjamin, Matt and Nancy – seeking the true faith.

DEPARTED: Bill; Iosif; Job; George (Georgiades); Diane (Georgia's sister); Victoria and Susan (mothers of Frank and Stacy); Dolores (Bingham); Gladys (Smolen); 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), 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).