

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001
RECTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur
CONTACT: 724.287.6983 (church); 412.390.8208 (priest);
frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 26 November 2017

TONE 8—Greatmartyr James the Persian (421). Ven. Palladius of Thessalonica (6th-7th c.). St. Jacob, Bishop and Wonderworker of Rostov (1392). Seventeen Monk Martyrs in India (4th c.).

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 has girt Himself! Refrain: Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia! *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 ...)*

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 might deliver us from passion; Thou art our life and our Resurrection, O Lord, glory to Thee.

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): On this day the Virgin comes unto the cave to give birth there to the Word before all time: beyond all words is this wonder! Dace with joy rejoice, all of creation, hearing these tidings! Glorify, along with angels and with the shepherds, him who willingly appears as a newborn baby, yet he is God before time.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Make your vows to the Lord our God and perform them.
God is known in Judah; His Name is great in Israel.*

The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

(Eph 4:1-7) Brethren, I, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The crucial term in this passage is "one." It points to the *unity* worked out by God: *one body and one Spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all.*

There is *one* God, and this God regards us as a father does his children—with kindness, with selfless love, with gentle care. There is *one* Lord: because God is our father, the Word of God (God's mind, or conscience, or self-manifestation) became man for us, so as to annihilate anything that separates us from him, heal us and save us and return of to the fullness of life. There is *one faith*, the revelation of the good news: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. There is *one baptism*: when we respond to God's call, he *immerses* us ("baptize" in Greek means precisely that) into the luminous gift that flows from him and we are planted into the Body of the risen Christ.

The Church is a mystery—*the mystery*, indeed, of God uniting himself to us, so that we may be one among us and one with him. This is **the calling to which we have been called**: the word "calling" is, in Greek, related to the noun "church"—the community of those "called" by God. We are to understand this call and live in a manner worthy of it. In other words, we are called to join God's tireless work of healing divisions and driving all to being "one," and cooperate with God **eagerly, by maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

And how does this look like on the ground, at home and in church? **Lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing one another in love.** Not easy! This is more a portrait of Christ, who said, "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart!" (Mat 11:29) and "I pray that they will all be one" (John 17:21). This is our call: the highest, not easy, seemingly impossible. And yet, God also makes it possible for us by giving **grace to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke

(Luke 18:18-27) At that time, a man came testing Jesus and asking, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.'" And the man said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when the man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus, seeing him sad, said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus said, "What is impossible for human beings is possible for God."

Here is a man who, by any standards of human morality, is a pretty decent person: he does not cheat on his wife, he behaves well with his parents, he does not steal, he does not slander or bring false accusations against others, did kill anyone, etc. There probably other vices he has managed to avoid. He is, moreover, a deeply religious person (his concern here is "how to inherit eternal life"), who shows appropriate respect for teachers of the Law (note how politely he addresses Jesus). Moreover, he's acted like that "since his youth"! A decent person, whom we would do well to emulate.

And yet, even while we recite the litany of this man's qualities, the Gospel seems to sets him forth as an example of *what to avoid*. The word this man receives from Christ comes as a hard blow to his self-esteem: what he has been doing is far from enough, and what he needs to do is impossibly hard for him. A very depressing answer, indeed, because Jesus puts his finger on a raw nerve: this man was very rich (and liked it), and he would have to give everything up. "The man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich."

Had the man not been terribly attached to money, but instead sexually promiscuous, the answer would probably been different; perhaps something like "One thing you still lack. Cut out your promiscuity, start living in chastity as of right now, and you will have treasure in heaven." And the man would have become sad, imagining himself unable to remain faithful to a single woman (chastity in marriage) or faithful to a vow of abstinence (as in monastic chastity). Had he been under the control of vanity, Jesus would have proposed the practice of humility; had he been plagued by anger or violence, the answer would have pointed to *that* problem, and proposed the appropriate spiritual medicine.

In short, the Gospel is not about a particular rich man unwilling to part with his riches; and it is not singling out riches as the major impediment to salvation. In truth, the Gospel applies to each and every one of us. There is no "objective" scale of sins, and no "objective" greatest sin: the greatest sin is always *my* sin. And the word of Christ is not easy to swallow: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for *you* to enter the kingdom of God." When Jesus spoke these words to the rich man, those around him were positively shocked: "In this case, who can be saved?" Obviously, nobody; it is, as the Lord states, "impossible for human beings."

Before speaking to the rich man about his salvation, the Lord points to the goodness of God: "No one is good but God alone!" We should therefore not react like the rich man, who became sad and preferred to leave as soon as he realized that God was not offering him a confirmation of his decent life, but a call to radical change. Note the encouragement: the very impossibility of our salvation and life in God is made possible for us by God himself. The call of today's Gospel is echoed by our Liturgy, again and again: "let us commit ourselves and all our life to Christ our God ... for You are a good God and You love humankind"! In other words, deny yourself and your sins, entrust yourself to Christ, allow Him to clothe you with His grace, allow Him to make possible that which is impossible.

The Nativity of Christ for which we have started our preparations is the joyous event of the beginning of our salvation: the Virgin prepares to give birth, the Son of God prepares to become one of us, our salvation draws near.

