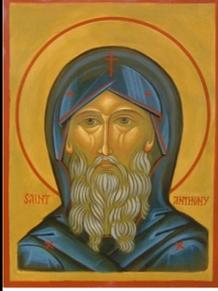


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 3 December 2017

TONE 1—Prophet Zephaniah. Martyrs Agapios, Seleukos and Mamas (3rd c.). St. Theodulus, Eparch of Constantinople (ca. 440). Ven. John the Silent of St. Sabbas' Monastery (558). Hieromartyr Theodore, Archbishop of Alexandria (606). Monk Martyr Cosmas of St. Anne's Skete (Mt. Athos). New-martyr Angelis of Chios.

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 1): While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O giver of life. Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ, glory to Thy kingdom, glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind.

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: *Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.*

From the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

(Ephesians 5:8-19) **Brethren: walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.**

One of the principles of Orthodox theology is that whatever we see in Christ, our Lord, is destined for us, his followers. If He is truly God, we are also called to increasing likeness to God—a process called “deification.” If we hear Christ proclaim, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), we are also to become and act as “children of the light.”

Today's Epistle reading has a rather lengthy list of *dos* and *don'ts*: not a random list, however, but one that reflects the process of entering and growing in the Christian life. First we hear ***Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light!*** This is very likely a fragment from a hymn that our Christian ancestors in the first century were using in their services. It speaks of fallen humanity as “dead” and “asleep,” and then summoned back to life by God. The same one who said “let there be light” at Creation now creates us anew individually, by calling us to turn from darkness to the light of Christ. After this first step follows a “walking” in the light, a separation from the works of darkness, a careful journey fraught with danger.

To complete this difficult journey of living in Christ is possible only by being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is why the Apostle urges us to **“be filled with the Spirit!”**; this is why we begin all our prayers, individual and communal, with an invocation of the Holy Spirit: “O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth come and abide in us!” Note that the presence of the Spirit, Whom we have received at Baptism, is “activated” in us in the Church's liturgical gathering, with its “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” when we are “singing and making melody to the Lord.” It is in Liturgy that we are receive the food and exercise our behavior for an everyday living as children of the light.

Overall, we are reminded that **the days are evil**—nothing new here—and called to “redeem time.” This is not simply “to make most of the time”. It means that, as Christians, as Spirit-bearers and children of the light, we ought to infuse this age with the presence of the Kingdom of God. We are called to *embody* the good tidings of this Advent season.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 18:35-43) At that time, as Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging; and hearing a multitude going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And he cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped, and commanded him to be brought to Him; and when he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me receive my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Today's Gospel tells of a spectacular conversion to Christ: a man becomes a follower of Jesus after the Lord cures him of his blindness miraculously, in an instant. If the Church has chosen this text for public reading, there is probably much to be learned from the healing of the blind man.

First off, his physical blindness is a reminder that of all of us, fallen humans, are "blind" and "deaf" to God. To be healed and made well (this is what the word "salvation" actually means: healing) is possible only by divine intervention. We cannot cure ourselves of the separation from God. The blind man knew where to go to find healing—Jesus Christ. Scripture says, "The Lord is the same, yesterday and today" (Heb 13:8); therefore, the same Lord can bring salvation also to me today.

Second, this man is faithful—unafraid, unashamed, stubborn in his faith. He cries out to the Lord "**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**" Even when some people try to silence him, he does not give up. He knows what he wants, and he has confidence that the Lord is the right one to ask for it: armed with this faith, he bulldozes his way through the hostilities of those around him, and *asks, and does indeed receive.*

Third, the Lord ask the blind man a strange question: **What do you want me to do for you?** What a weird thing to ask! The man is blind, it shouldn't be difficult to figure out that he wants to see! But God also asks us this very same question. Why are you in Church? Why do you call yourself a Christian—**what do you want me to do for you?** And sometimes we give the wrong answer: we may be here out of habit, for the sake of family tradition, social routine, perhaps to meet like-minded people, perhaps out of fear ... perhaps we've not given it too much thought. The question still stands: do you want to be healed, do you want to be saved? The blind man is our guide: "**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Lord, let me receive my sight!**"

Essentially, what is the blind man's faith? He believes it is the Lord—the God of Israel—who can do anything; but he also believes that this Lord is "the Son of David"—a true human being, one who feels what we feel, one who knows and sympathizes with our weakness. This is the faith of the Church.

Finally, it is remarkable that the man uses his very "profession" (he is "professional beggar," one might say, because this is all he does) to gain salvation. The beggar becomes a beggar for Christ, just like the fishermen become fishers of men, and just like the thief on the cross steals Paradise with his confession of faith. Whatever we have and whoever we are can be placed in the service of Christ, so that we, too, can be saved.

