

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 10 December 2017

TONE 2— Eothinon 5. *Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, and EUGRAPHUS, of Alexandria (ca. 313). St. Joasaph, Bishop of Belgorod (1754). Martyr Gemellus of Paphlagonia (ca. 361). Ven. Thomas of Bithynia (10th c.). Bl. Jovan, King of Serbia (1503) and his parents, Stephen (1446) and Angelina Brancovich.*

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 2): When Thou didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell with Thy Godly power. And when Thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of Heaven did cry aloud unto Thee: O Christ, Thou giver of life, 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! Dance 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: *The Lord is my strength and my song; The Lord has chastened me sorely.*

From the Epistle to the Ephesians

(Eph 6:10-17) **Brethren: draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

The Christians in Ephesus, who received this letter, must have understood this passage very well because they crossed paths daily with Roman soldiers wearing their armors and weapons. We, too, can see that Saint Paul is drawing an analogy between the weapons and armor of a soldier and the spiritual equipment of a Christian. It is good, however, to point out two elements that we might overlook.

First, the metaphor of warriors and weapons reminds us: Christianity is not for wimps! It is not easy, it is not comfortable, it requires discipline and constant vigilance. Indeed, there is a war—not against enemies “out there,” not a war with the body, but a war raging within the recesses of our minds and hearts: Christians are at war with the evil of their own sins and shortcomings, which are constantly attracting the activity of evil spirits. Anthony the Great, seeing these spirits roam all over the earth and interfere with us, asked in despair: “what can possibly avoid them?” The answer he received—“humility!”—connects well with another important point in today’s Apostle reading.

Soldiers receive their uniforms, weapons, and supplies from the army; they execute certain tactical maneuvers, as received through the army’s chain of command; their activities are part of a military strategy devised by their army superiors. Finally, the individual effort of a soldier is effective only inasmuch as it is part of a larger endeavor, involving various army units.

Christian life is also never about the individual detached from the community. This is why we Orthodox don’t speak of “my faith,” “my Bible,” “my prayer,” “my confession,” “my weekly Eucharist”; it is always about confessing and participating in the faith of the Church, hearing the Scriptures of the Church, joining in the prayer of the Church, tearing down (in the Sacrament of Confession) the invisible walls that separate me from the Church, entering (through Communion) into the great banquet of the Church. We fast together and feast together, and gradually learn to enter the communion of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As for the “armor of God,” the breastplate of righteousness, and the shield of faith that Saint Paul urges us to put on as equipment for our Christian life—all of these are *gifts*: we *receive* them when we enter the Church. To the extent that we nurture it, this grace (another word for gift) is activated in us, and cooperates with our effort of leading a life in Christ. “Put on!”; “Take!” “Be clothed in!” The Gospel states clearly that it is impossible for humans to be saved, *unless* and until we allow God to clothe us with the garment of grace, and allow Him to work in us and make the impossible possible.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 13:10-17) **At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your infirmity.” And He laid His hands**

upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrite! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As Jesus said this, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.

It is always good to be reminded that Jesus Christ was not a Christian: theologically, He does not "belong" to us—it is we who belong to Him; but also in a basic, historical, sense, He was a first-century Jew, who was addressed as "rabbi" by both his disciples and his opponents, who was circumcised (and we still celebrate the Lord's Circumcision on January 1), who kept the Sabbath, went to the Jerusalem Temple and synagogues regularly. Today's Gospel says that he was **teaching in the synagogue**.

Nevertheless, this rabbi from Nazareth not only teaches the Law, he also heals miraculously; and, through both teaching and healing, claims extraordinary authority in interpreting the Law. The teaching we receive from today's Gospel is captured best by the famous phrase in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath!"

Evidently, this applies just as much to us, Orthodox Christians. It is quite easy to idolize the externals of our faith—rules of worship, rules of piety, rules of Church discipline—and to treat them as independent realities, venerable in themselves. The Lord reminds the Pharisees (*and us*) that all religious laws and practices are only means to an end: they are meant to shape our awareness of God and to reorder our lives in relation to God. Ultimately, one's closeness to God is measured in the sensitivity towards all those created in the image of God. All "religion" that renders one callous and inattentive to the fellow human beings is delusion.

As for the miraculous healing—a chronic illness goes away "at once"—the Gospel speaks about more than just this extraordinary incident. We hear that the woman was "crippled *by a spirit*," so that "she was bent over, completely unable of standing erect," and then that "*Satan* had her bound for eighteen years." The crippled state of the woman is an image of fallen humanity: crippled, infirm, hopelessly under the power of the evil one. Like the woman, we receive, with the advent of the Lord, the truly Good News, "you are set free of your infirmity!"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** 1-year memorial for George Georgiades. We also pray for repose of the soul of Michael, King of Romania, who passed a few days ago at age 96, the last surviving WWII head of state. He was royal indeed, not because of his blood heritage (cousin of Queen Elisabeth II), but because throughout his very hard life he proved an example of faith, dignity, courage, and dedication to others.
- **Next Sunday** (Dec 17): 1-year memorial for Job. Since Job had no other family than our parish, we will remember him as we would a blood relative of ours. Fr. Bogdan will make koliva, the Cisloius will bring some fish, feel free to bring a small something to share.
- **Nativity Fast: November 15—December 25.** The rule of fasting is to use these 40 days to re-orient ourselves on "the one thing needful"—the presence of God—by a richer prayer life in church and in private, by seeking peace and reconciliation with God and neighbor, by practicing charity, and by simplifying our diet (abstaining from animal products). Clergy and people alike are reminded of the great help we receive in the Mystery of Confession. Father Bogdan will be available for confessions on Saturdays before and after Vespers, and Sundays after Divine Liturgy.

