

# ORTHODOX CRANBERRY: A Pastoral Outreach of St. Anthony Orthodox Church

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tone 1.—TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. *Leave-taking of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ*

### FIRST ANTIPHON

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Who settest fast the mountains by Thy strength, Who art girded about with power. (R.): *Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment. The mountains shall rejoice at the presence of the Lord, for He cometh; yea, He is come to judge the earth.* (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! (R.): *Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia! Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God: Zion is our mother, a man shall say, and such a man was born in her; and the Most High Himself hath established her.* (R.) Glory ... Now and ever ... Only Begotten Son of God ...

### THIRD ANTIPHON

TROPARION OF THE TRANSFIGURATION with the following verses:

- *Of Thy mercies, Lord, will I sing for ever.*
- *The heavens confess Thy wonders, Lord, and Thy truth the congregation of saints.*
- *Blessed is the people that knows jubilation; in the light of Thy Face shall they walk, and in Thy Name shall they rejoice all the day long.*

### LITTLE ENTRANCE AND HYMNS

*O, 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 6): When Mary stood at Thy grave, looking for Thy sacred body, angelic powers shone above Thy revered tomb; and the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led Hades captive and wast not tempted thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst give life to the world, O Thou, Who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE TRANSFIGURATION (Tone 7): Thou wast transfigured on the Mount, O Christ our God, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting light shine also upon us sinners; through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!

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 TRANSFIGURATION (Tone 7): On the mount Thou wast transfigured, and Thy Disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; that, when they should see Thee crucified, they would know Thy Passion to be willing, and would preach to the world that Thou, in truth, art the Effulgence of the Father.

## EPISTLE READING

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

*From Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*

(1 Cor 4:9-16) **Brethren: God has exhibited us Apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill clad and buffeted and homeless; and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off scouring of all things. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. I urge you, then, become imitators of me.**

The ministry of the Holy Apostles, as laid out by the Lord, was to bring the Good News to the entire world, and to make disciples of any and all who would taste the new life in Christ. Of course, "making disciples" is more than providing information or organizing disciplined battalions of followers; it means sharing the life of those who are being "made disciples" and gradually reshaping them in the image and likeness of a living model.

This is what the followers of the Lord experienced in their three years of following Jesus Christ, and, after Pentecost, in their new experience of the Risen Christ made present through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Apostles received the mandate to bring others into this spiritual fellowship with the Risen Lord: to make anyone willing a disciple—a disciple of Christ! And Saint Paul writes: Even if you should have countless guides to Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. Therefore, I urge you, be imitators of me. But why does Paul urge the Corinthians to imitate him? Why not "imitate Christ"? And why does he speak of himself as their father? Let us note, first, that in the same letter, the Apostle writes: **Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ** (1 Cor 11:1). Even in today's Epistle, Saint Paul compares "guide to Christ" to "father in Christ": both "guide" and "father" are explained, specifically, in relation to Christ! It is understood that a "guide to Christ" leads not to Paul, but to Christ.

So also with spiritual fatherhood: this much more intimate relation also results in making Paul's disciples into children of Christ. Christian discipleship today occurs in parishes and monasteries. **Each according to his own gift, one in this manner, and another in that**, as the Holy Apostle writes elsewhere (1 Cor 7:7). Even though we have few reliable guides to Christ today, and even fewer fathers in Christ, God will always provide for those who seek him earnestly, and whoever wants to be saved will be given the proper avenue of discipleship. The Lord promised to be us always, unto the end of the ages.

## GOSPEL READING

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*From the Holy Gospel According to Matthew*

(Mat 17:14-23) **At that time, a man came up to Jesus and kneeling before Him said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus said to them, "Because you have no faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. This kind never comes out except by prayer and fasting." As they were traveling together through Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will rise on the third day."**

As always, we look at today's Gospel not only for its "story"—the miraculous healing of a demon-possessed child two thousand years ago—but for what it says about us and *our state today*. It is noteworthy that the tortured existence of that child, as well as the shocking inability of the Apostles to provide healing (they are themselves puzzled about the incident) are due, the Lord says, to lack of faith. And it is about faith and its transformative power that Christ speaks to his disciples "in private," after the healing. We learn that "nothing is impossible" once we learn to live in faith.

What exactly is “faith,” then? Let us remember, first, that today’s Gospel text follows immediately after the Transfiguration. It is there, on Mount Tabor, that three of the disciples have seen Christ in the blazing light of his glory. That “the boy was cured instantly” is not surprising if we remember just *Who* it is that touched him: the Lord of glory, the Light and Life of the world. And we should also note that the Church sees the transfigured Christ as an image of what God intends for the restored humanity of the age to come.

What about us here and now, in the meantime—living as fallen creatures in this fallen world, even as we confess in the Creed, that we “look for the Resurrection and the life of the age to come”? The Gospel proclaims that the Kingdom of God has *already* dawned; we *already* experience a measure of the new reality, in which “God is with us, with His grace and love of mankind” (the priest proclaims this in the prayer following the main meal of the day). Miracles are the “normal” of the Kingdom to come, shining through, even for a single moment, in the fallen world. The key is faith.

Faith is the medium through which a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven can be received in our everyday lives. Indeed, it is *faith* that allows us to experience the healing power of Christ (and lack of faith prevents it, as we see with the Lord’s disciples today).

To prevent us from misunderstanding faith as a search for magical superpowers, today’s Gospel reading ends with the truth that undergirds our faith, hope, and love: **“The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will rise on the third day.”** We remember this every time we are called to draw near *with faith* to receive the Body of Christ, so as to taste the power and glory of the Resurrection even here and now.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

The Gospel of Matthew calls the Transfiguration of Christ a “vision”: **Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.** A vision of what? A vision of who? And why this vision? The tradition of our Church gives a variety of answers, all complementary, and all acknowledging the overwhelming greatness of this mystery. Thus: the display of supernatural light revealed to the disciples something about Christ’s divine identity, so that even when we behold the Crucified One we should not forget that He is the Lord of glory (1 Cor 2:8); the luminous vestments of the Lord represent the many layers of his divine and human reality, as disclosed to us in the many layers of the Scriptures; the blinding appearance of the Transfigured One sets before us the image of our glorified state in the age to come; the light that shone to the three disciples is the deifying divine energy, that is, God-as-He-gives-Himself.

We shouldn’t forget, however, that the Transfiguration is not only a “vision” (Matt 17:9) that the disciples have of Christ, but, so to speak, a vision of a vision: a vision granted to Moses and Elijah, witnessed by the disciples. When Moses requested to see the glory of God more intimately (Exodus 33) on Mount Sinai, God replied: “You shall not be able to see my Face, for no man shall see my Face and live ... You shall see my hind parts; but my Face will not appear to you (Exod 33:20, 23). Some early Christians interpreted this to mean that the vision face to face, refused to Moses, was being postponed for a later time. This is the view that was enshrined in the hymns of the Orthodox Church:

*He who once spoke through symbols to Moses on Sinai, saying, “I am He-who-is” was transfigured today upon Mount Tabor before the disciples (Vespers of Transfiguration, Apostichon).*

The message is clear: Moses appears with the Lord on Tabor because He-Who-Is, the Lord who had revealed Himself on Sinai, had promised the prophet a more perfect vision of God! “He-Who-Is,” the self-designation of God when he spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14), is precisely the “definition” given of Christ in all icons—be it of the baby in the arms of the Theotokos, or the Lord as Teacher, or the Crucified, Risen, or Transfigured One: “He-Who-Is” (or, in a different rendering, “The Existing One”), Christ our Lord ...” is also what we hear the priest proclaim at the closing of Vespers.

A final word on the Troparion of the feast: “When, O Christ our God, Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, Thou didst reveal Thy glory to Thy Disciples in proportion as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting light also enlighten us sinners ...”. This is not about some past event, but is sung about the “body of the Lord” that we must learn to discern (1 Cor 11:17) when called to approach the chalice “with fear of God, faith, and love.” We are called to draw near the Lord, the very Lord who spoke on Sinai, so that we may partake of the same vision as Moses, the Apostles, and all the saints, and join in their confession: we have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Kingdom!