

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

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tone 3 —TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. Ven. Pœmen the Great (ca. 450). St. Hosius the Confessor, Bishop of Cordova (359). St. Liberius, Pope of Rome (366). Ven. Pœmen of Palestine (ca. 602). St. Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles (543). Newly-revealed Martyr Phanourios of Rhodes

FIRST ANTIPHON

It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! (R.): *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! (R.): *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.)

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 3): Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad, for the Lord hath done a mighty act with His own arm. He hath trampled down death by death, and become the first-born from the dead. He hath delivered us from the depths of Hades, granting the world great mercy.

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 NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS (Tone 4): By thy holy nativity, O pure one, Joachim and Anna were delivered from the reproach of barrenness; and Adam and Eve were delivered from the corruption of death; thy people do celebrate it, having been saved from the stain of iniquity, crying unto thee: The barren doth give birth to the Theotokos, who nourisheth our life.

EPISTLE READING

Sing praises to our God, sing praises. Clap your hands, all ye nations!

The reading is from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

(1 Cor. 15:1-11) Brethren, I would remind you of the Gospel that I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved if you hold it fast—otherwise you believe in vain! For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

In today's Epistle reading, Saint Paul speaks to the Corinthians about **"the Gospel He preached to them."** It is always good to remind ourselves that the Gospel, or "Good News," does not refer primarily to the four biographies of the Lord Jesus Christ written by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. These written documents appeared *later* than the oral apostolic preaching—the "Gospel"—about Jesus Christ. Here is how Saint Paul summarizes the Gospel: **"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, He was buried and was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."**

The first thing to note is that the Good News is, essentially, Christ Himself: having tasted the life of fallen humanity even unto death, He has vanquished sin and death; therefore, *in Him* is the new life that God has in store for us, the resurrected life, life free from the consequences of the Fall. This is why we refer to Christ as "our hope" (1 Tim 1:1)—more specifically: Christ in us, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

This Good News, the Apostle says *twice* in a sentence, is "according to the Scriptures"—by which he means the Old Testament, for the New did not yet exist. In other words, the Gospel is the fruit of God's promises to Israel, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Moses and the prophets. We understand this if we search the Scriptures, which point to Christ (John 5:39), and if we understand the Scriptures in light of His Resurrection (Luke 24:25-27).

Indeed, "salvation comes from the Jews," as the Gospel of John (4:22) forcefully proclaims; it has been graciously extended to the Gentiles, and has now reached even us. We are the latest generation to whom the Good News has been delivered, the Gospel by which we are saved *if we hold it fast!* That is why Saint Paul's message applies fully to us, as well: **Brethren, I would remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved if you hold it fast—otherwise you believe in vain!**

In the end, the reading challenges us individually: will I grab hold of the faith which comes from the Apostles and has now been handed down to me? Will I embrace it, taste of it, live by it, in good times and in bad times?

GOSPEL READING

From the Holy Gospel According to Matthew

(Matt. 19:16-26) **At that time, a man came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is Who is good! If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, 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." When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."**

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, and he did not, and most likely never will, kill anyone. We can assume that there many other good things to be reported about him—for one, he is a deeply religious person (his concern here is for "eternal life"); he also shows appropriate respect for teachers of the Law (note how politely he addresses Jesus); and there probably are many vices that he has managed to avoid. Moreover, in the parallel text, in the Gospel of Mark, he'd acted like that **"since his youth" (Mk. 10:20)**, so that the Lord Himself **"looked at him and loved him" (Mk. 10:21)**. 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 set 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. **"When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."**

Had the man not been terribly attached to money, but instead sexually promiscuous, or addicted to drugs, or alcohol, or anger, or any other "passion," the answer would probably have been something like "One thing you still lack: cut out your (fill in: promiscuity, anger, drugs, alcohol, etc.), start living in chastity as of right now, and you will have treasure in heaven." We understand this kind of sadness when we imagine ourselves unable to live without

our addiction of choice: unable to remain faithful to a single woman (chastity in marriage), unable to steer clear of drunkenness, or drugs, or explosions of anger, or gossip, or lies, or ... whatever else it may be.

Had the man 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, this Gospel is not singling out riches as the major impediment to salvation, but speaks about *any sin* that may hold one back from salvation; and, of course, it is not about a particular rich man unwilling to part with his riches, but applies to each and every one of us. In truth, there is no “objective” scale of sins and no “objective” greatest sin: the greatest sin is always *my sin*. And the words of Christ are 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, the disciples were positively shocked: **“Who then can be saved?”** Obviously, nobody can! It is, as the Lord states, **“impossible for human beings.”**

Note that, before speaking to the rich man about his salvation, the Lord points to the goodness of God: **“One there is Who is good!”**—God, that is. 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. “Salvation belongs to the Lord,” says the Psalmist; and God extends His salvation to all who let go of themselves and receive life from the Giver of true life.

SAINT PHANOURIUS

A heavenly song of praise is chanted radiantly upon the earth: the company of angels joyfully celebrates an earthly festival, and from on high with hymns they praise your contests, while from below, the church proclaims the heavenly glory you have found by your labors and struggles, /O glorious martyr, Phanourius!

We know nothing for certain about the background of Saint Phanourius, nor exactly when he lived. Tradition says that when the island of Rhodes had been conquered by Moslems, the new ruler of the island wished to rebuild the walls of the city, which had been damaged in previous wars. Several ruined buildings were near the fortress, and stone from these buildings was used to repair the walls at the end of the fifteenth century, or the beginning of the sixteenth.

While working on the fortress, the Moslems uncovered the ruins of a beautiful church. Several icons, most of them badly damaged, were found on the floor. One icon, of Saint Phanourius, looked as if it had been painted that very day. The local bishop, whose name was Nilus, was called to see the icon. It said, “Saint Phanourius.”

The saint is depicted as a young soldier holding a cross in his right hand, with a lighted taper on the upper part of the. Twelve scenes from his life shown around the border of the icon clearly revealed that the saint was a martyr. Bishop Nilus sent representatives to the Moslem ruler, asking that he be permitted to restore the church. Permission was denied, so the bishop went to Constantinople and there he obtained a decree allowing him to rebuild the church.

At that time, there was no Orthodox bishop on the island of Crete. Since Crete was under the control of Venice, there was a Latin bishop. The Venetians refused to allow a successor to be consecrated when an Orthodox bishop died, or for new priests to be ordained, hoping that in time they would be able to convert the Orthodox population to Catholicism. Those seeking ordination were obliged to go to the island of Kythera.

It so happened that three young deacons had traveled from Crete to Kythera to be ordained to the holy priesthood. On their way back, they were captured at sea by Moslems who brought them to Rhodes to be sold as slaves. Lamenting their fate, the three new priests wept day and night.

While in Rhodes the priests heard of the miracles performed by the holy Great Martyr Phanourius. They began to pray to him with tears, asking to be freed from their captivity. Each of the three had been sold to a different master, and so remained unaware of what the others were doing.

By the mercy of God, each of the priests was allowed by his master to pray at the restored church of Saint Phanourius. All three arrived at the same time and prostrated themselves before the icon of the saint, asking to be delivered from the hands of the Hagarenes (Moslems, descendents of Hagar). Somewhat consoled, the priests left the church and returned to their masters.

That night Saint Phanourius appeared to the three masters and ordered them to set the priests free so that they could serve the Church, or he would punish them. The Moslems ignored the saint's warning, believing the vision to be the result of sorcery. The cruel masters bound the priests with chains and treated them even worse than before.

Then Saint Phanourius went to the priests and freed them from their shackles, promising that they would be freed the next day. Appearing once more to the Moslems, the holy martyr told them severely, "If you do not release your slaves by tomorrow, you shall witness the power of God!"

The next morning, all the inhabitants of the homes where the priests were held awoke to find themselves blind, paralyzed, and in great pain. They considered what they were to do, and so decided to send for the priests. When the three priests arrived, they asked them whether they could heal them. The priests replied, "We will pray to God. May His will be done!"

Once more Saint Phanourius appeared to the Hagarenes, ordering them to send to the church a document granting the priests their freedom. He told them that if they refused to do this, they would never recover their sight or health. All three masters wrote letters releasing the priests and sent the documents to the church, where they were placed before the icon of Saint Phanourius.

Before the messengers returned from the church, all those who had been blind and paralyzed were healed. The priests joyfully returned to Crete, carrying with them a copy of the icon of Saint Phanourius. Every year they celebrated the Feast of Saint Phanourius with deep gratitude for their miraculous deliverance.

The saint's name sounds similar to the Greek verb "phanerono," which means "to reveal" or "to disclose." For this reason, people pray to Saint Phanourius to help them find lost objects. When the object is recovered, they bake a sweet bread and share it with the poor, offering prayers for the salvation of saint's mother. Her name is not known, but according to tradition, she was a sinful woman during her life. Saint Phanourius has promised to help those who pray for his mother in this way.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER

Saturday-Sunday, September 2-3: services at St. Anthony's in Butler

Sat, 6:30 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:15 am: Matins and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 9-10: services at the Cranberry Outreach

Sat, 6 pm: Great Vespers followed by music practice

Sun, 9:30 am: Akathist "Glory to God for all things" and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 16-17: services at St. Anthony's in Butler

Sat, 6:30 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:15 am: Matins and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 23-24: services at the Cranberry Outreach

Sat, 6 pm: Great Vespers

Sun, 9:30 am: Akathist "Glory to God for all things" and Divine Liturgy

Saturday-Sunday, September 30-October 1: services at St. Anthony's in Butler

Sat, 6:30 pm: Great Vespers; Sun, 9:15 am: Matins and Divine Liturgy

WEEKDAY FEASTS IN SEPTEMBER

Friday, September 8: Nativity of the Theotokos. Fr. Bogdan is unable to leave Pittsburgh. Please attend services either at one of the Orthodox churches in Lyndora or at the **Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery in Saxonburg (Liturgy, 9 am).**

Thursday, September 14: Elevation of the Holy Cross. Fr. Bogdan is unable to leave Pittsburgh. Please attend services at one of the Orthodox churches in Lyndora.