

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

9 July 2017

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TONE 4.—FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. *Hieromartyr Pancratius, Bishop of Taormina in Sicily (1st c.). Hieromartyr Cyril, Bishop of Gortyna in Crete (3rd-4th c.); Ven. Paternuthius and Coprius, Ascetics, of Egypt (4th c.); St. Theodore, Bishop of Edessa (9th c.).*

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.)*

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Beatitudes

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 4): Having learned the joyful message of the Resurrection from the angel the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation. And proudly broke the news to the Disciples, saying: Death hath been spoiled; Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy!

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 OF ORDINARY SUNDAYS (Tone 4): O protection of Christians who cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the Creator most constant: despise not the suppliant voices of those who have sinned; but be thou quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession, and speed thou to make supplication, thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honor thee.

EPISTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *How great are Thy works, O Lord! In wisdom hast Thou made them all. Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

The Reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans

(Rom 10:1–10) **Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For**

Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The Epistle assigned for reading today speaks about **righteousness**. The Scriptures often refer to righteousness as the sum of qualities that express *godlikeness*. Because God himself is righteous, someone (an individual or a community) or something (an idea) is “righteous” when God’s way of being is reflected in them.

Today we hear Saint Paul criticize those who, **ignorant of God’s righteousness, are seeking to establish their own righteousness**. Their problem is not lack of faith and piety—on the contrary, their “zeal for God” is real. But they are missing the mark by obstinately holding on to their own notion of what God is like, what God desires for us, and what we should do to flourish in our life with God. They have, in the words of the Apostle, **not submitted to the righteousness of God, but are seeking to establish their own righteousness**. Not *God’s* but *their own*.

He then goes into more specifics. “**Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above)**. In other words: stop trying to “make it to heaven” on your own terms; stop disbelieving that, indeed, Christ has risen *for us*, and entered God’s presence *for us*, and is at work *in us* to accomplish the same *for us*. Stop trying to establish your own righteousness (religiosity, piety, zeal) apart from and outside of Christ.

And “**Do not say “Who will descend into the abyss?”” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)**. In other words: stop disbelieving God’s mad love for us, “foolish” and real: that He descended to us, the Creator to his creation, the Holy One among sinners estranged from holiness, like a shepherd at the fall of night deciding to seek out a single sheep who had gotten lost on the way. “Who among you would not do this?” asked Christ when he spoke the parable of the lost sheep; and the many shepherds in the audience must have muttered, “*nobody* would venture out in the darkness, at risk for his own life, to seek a stupid sheep that got lost because it was disobedient. No one in his right mind would even *think* of doing this.” And yet, God did, and Saint Paul insists: stop disbelieving that God, out of sheer love for us, descended into the abyss, to find us and return us to himself.

Ultimately, the Apostle calls us to believe that, in Christ, God descended to us, and that, in Christ, we also ascended to God; and that the reunion of God and man, which has occurred in Christ, is to become the real life for all of us, in this life and in the life to come—the risen life. **If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**

GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

(Mat 8:28-9:1) At that time, when Jesus came to the country of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs met Him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have we to do to Thee, O Son of God? Art Thou come here to torment us before the time?” Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged Him, “If Thou cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine.” And He said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they begged Him to leave their neighborhood. And getting into a boat He crossed over and came to His own city.

It is frightening to imagine a human life that has become the playground of demons. We know how painful it is to walk around plagued by a mere headache, or how terrible it is to be haunted by regrets and painful memories, and how guilt over things past or anxiety over things future can rob you of your of peace and of the ability to enjoy anything in the present. How much worse, then, for the two demoniacs of today's Gospel reading! Although alive, they spend their tortured existence in tombs, haunted by nightmarish frights; they are "fierce" and nobody can pass by without being deeply affected.

It is not so much their apparition and their antics that frighten, as it is the insight that we, "normal" ones, are only a hair's breadth away from their state and not safe at all. Indeed, according to Scripture, "the world lies under the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), so that we have here an appropriate image of the fallen existence that Adam chose by trusting the evil one rather than God.

The Lord decides to heal the demoniacs in such a way that people would see and understand the depth of this man's torment: he sends the legion of demons into a herd of swine. The resulting stampede, with the swine rushing headlong off a cliff to a miserable drowning, gives us a frightening view of the destructive force that had been ravaging the two demoniacs.

Most frightening, however, is what follows after the demons are banished and the two restored to health. Instead of giving thanks for the healing and perhaps throwing a feast, the Gergesenes **begged Him to leave their neighborhood**. They are afraid, it seems, not of the demons *but of God!* Their situation so far was, in a way, settled and satisfying: the two demoniacs allowed the other inhabitants to view themselves as "good" by imagining that all evil was *elsewhere*—namely *there*, in the tombs, in the two demoniacs. Jesus disrupts this arrangement and now the Gergesenes are afraid that God is coming into their lives. They are unwilling to welcome into their homes a guest that disrupts the status quo by bringing in a new kind of life.

As for us, we are called to move in the opposite direction. The Bible ends with these words: "Come Jesus Christ!" And we train ourselves for that coming when we respond to the call issued at Liturgy: "With fear of God, faith, and love *draw near!*"

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Martie Johnson** and his family will be moving to Cranberry (Adams township) at the end of July. We are looking forward to Martie's ordination to the diaconate some time at the end of summer.
- **SATURDAY, August 12, Holy Transfiguration Monastery: "Becoming a Better Christian Community Despite Ourselves."** After Liturgy and brunch, Mother Christophora will be speaking to us (and answering questions) about the experience of forming a monastic community and how it applies to life as a parish.

CRANBERRY OUTREACH SURVEY! Our Cranberry Outreach now stands at an important juncture and needs your feedback. The Gospel of Jesus Christ "is the same yesterday, and today, and to the ages" (Heb 13:8)—but the reality of where people are in terms of needs, abilities, and expectations determines how we should carry out our mission. Please take a few moments to fill out the online survey, either anonymously or by name. Your input (as well as your presence and, above all, your prayers) is not only needed, but needed greatly! (And do let us know if you have not received the email with the link to the online survey!)

- **CAN NON-ORTHODOX RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION?** In our tradition, ritual reflects faith: *what we do reflects what we believe*. This means that when receiving Communion we also confess belief in the doctrine and spirituality of the Orthodox Church. This is why persons who are not (yet) Orthodox are asked to not receive Communion. It is not because "we" fancy ourselves better than "you," but because Communion should reflect complete unity in matters of faith. Please join us in prayer, fellowship, and learning about the faith. You are also welcome to come forward at the end of liturgy to receive a piece of blessed bread. You are also welcome to come forward at the end of liturgy to receive a piece of blessed bread.