

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

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tone 6.—SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. *Holy Prophet Ezekiel. Hieromartyr Apollinaris, Bishop of Ravenna (ca. 75). Hieromartyr Phocas, bishop of Sinope (117); Martyr Apollonius of Rome (185); Martyrs Trophimus, Theophilus, and 13 others in Lycia (4th 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 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 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: O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance. Until Thee will I cry, O Lord my God.

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

(Rom 15:1-7) **Brethren: we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult Thee fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together, with one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God.**

Saint Paul was a realistic teacher and pastor. He knew well how weak his disciples were. Above all, he knew that by ourselves, without being part of a living community, our life in Christ is near impossible: we are in danger of forgetting why we are on the way, of losing sight of where the road is leading us, and of losing the hope and the joy that sustain us on our journey in Christ. Saint Paul speaks of the Church as "Body of Christ": members of the Body need each other and must care for each other.

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of those who are weak—especially since those who today are "strong" may be "weak" tomorrow! And **"live in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus:"** note that Saint Paul mentions "accord" with Christ in the same breath as "harmony" with one another. We are, in a way, like the spokes of a wheel: the closer the spokes come to the axis of the wheel, the closer they are to each other.

Finally, a very weighty statement: **Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God!** The key lies in the second half of the sentence, so let's read it as follows: "Since Christ has welcomed you into the glory of God, welcome also each other!" This "glory" is more than some vague "honor": "the glory of God" is Scripture's language for the presence of God in creation—God's grace, God's light, God's energy, God's creative and sanctifying power.

Saint Paul says that we have been received into the glory of God. How did we get there? We didn't "get there" ourselves, we didn't "make it": we were received. Remember: no one has ascended to heaven; the only one who knows the way from earth to heaven and into the presence of God, knows how to guided and care for his followers and friends, the only one who has the keys to open for them the gates of the Kingdom, is the one who humbled himself to make the journey from there to here, from heaven to earth, from the glory of God into the mortal human existence. In short: It is Christ who grants us access into the glory of God.

But how do we go about following him and entering? There is one condition: that we should welcome others, just as we have been welcome. In doing so, we actually begin to enter ourselves.

GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

(Mat 9:27-35) **At that time, as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud: "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When He entered the house, the blind men came to Him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread His fame through all that district. As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to Him. And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marveled, saying, "Never**

was anything like this seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity.

The Lord breathed His own breath into the man He had molded out of clay. Thus, Adam was consecrated as the living icon or living statue of God. “Living” because of the connection with God, the Giver of life, and because of divine intention of “communing” humanity from the Fruit of eternal Life.

But fallen mankind is like a shattered statue, a deserted temple, an inert idol. The Psalmist speaks about the inert statues of pagan worship very eloquently: *The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear, and there is no Breath in their mouths. Those who make them, and all who trust them shall become like them (Ps 135:15-18).* It is the last line that is chilling: **Those who make them, and all who trust them shall become like them!**

This is exactly how the Lord describes those who reject him: *The heart of this people has become calloused, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and their eyes they have closed—otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them (Isa 6:9-10, quoted in Mat 13:15 and Acts 27:28).*

In today’s Gospel, Christ heals two blind men and one who was in the grips of demon who rendered him “dumb” or mute. It is not only physical healing that happens, but also a sign of greater things: **“He touched their eyes ... and their eyes were opened. ... A dumb demoniac was brought to Him ... and the dumb man spoke.”** Here at work is the Lord Himself, taking pity on His creature, returning it from brokenness to wholeness and from disease to health, unraveling the dark power of the devil and returning the inert, dumb, and blind idol to being, once again, the living icon of God. As the Gospel says, **“never was anything like this seen in Israel.”**

It is striking, however, that even in the presence of obvious encounters with God, people are still able to play blind, deaf, and dumb. The Lord heals two blind men and a mute. The reaction of the “professional theologians”: they deny the obvious work of God, and accuse Jesus of being in league with evil spirits. More important is the reaction of Christ: he went on teaching, preaching, and healing every disease.

As always, the Gospel reading calls for us to place ourselves in the story: do we want to be like the blind men, who beg for and receive their healing? Are we like crowd, cheering on whatever and whomever has power and success? (the crowds are amazed now, when he is “impressive” because of his miracles, but as soon as he starts to look weak, they will abandon him and ask for his crucifixion).

The question is: what do we want? If we want to discuss the flaws of the Church, there is much to criticize about bishops, priests, monastics, Church administration, ritual, music, length of the services, etc, etc, etc. But maybe we want to be healed? If so, let us follow the blind men who receive their sight, and recognize Christ for who he is; and imitate the dumb man, who is freed from dark oppression, and can speak. We are even given the words to express ourselves: “Have mercy on me, Son of David!”

All of this is available to us—if that is what we are seeking. The Gospel of the Kingdom, the good news that God is with us with his grace and love for mankind, is still being preached. And Christ does not disdain our diseases or infirmities; it is up to us, however, to acknowledge them and ask for healing.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Martie Johnson** and his family will be moving to Cranberry (Adams township) next weekend! We are looking forward to Martie's ordination to the diaconate some time at the end of summer.
- **SATURDAY & SUNDAY, August 5-6: Pilgrimage at the Transfiguration Monastery for the feast of the Lord's Transfiguration.** Saturday, 5:30 Vigil; Sunday, 9:30 Hierarchical Liturgy; 3 PM: Holy Unction.
- **SATURDAY, August 12: Workshop at Holy Transfiguration Monastery: "Becoming a Better Christian Community Despite Ourselves."** 9 AM: Divine Liturgy (Fr Bogdan). After 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. A tour and shopping at the monastery store will conclude our workshop.
- **SUNDAY, August 20: St. Anthony's picnic** (at the Dollie Sipos Ranch). More info from Butch, Frank, or Dollie.

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.