



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

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NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

7 October 2018

TONE 2—Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus in Syria (290-303). Martyrs Julian the Presbyter and Cæsarius the Deacon, at Terracina (1st c.). Ven. Sergius the Obedient, of the Kiev Caves (Near Caves—ca. 13th c.). Ven. Sergius, Abbot of Nurma (Vologdá—1412), disciple of Ven. Sergius of Rádonezh. Virgin Martyr Pelagia of Tarsus (290). Martyr Polychronius the Presbyter (4th c.).

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! (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.:) *Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)*

LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ! Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant 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 FOR STS. SERGIUS AND BACCHUS (Tone 4): Thy martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee * received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. * For, since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants * and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. * O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

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 ORDINARY SUNDAYS (Tone 4): O protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the Creator most constant, O 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.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *The Lord is my strength and my song.
The Lord has chastened me severely.*

The Reading is from Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians

(2 Corinthians 11:31-33; 12:1-9) Brethren, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed for ever, knows that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands. I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows). And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

In this fragment Saint Paul seems to be affirming two contradictory things: on the one hand, he "boasts" of some extraordinary spiritual experiences—visions, and heavenly journeys—and on the other hand he says that boasting is foolish in itself, and boasting about such experiences even more so, because this is *not* what a Christian should be hunting for!

The context here is very important: other Christian preachers and teachers were carrying out a deceitful mission among the Corinthians, and were denigrating the apostle Paul, claiming

that he lacked the necessary spiritual authority because he didn't possess extraordinary "spiritual gifts." It is these false apostles, puffed up by their alleged spiritual experiences, who initiated a sort of contest between themselves and the Apostle Paul. Saint Paul begins his reply with: **"I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord."** He then proceeds to speak of being taken up into the highest heaven and granted visions and mysteries impossible to put in human words. We can see that he feels compelled and is uneasy, because he talks about these experiences in the third person ("I know a man in Christ"), even though he is actually talking about himself. In short, Paul is saying: if *this* is what you want—a "superpowers competition"—then let me tell you that the things I have received from God dwarf anything you can come up with!

The odd thing, however, is that the Apostle frustrates our very expectation for some overwhelming account of a heavenly vision and, perhaps, of a miraculous healing. Nope—he says that **the abundance of revelations** he has received are **things that cannot be told**; and he tells us that the healing he was insistently asking for was *not* granted. The revelation he can share with the Corinthians (and with us) is the following word from the Lord: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

Boasting of spiritual exploits is foolish and a sure sign of spiritual delusion. Christ did not come to rid us of all weakness, to make us healthy, happy, rich, and famous. A quick look at the Apostle Paul suffices: he was in constant danger, often arrested and beaten up, and sometimes escaping narrowly (as we read today: let down in a basket through a window in the wall!); his health was not the best, he probably had bad eyesight, and his opponents—who claimed to be highly "spiritual" Christians—were mocking him. And yet, it is in Paul's weakness and humility that Christ displayed his power and wisdom.

In fact, this is what the Apostle teaches: faith in Jesus Christ is not about boosting our ego by using religion to better manage and "improve" ourselves, but about leaving aside all excuse and relying, joyfully, on God's mercy.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

From the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 7:11-16) **Jesus went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with him. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!"**

Some of the miracles of Christ might strike us as "unfair" because of their partiality: why did he heal some people, and not all sick people? And, in case of today's Gospel, why did he raise *this* boy, and not *all* children who, to this day, die before their parents' eyes? "He had compassion," Saint Luke says; the boy was the only son of her mother, and she was a widow who would have been left alone, powerless to care for herself in the society of that day and age—so Jesus had compassion. Well, why *then* and not *now* and *always*? Why did He have compassion on *that* widow mother and not on *all* those in similar circumstances?

Sometimes the Church does not have easy or soothing answers. And that is because the Church is preaching the Gospel, not fairy tales. Part of the Good News is that the Kingdom has *already* come, but *not yet* “in full power.” *Already but not yet!* We are still waiting for the world to be transformed into the image and likeness of the risen Christ; we are still praying, “Thy Kingdom come!”; and our Liturgy is already a foreshadowing, but not yet *that day*.

Miracles are most valuable not in themselves, but as signs pointing to something greater. Christ changed water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and multiplied bread and fish so that five loaves and two fish became the food of thousands. Still, the people who ate of the bread that had been miraculously multiplied eventually became hungry again; the guests at the wedding went back to drinking regular water and not-so-great wine the next day; and, in today’s Gospel, the son of the widow, like Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, eventually died for good. Christ worked what we call “miracles” drawn by compassion and, in the case of Cana, at the intercession of his mother. And yet, these are only a foreshadowing of the true miracle: the Resurrection of Christ, which opens the door for our resurrection.

Lazarus, the friend of the Lord, as well the young boy from Nain, and each and every one of us who believe and confess Christ, are going to be like He is: “risen”—that is, freed from mortality, so that we no longer die; feasting in the age to come with love and joy that never grow sour and are ever renewed. This is what we confess in the Creed: “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life *of the world to come!*”

All of this, however, begins here and now. It begins with “I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” Whether baptized as children or coming to the faith later in life, this is our first resurrection, when the grace of God reveals Christ in us: “**Young man, I say to you arise!**” and we start on a journey from this first resurrection—“conversion”, if you wish—to the Resurrection we expect in the age to come. The young man in Nain stands for each one of us.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** 6-month memorial service for Viorica (Stan)
- Official start of the new Sunday School year.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: grieving Serbanescu and Becker families; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Norma; Karen (Jane Best’s daughter); Elisabeth, Chris and Jillian; Sula; Stella & Dimitrios; Christine (Abraham); Daniel (Sipos); Venetia (Chrissi’s mom); Barbara (Dollie’s daughter); Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; John, Janet, Christy (relatives of Jean); Stelian (Cezar’s father); Edith (Humphrey); Diane.

DEPARTED: Tim (Becker); Silviu; Ross (Chrissi’s friend); Richard Johns; Viorica; Bishop Antoun; Vito (DiPento); Miltiades; Jim and Marion (Raimondi); Stephanie (Yazge); Job; George (Georgiades); Abie (Abraham); Bill (Thomas).