



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001

PASTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur

724.287.6893 (church); 412.390.8208 (priest); frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

2 December 2018

TONE 2, Eothison 5—Prophet Habakkuk. Martyr Myrope of Chios (ca. 251). Ss. John, Heraclemon, Andrew, and Theophilus, of Egypt (4th c.). St. Jesse, Bishop of Tsilkani in Georgia (6th c.). St. Stephen-Urosh, King of Serbia (1367). Venerable Ioannikios of Devitch. Martyr Habib the New.

THE SERVICE OF HOLY BAPTISM

- Today's baptism of Elisabeth Violetta DiNunzio replaces the first part of the Divine Liturgy.
- We will begin at the entrance of the church, praying that the Lord would expel every unclean spirit in preparation for Baptism. The godmother will testify on behalf of Elisabeth—*I renounce Satan and all his works, and all his worship, and all his angels, and all his pomp; I align myself with Christ; I bow down before Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Trinity one-in-essence and inseparable.* Then, after the recitation of the Creed, we move to the front of the Church for the service of the Baptism.
- The priest, aided by the godmother, will perform the pre-baptismal anointing. This rite symbolizes the anointing of spiritual athletes before they enter the spiritual ring.
- Then Elisabeth will be submerged in water three times, baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and thereby grafted into the Body of the risen Christ. After the child is clothed with the baptismal garment, we will sing "*Grant unto me a robe of light, O Thou who clothest Thyself in light as in garment, O Christ our God, plenteous in mercy!*"
- Finally, by Chrismation (which, from early on, replaced the laying on of hands), she will be "sealed" with the gift of the Holy Spirit, as a personal Pentecost which "activates" all the charisms of the Baptism.
- The symbolic tonsure of the newly baptized indicate the life of discipleship, which allows one to cooperate with God's rich outpouring of grace and to taste the divine life of the Kingdom.
- Instead of the thrice-holy hymn we will sing the baptismal hymn: "*As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ—Alleluia!*"

St. Nicholas Cavasilas, *Life in Christ*: "Baptism is nothing else but to be born according to Christ and to receive from Christ our very being and nature. In Baptism Christians are formed and shaped, and our shapeless and undefined life receives shape and definition. *Birth* and *new birth*, *refashioning* and *seal*, as well as *baptism* and *clothing* and *anointing*, "gift," "enlightening" and "washing"— all signify this one thing: that the rite is the beginning of existence for those who are and live in accordance with God."

LITTLE ENTRANCE

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 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 OF ST ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4): 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 THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 3): On this day the Virgin comes unto the cave to give birth there to the Word before all time: beyond all words is this wonder! Dance with joy rejoice, all of creation, hearing these tidings! Glorify, along with angels and with the shepherds, him who willingly appears as a newborn baby, yet he is God before time.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

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

From the Epistle to the Ephesians

(Eph 6:10-17) **Brethren: draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

The Christians in Ephesus, who received this letter, must have understood this passage very well because they crossed paths daily with Roman soldiers wearing their armors and weapons. We, too, can see that Saint Paul is drawing an analogy between the weapons and armor of a soldier and the spiritual equipment of a Christian. It is good, however, to point out two elements that we might overlook.

First, the metaphor of warriors and weapons reminds us: Christianity is not for wimps! It is not easy, it is not comfortable, it requires discipline and constant vigilance. Indeed, there is a war—not against enemies “out there,” not a war with the body, but a war raging within the recesses of our minds and hearts: Christians are at war with the evil of their own sins and shortcomings, which are constantly attracting the activity of evil spirits. Anthony the Great, seeing these spirits roam all over the earth and interfere with us, asked in despair: “what can possibly avoid them?” The answer he received—“humility!”—connects well with another important point in today’s Apostle reading.

Soldiers receive their uniforms, weapons, and supplies from the army; they execute certain tactical maneuvers, as received through the army’s chain of command; their activities are part of a

military strategy devised by their army superiors. Finally, the individual effort of a soldier is effective only inasmuch as it is part of a larger endeavor, involving various army units. Christian life is also never about the individual detached from the community. This is why we do not speak of “my faith,” “my Bible,” “my prayer,” “my confession,” “my weekly Eucharist”; it is always about confessing and participating in the faith of the Church, hearing the Scriptures of the Church, joining in the prayer of the Church, tearing down (in the Sacrament of Confession) the invisible walls that separate me from the Church, entering (through Communion) into the great banquet of the Church. We fast together and feast together, and gradually learn to enter the communion of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As for the “armor of God,” the breastplate of righteousness, and the shield of faith that Saint Paul urges us to put on as equipment for our Christian life—all of these are *gifts*: we *receive* them when we enter the Church. To the extent that we nurture it, this grace (another word for gift) is activated in us, and cooperates with our effort of leading a life in Christ. “Put this on!”; “Take this!” “Be clothed in this!” The Gospel states clearly that it is impossible for humans to be saved, *unless* and until we allow God to clothe us with the garment of grace, and allow Him to work in us and make the impossible possible.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Lk 18:35-43) At that time, as Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging; and hearing a multitude going by, he inquired what this meant. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” And he cried, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped, and commanded him to be brought to Him; and when he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me receive my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Today’s Gospel tells of a spectacular conversion to Christ: a man becomes a follower of Jesus after the Lord cures him of his blindness miraculously, in an instant. If the Church has chosen this text for public reading, there is probably much to be learned from the healing of the blind man.

First off, his physical blindness is a reminder that of all of us, fallen humans, are “blind” and “deaf” to God. To be healed and made well (this is what the word “salvation” actually means: healing) is possible only by divine intervention. We cannot cure ourselves of the separation from God. The blind man knew where to go to find healing—Jesus Christ. Scripture says, “The Lord is the same, yesterday and today” (Heb 13:8); therefore, the same Lord can also bring salvation *to me and today*.

This man is faithful—unafraid, unashamed, stubborn in his faith. He cries out to the Lord “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” Even when some are trying to silence him, he does not give up. He knows what he wants, and he has confidence that the Lord is the right one to ask for it: armed with this faith, he bulldozes his way through the hostilities of those around him, and *asks, and does indeed receive*.

Note also how gentle but firm the Lord teaches by his deeds: without saying much, he stops the crowd, which, in its festive procession, was about to pass by the blind man. “**Those who**

were in front”—perhaps some of the apostles, perhaps others who were “organizing” and “running” Jesus’ visit to Jericho—found the beggar with his insistent yelling an irritating distraction to the great event. So “**they rebuked him,**” trying to keep things orderly and carry on smoothly with the grand procession. But this is not the way of the Lord. He stops everything and asks those self-appointed leaders and body-guards to bring the blind man to him: a gentle but effective lesson for them and for us. The Church must never forget about “the little ones,” those in pain, those in need, those on the margins—for God sees and goes searching for all lost sheep.

The Lord asks the blind man gently and very politely: **What do you want me to do for you?** A somewhat strange, or even weird, question... The man is blind, it shouldn't be so difficult to figure out what he wants: to see! But God also asks us this very same question. Why are you in Church? Why do you call yourself a Christian—**what do you want me to do for you?** And sometimes we give the wrong answer: we may be here out of habit, or for the sake of family tradition and social routine, perhaps to meet like-minded people, perhaps out of fear ... perhaps we've not even given it much thought. The question still stands: do you want to be healed, do you want to be saved? The blind man is our guide: **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Let me receive my sight!”**

Essentially, what is the blind man’s faith? He believes it is the Lord—the God of Israel—who can do anything; but he also believes that this Lord is “the Son of David”—a true human being, one who feels what we feel, one who knows and sympathizes with our weakness. This is the faith of the Church.

Finally, it is remarkable that the man uses his very “profession” to gain salvation. The beggar becomes a beggar for Christ, just like the fishermen become fishers of men, and just like the thief on the cross steals Paradise with his confession of faith. Whatever we have and whoever we are can be placed in the service of Christ, so that we, too, can be saved.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today:

- Baptism of Elisabeth DiNunzio, daughter of Chris and Jill. The godmother is Melinda Johnson.
- one-year memorial for Miltiades (Milton), son of Stella Liras

*Sunday, December 15, 12:30-1:30 pm: **Sunday School for Adults.** Fr. Bogdan will speak about “The Son of Man and Ancient of Days Born Today in Bethlehem: Learning the Faith from Prophet Daniel and the Tradition of the Church.” Come and bring a friend!*

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Norma; grieving Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); 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: Miltiades; Tim (Becker); Silviu; Ross (Chrissi’s friend); Richard Johns; Viorica; Bishop Antoun; Vito (DiPento); Jim and Marion (Raimondi); Stephanie (Yazge); Job; George (Georgiades); Abie (Abraham); Bill (Thomas).