



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

SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

24 March 2019

TONE 2 / Eothinon 10—Forefeast of the Annunciation. St. Gregory Palamas. Synaxis of the Venerable Fathers of the Kiev Caves Lavra. Ven. Zachariah the Recluse. St. Artemius (Artemon), Bishop of Seleucia (1st-2nd c.). Ven. Zachariah, Ascetic, of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—13th-14th c.).

FIRST ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, and hath clothed Himself with majesty. The Lord is robed; He is girded with strength. For He has established the world so that it shall never be moved. Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! *Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can cause all his praises to be heard? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)*

SECOND ANTIPHON

Let them praise the Lord for His mercies, and for His wonderful works to the children of men. Refrain: Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, "Alleluia"! *Let them exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. (R.:) The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose the sons of the slain. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten ...)*

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

*Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ!
Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, 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 FOR THE FOREFEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 4): Today the preludes of universal joy move us to sing the prefestal hymn; for behold, Gabriel cometh, bringing the good tidings to the Virgin, and shall cry to her: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace; the Lord is with thee.

TROPARION OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS (Tone 8): O Star of Orthodoxy, support of the Church and its teacher, O comeliness of ascetics, and incontestable champion of those who speak in theology, Gregory the wonder-worker, the pride of Thessalonica and preacher of grace, implore thou constantly for the salvation of our souls.

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 FOREFEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 8): To thee, the Champion Leader, do I offer thanks of victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror; but as thou that hast that power invincible, O Theotokos, thou alone can set me free: from all forms of danger free me and deliver me, that I may cry unto thee: "Rejoice, O Bride without Bridegroom."

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *O Lord, Thou will preserve us and keep us from this generation. Save me, O Lord, for the godly man hath disappeared.*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 1:10-2:3) "At the beginning, O Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment. You will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end." But to what angel has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the message declared by angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and attested to us by those who heard Him.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a very difficult text. Nevertheless, if we heard this reading today, we are called to take with us as much as we can of its message. One of the memorable passages is the following: **To what angel has God ever said, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet"?** Indeed, to sit at the right hand of the king, for people of that time, meant to share the king's authority; thus, to sit at the right hand of God means to share His divinity. And even the highest angels remain, still, creatures, radically different from the Creator.

With Christ, however, things are different. He shares in God's reality in a way that is not true of even the highest of angels. In him the prophetic verse from Psalm 110:1 ("**Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet**") finds its fulfillment. Indeed, He is truly divine, just as much divine as the Father is: *true God of true God*.

Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord is a serious matter. "Lord" is an exclusive title for God. If, then, we acknowledge His divinity, we also acknowledge that we find ourselves face-to-face with His message—a message, as we read today, "**declared at first by the Lord, and attested to us by those who heard Him.**" Let us take to heart the Apostle's advice and not neglect or despise the words of our eternal life, coming from the Lord Himself; let us not miss out on "**such a great salvation**" as He has in store for those who give ear to his call.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

From the Holy Gospel according to Mark

(Mk 2:1-12) At that time, when Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and He was preaching the Word to them. And they came, bringing to Jesus a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, they

removed the roof above Him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you reason thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic – "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all. So that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

A well-known Gospel story is recounted here. A paralytic brought to Jesus receives his healing almost instantaneously, in a spectacular manner ("all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"). No less impressive is the fact that Christ knows what people are "reasoning in their hearts"—"immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves ..." And who is it that knows our heart—our hidden inner self—even more intimately than we know it ourselves? God alone.

Christ's adversaries ask themselves "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They decide from this that Jesus is blaspheming, since He cannot possibly be who He says He is; later on, when faced with the reality of so many undeniable healings and miracles, they grant that something happened but accuse Him of being possessed and working with the power of demons. We, however, understand that Jesus heals and forgives because He is truly God. Because He is truly God He shows us the true Image of God: what else does God desire but our healing and return to fullness of Life?

But it is also important to pay attention to another detail of the story. **Today's Gospel offers us a beautiful image of what the Christian community should be.** Note the relationship between the paralytic and the four men who bring him in on a pallet. Undoubtedly, these are real friends, ready to go to any length for their afflicted friend. After making their way through the massive crowd (surely not an easy task) and realizing that it was simply impossible to advance an inch further towards Jesus, they even "removed the roof, ... made an opening, and let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay."

These four have not left their neighbor behind in hopes of "finding God": that kind of seeking for God would have been spiritual delusion. What enables them to find the true God, is, rather, precisely the dedication with which they take their paralytic friend to Jesus. When they have finally managed to present the paralytic to the Lord, the Evangelist writes the following: "And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven!'" Note: "when Jesus saw *their* faith"! The Lord always emphasizes the importance of faith; only this time it is the faith *of the others* that saves the paralytic.

Christianity "by oneself" is a fiction, and can be a dangerous delusion. If we are to be saved, we are saved by cooperating with God's grace and in relation to others; it is only sin that is strictly "individual." The Church strives to embody the model set forth in today's Gospel. Through fasting and feasting *we* journey, *we* praise God, *we* commit to God ourselves and each other, *we* give thanks, and *we* draw near the chalice in faith and love. In short, we are exercising ourselves into becoming "we": the Body of Christ made up of many members, and are learning to call God not only "my God" but "our Father."

We exercise this manner of existence—being joined together as members of the Body of Christ—when we gather *as the Church*, when we fast *together*, pray *together*, and are *together* called to receive Communion. When our sins and failings estrange us from the Body, we repent—individually—in order to return to fuller communion in Christ. These are the words the priest speaks at Confession: "Show mercy now on Your servant, and grant to him/her an image of repentance, forgiving all his/sins, whether voluntary or involuntary. **Reconcile and unite him/ her to Your Holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord!**"

FROM THE TEACHING OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

Through the fall our nature was stripped of divine illumination and resplendence. But the Logos of God had pity upon our disfigurement, and in His compassion He took our nature upon Himself. On Tabor He manifested it to His elect disciples clothed once again most brilliantly. He showed what we once were and what we shall become through Him in the age to come if we choose to live our present life, as far as possible, in accordance with His ways.

On the day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but now, since it is mingled with us and exists in us, it illuminates the soul from within. ("Triads" 1. 3.38)

By this prayer [the Jesus Prayer] the dew of the Holy Spirit is brought down upon the heart, as Elijah brought down rain on Mount Carmel. This mental prayer reaches to the very throne of God and is preserved in golden vials. . . . This mental prayer is the light which illumines man's soul and inflames his heart with the fire of love of God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God. ("Homily on how all Christians in general must pray without ceasing")

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Today:**
- 40-day memorial for Norma (Cirillo)
 - installation of the parish council
 - **Sunday School for Adults:** Deacon Martin will speak about the interpretation of the Bible in the Canon of St. Andrew.

THIRD WEEK OF LENT

- **Tomorrow (Monday, March 25): Annunciation** (Vesperal Divine Liturgy)
- 6 PM at Saint Anthony's.
- **Wednesday, March 27: Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts**
- 6 PM at Saints Peter and Paul
- **Friday, March 29: Compline and Akathist to the Holy Theotokos**
- 5 PM at Saint Anthony's

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Charitini; 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: Viorica; Norma; 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).