



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
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SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

10 February 2019

TONE 4— Eothinon 4. Hieromartyr Haralambos of Magnesia in Thessaly, and those with him (202). Martyrs Ennatha, Valentina and Paula, of Palestine (308). Ven. Zenon the Ascetic of Antioch (c. 400)

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! Refrain: Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, as we chant to Thee, Alleluia! For He has 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 ...)

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 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 ST. HARALAMBOS (Tone 4): By faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers, when through them Thou didst betrothe Thyself aforetime to the Church from among the nations. The Saints boast in glory that from their seed there is a glorious fruit, even she that bare Thee seedlessly. By their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls!

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT: 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: *Make your vows to the Lord your God! In Judah God is known.*

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

(2 Cor 6:16-7:1) **Brethren, we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God!**

Saint Paul is quoting the Scriptures and understanding them in a new way, applying the revelation of old to the realities of his day. In this, he actually follows in the footsteps of the great prophets of Israel. We read that **"God was walking in the garden in the cool of the day"** (Genesis 3:8)—meaning that Paradise is, essentially, the presence of God. Later, when God chooses Israel as that portion of humanity which may welcome the presence of God and act as a priest among the nations, the Book of Leviticus has God declare to Israel, **"I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people"** (Leviticus 26:12). Later still, as Israel was to return from the Babylonian slavery, the prophet Isaiah recalled their leaving the slavery in Egypt and wrote: **"Depart, depart, go out, touch no unclean thing"** (Isaiah 52:11).

Saint Paul sees the Christian Church—Jews and non-Jews alike—as following Christ in our new Exodus: from estrangement to reunion with God, from sinfulness to deification, from mortality into the risen life of Christ. Looking back to the Law and the Prophets, the Apostle exhorts us: **Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God!**

But how realistic is the command that we **"cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit"**? How can we **"make holiness perfect"**? Let us also remember the similar words proclaimed during the Divine Liturgy: "the holy things are for *those who are holy!*"

God seems to require *the impossible!* True. But it is also true that if we are thinking of God "over there" making such requirements of us "over here"—well, then we are misunderstanding our faith. Let us start with the Orthodox confession of faith: "God became man, so that man may be deified." He did not simply order us to "be like God," but rather came among us, became one of us, so as to lead the way to God; and He sent the Holy Spirit to "dwell in us" and assist us on the way.

It is true that the Liturgy proclaims "the holy things are for the holy"; but we also hear at Liturgy, *"You – God – are our sanctification."* And the Apostle begins by telling us that we are temples of the living God, and that God lives and moves in us. Not some lofty *concept* of God or some pious emotions, but the living God, the fire unconsumed who comes to purify, enlighten, and transform us.

Yes, God demands the impossible. But He is himself at work in us, to make the impossible possible—to cleanse us from every defilement of body and spirit" and to perfect His holiness in us. The point is simply to allow Him to live and move in us. And the first step is to receive the gift of God Himself given to us in the Holy Eucharist: *Receive the Body of Christ, taste the fountain of immortality!*

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

(Matt 15:21-28) At that time, Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." And he answered, "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

This is a difficult Gospel: Christ first ignores the woman begging for help; He even ignores the pleas of the disciples; He then says that His ministry is only for Israel, not for pagans. Finally, He even insults the woman: "it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

But we know from the witness of the Gospels that Jesus had mercy on those who approached Him. We also know that He was concerned not only with the sons of Israel, since He said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice" (John 10:16). And we know that He was always particularly caring and gentle in His interaction with women (remember the woman caught in adultery: He does not shame her by looking at her when she was most likely half-naked).

All of this leads us to understand that what is going on is a testing of sorts, an exam. A test for the woman as well as for the disciples. For the disciples, because the Lord steps into *their* world, speaks words that fit and express *their* prejudicial and insulting words towards the Canaanites—all of this in order to reverse it *with the help of the woman herself*. It is, however, an exam for her. A hard exam, which the Canaanite passes with flying colors: she continues to ask, full of faith, despite all the setbacks; she does not give up, she does not become bitter or cynical, she does not respond with insults of her own. She is humble, acknowledging her lowly status ("Yes, Lord, but even the dogs ..."). And she does all of this out of love, because she is not begging for herself but for her daughter!

The Lord's response is unique. "O, woman!" he addresses her. This exclamation the Gospels reserve only for her. And then, "**great is your faith!**" Nobody ever received such congratulation from the Lord. Finally, "**Be it done for you as you desire!**" Not "according to your faith" (as the Lord addresses several others), but "as you desire". The message is, of course, the same. And yet, this expression, "as you desire," bespeaks a special intimacy. The Canaanite woman *already* receives that which the Lord promises His disciples for the *future*: "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (John 16).

Today's Gospel also teaches an important theological lesson. As Orthodox we do not say that "now," in this age, is the time for toil, and "then" or "there" in the afterlife, the time to collect the reward. We believe, rather, that faith bridges the gap between seen and unseen realities, making us contemporaries of the saints from all times and places, and *citizens of the age to come*. The saints always say that, if we live with God and in God, entering the depths of faith, the realities of the age to come become present to us here and now. This is why miracles are not arbitrary and bizarre events that twist the laws of nature as we know it, but glimpses here and now of the future "normal", when we all share the glorious state of the Risen Christ.

Perhaps these are dizzying heights for us, who are mere beginners and too often lukewarm in our faith. Nevertheless, we have the encouraging example of the Canaanite woman, who gained access to spiritual heights by her courageous humility. Let us learn from her how to say and mean, **Have mercy on me, O Lord!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Deacon Martin** and his family are helping out in Beaver Falls today, at Saint John the Evangelist Antiochian Orthodox Church.
- **Today:** 1-year memorial for Viorica Elena (Ion Stan's wife)
- **House blessings:** if you would like to have your house blessed, please speak to Fr. Bogdan. Saturdays before Vespers or Sundays after Liturgy are the best times.
- **From the treasurer:** January receipts = 2,401; expenses = 2982; deficit 581.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; 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: 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).