



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
www.orthodoxbutler.org

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

PASTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur

Contact: 724.287.6893; 412.390.8208 (priest); frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

13 October 2019

TONE 8 / Eothinon 6—*Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council. Martyr Florentius of Thessalonica (2nd c.). Martyrs Carpus, Papyrus, Agathadorus, and Agathonica, at Pergamum (251). Martyr Benjamin of Persia (421-424). St. Nicetas the Confessor of Paphlagonia (838). Hieromartyr Jacob of Hamatoura (13th c.). New Martyr Zlata of Bulgaria (1796).*

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 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 Son and Word of God ...)

LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ!
Save us, O Son of God Who art risen from the dead, as we sing to Thee: Alleluia!

TROPARION OF RESURRECTION (Tone 8): From the heights Thou didst descend, O compassionate One, and Thou didst submit to the three- day burial, that Thou might deliver us from passion; Thou art our life and our Resurrection, O Lord, glory to Thee!

TROPARION OF THE HOLY FATHERS (Tone 8): Thou, O Christ, art our God of exceeding praise Who didst establish our Holy Fathers as luminous stars upon earth, and through them didst guide us unto the true Faith, O most merciful One, 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 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 sees the Christian Church—Jews and non-Jews alike—as following Christ in a new, spiritual Exodus: from sinfulness and estrangement from God, to reunion with God and deification, from mortality to the risen life that is in 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!**

Quoting the Hebrew Scriptures and applying the revelation of old to the realities of his day, Saint Paul is actually following 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).

But how realistic is the command that we **"cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit"**? How can we even dream of **"making holiness perfect"**? Even some pronouncements of the Divine Liturgy are difficult to hear—for instance, *"the holy things are for those who are holy!"* This 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 pious emotions, but the living God, the fire unconsumed who comes to purify, enlighten, and transform.

Indeed, 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, the burning coal that Prophet Isaiah received in his vision of the Lord (Isa 6): *Receive the Body of Christ, taste the fountain of immortality!*

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 8:5-15) The Lord spoke this parable: A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold." After saying this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear let him hear." Then his disciples asked him what the meaning of this parable was. He answered, "Knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God has been granted to you; but to the rest, they are made known through parables so that 'they may look but not see, and hear but not understand.'" This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those on the path are the ones who have heard, but the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts that they may not believe and be saved. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of trial. As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the ones who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit. But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit in perseverance.

The parable of the sower is well known; it is, however, easily misunderstood. The parable seems, at first sight, to speak of different types of persons: some refuse to hear the Gospel; others hear it but are superficial and lazy; others always seem to put God and their salvation last; and others, again, receive the Gospel like a seed planted in rich soil, which grows and brings forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Let us note, first, that God (the sower) is "foolishly" generous, even prodigal, and sends His Word (the seed) *everywhere and to everyone*: on good soil but also, no less, on the path, on rocky ground, and among thorns. In fact, we see that most of the effort is in vain, since the majority (75% in the parable) reject or misuse the seed. Still, God continues to sow the Word of God even in this world and in this faithless and adulterous generation.

The "soil" that receives the seed is nothing else than our heart. It can be a careless, inhospitable heart (where God's presence goes unnoticed); a hard heart, which refuses to be pierced through by the Word, and remains shallow, without root; a poisoned heart ("choked by thorns"), where the Word of God is soon overwhelmed by a crowd of other concerns; or, as the Lord explains, the good soil refers to "a good and generous heart."

So, which type am I? Which "category"? What kind of soil? -- What a silly question! Our heart is like *all* those types of soil—sometimes like barren ground, oblivious to God and our neighbor, sometimes reducing God to some shallow feeling or thought, sometimes too anxious about many things and therefore unable to be still in front of God.

To think that "some are just like this – the 'churchy' type – and others just aren't" is simply not Orthodox. It leads to arrogance (remember the Pharisee: "God, I *thank you* that I'm *not like* other people!") and despair. The point of the parable is rather that we are encountering the very Word of God as a seed being sown in our hearing, that we are called to receive it, and *to change*, to become good soil. And change begins here and now: the Word of God is sown during Liturgy, read in the Psalm verses, the Epistle, and the Gospel, preached in the sermon, and tasted in the Eucharist.

The Word of God is searching for our heart. He calls to us to become *receptive and hospitable* (because, "to those that *receive* Him He has given power to be children of God," John 1:12), but also *patient and perseverant*. Remember, the good soil (the good heart) "will bring forth fruit *in patience*!" Or elsewhere, also in the Gospel of Luke: "by your **endurance** you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:19).

Finally, laboring for the cultivation of the heart, learning to receive God with an open, patient, and perseverant heart is well worth it. The harvest—the fruit of the Spirit—is rich beyond belief, worthy of God’s generosity: **when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold. *A hundredfold!***

TWO "NEW MARTYRS" OF THE CHURCH



St. Jacob was a saintly monk in Hamatoura (Lebanon), in the late 3th century. The Turks set their minds to force him to convert to Islam. He was dragged to Tripoli, imprisoned and tortured for a year, and eventually beheaded; his body was burned to prevent any veneration as martyr. Despite the forced conversion of many to Islam and the burning of manuscripts, his memory was kept by monks and pilgrims who reported visions of him or even being healed by St Jacob. Recently, a note about his martyrdom was found in a manuscript at the Balamand Monastery, which also gives October 13th as the date of his commemoration.

gather wood with other women, a Turk gathered some friends, kidnapped her and took her to his home. He first tried to seduce her with promises, in order to make her renounce her Christian faith and become his wife. The Turk and his friends spent months harassing and threatening Zlata, trying in vain to make her give in. They even tried to force her parents and siblings to get her to convert. Her family told her to give in “just for the sake of appearances.” The saint remained steadfast, although this brought arrest, flogging, horrible humiliations and tortures, and eventually death and dismemberment.



St. Zlata was a young woman in 18th-century in the Bulgarian village of Maglen. She was known for her chastity and beauty. Once when Zlata went out of the village to

Remember in your prayer

LIVING: Fr. Paisius (recovering from surgery); Nyal, Jean's son-in-law (motorcycle accident); Joseph Totin (recovering from illness and surgery); Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Charitini; Stella & Dimitrios; Christine (Abraham); Dollie; Venetia; Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; Kent, Bob, David (relatives of Jean); Stelian; Diane; Maura (Andronic); Susannah.

DEPARTED: Kurt (Melinda's father); Jackie (Rose Totin's mother); Maria (Stella Lyras' sister); Sula; Kurt (Diane's son); 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); Marta.