



## SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
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### TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

8 December 2019

*TONE 8, Eothon 3—Holy Apostles of the Seventy: Sosthenes, Apollos, Cephas, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, Cæsar, and Onesiphorus (1st c.). Venerable Patapius of Thebes (8th c.). Sophronius of Cyprus. Martyr Anthusa, at Rome (5th 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 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 ...)*

#### 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 THE 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 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 THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 3): On this day the Virgin cometh to the cave to give birth to God the Word ineffably, Who was before all the ages. Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing the gladsome tidings; with the Angels and the shepherds now glorify Him Who is willing to be gazed on as a young Child Who before the ages is God.

## TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Make your vows to the Lord our God and perform them.  
God is known in Judah; His Name is great in Israel.*

*The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians*

(Eph 4:1-7) Brethren, I, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The crucial term in this passage is "one." It points to the *unity* worked out by God: *one body and one Spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all.* There is *one* God, and this God regards us as a father does his children—with kindness, with selfless love, with gentle care. There is *one* Lord: because God is our father, the Word of God (God's mind, or conscience, or self-manifestation) became man for us, so as to annihilate anything that separates us from him, to heal us and save us and return us to the fullness of life. There is *one faith*, the revelation of the good news: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. There is *one baptism*: when we respond to God's call, he *immerses* us (this is what "to baptize" means in Greek) into the luminous gift that flows from him, adapting us to the Body of the risen Christ.

The Church is a mystery—*the mystery*, indeed, of God uniting himself to us, so that we may be one among us and one with him. This is **the calling to which we have been called**: the word "calling" is, in Greek, related to the noun "church"—the community of those "called" by God. We are to understand this call and live in a manner worthy of it. In other words, we are called to join God's tireless work of healing divisions and driving all to being "one," and cooperate with God **eagerly, by maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

And how does the "high calling" of a Christian look like in real life, at home and in church? **Lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing one another in love.** Not easy! This is more a portrait of Christ, who said, "learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart!" (Mat 11:29) and "I pray that they will all be one" (John 17:21). This is our call: the highest, not easy, seemingly impossible. And yet, God also makes it possible for us by giving **grace to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

## TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

*The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke*

(Luke 13:10-17) At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrite! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed

from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As Jesus said this, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.

It is always good to be reminded that Jesus Christ was not a Christian: theologically, He does not "belong" to us—it is we who belong to Him; but also in a basic, historical, sense, He was a first-century Jew, who was addressed as "rabbi" by both his disciples and his opponents, who was circumcised (and we still celebrate the Lord's Circumcision on January 1), who kept the Sabbath, went to the Jerusalem Temple and worshipped in synagogues regularly. Today's Gospel says that he was **teaching in the synagogue**.

Nevertheless, this rabbi from Nazareth not only teaches the Law, he also heals miraculously; and, through both teaching and healing, claims extraordinary authority in interpreting the Law. The teaching we receive from today's Gospel is captured best by the famous phrase in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath!"

Evidently, this applies just as much to us, Orthodox Christians. It is quite easy to idolize the externals of our faith—rules of worship, rules of piety, rules of Church discipline—and to treat them as independent realities, venerable in themselves. The Lord reminds the Pharisees (*and us*) that all religious laws and practices are only means to an end: they are meant to shape our awareness of God and to reorder our lives in relation to God. Ultimately, one's closeness to God is measured in the sensitivity towards all those created in the image of God. All "religion" that renders one callous and inattentive to the fellow human beings is delusion.

As for the miraculous healing—a chronic illness goes away "at once"—the Gospel speaks about more than just this extraordinary incident. We hear that the woman was "crippled *by a spirit*," so that "she was bent over, completely unable of standing erect," and then that "*Satan* had her bound for eighteen years." The crippled state of the woman is an image of fallen humanity: crippled, infirm, hopelessly under the power of the evil one. Like the woman, we receive, with the advent of the Lord, the truly Good News—may we receive it and make it ours—"you are set free of your infirmity!"

## A WORD ON THE CONCEPTION OF MARY THE THEOTOKOS

Throughout the Eastern Roman empire, from as far back as the fifth century, a feast day was observed on December 9, celebrating the conception of the Theotokos by Joachim and Anna. There was no attempt on the part of the hymn writers to suggest that there was any other miracle than the conception in the face of prolonged sterility and very old age. In the course of time some Western churchmen began teaching that Mary was, from the moment of her conception, "miraculously innocent" of the guilt of original sin. Although the notion of Mary's "immaculate conception" was opposed by such prominent figures as Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure, in 1854 Pope Pius IX officially promulgated it as an official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The official statement reads as follows: "*The doctrine which declares that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first instant of her conception ... in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church.*"

In order to understand the position of the Orthodox Church on this teaching we must begin with understanding the Orthodox concept of original sin, as opposed to that of Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic teaching of original sin is based in part on the writings of Blessed Augustine of Hippo, a great thinker and churchman of the fifth century who stated that each human being at the moment of conception shares in the *guilt* of Adam's disobedience. In medieval Western Christianity this original sin was believed to be transmitted in a physical sense through sexual intercourse and conception. It thus became important that Mary be preserved from this supposed "taint." Hence the creation in the ninth century of the doctrine of the "*immaculate* conception."

The notion of the Immaculate Conception separates Mary from the rest of the human race, even implying her being exempted from death (which is why many Roman Catholics have a real difficulty with the notion that the Theotokos really, truly *died*, even though she was the first to be raised from the dead by Christ). The "immaculate conception" of Mary would also make it impossible for Christ to inherit from her the common state of fallen human nature.

The Orthodox Church has kept alive the original understanding of the early Church as regards "original sin." The early Church did not understand "original sin" as having anything to do with transmitted guilt but with inherited and shared mortality. Because Adam sinned, all humanity shares not in his guilt but in the same human nature, now become mortal. In the orthodox understanding, original sin is not something that we are guilty of personally, but the mortal state, alienated from God, in which all sons of Adam are born. As humans we sin, and our own guilt is because of our own personal sin. In Orthodox eyes, Mary is human, and through her, God became fully human as well; and there is simply no original guilt from which Mary would have to be somehow excepted.

It is true that saintly theologians and hymnographers of the Church sometimes refer to Mary as having been "prepared," and "sanctified," and hail her as the "immaculate one"; but they are not thinking in the context of the Augustinian view of original sin. We hold that Mary was sanctified through her extraordinary life of prayer and purity, and through her response to the Annunciation: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). This immediately allowed the Word of God to take abode in her and make her into the living temple of God.

During this Advent season, the Orthodox Church frequently remembers the Virgin Mary as a gift of humanity to God, through whom God gave Himself back to humanity. One of our Christmas hymns asks "What shall we offer You, Christ, You Who for our sakes appeared on earth as a man? Every creature which You have made offers You thanks ... We offer You a Virgin Mother. O God before all ages: have mercy on us." *(Edited from an article in "The Word" Magazine)*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Father Bogdan is available for confessions on Saturdays before and after Vespers, and Sundays after Divine Liturgy.
- **TOYS FOR TOTS.** Please place your gift of a toy (20 dollars max.) in the special box. These toys will be delivered to *Toys for Tots*, a program run by the US Marine Corps.

NEXT SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15: SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR ADULTS

### *The Place of Imagination in Orthodox Spirituality*

We will read and try to understand a text from the compendium of ascetical writings known as the *Philokalia*, which deals with the place of imagination in personal prayer.

**LIVING:** Frank (Seba's brother); Ann (Wilson), 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; Ed Sr (Totin).

**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.