



SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
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TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

15 December 2019

TONE 1, Eothon 4—Sunday of the Forefathers. Hieromartyr Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyria, and his mother, Martyr Evanthia (2nd c.). Ven. Paul of Latros (955). St. Stephen the Confessor, Archbishop of Sourozh, Crimea (8th c.). Ven. Tryphon, Abbot of Pechenga (1583). Martyr Eleutherius at Constantinople (3rd c.). Ven. Pardus, Hermit, of Palestine (6th 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 1): While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O giver of life. Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ, glory to Thy kingdom, glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind.

TROPARION OF THE FOREFATHERS (Tone 2): Thou hast justified by faith the ancient Forefathers, and through them Thou hast gone before and betrothed unto Thyself the Church of the Gentiles. Let the saints, therefore, take pride in glory; for from their seed sprouted forth a noble fruit, and it was she who gave birth to Thee without seed. Wherefore, by their pleadings, O Christ God, save our souls.

TROPARION OF ST. ELEUTHERIOS (Tone 5): Being adorned in thy sacred priestly robes and newly drenched with the streams of thy pure and sanctified blood, thou didst soar aloft to stand before thy Master, Christ; hence never cease to intercede for those honoring with faith thy mighty and blessed contest, thou overthrower of Satan, O wise and blessed Eleutherios.

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: *Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers.
Thou art just in all that Thou hast done to us!*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Colossians

(Col 3:4-11) **Brethren: when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free man, but Christ is all and in all.**

Today's Epistle speaks about cutting out anger, malice, lies, slander, foul talk, all manner of sexual impurity, and greed. We all know pretty well that these vices estrange us from God and His Kingdom. If there is something surprising, it is that Saint Paul adds a special note about greed or covetousness: he says that it is a form of idolatry. *Idolatry?* Indeed! Greed is idolatry because it is a twisted emotional attachment—an addiction—to material possessions.

It is natural to seek personal security and a place and status in society. But *covetousness* means believing that security and "being someone" comes from *having stuff*, and lots of it. With this attitude we make money into a god and sell ourselves into slavery to this god. And Christ warns us at: **"No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money!" (Mat 6:24).** The same applies to all other vices. Therefore, Saint Paul writes, we must put away all these evil masters: anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, and all the rest.

According to the Apostle, being a Christian is not simply about doing certain things that are "good" and abstaining from others that are "not nice" or "bad for society." Rather, living as a Christian is about exercising here and now "the life of the age to come" that we confess in the Creed. And being with Christ in the age to come is possible only if we practice living "in Christ" *in this age*. Note the wording of the Apostle: "**when Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**" In other words, when Christ appears in glory, either He will be the very content of our lives, or we will find ourselves outside of the life of the Kingdom. It is for this reason that our day-to-day existence matters tremendously: either we struggle to make Christ's life our own, anticipating the full glory of the Kingdom to come, or we are increasingly sabotaging our chances in the age to come.

Our life in Christ is a return to true humanity. With his becoming man (as we celebrate at Christmas), the Word of God has taken on our human nature and healed it. What is more, this renewed humanity is not His personal privilege, but a gift He shares with us: "**Christ *in all!***" Christian morality means, therefore, to give ourselves and all our live to Him, "trading in," as it were, our fallen humanity for the life of the "new Adam." In the words of the Apostle, "**put off the old nature with its practices** (anger, malice, lies, slander, foul talk, sexual impurity, etc) **and put on the new nature renewed after the image of the Creator.**"

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

(Luke 14:16-24) Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, 'none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

To speak of God's call addressed to estranged humanity, the Church uses the image of a rich banquet, "a great dinner" with much rejoicing. As we hear on Pascha night: *Rejoice today for the table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith!* Let us summarize today's Gospel: a "great dinner" is organized; the dinner is free; "everything is ready"; "many" are invited (and it turns out, in the end, that *everyone* is invited).

The parable also portrays the petty excuses that humanity makes when receiving this call. In contrast to the greatness of the person organizing the banquet (the Gospel of Luke says it was "a *great* dinner," while Matthew 22 speaks of a *kingly banquet!*), the magnitude of the celebration, and the attention devoted to sending out the invitations, the response is embarrassing. People make their excuses arguing (unconvincingly) that they have to attend to various less pressing and much less important duties. Rather than receiving the gift and feasting in the Kingdom of God as children of the light, they are bound and enslaved by petty concerns of this earth.

In its original context, those who first receive the invitation represent the people of Israel; the second group—the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—to whom the call goes out afterwards, are the nations, the pagans. “*Even the pagans,*” as the first disciples understood with amazement. In the life of the Church, however, the parable also speaks about God’s *ongoing* work of calling home his estranged children—*with fear of God, with faith and love, draw near!*—and about our *ongoing* work of receiving God in our lives, and *ongoing* work of drawing near to God in the banquet of the Church. As we pray: *O Son of God, receive me today as a partaker of Your mystical supper!*

How do we respond to God’s invitation? And if we already have responded and taken the first step (some of us by our baptism as children, others by joining the Church later in life), how do we live out this fellowship with Christ? A Christian life is not easy. Saint Paul describes it as an ongoing work of “putting off the old nature with its practices, and putting on the new nature.” The journey is hard, the world is full of snares, and we are flawed creatures. And yet, we draw strength by reminding ourselves that we are at the Lord’s Table, called by a good and generous Lord to share in the light of His goodness. *Christ is among us! He is and ever shall be!*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Confessions:** 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.
- **Today:** memorial service for George (Georgiades) and Job/Ron (Butler), as well as for the newly departed Elder Ephraim, the founder and spiritual guide to numerous monastic communities in North America.
- **Today:** *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.
- **Tuesday, DEC 24:** Nativity Matins (5 PM), Nativity Liturgy (6 PM), Christmas carols and potluck!

Remember in your prayers

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.