



## SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
[www.orthodoxbutler.org](http://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](mailto:frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org)

### THE AFTERFEAST OF THE LORD'S ASCENSION

31 May 2020

**STONE 6 / EOTHINON 10**—*Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. Apostle Hermas of the Seventy (1st c.). St. Apollonios of the Egyptian Thebaid (395). Martyr Hermias at Comana in Cappadocia (2nd c.). Martyr Philosophus at Alexandria (3rd c.). Metropolitan Philotheos of Tobolsk, Enlightener of Siberia (1727).*

#### FIRST ANTIPHON

*Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with songs of rejoicing! (R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us! For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth! (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)*

#### SECOND ANTIPHON

*Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, His holy mountain. God is known in her palaces, when He undertakes to help her. (R.:) Save us, O Son of God, Who didst rise from us in glory to the heavens, as we chant unto Thee: Alleluia! For behold, the kings of the earth assembled, they came together. (R.:) Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten ...)*

#### THIRD ANTIPHON

TROPARION OF ASCENSION (see below) preceded by the following verses:

- *Hear these words, all you nations; give ear, all you that dwell upon the earth.*
- *My mouth shall speak of wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall bring forth understanding.*
- *I will incline my ear to a parable, I will open my riddle on the harp.*

#### LITTLE ENTRANCE

*Come, let us worship and fall 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 4): When Mary stood at Thy grave, looking for Thy sacred body, angelic powers shone above Thy revered tomb. And the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led Hades captive and wast not tempted thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin and didst give life to the world, O Thou, Who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE ASCENSION (Tone 4): Thou hast ascended in glory, O Christ our God, and gladdened Thy disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit; and they were assured by the blessing that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world!

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 OF ASCENSION (Tone 6): When Thou hadst fulfilled the dispensation for us, uniting things on earth with the heavens, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, departing not hence, but in no way wast Thou parted from those who love Thee, but remaining inseparable from us and crying unto them that love Thee: "I am with you and no one can be against you!"

## FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT: PSALM 68 (67)

*Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; and let them that hate him flee from before his face. As smoke is driven away; as wax melts before the fire. ... A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy habitation ... You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious ...*

We recognize the opening verses of Psalm 68 (or, in the Orthodox Bible, Psalm 67): "Let God arise!" We sing these verses during the entire Easter period, from Pascha until Ascension. And then, at Ascension, we focus on another verse: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive." Christ has, indeed, ascended on high; but what does it mean that "He led captivity captive"? We sing something similar at Pascha: "Christ is risen from the dead *trampling down death by [his] death*"—Christ has "killed death," He has freed us from the grip of the evil one. So also here: "He has led captivity captive" means that He has annulled our captivity, He has set us free.

But this verse presents a problem. The psalm reads: "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts from people, even from the rebellious," while Saint Paul quotes it at Ephesians 4:8 in a significantly different version: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." Well, why the difference? And what is this verse about, anyway?

Christian tradition understands Psalm 68 as foreshadowing the Ascension of Christ. He defeated our enemies—the evil one, who had held us captive; it is His Resurrection that shines like fire, and makes these enemies melt like wax; and He has ascended, taking spoils (as it were) from the captors of humankind. What spoils? Humanity itself! Christ has plundered hell and emptied it of its inmates. But this conqueror distributes the spoils he takes: Christ ascends to God in order to send us the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We will understand more about this when we celebrate the Giving of the Spirit, Pentecost.

## TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our Fathers. Thou art just in all Thou hast done.*

*The Reading is from the Acts of the Apostles*

(Acts 20:16-18, 28-36) In those days, Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert,

remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

We hear today the words Saint Paul addressed to "the elders of the church": words of advice from one who knew the crucial importance of the ministry of a priest or bishop. **"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.**

Obviously, the job of the "overseer" is not simply one of administration. Paul speaks of the *Holy Spirit* assigning certain individuals to that ministry. Nor is the community ("the flock") simply an association of pious individuals. The very existence of the Church is the work of God, who has established it "with the blood of His own Son." Consequently, this flock is a community of people who have responded to God's call and become collaborators with Christ, allowing Him to complete His work of salvation in them.

Finally, the Christian life is nothing but the continuation of Christ's life in us and among us. This is not only a matter of fidelity to some lofty ideal, but the way to make life truly beautiful and meaningful; in short, one who practices generosity, forgiveness, and love is the first to benefit from it: **It is more blessed to give than to receive!**

The words of Jesus Christ about the joy of giving are not recorded in the Gospels; Saint Paul must have learned them from the first eye-witnesses of the Lord. He quotes them not as something new and unknown, but as a saying that was quite familiar to the Christians in Ephesus. Let it then become a saying familiar to us as well: if we are living as brothers and sisters, taking care of each other, in turn forgiving and asking forgiveness, comforting and being comforted, it is because, as our Master said, **"You're far happier giving than getting!"**

## TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

### *The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to John*

(John 17:1-13) **At that time, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began. I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely.**

We meditate today on Christ's ascension to heaven—that is, on Christ's "entry into glory." On the one hand, we may say that there is nothing new or extraordinary to the fact that the Son should share the glory of the Father! Indeed, we confess that He became human without thereby forsaking or diminishing His divinity; and we confess that He is now returning, as the Gospel says, **"to the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made."**

On the other hand, however, there is something entirely new! This new and extraordinary reality is that the One who ascends *is fully human*, not only divine. He takes into the presence of God—into God's very glory—the humanity He shares with us. As such, He truly is our representative, our forerunner, going to prepare a room for us in the Kingdom of our Father: **"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to Myself, so that where I am you also may be"** (John 14:2-3). But to us, in the meantime, it feels as though we are orphaned, or widowed, or left behind by our closest friend: we are on earth, He is in heaven. The Lord knew this well, and His prayer to the Father is precisely for us: **And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name.** And to His disciples and to us, He spoke these words of reassurance: **"I will not leave you orphans"** (John 14:18). One of the hymns of Ascension, the kontakion, also proclaims: "In no way wast Thou parted from those who love Thee, but remaining inseparable from us and crying unto them that love Thee: "I am with you and no one can be against you!"

How it is that we are not orphaned of the presence of God, and "left behind" we will understand better at Pentecost. For now, note that "being kept in God's Name" (abiding in the presence of God) is measured by a very visible and concrete indicator: **Father, keep them in Thy Name that they may be one, even as We are one.** In other words, we abide in God to the extent to which we, the Church, mirror the unity of love that constitutes the very glory shared by the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Friday, June 5: ordination of Deacon Martin to the holy priesthood.** Even if most of us cannot participate in the service (which will take place at the cathedral church in Charleston, WV), let us all remember before God the reverend deacon Martin, that "the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, which always completes that which is lacking" may come upon him and clothe him with all that is necessary for his ministry as a presbyter.
- **Sunday, June 7: Pentecost (Descent of the Holy Spirit). Matins 9:15 AM, Divine Liturgy 10 AM.** While we must be careful to minimize the risk of contagion, St. Anthony's resumes communal worship. It goes without saying that one should stay home if feeling sick and if there is a fever. In church, individuals or families (whose members will stand together) are asked to keep a distance of 6 feet from others individuals/ families, and to wear masks.
- As Orthodox churches are gradually returning to near-normal worship, there are unfortunate **differences of opinions and practices**—some among Orthodox communities remain closed, some reopen and will be using multiple spoons, some denounce any change whatsoever; some trust and support the civil authorities, some are highly suspicious. All of this naturally opens the door to comparisons, gossip, and judgment. Let us recognize that, even when some ideas may be better than others, we are all in the same boat: we all want to find a way to return to our liturgical worship in a way that does not put lives at risk; we all want to do what is necessary from a medical point of view, but don't want to dilute the practice of our faith. To preempt the temptations of this time, let us be extra gracious with each other, as St Paul's writes: "receive each other" just as Christ has received all of us into the glory of God (Rom 15:7).
- As citizens of this country, **we hold diverse political views** – and enjoy this freedom as a privilege. But in times of acute polarization, the reality of political and ideological diversity has its dangers. The tragic killing of George Floyd and the angry protests and riots that came in reaction to it in Minneapolis are fanning the flames of our passions and reduce us to political activists on the left or on the right. Let us remember that we are called to much more: we are the Church of Christ sojourning in this day and age, practicing daily the grace-filled struggle of living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, and committed, therefore, in equal measure to real justice *and* genuine peace, to personal human dignity and to communal order.

### *Remember in your prayers*

LIVING: Dollie; Mother Barbara (recovering after surgery); Maura (Andronic); Don (Dollie's brother); Ann (Wilson), recovering after her latest hospital visit; Nyal, Jean's son-in-law (motorcycle accident); Joseph Totin; Ion, Marius & Katherine (Stan); Serbanescu and Becker families; Gabriel; Charitini; Stella & Dimitrios; Christine (Abraham); Dollie; Venetia; Maura; Ann; Ed, Peter, John, Jonathan and Joanna; Andrei; Kent, Bob, David (relatives of Jean); Stelian; Diane); Susannah; Ed Sr (Totin).

DEPARTED: Dragos (friend of Fr Bogdan); Karen (Jane Best's daughter); Frank (Seba's brother); 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.

**We are very grateful for your continued financial support, which allows St. Anthony's to remain current with its obligations.**