

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

("Sunday of Gregory Palamas") — *Tone 6.*

11 February 2012

Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonika (1359); Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him (250); Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (644); Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod (1458).

FIRST ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:) Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can cause all his praises to be heard? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. (R.:)

Glory... Now and ever... (R.:)

SECOND ANTIPHON

Let them praise the Lord for His mercies, and for His wonderful works to the children of men. (R.:) O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead: save us, who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"!

The eyes of the Lord are upon those that fear Him and hope in His mercy, to hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose the sons of the slain. (R.:)

Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son ...)

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 6): 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 FOR ST GREGORY PALAMAS (Tone 8): O star of Orthodoxy, support of the Church and its teacher; O comeliness of ascetics, and incontestable champion of those who speak in theology—Gregory the wonder-worker, the pride of Thessalonica, the preacher of grace: implore thou constantly for the salvation of our souls.

TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT (Tone 4, Russian): 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 THE ANNUNCIATION (Tone 8): To thee the champion leader, I thy servant offer thanks for victory, O Theotokos, thou who hast delivered me from terror. As thou hast power invincible, free me from every danger that I may cry unto thee: Rejoice, O bride without bridegroom!

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *O Lord, Thou wilt preserve us and keep us from this generation. Save me, O Lord, for the godly man hath disappeared.*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 1:10-2:3)

“At the beginning, O Lord, you established the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment. You will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will have no end.” But to what angel has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet”? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? Therefore, we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the message, declared by angels, was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard Him.

The Epistle to the Hebrews—and its first chapter is particular—is a very difficult text. Nevertheless, if we heard this reading today, we are called to take with us at least *part* of its message.

One of the memorable passages is the following: **To what angel has God ever said, “Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet”?** Indeed, to sit at the right hand of the king, for people of that time, meant to share the king’s authority; thus, to sit at the right hand of God means to share His divinity. And even the highest angels remain, still, creatures, radically different from the Creator. With Christ, however, things are different. In him the prophetic verse from Psalm 110:1 (“**Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a stool for Your feet**”) find its fulfillment, as He is truly divine, as much divine as the Father is: *true God of true God*.

Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord is a serious matter. “Lord” is an exclusive title for God. If, then, we acknowledge His divinity, we also acknowledge that we are now face to face with His message—a message, as we read today, “**declared at first by the Lord, and attested to us by those who**

heard Him.” Let us take to heart the Apostle’s advice and not neglect or despise the words of our eternal life, coming from the Lord Himself, let us not miss out on “such a great salvation” as He has in store for those who give ear to his call.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mk 2:1-12)

At that time, when Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and He was preaching the Word to them. And they came, bringing to Jesus a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you reason thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – He said to the paralytic – “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.” And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all. So that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

A well-known Gospel story is recounted here. A paralytic brought to Jesus receives his healing almost instantaneously, in a spectacular manner (“**all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’**”). No less impressive is the fact that he also has immediate knowledge of what people are “reasoning in their hearts”—“**immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus reasoned within themselves ...**”

The first lesson we draw from today’s Gospel is that Jesus Christ heals and forgives because He is truly God; as his adversaries note, “**Who can**

forgive sins but God alone?" And it is also God alone who knows our heart, our hidden inner selves, more intimately than we know it ourselves.

But it is also important to pay attention to another very significant detail of the story. Note the beautiful relationship between the paralytic and the four men who bring him in on a pallet. Undoubtedly, these are real friends, ready to go to any length for their afflicted friend. After making their way through the massive crowd (surely not an easy task) and realizing that it was simply impossible to advance an inch further towards Jesus, they even **"removed the roof, ... made an opening, and let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay."**

These four have not left their friend behind to run and meet some fictional "God"; and that is why, in the very dedication with which they take their paralytic friend to Jesus, they find the true God. When they have finally managed to present the paralytic to the Lord, the Evangelist writes the following: **"And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven!'"** Note: **"when Jesus saw *their* faith!"** The Lord always emphasizes the importance of faith; only this time it is the faith *of the others* that saves the paralytic.

Christianity "by oneself" is a fiction, and can be a dangerous delusion (I owe this insight to a blessed monk!). If we are to be saved, we are saved by cooperating with God's grace and in relation to others; it is only sin that is strictly "individual." Indeed, the Church strives to embody the model set forth in today's Gospel. Through fasts and feasts, *we* are journeying, *we* praise God, *we* commit to God ourselves and each other, *we* give thanks, and *we* draw near the chalice in faith and love. In short, we are exercising ourselves into becoming "we": the Body of Christ made up of many members, and are learning to call God not only "my God" but "our Father."

We exercise this manner of existence—being joined together as members of the Body of Christ—when we gather *as Church*, fast *together*, pray *together*, and are *together* called to receive Communion. When our sins and failings estrange us from the Body, we repent—individually—in order to return to fuller communion in Christ. These are the words the priest speaks at Confession: *"Show mercy now on Your servant, and grant to him/her an image of repentance, forgiving all his/sins, whether voluntary or involuntary. Reconcile and unite him/ her to Your Holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** Memorial service for Nicolae (Silviu's father).
- **Today:** General Parish Meeting. (Please do not leave ...!)
- **Bishop's Visit: Not happening next Sunday!** As he is recovering from surgery, His Grace, Bishop Thomas has postponed his visit to our parish for April 21/22 ("Thomas Sunday"!).

Remaining weekday services in Great Lent

WED 3/14, 6pm:	Presanctified Liturgy [<i>Sts Peter and Paul</i>]
WED 3/21, 6pm:	Presanctified Liturgy at [<i>St. Andrew</i>]
WED 3/28, 6pm:	Presanctified Liturgy at [<i>St. Anthony</i>]
TH 3/29, 6pm	Canon of Repentance [<i>St. Andrew</i>]
WED 4/4, 6pm:	Presanctified Liturgy [<i>Sts Peter and Paul</i>]

PLEASE KEEP IN YOUR PRAYERS

LIVING: Bill, Jennifer, Karen (Joanna's mother), Abie, Victoria (Frank's mother), Diane, Sula, Fran, Dolores (Sipos), Leatrice (Totin), Ed, Dolores (Bingham), Angelica, Karyn, Brian, Justin, Sara, Lorine, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka.

DEPARTED: Nicolae (Silviu's father), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), George (Botsis), Michael, priest James, Gabriel, Eduard, Lance, Nancy.