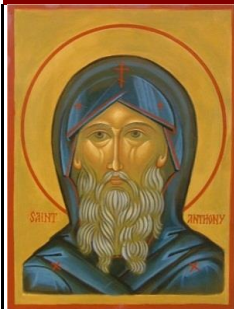


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001
RECTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur
CONTACT: 724.287.6983 (church); 412.390.8208 (priest);
frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT ("Sunday of St. John of the Ladder")

30 March 2014

Tone 7—Ven. John of Sinai, author of "The Ladder" (6th c.). Prophet Joad (1 Kings 13:11—10th c. B.C.); Apostles Sosthenes, Apollos, Cephas, Cæsar, and Epaphroditus, of the Seventy (1st c.); Eubula, mother of St. Panteleimon (ca. 303); Ven. John the Silent of St. Sabbas' Monastery (6th c.); Zosimas, Bishop of Syracuse (ca. 662).

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"! Let them exalt Him in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders. (R:) The eyes of the Lord are upon those that fear Him, upon those that 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 ...)

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Norma, Richard (Michaels), Victoria (Frank's mother), Richard (Johns), Bill, Ed, Peter, Georgia and Scot, Sam, Karen (Joanna's mother), Diane, Sula, Dollie, Dolores (Bingham), Angelica, Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet.

DEPARTED: Metropolitan Philip; Stella, Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Hilda (Chris Abraham's mother).

LITTLE ENTRANCE

*Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ!
Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: "Alleluia"!*

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION (Tone 7): Thou didst shatter death by Thy Cross, Thou didst open paradise to the thief; Thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment-bearing women into joy, and didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim a warning, that Thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world great mercy.

TROPARION FOR ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER (Tone 8): The barren wilderness thou didst make fertile with the streams of thy tears; and by thy deep sighing thou hast given fruit through thy struggles a hundredfold. Accordingly, thou hast become a star for the universe, sparkling with miracles. Therefore, O righteous Father John, intercede with Christ God to save 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: *The Lord will give strength to his people. The Lord will bless his people with peace.*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Hebrews

(Heb 6:13-20) **BRETHREN**: when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, God confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Over the past few weeks we have learned a bit about Abraham—how God spoke to him, and called him, and how he *immediately* chose to abandon the worship of idols and follow the Lord; how he left behind land and possessions and *trusted* the promises of the Lord; how he left behind the comfort of "life as we know it" and risked everything because he trusted the word of God. And what promises did God made? "Go to a land that I will show you" (but he did not tell him where exactly); and "you will have many offspring" (when Abraham and Sarah were old and sterile). In short: impossible promises. Yet Abraham believed; and, as we hear today, **"after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."** Moreover, Abraham became for us a model of faith.

We also hear that God swore an oath to Abraham, that he swore on Himself. We read that in Genesis 15 God humbled himself and fulfilled the ritual by which "covenants" (solemn agreements between kings were concluded). A strange ritual, to be sure: they would sacrifice animals (heifers, sheep, etc) and cut them in half; then, the lower of the two parties would advance between the halved animals and solemnly recite his promise to keep the covenant. The Bible states that Abraham entered a state of ecstasy and saw a flame of fire passing between the halved animals. Note! It was not Abraham, but *God* who took the position of the lower party—he promised, as it were *on his own life*, that the promises to Abraham (inheritance of the land and the birth of many offspring) would surely be fulfilled!

And today we are reminded of God's faithfulness: as he promised to Abraham, so he promises to us—not a physical land and many children, but that we would also enter into the Resurrection and inherit the "new earth" that God has in store for us. And how can we know that this promise will be fulfilled? Because God has himself humbly taken on our flesh, become man, and made a covenant with us *in his blood*. He, the blameless lamb of God, sacrificed for the life of the world and its salvation; He, our High Priest, who has made a way through death *for us*, and has entered into the presence of God *on our behalf*.

Although we are still journeying as mortals through the Valley of Death, we have before us the risen Christ who calls us to **lay hold of the hope set before us**. Faith in Christ is full of hope, since He is also our *forerunner*; that is, He is the first in a long line of followers: as He is—risen from death, that is, liberated from the Fall into mortality—so shall we also be. Will we believe? Let us learn from our father Abraham.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mk 9:17-30) Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so." He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me!" And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! - All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child, cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!" After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them "This kind can come out only through prayer."

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, he will rise on the third day."

The fact that we are reading this Gospel text about prayer and fasting, now that we have just passed the midpoint of our Lenten journey is not accidental. The Church has evidently found it useful to remind us of the importance of the discipline of fasting and prayer. We are also, to the best of our abilities, participating in this fundamental Christian exercise.

But today's reading also makes an appeal to an even more basic practice: faith. "All things can be done for the one who believes," the Lord tells the desperate father; "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!" replies the man. Is this man a believer or an unbeliever? Does he have undivided and unshakable faith in God, or is he simply giving God a try ("Who knows? Let's hope it works!"). We can ask this question about ourselves as well.

The fact is that faith is not a static, fixed *thing* that you either have or you don't. It is more dynamic than that, it is a process—the process of our spiritual reshaping into children of God. "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!" is not only the cry of that desperate parent, wavering between hope and doubt. It journeys with us all along our life of faith. Faith is a gift of God that we gradually accept and that our being continually "metabolizes." As such faith is always imperfect and always striving for greater depth. And we don't "have faith" in the sense of "possessing" it as one would possess an object. Rather, faith is an attitude of entrusting ourselves to God, so as to allow God to work in us, and change us from glory to glory.

This, in fact, is what our Lenten journey is all about: growing in the experience of God, growing in faith. **I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TODAY

- We are welcoming today Fr. James Purdie from St. Basil's in Poquoson. He brings us relics of Saint Anthony and his disciple, Saint Paul the Simple, and will receive the altar table as a donation from our church to the community he is serving.
- Installation of the new parish council
- **1pm:** LEARNING THEOLOGY FROM THE HYMNS OF LENT AND HOLY WEEK. This will be an audio-video presentation, followed by questions-and-answers.

Wednesday, April 2, 6pm: Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts [Sts. Peter and Paul]

Next Saturday, April 5: No Vespers! Fr. Bogdan will be at the Antiochian Village for the retreat and then attend the **Syria Relief Dinner** at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.

Wednesday, April 9, 6pm: Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts [St. Anthony's]

SATURDAY, April 12 ("Saturday of Lazarus"), 10 AM: General commemoration of the departed. On the day that the Church remembers the Lord's miracle of rising his friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, we will commemorate all former parishioners, and all our in our families and among our friends departed. Please come to remember and to pray for your dear ones.

Schedule of Services During Holy Week: to be announced