

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 21 September 2014

Tone 6. —Leavetaking of the Elevation of the Cross. Apostle Quadratus of the Seventy (ca. 130); Hieromartyr Hypatius, Bishop of Ephesus, and his Presbyter, Andrew (ca. 730-735); Twenty-six Monk Martyrs of Zographou (Mt. Athos—1285); Ven. Cosmas the Bulgarian of Zographou (Mt. Athos—1323).

FIRST ANTIPHON

*My God, my God, look upon me; why hast Thou forsaken me? The words of my transgressions are far from my salvation. **Refrain:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!*

My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not. But Thou, the praise of Israel, dwellest in the sanctuary. (R.:)

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

*O God, why hast Thou cast us off forever? Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old. **Refrain:** O Son of God who wast crucified in the flesh, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!*

This is Mount Zion wherein Thou hast dwelt. (R.:)

God is our King before the ages: working salvation in the midst of the earth. (R.:)

Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

THIRD ANTIPHON: TROPARION OF THE CROSS

The Lord is King, let the people rage; He is seated upon the cherubim,
let the earth be moved. TROPARION OF THE CROSS

The Lord is great in Zion; and He is high above all the people.
TROPARION OF THE CROSS

Let them give thanks to Thy great Name, for it is holy.
TROPARION OF THE CROSS

AT THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy!
**Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead,
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. Thou who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee.

TROPARION OF THE CROSS (Tone 1): O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance. Grant victory to the Orthodox Christians over their adversaries; and by the power of Thy Cross preserve Thy habitation.

Glory ... TROPARION OF SAINT ANTHONY (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.

Now and ever ... KONTAKION OF THE CROSS (Tone 4): Thou who wast raised upon the Cross of Thine own will, O Christ our God, do Thou Thy compassions upon this Thy new commonwealth named after Thee. Gladden with Thy sovereign might our most Orthodox hierarchs, and vouchsafe them victory over every false teaching; and as Thy help in war may they possess the weapon of peace, the trophy invincible.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In Wisdom hast Thou made them all. Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

From the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians

(Galatians 2:16-20) Brethren, we who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law; because by works of the law shall no one be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I show myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In this passage Saint Paul is responding to the charge that if one does away with the Law and emphasizes only Christ, one would be making it very easy for people to fall into immoral behavior—thus making, as it were, Christ into an instrument of sin! In reply, the holy Apostle affirms that being “in Christ” implies a high level of morality; for a Christian, however, to strive to attain God by following the Law, is a terrible rejection of God’s providence that the Law should be surpassed and absorbed by Christ.

St. Paul is thinking of Christ as the living Law of God, the Law-made-flesh. The Law that Moses received on Mount Sinai (the ten commandments, the commandments regarding the worship of God, and the host of commandments regulating everyday life in Israel) was meant as a preparation for the coming of Christ. Once the fullness of God has come among us as a human being, however, the commandments of the Law no longer retain their complete validity. *We have, as it were, graduated elementary school, and must move on to higher things!* For instance, the ten commandments are contained in and surpassed by the “new commandment” that we love each other; the tent of meeting and, later, the Temple, is contained in and surpassed by new true temple of God: Jesus Christ; as for dietary laws and other such regulations, they are relative now, and subservient to fostering our life in Christ.

To live in Christ means— for Saint Paul just as for today’s Gospel—to be crucified with Christ: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” That is, to become gradually, step by step, similar to Jesus

Christ. Elsewhere in the New Testament we find a vivid comparison: it is as though the life of a Christian would consist of becoming an icon of Christ. With every step of our life, we draw the lines, we add the colors, we shape our being such that it would reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ “who loved me and gave himself for me.”

“Christ loved *me* and gave his life *for me*”— note how St Paul, who often speaks about the Church as a body formed of many members, and who emphasizes the cosmic dimension of Christ’s work of salvation, speaks here about “I, me, mine”. This is not “individualism”: it means, simply but very seriously, that God’s universal work of salvation becomes “real” only when *I personally* come to taste of it.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

From the Gospel according to Saint Mark

(Mark 8:34-38; 9:1) The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and lose his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

This Sunday is the afterfeast of the Elevation of the Cross—that is, we keep our gaze on the afterglow of the Feast; we continue to meditate on the theological and spiritual meaning of the Cross of Christ, and on its implication for our daily lives as Christians.

Today’s Gospel text has a clear, even blunt, message: to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, means to follow and imitate Christ—and this necessarily includes the central element of Christ’s earthly life, the crucifixion. But what exactly does it mean, “to deny oneself”, “to take up one’s cross,” and “to lose one’s life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel”? Obviously, “taking up one’s cross” means getting ready to be crucified—but not in the sense of imitating Jesus *physically*. Rather, we can think of this as an exchange: letting go of the *me*-centered life, and becoming instead *Christ*-centered, like the Theotokos; letting go of the fallen life of Adam and Eve, and starting to live in relation to the source of true life—Christ; letting go of the grim news that we are born only to die, and embrace the Good News (the “gospel”) that we are called to become

children in the Kingdom of God, to be raised from the dead and to forever advance in love and knowledge of God. This is why “losing one’s life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel” is, in a way, “investing” our life in God, so that we may regain it back as eternal life. It is similar to the way in which we “lose” our bread and wine for the sake of the Liturgy, and receive it back transformed by the Holy Spirit into food for eternal life.

By the same token, not “investing” our life in Christ—refusing to deny our life, refusing to lose it for Christ— we find our life rotting away pointlessly, and we lose everything we thought we possessed.

Put this way, who wouldn’t want to lose one’s life for Christ? Who would not trade “our” life for the free gift of “resurrected life” that the Christ is offering? And yet, in practice, it seems that letting go of our lives and embracing Christ is unbelievably hard. To be frank, being a Christian is not easy: forgiving is not easy, and asking for forgiveness is even harder; loving those who hate us is not easy; being merciful to those who do not “deserve” it, and leaving all judgment to God—all of this is easier read or written about than actually practiced. All of this is the crucifixion that we are called to experience in our lives: crucifying the “old man” (our fallen, sinful habits) so that we may enter the resurrected state of the “new creation” (Gal 6:15) and be children of God.

Today’s Gospel is not an easy one to hear. It comes with a terrible warning about the choice we are making. When we live without God, when we refuse to “deny” and “lose” our life in exchange for Christ’s very life in us, our existence remains sterile, unsatisfying, pointless: an absurd joke ending, inevitably, with death. In the end, as Christ says, you may gain this or that thing—perhaps even gain the whole world—but your life will be lost.

The tone of the Gospel then becomes harsh: “whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father.” We might ask: isn’t it below God to answer tit for tat? Can’t God save all of us, despite everything? But God, because He is a good God, made us free—free even to reject him. And if I am ashamed of Him, if I refuse His gift, if I shut Him out and cling to a dead life without Him, God will have to allow me the freedom of my choice—eternally. By contrast, those who take up their cross by entrusting their life to Christ, will receive their own selves back, refreshed, restored, and resurrected in the Kingdom of God.

“On the cross time and eternity intersected, our history became united for a moment with what is beyond it. The Son of God lifted up His human flesh on the cross. And later human history could follow one of two paths: either – pierced once and for all by the cross, having seen eternity once and for all, having been blinded once and for all to the temporary – it could become authentic Christian history, that is, eschatological in its essence, and exodus, a breakthrough, the eternal yearning of the winged, God-manly spirit; or it could fall down again, forget how the gates to eternity are open, even forget about eternity itself, begin to measure and to weigh, to rejoice over small national successes and be distressed at small national failures.” (Mother Maria Skobtsova).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Today:** first meeting of Sunday school is next Sunday (9/21)!
- **Supporting our Seminarian:** if you can, please make a donation—however small or large—today or on the next two Sundays, to help our seminarian, Ignatius Green, pay the tuition for his last year of seminary. For this special collection we are using the white box “for needy people” at the entrance into the church.
- **Saturday, 10/25: Rummage and Cookie Sale.** Volunteers are needed for baking cookies, and for set-up, clean-up, and the day of the sale. For any info on the Rummage and Cookie Sale, please contact Seba Michaels (724.285.1540).

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Ron (upcoming surgeries), Angelica (Georgia’s mother), Christine (Abraham), Luke (Dollie’s grandson), 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), Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Benjamin, John, Janet, Craig, Christy (relatives of Jean) Shea and Katie, Timothy and Carolyn – seeking for the true faith.

DEPARTED: Metropolitan Philip; Elena; Joe and David Sipos; Bill (Georgia’s father-in-law), Glenn (Jean’s grandson); 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).