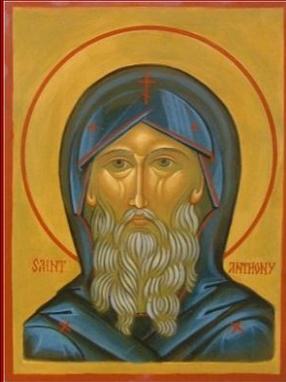


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



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TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

24 November 2013

TONE 5 — Afterfeast of the Entry into the Temple of the Holy Theotokos. Holy Hieromartyr Clement, Bishop of Rome (~100); Holy Hieromartyr Peter of Alexandria (312); Hermogenes, bishop of Agrigentum (~800).

FIRST ANTIPHON

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised: in the city of our God and in His holy mountain. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

God is known in her palaces for a refuge. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. (R.:)

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Most High hath sanctified His tabernacle. Holiness and majesty are in His sanctuary. (R.:) O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead: save us who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"!

This is the gate of the Lord, by which the righteous shall enter. (R.:)

Holy is Thy temple, and wonderful in righteousness. (R.:)

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

AT THE 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 5): Let us believers praise and worship the Word, co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our salvation; for He took pleasure in ascending the Cross in the flesh, to suffer death and to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection.

TROPARION OF THE ENTRANCE INTO THE TEMPLE (Tone 4): Today is the prelude of God's good will and the heralding of the salvation of mankind. In the temple of God, the Virgin is presented openly, and she proclaims Christ unto all. To her, then, with a great voice let us cry aloud: "Rejoice, thou fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!"

Glory ...

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.

Now and ever ...

KONTAKION OF THE ENTRANCE INTO THE TEMPLE (Tone 4): The most pure temple of the Savior, the very precious chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasure of the glory of God, is presented today in the house of the Lord. She bringeth with her the grace of the Spirit, which the angels of God do praise. She is the heavenly tabernacle.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *Thou, O Lord, shalt keep us and shalt preserve us.
Save me, O Lord, for the godly man is no more!*

The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians
(Galatians 6:11-18)

Brethren, see with what large letters I am writing to you, with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law; but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision: what counts is to be a new creation! Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

It is clear that Saint Paul is writing here about a matter he views as extremely important. The first line about the “large letters” means something like “I want to emphasize in the bold scrawls of my personal handwriting the immense importance of what I have written.” What was the problem? Saint Paul was writing to warn the Galatians against certain Christian leaders who compelled all new converts to the faith to practice circumcision. He warned that such “missionaries” were in fact interested in cultivating their own public image in the Christian community, while at the same time “keeping a low profile” in the larger society, so as to avoid prosecution by the Roman Empire (as long as Christians would be perceived as a type of Judaism, they would not be persecuted, but tolerated, like the Jews). The false missionaries were not “crazy” to insist on circumcision; it was, to them and to many, a definite mark of religious piety. Today, it would be things like not eating certain foods on certain days, dressing in a certain way, abstaining from this or that, etc.

Saint Paul’s point is that, ultimately, all these things must be placed in a different perspective: what truly matters is not that we do this or that, or that

we keep this or that rule of piety; what matters is that we become a “new creation”—and this is God’s work in us. Indeed, as the Apostle writes elsewhere (2 Cor 4:6), the same God who spoke at creation, let there be light—and it was light, now shines in our hearts, drawing us out of darkness and re-creating us into children of the light. “A new creation” means that our Christian life is God’s liturgy in us, where we are co-workers with God.

Expecting the dawn of a “new creation” is precisely what the beauty of Christmas is about. The “magic” atmosphere of “winter wonderland,” the carols and candy cane, decked Christmas trees, and red-nosed Santas and Rudolfs at the mall—all of this has its place and its charm. But Christmas is about God coming to seek for us, to rekindle in us the love of the Beginning.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke

(Luke 18:18-27)

At that time, a man came testing Jesus and asking, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.’” And the man said, “All these I have observed from my youth.” And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus, seeing him sad, said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus said, “What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.”

Here is a man who, by any standards of human morality, is a pretty decent person: he does not cheat on his wife, he behaves well with his parents, he does not steal, he does not slander or bring false accusations against others, and he did and most likely never will kill anyone. We can assume that there

many other good things to be reported about him. For one, he is a deeply religious person (his concern here is “how to inherit eternal life”), who shows appropriate respect for teachers of the Law (note how politely he addresses Jesus); and there probably are many vices that he has managed to avoid. Moreover, he’s acted like that “since his youth”! A decent person, whom we would do well to emulate.

And yet, even while we recite the litany of this man’s qualities, the Gospel seems to set him forth as an example of *what to avoid*. The word this man receives from Christ comes as a hard blow to his self-esteem: what he has been doing is far from enough, and what he needs to do is impossibly hard for him. A very depressing answer, indeed, because Jesus puts his finger on a raw nerve: this man was very rich (and liked it), and he would have to give everything up. “The man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich.”

Had the man not been terribly attached to money, but instead sexually promiscuous, the answer would probably be different; perhaps something like “One thing you still lack. Cut out your promiscuity, start living in chastity as of right now, and you will have treasure in heaven.” And the man would have become sad, imagining himself unable to remain faithful to a single woman (chastity in marriage) or faithful to a vow of abstinence (as in monastic chastity). Had he been under the control of vanity, Jesus would have proposed the practice of humility; had he been plagued by anger or violence, the answer would have pointed to *that* problem, and proposed the appropriate spiritual medicine.

In short, the Gospel is not about a particular rich man unwilling to part with his riches; and it is not singling out riches as the major impediment to salvation. In truth, the Gospel applies to each and every one of us. There is no “objective” scale of sins, and no “objective” greatest sin: the greatest sin is always *my* sin. And the word of Christ is not easy to swallow: “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for *you* to enter the kingdom of God.” When Jesus spoke these words to the rich man, those around him were positively shocked: “In this case, who can be saved?” Obviously, nobody; it is, as the Lord states, “impossible for human beings.”

Before speaking to the rich man about his salvation, the Lord points to the goodness of God: “No one is good but God alone!” We should therefore not react like the rich man, who became sad and preferred to leave as soon as he realized that God was not offering him a confirmation of his decent life, but a call to radical change. Note the encouragement: the very impossibility of

our salvation and life in God is made possible for us by God himself. The call of today's Gospel is echoed by our Liturgy, again and again: "let us commit ourselves and all our life to Christ our God ... for You are a good God and You love humankind"! In other words, deny yourself and your sins, entrust yourself to Christ, allow Him to clothe you with His grace (for details, see today's Apostle reading), allow Him to make possible that which is impossible.

The Nativity of Christ for which we have started our preparations is the joyous event of the beginning of our salvation: the Virgin prepares to give birth, the Son of God prepares to become one of us, our salvation draws near.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are one month away from the great feast of the Nativity. The Nativity fast is our opportunity to renew our relationship with Christ, so as to rejoice with the Theotokos and all creation about God's love for us. As Orthodox Christians, our preparation for Christmas should be

- to come to confession "with fear of God, with faith, and love";
- to practice generosity, especially towards those most needy;
- to forgive and ask forgiveness;
- to remember God with joy, and to pray for oneself and others
- to keep the dietary rules of the Church with humility, joining fasting with prayer and almsgiving. Before December 20, fish is allowed on Saturdays and Sundays (some allow it also on Tuesdays and Thursdays).

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Miruna, Sam, Richard (Johns), George (Georgiades) and family, Bill, Georgia and Scot, Karyn, Victoria, Sula, Dollie and her family, Dolores (Bingham), Ignatius and Amy, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Brooke, Thomas Joseph.

DEPARTED: Alex (Julie Smolen's brother), Connie (Svolos), Hilda, Andy (Michaels), Jeannie (Ferver), David (Sipos), Edmund, Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Abie, Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Eugenia (Cristina's godmother), Faynasia, Niculai.