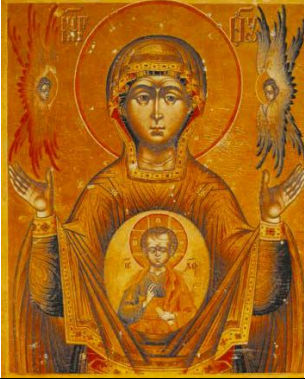


SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

27 November 2011

On this day, we commemorate the Greatmartyr James the Persian (421); St. Jacob, Bishop and Wonderworker of Rostov (1392); the seventeen Monk Martyrs in India (4th c.); St. Roman (5th c.); Ven. Palladius of Thessalonica (6th-7th c.).

LIVING: Abie (Abraham), Diane, Sula, Bill, Norm, Fran, Dolores (Sipos), Leatrice (Totin), Dolores (Bingham), Angelica, Karyn, Brian, Justin, Sara, Miguel, Christine, Jeaneen, Lorine, Ignatius and Aimilia, Jonathan and Joanna.

DEPARTED: George (Botsis), Michael, priest James, Gabriel, Eduard, Lance, Nancy, Petruța, Peter, Michael, William, Mariana, James, Mary Ann, Michael.

FIRST ANTIPHON

*It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! **R.:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!*

*To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! **(R.:)***

*Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him **(R.:)***

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! (R.:) Save, O Son of God Who art risen from the dead, us who sing to Thee, “Alleluia”!

For He established the world which shall not be shaken! (R.:)

Holiness befits Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! (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! 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 mourning of the ointment-bearing women into joy, and didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim warning that Thou hast risen, O Christ, granting the world great mercy!

TROPARION OF GREAT MARTYR JAMES (Tone 4): Thy Martyr, O Lord, by his struggle hath received from Thee, our God, the imperishable crown. For acquiring Thy strength, he demolished usurpers and crushed the powerless might of Satan. Therefore, through his intercessions, O Christ God, save our souls!

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 FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY (Tone 3): The Virgin cometh today to the cave to give birth, ineffably to bring forth the Word eternal. Therefore, rejoice, O world, at the message; with the angels and shepherds, give glory to Him Who shall appear by His own will as a young child—He Who is from eternity God.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon: *The Lord will give strength to his people. Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of God, ascribe to the Lord honor and glory.*

The Reading is from the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians
(Eph 2:14-22)

Brethren: Christ is our peace, He who made both groups one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through His flesh, abolishing the Law with its commandments and legal claims, in order to create in Himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and to reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through Him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The two groups that are mentioned in this text are the people of Israel and the Gentiles. For the longest time God had been erecting a fence around Israel, to keep them as his “treasured possession” (Exod 19:5), as the people chosen to know God and bear witness to him before all the families of the earth. With the advent of Christ, however, the dividing wall is abolished, and both groups are joined into the One Church: both Jews and Gentiles, all those who confess that God has visited His people, becoming flesh for our sake. Saint Paul does not insist on the newness that this tearing down of the wall brought *to Israel*; since he is writing to a community of Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, his message is tailored primarily *for us*, former pagans.

We were “far off” from God, and have been given most intimate “access to the Father”; we were “strangers and sojourners,” and are now counted as “fellow citizens with the holy ones.” In short, we have been taken in, adopted into Israel, and God no longer differentiates between Israel, his first born, and

the Gentiles: as long as any Jews or Gentiles are “in Christ,” they are equally part of the people of God.

Of course, the gate of Baptism through which one enters “in one Spirit” into the new reality of the One Church, is merely the beginning. Our calling is to become “a temple sacred in the Lord,” to “grow into a dwelling place of God.” In other words, Jews and Gentiles alike are called to be, individually, what the ancient Temple was: a receptacle and abode of the divine Glory; called to be, individually, what the Theotokos is: a Christ-bearer; or, like the bread and the wine that we bring to the altar, called to be transformed by the Holy Spirit, Who does not shy away from descending upon us and our gifts.

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. To paraphrase the Kontakion sung today, *Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it heralded: "What is impossible for human beings is possible for God."*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today: 40-day memorial for George Botsis.

Tuesday, Nov. 29, 7:30 pm, at Perkins: Bible Study in Cranberry. We are planning to meet once a month.

Wed, Nov. 30, 10 am: Divine Liturgy at St Andrew's (OCA) for the feast of Saint Andrew, the first-called apostle of the Lord.

Sunday, Jan. 15: The nuns of Holy Transfiguration Monastery have confirmed that they will join us for the celebration of our patron saint, Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism. In light of last year's experience, we should think about the type of hospitality we want and are able to extend to the nuns as well to our brothers and sisters from the other two Orthodox parishes.