

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

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SUNDAY AFTER THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS 16 September 2012

—*Tone 6. Afterfeast of Elevation of the Cross; Greatmartyr Euphemia (304); Sebastiana, disciple of St. Paul the Apostle (1st c.); Martyr Melitina of Marcianopolis (2nd c.); Martyrs Victor and Sosthenes at Chalcedon (ca. 304); Ven. Dorotheus, Hermit, of Egypt (4th c.); New Martyrs Isaac and Joseph of Georgia (808).*

FIRST ANTIPHON

O God, my God, attend to me; why hast Thou forsaken me?

R.: Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!

My God, I will cry by day, and wilt Thou not hearken? (R.)

Thou dwellest in the sanctuary, O Praise of Israel. (R.)

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

SECOND ANTIPHON

God, why hast Thou cast us off unto the end? R.: O, Son of God, Who wast crucified in the flesh: save us who sing to Thee, Alleluia”!

Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased from the beginning. (R.)

God is our King before the ages, He hath wrought 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 (x3)

Byzantine melody (tone 1)

O Lord, save Thy peo - ple and bless Thine in - her - i - tance.

Grant vic - to - ry to the Or - tho - dox Chris - tians ov - er their ad - ver - sa - ries;

and by the pow - er of Thy Cross, pre - serve Thy ha - bi - ta - tion.

Russian Melody (Obikhod, tone 1)

O Lord, save Thy peo - ple and bless Thine in - her - i - tance.

Grant vic - to - ry to the Or - tho - dox Chris - tians

ov - er their ad - ver - sa - ries; and by the pow - er of Thy Cross, pre - serve Thy ha - bi - ta - tion!

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 hast led Hades captive and wast not tempted by it; 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 OF THE CROSS (Tone 1): O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance, grant to Thy people victory over all adversaries; and by the power of Thy Cross preserve Thy habitation.

TROPARION OF ST. EUPHEMIA (Tone 4): O Lord Jesus, unto Thee Thy lamb doth cry with a great voice: O my Bridegroom, Thee I love; and seeking Thee, I now contest, and with Thy baptism am crucified and buried. I suffer for Thy sake, that I may reign with Thee; for Thy sake I die, that I may live in Thee: accept me offered out of longing to Thee as a spotless sacrifice. Lord, save our souls through her intercessions, since Thou art great in mercy.

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): Do thou, who of thine own good will wast lifted upon the Cross, O Christ our God, bestow thy bounties upon the new nation which is called by Thy Name. Make glad in Thy might those who lawfully govern, that with them we may be led to victory over our adversaries, having in thine aid a weapon of peace and a 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.*

*The Reading is from the Epistle of St. 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.

Saint Paul's theology is quite complicated. Even his apostolic colleague, Saint Peter, wrote about him that "his letters contain some things that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). Difficult as they are, however, we cannot bypass Paul's letters.

This passage is responding to the charge that eliminating some of the Old Testament legislation in favor of Christian freedom would encourage libertinism. Indeed, this is what many of the early Christians of Jewish descent were thinking: if you do away with the Law and emphasize only Christ, you are making it very easy for people to fall into immoral behavior—and thus you are making Christ 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) were 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’ universal work of salvation becomes “real” only when *I personally* come to taste of it.

TODAY’S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is 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."

"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).

The feast of the Elevation of the Cross—which commemorates the finding of the true cross on which Jesus Christ had been crucified in Jerusalem, in the early fourth century—is celebrated every year on September 14, which almost always is a weekday. Nevertheless, the Sunday before and the Sunday after the feast are both revolving around the Cross of our Lord, its theological and spiritual meaning, and 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.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today: beginning of the new Sunday School, blessing of the children, parents, and teachers.

Saturday 29 September, 6:30 PM: *Introduction to Orthodoxy!* We will learn about the life of Anthony the Great, as told by St Athanasius of Alexandria. After some Q&A, we will conclude by praying together the Akathist of St. Anthony the Great.

Remember in your prayers

LIVING: Ed and family, Peter and family, Georgia and Scot, Richard (Michaels), Karen (Joanna's mother), Victoria (Frank's mother), Diane, Sula, Fran, Dolores (Sipos), Dolores (Bingham), Angelica, Karyn, Ignatius and Amy, Jonathan and Joanna, Andrei and Nyoka, Jackie (Ed's friend).

DEPARTED: David (Sipos), Edmund (Ed's uncle), Richard, Dolores Patricia (Thompson), Leatrice (Totin), Ed (Joanna's grandfather), Abie, Nicolae (Silviu's father), Joseph (Rose's father), Fred (Dollie's uncle), Bob (Diane's father), Michael, Gabriel, Lance, Nancy (Dunkle), Eugenia (Cristina's godmother).

BEGINNING OF SUNDAY SCHOOL YEAR

Illumine our hearts, O Master and lover of mankind, with the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Your Gospel teachings; implant in us also the fear of Your blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are pleasing to You: for You are the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and to You we send up glory, together with Your Father who is from everlasting, and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen!

Let us pray to the Lord. (People: *Lord have mercy!*)

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God Who, when Thou wast made man, in Thy childhood and youth in Nazareth was submissive and obedient to Thy Most Pure Mother and Thy holy provider and guardian Joseph, leaving us an image of a pure childhood: do Thou Thyself, O Lover of mankind, enlighten, help, and inflame with Thy love these children; preserve and grow them in the Orthodox faith, that they may increase in wisdom and in fulfilling of Thy commandments, and become heirs of Thy Kingdom. Bless also their parents and grant that they may see their children grow like olive shoots around their table. For Thou art a God mighty in mercy and strength, and to Thee we send up glory, together with Your Father who is from everlasting, and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen!

Let us pray to the Lord. (People: *Lord have mercy!*)

O Lord Jesus Christ, our God Who in the past at many times and in various ways didst teach Those who have been well-pleasing to Thee, and Who in these latter times didst send out Thine Apostles to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them and teach them Thy new commandment of love; and Who in Thy church hast appointed apostles, and prophets, and teachers: stretch forth Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling-place on high heaven and bless these teachers, strengthening them for this ministry which Thou hast set before them. For Thou, O Lord, hast said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God," and Thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and to Thee we send up glory, together with Your Father who is from everlasting, and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages, Amen!