

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos -- November 21st

A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this 26th weekend after Pentecost our readings are again taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and Luke's retelling of the Parable of the Rich Man who had a good harvest. Each reading conveys an unique message that can help us as we attempt to spiritually grow.

St. Paul calls us, in this reading, to "live in the light." He declares that light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth. *Be correct*, he urges us, *in your judgment of what pleases the Lord*. He then proceeds to list a number of behaviors that we must attempt to cultivate if we want to be true followers of Jesus. He calls us to watch over our conduct, saying:

Do not act like fools

Make the most of the present opportunity

Do not continue in ignorance

Avoid getting drunk on wine

Be filled with the Spirit

Sing praise to the Lord

Give thanks to God the Father

Defer to one another

If you want to know how to live as a follower of Jesus, look to developing these behaviors. If you do, you will be correct in your judgment of what pleases the Lord. These are just some of the behaviors that we should attempt to make a part of our lives.

The parable that Luke shares with us clearly points out that we must, if we desire to be followers of Jesus, **TRUST IN GOD, NOT IN POSSESSIONS**. Unfortunately we humans tend to want to trust in things since having



something tangible seems to bring us more peace. The problem is that *things* will not protect us from death and will only get in our way of growing spiritually and becoming more like Jesus. And, of course, growing in our likeness of Jesus is the goal of this earthly existence.

I believe that this is such a very important message as we prepare to celebrate the Winter Theophanies. Our world has so commercialized Christmas that it is robbed of its true "spiritual meaning." Stores are now calling us to "buy things" even before Thanksgiving and convey the belief that Christmas is all about "giving gifts" to others - giving others "things" to express our love. How very shallow.

Christians have allowed businesses to rob them of the true meaning of Christmas.

Are you willing not to buy into the "commercial" meaning of Christmas and give love to others instead of things? Things can only draw us away from the true meaning of life - to grow in the likeness of Jesus!

SOME THOUGHTS ON PRAYER



When the Gospels and Epistles become real for us, we see how naïve were our former notions of God and life in Him. The Wisdom that is revealed to us far surpasses man's imagining - "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." This is why I continue to urge you to think about what you hear in the Gospels and Epistles that we share at our worship. As I have repeatedly shared with those who worship with me, I do not purport to share the absolute truth of what we hear but, rather, try to share what impact the readings have on me. I do believe that each of us is given our own understanding of the readings if we listen to them with an open mind and heart.

True prayer uniting us with the Most-High is nothing other than light and strength coming down to us from heaven. In its essence it transcends our

plane of existence. This world contains no source of energy for prayer. If I eat well so that my body may be strong, my flesh will rebel against prayer. If I mortify the flesh by excessive fasting, for a while abstinence favors prayer but soon the body grows faint and refuses to follow the spirit. If I associate with good people, I may find moral satisfaction and acquire new psychological or intellectual experience but only very rarely will I be stimulated to prayer in depth. If I have a talent for science or the arts, my success will give rise to vanity and I shall not be able to find the deep heart, the place of spiritual prayer. If I am materially well-off and busy wielding the power associated with riches or with satisfying my aesthetic or intellectual desires, my soul does not rise up to God as we know Him through Christ. If I renounce all that I have and go into the desert, even there the opposition of the cosmic energies will paralyze my prayer.

True prayer to the true God is contact with the Divine Spirit which prays in us. The *Spirit* gives us to know God. The *Spirit* draws our spirit to contemplation of eternity.

So I must allow *God's Spirit*, Who is within me, to guide my prayer. I cannot force contact with God. I can only desire to come into contact with Him and then rely on the *Spirit* within me to make the contact for me.

What is your idea of prayer?

ACQUIRING THE MIND OF CHRIST

Heaven is not a place but a Person. It is personal communion with the Triune God and experiential knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. Hell is the loss or refusal of this communion, whether by our conscious rejection or the denial of it by our lives. The reality of heaven and hell is clearly taught throughout the Holy Scriptures particularly by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is only in the light of the true faith that we come to know the full extent of the sobering reality of God's eternal love for mankind.

I think, however, that it is critical to not focus on the idea of Hell but, rather, to focus on the idea of heaven and true communion with our God. Heaven - that experience of being one in communion with the Holy Trinity through Christ in the Holy Spirit - can truly begin here and now and not something that is possible only in the future and after physical death. I also think that it is important to not focus on evil or the devil. If we do, we miss multiple opportunities to focus on Christ and good. If our lives are truly completely focused in growing in our likeness of Jesus we don't have to fear hell or evil.

Too often Christians, especially in the West, seem to focus on the devil

and evil and, therefore, distract people from focusing on Christ and good. To what value and end.

When you think about how Jesus lived you become aware of the fact that He truly seized every opportunity to bring good into the world - He made sure that He was constantly open to helping others - He was genuinely a healing and life-giving Person. He made sure that everyone He

encountered walked away feeling more loved and valuable.

So to acquire the mind of Christ we must make a voluntary and conscious effort to be a healing and life-giving person to others. We must want others who encounter us to go away feeling better about themselves and happier.

This means that we must always examine our encounters with

others and ask ourselves: *Do people feel better after they have met me and interacted with me? Do people feel that they are loved and respected after they have encountered me?*

To be more like Jesus we have to make a conscious effort to be a person who makes God's kingdom real by the way we treat others. God's Kingdom is present when people feel unconditional love from us.





Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan



THANK YOU

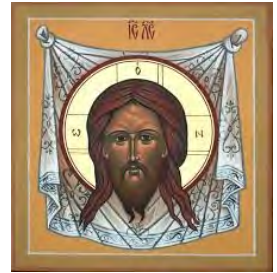
I would offer a very special "THANK YOU" to all who helped us in providing a dinner to the "homeless" from the Detroit area. We cooperate with the First Methodist Church in Plymouth to provide this support as a part of their week long program each year. We have indeed participated in this program with our fellow Christians in this area for a number of years as our Christian Outreach effort. It is critical, I feel, to be involved in such programs. Thank You, therefore, for your help and support.



Not how long, but how well you have lived is the main thing

CALLED TO HOLINESS

It is my sincere belief that periods like the St. Philip's Fast provide us with a real opportunity to focus our attention on our spiritual lives.



That is, of course, if we seize the opportunity to use this time to spiritually grow. Unfortunately in our modern American society we are easily distracted from spiritual growth, especially at this time of year. First, we encounter Thanksgiving which is all about "eating" and watching "parades." I wonder how many people, when they gather for their Thanksgiving meal, truly take time to thank God for all of His blessings. Many think of Thanksgiving as a Civil Holiday and don't really take time to offer "thanks" for what they have. The original holiday was all about thanking God for His blessings.

Second, it seems that Christmas has become a time of "bargain sales" and "parties" with little thought about what the holiday is supposed to mean. I think that it is an opportunity for people to get rid of the "blues" that come with the "winter months." Understandable! It therefore becomes

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A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE ST. PHILIP'S FAST

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18th

Heavenly Father, on this fourth day of this Fast, we remember the holy martyrs Plato and Roman who voluntarily died rather than deny their belief in Jesus Christ. As I think about their act of self-sacrifice, I realize that it is imperative that I truly focus on the real meaning of Christmas and voluntarily refuse to get so consumed with “giving things” to others and “having parties” that I forget to remember that I am celebrating Your revelation to me that You are the source of my life. This feast tells me that Jesus, Your only-begotten Son, was a human like me and He willingly chose to live a life that extended unconditional love to all others. Help me to grow in His likeness. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19th

Heavenly Father, on this fifth day of this Fast, the Church remembers Obadiah, the prophet. His name means “servant of God.” As I continue my preparation for these Winter Feasts, I ask You, Father, to help me prepare myself to spiritually celebrate them and to recognize all that You, my God, have done for me. I truly believe You become Incarnate in the Person of Jesus to show me how to live this earthly, human life. I know I am called to become more like Jesus and Obadiah, namely become a true servant of You, my God. I know that as Your servant I must attempt to act like Jesus, extending unconditional love and forgiveness to all others. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH

On this sixth day of this Fast, I ask You, Heavenly Father, to guide my life in peace. I make this request through the entreaties of Saints Gregory and Proclus. I know that at this time of the year I need to maintain a peaceful life. Help me to not get consumed with a commercialized celebration of Christmas. Help me to make Christmas a time of love and peace, focusing on its spiritual meaning. Gift giving originally became a part of our Christmas celebration because of the sacred gift You gave humankind, namely Jesus. Let me truly make Christmas a time of thanksgiving for the great love You extended to me and humankind by extending love to others. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST

Heavenly Father today the Church celebrates the heralding mankind's salvation by celebrating the entrance of Mary into the Temple. By her entrance she voluntarily accepted her role in mankind's salvation. Help me to voluntarily embrace my preparation to bear Christ, as she did, into my world. Help me, like Mary, to embrace the role that You have for me in making Yours Kingdom real, right now. Help me to understand that I can only accomplish this role by becoming an unselfish person, opening myself to live as Jesus did. I know that this can only be accomplished if I am willing to unconditionally love others and genuinely forgive them, treating them always as I want to be treated. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE ST. PHILIP'S FAST

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22ND

Heavenly Father, on this eighth day of this feast, my country calls me to celebrate **THANKSGIVING**. As I think about all that You have given me, I offer this prayer of thanks. You have given me life and granted me the gift of Your Holy Spirit. I truly believe You are doing this out of love and are calling me to grow in my likeness of Jesus, Your Only-begotten Son. Help me to focus my efforts on growing in His likeness. Help me also to know that You unconditionally love me and only want what is for my benefit. Help me through the struggles of life, using them as opportunities to truly place my complete trust in You. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD

On this ninth day of this fast, O Heavenly Father, I pause and think about all the Christians who have, down through the centuries, professed belief in You as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Today I especially remember our Fathers among the saints, Amphilochius and Gregory. They, through their personal efforts to become more like Jesus, truly promoted our Christian faith. They endured various difficult challenges and false accusations. They refused, however, to abandon their hope and trust in You. I would ask them to entreat You, on my behalf, to help me grow in my desire and courage to truly embrace the **WAY** that Jesus lived, doing unto others as I would have them do unto me. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH

Heavenly Father, on this tenth day of this fast, I call upon our Fathers Among the Saints, Clement and Peter, to entreat You on my behalf to give me the strength and courage to spiritually grow during this period of preparation for the Winter Feasts. They were men who lived their faith and were willing to die for it. They made the Christian faith strong by the "Seal of Martyrs". While I don't think I will ever be called upon to give my life for my faith, I would ask of You, Heavenly Father, to give me the courage to live my faith as they did, being unwilling to ever compromise my commitment to the teachings of Jesus. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 25TH

Heavenly Father, on this eleventh day of this fast, I would remember the Great Martyrs Catherine and Mercurius. Their steadfastness in the faith indeed encourages me to make a serious effort to truly live my faith and spiritually prepare myself for the up-and-coming Winter Feasts. Their struggle to maintain their faith encourages me. Help me to see, as they did, Your revelation to humankind about the meaning and purpose of this earthly life. Help me to have the same commitment to follow Jesus as they did, making every effort to truly live as He did. Their example encourages me to take my faith seriously and to seize the opportunity that this Fast presents to me to spiritually grow. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

Schedule of Services

Holy Ascension
Eastern Catholic Church
1062 Church Street
Plymouth, MI 48170

Rev Wayne J. Ruchgy PhD
Serving Priest

Rectory: (313) 582-1424
Emergency: (313) 580-4412
WRuchgy@gmail.com

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturdays

5:30 PM English

Lenten Services

Wednesdays @ 7:45 PM

Religious Education

September-June

SACRAMENTS

Penance

By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony

*Six-month membership
required*

Funerals

*Membership of an
immediate
family member required*

Saturday, November 17- -26th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 1

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

Saturday, November 24- -27th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 2

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

an opportunity of us Christians to make sure that, at least, in our lives we **PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS.**

The call to holiness, in my estimation, is a call to make what I believe - namely our faith - *something that I truly mean and hold* to be true. This of course would require that I observe Christmas in a manner that stresses that I believe that God became incarnate as a human in the Person of Jesus in order to reveal to me that He is the life force that calls me into and sustains me in existence. Christmas is a time to express my belief that **GOD IS WITH US.** He has joined Himself to us, His human children. This is something that I know I can truly celebrate in a special, spiritual way.



Prayer Request

Please remember in your prayers.

Loretta Simon

Larry Tailard

Life's Journey is an ascension to the Heavenly Father that is made

through personal attitudinal change and spiritual

Promote Holy Ascension by sharing our website

<http://www.holyascensionugcc.com>

EVERYDAY FUND-RAISING FOR HOLY ASCENSION

Here are several ways to help raise funds for Holy Ascension.

KROGER CARD: Register your name and number

GOOD SEARCH: Use this Internet search engine to gain credit for Holy Ascension. Use *Good Shop* to shop online.

GIFT CARDS

Holy Ascension offers gift cards for a variety of stores in the community. Use them and help Holy Ascension.

BUSCH'S

Re-loadable gift cards available for these stores.

USED CANS: Holy Ascension recycles eligible cans

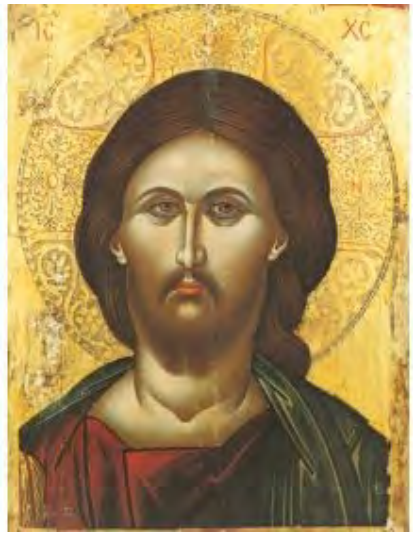
Involvement in these programs is not limited to Holy Ascension members. Family members, neighbors and friends can help.

MORE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

How are we to read the witness of the Gospels - and of the New Testament, more broadly - to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ? It is abundantly clear that it is from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Christ that we are to read these works. The death of Christ is so important because it is death that has cast its pall over human life, and indeed over the life of the cosmos. Death is the problem that needs to be answered: death that calls in question everything we try to achieve; death that seems to be the inevitable horizon of human life. No remedy for the human condition that falls short of death is of any use.

The verses that we sing during Great and Holy Week speak a great deal about Christ's 'voluntary passion'. Every service between Palm Sunday evening and Holy Thursday ends with the priest's blessing which begins: 'May the Lord who is coming to his voluntary passion.' There is a kind of deliberate contradiction - or paradox - in that expression. For a *pathos* is essentially something that happens to us, that overwhelms us, that we suffer, whereas what is voluntary is something that we do. We do not decide to die; it is the ultimate *pathos*, something that happens to us.

But not, we believe, in the case of Christ. Even in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is presented not as someone to whom things happen, but as one who stamps his own character on events; in the fourth Gospel it is explicit - 'no one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (John 10:18) - or as we hear in the Liturgy of Chrysostom: "*on the night when He was betrayed, or rather, when He surrendered Himself for the life of the world*". And so in the case of his death: Christ does not succumb to death, but rather encounters death and overthrows it; he descends into the place of



the dead, Hades, or hell, and liberates those who had been held there since Adam, beginning with Adam and Eve, as we see in the icon of the resurrection, or the *Anastasis*. "Love is as strong as death", we read in the Song of Songs, and here that observation takes on a new meaning: Christ's love for human kind is able to overcome death, for it does not succumb to death, but seeks it out.

So our faith declares not only that God shares His very life force with us but that He also destroyed death by becoming incarnate as a human in the person of Jesus, God's only-begotten Son. ***Do you truly believe this?***

UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY GOSPELS

I ended that last issue of this article by sharing that Luke shares that the poor and significant are chosen for the greatest privileges: the childless couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth; Mary and Joseph from unknown Nazareth; shepherds from the countryside; an old man and elderly widow at the Temple. Luke preserves the strong regard for actual poverty in his beatitudes. In writing “happy are you poor,” he keeps the direct address of the second person and does not add, like Matthew, “poor in spirit”. He includes the full Isaian text about the poor to whom the gospel is brought. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is exclusive to Luke. Still other words about poverty, including a parable, are found only in Luke.

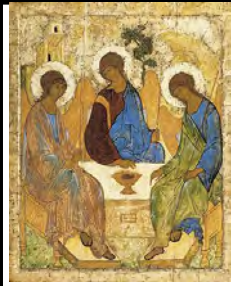
It is not surprising, therefore, that Luke should write the “Gospel of Absolute Renouncement.” Disciples must leave “all things”; in a similar statement, Mark and Matthew restrict the renouncement to nets and father to follow Jesus. Yet another statement, only in Luke, insists upon total dedication to Jesus. Luke alone adds the word “wife” to the list of what some will be asked to renounce for the sake of the kingdom. Again, where Matthew writes “lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven”, “sell what you have and give alms”. Luke extends the cross-bearing of the single eschatological moment to the continuous daily sorrows of life. The necessity of renunciation and suffering as the way to glorious fulfillment shows up in repeated assertions that Jesus “must” suffer (e.g., 9:22; 13:33; 17:25).

Such detachment and renunciation are possible because Jesus and his followers are shown continuously dedicated to God in this “Gospel of Prayer and of the Holy Spirit”. Luke explicitly portrays Jesus at prayer before every important step of the Messianic ministry; at his baptism; before the choice of the Twelve; before Peter’s profession of faith; at the transfiguration; before teaching the



“Our Father”; and, of course, in Gethsemane. Jesus was the master of prayer and frequently insisted that his disciples be men of prayer.

Also, Luke constantly alludes to the role of the Spirit. Where Matthew speaks of the good things the heavenly father gives to those who ask, Luke speaks of the Holy Spirit who is the gift. Once given to the OT judges, this Spirit is now sent to John the Baptizer and his parents. Jesus Himself is conceived through the power of the Spirit and is filled with the Holy Spirit. What happened to Jesus must continue to happen to the Church - until the Parousia.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.

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November 17-18, 2018

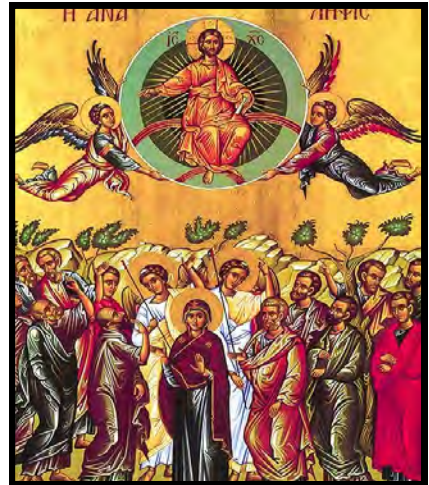
THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

Eastern Christian theologians claim that the doctrine of *Theosis* has a solid biblical basis that goes beyond the two explicit texts that I mentioned in last week's Bulletin (i.e., 2 Peter and Psalm 82). They refer to other biblical passages, such as Exodus 34:30 where Moses' face shone, or Exodus 7:1 which reveals that Aaron became a god to Pharaoh. The transfiguration on Mt. Tabor (Matthew 17:4) is also considered another classic text. Eastern Fathers often cite 2 Corinthians 8:9, Hebrews 4:15 and a host of texts from the Johannine corpus (John 3:8; 14:21-23; 15:4-8; 17:21-23; and 1 John 3:2; 4:12). I would encourage you to pick up your New Testament and find these various passages and judge for yourself.

In a discussion of the idea of *Theosis* in the Bible, based largely on Maximos the Confessor, Jaroslav Pelikan points out that the idea goes beyond a few individual passages of Scripture:

The purpose of the Lord's Prayer was to point to the mystery of deification. Baptism was "in the name of the life-giving and deifying Trinity." When the guests at the wedding in Cana of Galilee said that their host had "kept the good wine until now," they were referring to the Word of God, saved for the last, by which men were made divine.

Even when the objection is raised that often these texts are taken out of context, Eastern exegetes are not overly concerned. Even now,



Life's Journey is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

Eastern theologians feel much more comfortable with the idea of spiritual interpretation.

The idea of *Theosis* as the goal of this earthly life is so very important for us as Eastern Christians. It truly puts into perspective the meaning and purpose of this earthly existence and helps us to see God's plan for us.

It is my hope that my readers will come to understand this.

Continually Before the Face of God

Be mindful of God, so that in every moment He may be mindful of you. If He is mindful of you, He will give you salvation.

Do not forget Him, letting yourselves be seduced by vain distractions. Do you want Him to forget you in your times of temptation?

Stay near Him and obey Him in the days of your prosperity. You will be able to rely on His word in difficult days, because prayer will keep you safe in His continual presence.

Remain constantly before His face, think of Him, remember Him in your heart. Oth-

erwise, if you only meet Him from time to time, you risk losing your close friendship with Him.

Familiarity between people comes about through physical presence. Familiarity with God, by contrast, is built on meditation and self-abandonment to Him during prayer.

Those who would see the Lord should purify their hearts with the continual remembrance of God. They will reach the contemplation of God in every moment, and within Him all will be light.

St. Isaac of Nineveh