

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



Icon of Saints Stephen and Irenarchus -- November 28th

A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND



On this 27th weekend after Pentecost, our readings are again taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and also Luke's account of Jesus curing the "stooped" woman on the Sabbath. St. Paul's analogy about "Christian Warfare" is interesting to say the least. This approach toward leading life as a follower of Jesus is only found in this letter to the Ephesians. Many modern Protestant and Evangelical religions refer to this passage in an attempt to bolster the awareness of their members to the power of the "devil" to influence them. Although I think that the idea of putting on the "armor of God" is a good one if we are to grow in our likeness of Jesus, I personally see the armor as meaningful to just face the challenges of modern life.

Paul sees "truth" as a belt around your waist; "justice" as a breastplate; and "zeal" to propagate the gospel of peace as your footgear. If we truly incorporate these three behaviors into our daily living, we will spiritually grow and be able to meet the challenges of life. I think, however, that if we only

develop these behaviors to resist the power of the devil, we will not learn how to take personal responsibility for our behaviors. The Flip Wilson words, "The devil made me do it", is, I believe, a personal cop-out.

The story of the cure of the stooped woman is interesting for many reasons. The number 18 has long been viewed as corresponding to the Hebrew word "chai", meaning "alive." It is a tradition among Jewish people to give gifts of money in multiples of \$18 as symbolic of giving "chai" or life to others. This is particularly true around *bar/bat mitzvah* or *wedding* celebrations.

So in this story Jesus is the true giver of "chai" or "life." Do you believe that the life within you right now is nonother than the God's own life? It is critical that we believe, truly believe, what our Church teaches. It makes all the difference in the world. If you truly believe that God's life is within you, you will want, because what is true of you is true of all other humans, to respect the life within others.

If you listen to the NEWS in our country you will find that there is very little respect for human life. This means that very few believe that human life is a sharing in Divine Life. Ask yourself, *What do I truly believe?* While I can't prove that the Christian approach to life is the absolute truth, it is something that I believe because of Jesus Christ. What do you believe? It makes all the difference in the world.

SOME THOUGHTS ON PRAYER



As you probably know, if you have been attempting to integrate *prayer* into your daily life, the struggle for prayer is not an easy one. The spirit fluctuates - sometimes prayer flows in us like a mighty river, sometimes the heart dries up. But every reduction in our prayer-strength must be as brief as possible. To pray not infrequently means telling God of our disastrous state: of our weakness and despondency, our doubts and fears, the melancholy, the despair - in brief, everything connected with our condition. To pour it all out, not seeking to express it elegantly or even in logical sequence. Often this method of approach to God turns out to be the beginning of prayer as communion.

Sometimes we shall lie afloat in a sea of Divine Love, which in our imagination we interpret one-sidedly, as our love for Him. It was like that with me - I did not dare think that the infinitely great Creator of all things

could heed my worthless, vile self. And I would cry, 'Oh, if only You could love me as I love You. Do You not see how my hearts thirsts for You day and night? Incline unto me. Show me Your countenance. Make me such as You do desire to see them that You have created - such as You, All-holy One, may receive and love.' I did not know what I said. I did not dare think that it was He Himself praying in me.

Contemplation of the holiness and humility of God astounds the soul and with deep veneration she worships Him in love. A prayer of this kind may sometimes be transformed into contemplation of the Uncreated Light.

So that we may truly become acquainted with His gifts, God, after being with us, leaves us for a while. This abandonment by God makes a strange impression. Some saints have called this the *Dark Night of the Soul*. Most everyone who attempts to truly integrate prayer into their life comes to a time when prayer is difficult. Why? Because we try so hard to direct our attention to God that we forget to listen to God speaking back to us.

How does God speak to us? Usually through certain thoughts, ideas or insights that we have as we are trying to pray. Prayer usually is connected with *words* that are going through our minds. We need to take the time to just stop thinking, blanking our minds so that we can hear God speaking to us. ***What does this mean to you?***

ACQUIRING THE MIND OF CHRIST

The heart of Eastern Christian spirituality is in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ - is in the act of God taking on a human form (i.e., nature) in the Person of His Son. By this act, God revealed creation's intrinsic beauty and beauty. At the same time, it presented to our world a vision of what God truly intended when He created humankind and placed it in a created universe.

The Church, Christ's Body, incarnates this beauty into the world through her Liturgy with its symphony of liturgical arts and expression. The Church provides windows for all to see and behold the glory of God, by which they can be sanctified. Being mystically called by and witnessing this beauty of Holiness, we begin to participate in the deifying vision of God, which is salvation. The Church presents to us an opening to the Mind of Christ. To the degree that we participate in this eternal divine beauty inherent in God's creative act; we ourselves become transfigured in the process and through it find salvation.

Salvation is our cooperative effort with God's grace through the keeping of the teachings of the Gospels and the acquisition of the beauty of the virtues, which bring man, who is in the

image of God, to the likeness of God. As the summit of creation's beauty, St. John Chrysostom tells us that "there is nothing more beautiful than a beautiful soul". He exhorts us therefore to "seek this beauty, in order that God might desire our beauty and impart to us the eternal blessings".

Of course we have to (1) believe that we are placed on earth and given human life to grow in our likeness of God as seen in the Person of Jesus; (2) take seriously our faith and all of its insights into how to live our human life; (3) desire to grow in our likeness of Jesus; (4) work at this growth, seizing every opportunity to respond to life's experiences and challenges as Jesus did; and (5) truly take personal responsibility for how we live, without making any excuses. To grow in our likeness of



Jesus, means to make every attempt to *acquire His mind* - to learn how to think like Jesus, remembering that our behaviors are governed by the way we think.

So, in order to acquire the mind of Jesus, we have to pick up the New Testament and see how He thought and lived. We have to begin reflecting on what He taught and how He acted during His lifetime.

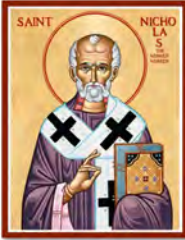


Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

COMING DECEMBER FEASTS

St. Nicholas - December 6th



We will be celebrating this feast on **December 8th** and anticipate that St. Nicholas will have at least paid a visit to the pastor prior to this date.

So we would encourage all families with children to make an effort to be with us. If you could, please email Mary Christie that you will be attending.

MJECHRISTIE@AIM.COM
734-453-4079

Conception of St. Anne - December 9th

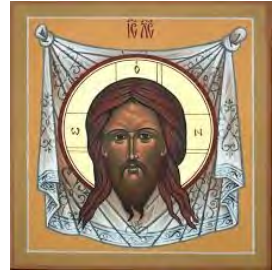
We will be celebrating this feast on **December 15th**. In the West this feast is celebrated on December 8th and is called the Immaculate Conception. The original date this feast was celebrated was December 9th and our Church has chosen to celebrate it on that date.



We're born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we're not alone

CALLED TO HOLINESS

As I shared in the last issue of this article, the call to holiness becomes real with I am forced to put my beliefs into practice and to live in a accord with my beliefs. My example was this: how will I spend Christmas this year? Will I just buy into the general attitude of my society and make it a “commercial” holiday or will I make it a HOLY DAY.



I can make Christmas a Holy Day by the way that I celebrate it. This means that I consider the “spiritual” meaning of the day and focus my attention on that instead of “gift-giving”. Christmas is not about material gifts. Its about an awareness of the Gift that our Heavenly Father gave us in the Person of Jesus, the Christ. In essence it was the GIFT OF HIMSELF.

So, will you give the gift of yourself to those you love this year? How will you do it? Giving “material things” to others is not necessarily equivalent of a gift of yourself. As you can see, this takes some thinking and reflection on the subject. You have to think about how you can give

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

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**

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH

Heavenly Father, on this twelfth day of this fast, I turn to You again and ask Your assistance in helping me maintain a spiritual focus. It becomes more difficult as the weather turns cold and so much emphasis in society is placed on “buying special things” to express my love for others. With so much emphasis placed on “buying things to express my love for others,” it is easy to get distracted from the meaning of Christmas. I want to express my love to others but fear that if I don't give them things, my love will be questioned. Help me to learn how to truly express my love for others without going overboard without giving expensive gifts. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27TH

On this thirteenth day of this fast, Heavenly Father, I would remember the great martyr James the Persian who, in his early life, was allured away from a Christian life by a King's friendship and flatteries. He preferred the temporal glory of the world and its luxuries to the love of Christ and communion with God. His mother and wife threatened to reject him for his way of living. When they did this, he repented and changed his life even though he was martyred as a result. Help me, like James, to reflect on the way I live and do all in my power to imitate Christ and not be attracted to only the things of this world. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH

Heavenly Father, today I would remember the martyr Stephen the New. Indeed, the fame of his spiritual struggles gives me hope as I struggle to truly grow in my likeness of Jesus. He saw in the Holy Icon of Christ a model for personal transformation. His courageous fight against iconoclasm – the destruction of Holy Icons – first earned him exile and later martyrdom. For him Holy Icons were windows into the heavenly realm, giving him the courage to truly work on his own personal transformation. Help me, Heavenly Father, during this Winter Lent to work on my own personal transformation and spiritual growth. Increase my desire to grow in the likeness of Jesus and doing everything to please You. 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 29TH

On this fifteenth day of this Winter Lent, Heavenly Father, I again turn to You in prayer and offer you my humble worship and praise. I implore You, help me, as I continue my preparation for the great Winter Feasts, to grow in my commitment to growth in my likeness of Jesus and to truly prepare myself to spiritually celebrate the two great Theophanies of my faith – the two great events when You manifested Yourself to humankind through the Person of Jesus, the Christ. Help me to celebrate the coming feasts in a manner which will deepen my faith and belief in You, my loving God. Help me to understand what You revealed to me through these feasts. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30TH

Today, Heavenly Father, I remember the Apostle Andrew, the First-Called and brother of Peter. Originally a disciple of John the Baptizer, Andrew heard the witness of John who declared Jesus as the “Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.” After these words, Andrew straightway followed Jesus and then convinced his brother and others to become disciples. Help me Father to imitate Andrew in bringing others to know Jesus, Your Son, by the way I live my life. Help me to treat others the way that I want to be treated. Help me to reflect Christ by my imitation of how He lived. Help me to be truly committed, like Andrew, to be His disciple. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1ST

Heavenly Father, today I remember the Prophet Nahum, whose name means “comforter.” As I continue my preparation for the Winter Feasts, I realize that Nahum lived in accord with His name. He was a comforter. As I think about him, I also think about Jesus. One of His primary human characteristics was that He was a genuine comforter of others. He used His power to console and heal them. He comforted all who came to Him by unconditionally loving them. Help me Father, to develop my ability to unconditionally love others, regardless of how they treat to me. Help me to realize that if I love others unconditionally, I truly grow in my likeness of Your Son, Jesus. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2ND

Today I remember, Heavenly Father, the Prophet Habakkuk whose name means “loving embrace.” He encourages believers to wait on the Lord, expecting and believing that He will indeed work out all things for our good. I beseech You, Heavenly Father, to help me wait on You and truly believe that life’s challenges are meant to help me spiritually grow. Deepen my awareness, Heavenly Father, that You are always with me, ready to help me positively respond to the challenges of life. Help me to be aware of your loving embrace and, in turn, lovingly embrace all others who cross my life’s path. Help me, especially at this Christmas time, to genuinely share my love with others without conditions. 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 24- -27th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 2

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

Saturday, December 1- -28th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 3

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

yourself to others in love and not get trapped into thinking that love is expressed by giving "things" to express your love.

I would offer a challenge to my readers. Figure out how you will do this and then send me a message (i.e., email or snail mail or in the collection basket), telling me how you plan to do this. This will, at least, get you to think about this and, having put some thought into it, you will at least begin to put Christ back into Christmas and to give the true gift of yourself to others.

Its simple, little things like this that can help us to spiritually grow. It puts Christ and God on our minds, which is the beginning of true holiness.

Are you up to the challenge?



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

The belief that Christ did not succumb to death, but, rather, overcame death: which is something manifest in the resurrection when He demonstrates that death has not taken Him, but He has overthrown death - is the our fundamental Christian belief. Because it is death that Christ has overthrown - death that reduces all our efforts to nothing - Christ is shown to be beyond the reach of any power that could threaten us. So the apostle Paul affirms:

I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be

able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A love more powerful than 'anything else in all creation': already Paul had probably drawn from that the conclusion that the one who had died on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ, is one 'through whom are all things and through whom we exist'. It is an amazing statement: that one who had died barely 20 years earlier was the one through whom all things came into being. For the apostle Paul it had

to be true, because otherwise it would be impossible to explain how there is nothing in all creation that can threaten the 'love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. The one who had died on the cross was evidently a man; but the nature of that death, and the consequences of that death, demonstrated that he transcended creation: and this is the case, because it was through him that everything had been created.

The Church came to the conclusion that Jesus unites in Himself sonship in two ways - as 'Son of Man', understood by the Fathers to mean 'one among human sons', and "Son of God",

begotten by the Father. Out of this perception, there emerged the doctrine of Christ as one person in two perfect natures, divine and human. It is the realization of this doctrine, and the working out of its implications, that came to be the central preoccupation of the Ecumenical Councils of the Church. This process of coming to some common consensus of Who Jesus Is, was a laborious and tedious process. Heresies were condemned right and left.



UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY GOSPELS

As Luke presents the story of God's Incarnation in the Person of Jesus, he also suggests that what happened to Jesus must continue to happen to the Church - until the Parousia. The Spirit, consequently, occupies the same prominent position in ACTS, which, as I have shared, was also written by Luke. The implication is clear enough. The Church continues the mission of Jesus; the eschatological age, inaugurated by Jesus, persists until the Spirit brings it to perfection at some future moment.

We, as I'm sure all of my readers are aware, ARE THE CHURCH. Jesus now is, hopefully, working through us to bring about God's Kingdom in the here and now. Just as He and His disciples attempted to do, we are called to do.

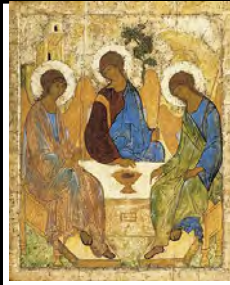
The Spirit, possessed by Jesus, spreads joy and peace among those who listen to Him. Luke wrote the "Gospel of Messianic Joy." Even a cursory reading of the various Gospels leaves the impression that Matthew has a serious, almost majestic setting and Mark the relaxed candor of a diary; but Luke rebounds with joy after one has had time to ponder the wonder of what has taken place. More than any of the other Evangelists, Luke tells of the admiration of the crowds following Jesus (5:26; 10:17; 13:17; 18:43). Such a spirit among the people fulfills Jesus' promise that His followers will be "happy" and also "fortunate".

Luke 1:1-4 states strenuous efforts were made to acquire firsthand knowledge about Jesus. Various written documents or official traditions, as well as many oral traditions, privately circulating in the Church, were tracked down. At Antioch, where he may have been baptized, Luke came into contact with Manaen, a boyhood companion of Herod Antipas; perhaps through him Luke met Joanna, the wife of Antipas' steward, Chuza. These persons could have informed Luke about Herod's dealings with Jesus, which are related only in Luke. In Asia



Minor he must have moved at times among the Johannine disciples; either from the apostle John or his disciples, Luke absorbed some of the themes characteristic of John and acquired the Infancy Narrative (which John probably learned from Mary) as well as the substructure of his Passion-Glorification Narrative. Johannine traces in Luke are: the motifs of Jerusalem and the Temple; exclusive facts about Jesus' ministry at Nazareth and the importance of Jesus' glorification.

As is obvious, Luke did not have any firsthand experience of Jesus.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 64 No 47 27th Weekend after Pentecost November 24-25, 2018

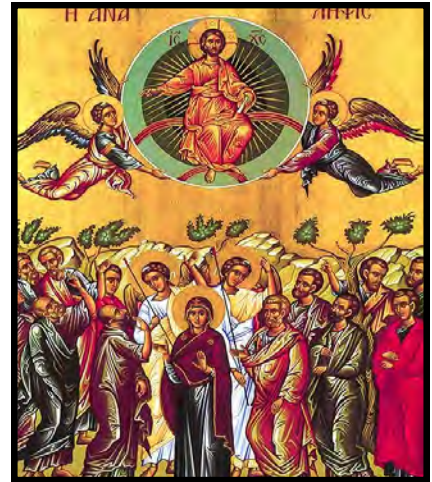
THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

It should be noted that Eastern theology is lived theology rather than analytical speculation. This theology is the basis of our spirituality. In fact, definite limits are set on human inquiry into things divine by *apophatic* theology (e.g., this is known as negative theology, is a form of theological thinking and religious practice which attempts to approach God, the Divine, by negation, to speak only in terms of what may not be said about the perfect goodness that is God) which is truly characteristic of our Eastern theology that proceeds mainly by negation. What theology is able to say about God and God's dealings with humanity are mainly what these things are **not** rather than what they are.

The idea of *Theosis* permeates much of the liturgy and prayer life in the Eastern Church. A good example is the Canon for Matins of Holy Thursday in which the church confesses in its worship: *In my kingdom, said Christ, I shall be God with you as god.* The ancient liturgy of St. James proclaims:

Thou has united, O Lord, Your divinity with our humanity and our humanity with Your divinity. Your life with our mortality and our mortality with Your life. You have received what was ours and has given unto us what was Yours, for the life and salvation of our souls, praise be to You in eternity.

Think about what this suggests. God, through His incarnation as a human in the Person of Jesus,



Life's Journey Is an Ascension to

took on our human nature and revealed to us the truth about our human nature and about our life on earth. A real understanding of this is critical for our spiritual growth and development. Do you believe that God is the life force within you? Our faith says that this is true. Do you truly believe it? It is critical that we embrace this truth. It makes a great deal of difference! *Think about this!*

Preaching the Good News

The Church of the Lord is built upon the rock of the apostles among so many dangers in the world; it therefore remains unmoved. The Church's foundation is unshakable and firm against the assaults of the raging sea. Waves lash at the Church but do not shatter it. Although the elements of this world constantly beat upon the Church with crashing sounds, the Church possesses the safest harbor of salvation for all in distress. Although the Church is tossed about on the sea, it rides easily on rivers, especially those rivers that Scripture speaks of: The rivers have lifted up their voice. These are the rivers flowing from the heart of the man who is given drink by Christ and who receives from the Spirit of God. When these rivers overflow with the grace of the Spirit, they lift up their voice.

There is also a stream which flows down on God's saints like a torrent. There is also a

rushing river giving joy to the heart that is at peace and makes for peace. Whoever has received from the fullness of this river, like John the Evangelist, like Peter and Paul, lifts up his voice. Just as the apostles lifted up their voices and preached the Gospel throughout the world, so those who drink these waters begin to preach the good news of the Lord Jesus.

Drink, then, from Christ, so that your voice may also be heard. Store up in your mind the water that is Christ, the water that praises the Lord. Store up water from many sources, the water that rains down from the clouds of prophecy.

St. Ambrose of Milan

**For more information on the Eastern Churches,
visit www.mytheosis.com**