

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SUNDAY OF ZACCHAEUS



Icon of Saints Simeon and Anna -- February 3rd

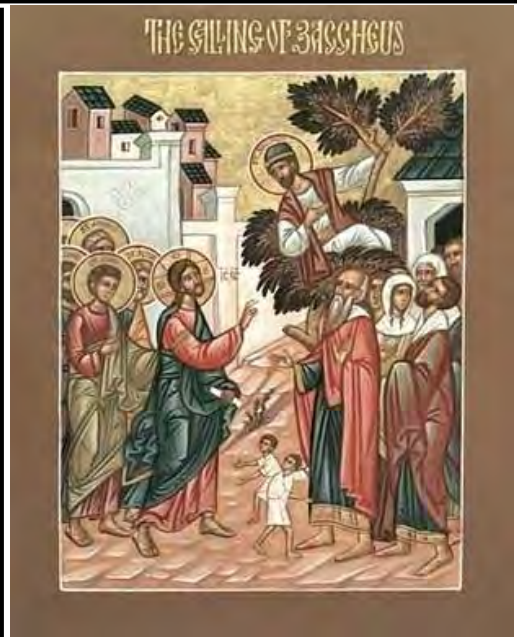
A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this first weekend of February we have two commemorations: the Marion Feast of the Encounter and the Lord's meeting of Zacchaeus (*this begins the five-week pre-Great Fast preparation period*). We have four different readings: (1) passages from Paul's Letter to the Hebrews and his first Letter to Timothy; and (2) two passages from Luke's Gospel. The passage from First Timothy has Paul telling Timothy why we, as followers of Jesus endure the challenges of life:

We work and struggle as we do; our hopes are fixed on the living God who is the savior of all men, but especially of those who believe.

In the passage from Hebrews Paul makes the case that Melchizedek is a type of Christ. The writer of Hebrews considered Jesus a **priest of Melchizedek** because, like **Melchizedek**, Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron and thus would not qualify for the Jewish priesthood under the Law of Moses. **Melchizedek**, an Old Testament figure, was important because he was both king and priest. Connected with Jerusalem, he was revered by Abraham who paid a tithe to him. He appears in an interpolated vignette (Gen. 14:18-20) of the story of Abraham rescuing his kidnapped nephew, Lot, by defeating a coalition of Mesopotamian kings under Chedorlaomer.

Our two Gospel readings relate two stories, namely the "churching" of Mary the Mother of God 40 days after giving birth to Jesus and the chance meeting of Zacchaeus by Jesus. Each story has great



meaning, in my estimation.

Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus and Jesus, although He was also God, submitted Himself to the rituals of humans. Even the God-Man learned something about humans through the experience He had with His parents. In both cases, the case of Zacchaeus and the ritual Presentation in the temple, we see how important it is that we have some idea of who God is. Zacchaeus wanted to know who Jesus was - he heard so many stories about Him. Mary wanted to please God and so she brought Jesus to the Temple to be blessed by Simeon. Do we really want to know Who God Is?

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EASTERN SPIRITUALITY



The Synoptic Gospels (i.e., *the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which I believe all who read my Bulletins already know*), have deeply entered the Eastern Christian popular conscience. The simple and unconditional precepts of the Sermon on the Mount (*whether from the Gospel of Matthew or Luke*), and the call of Christ to all who suffer and are heavy laden, have found a special echo there. These Gospel passages lie at the base of what has been called “Eastern Kenoticism.” One should understand under that name not a particular theology of the *kenosis* (*the renunciation of the divine nature, at least in part, by Christ in the Incarnation - God’s emptying of Himself of His divine nature to become truly a human being*) but a singularly vivid awareness of all that the “humiliation of Christ” and His “taking the form of a servant” imply. The self-lowering of our Lord, mediated upon

by simple and ardent souls, gave birth to a special kind of asceticism, not unknown in the West but more proper to the East: the ascetic way of the “fool for Christ’s sake”. It is important to note that the East truly considers the incarnation of God lowering Himself to take on human nature as a real and true expression of love for His creation. Non-resistance to violence, exemplified in ancient Ukrainian history by the Holy Princes Boris and Gleb before being systematized by Tolstoi, belongs to the same trend. A kind of connaturality between the Ukrainian soul and suffering has produced, in the name of Christ, a passionate pity and generosity towards all the “humiliated and offended.” This breaking of a compassionate heart comes over and over again in almost all Ukrainian literature.

St. John Chrysostom has been the special interpreter of the Apostle Paul to the Greek-speaking East as was St. Augustine to the Latin West. Both of them deeply entered into St. Paul’s thought concerning Christ’s Mystical Body, but while Augustine mainly deduced from Paul a theology of grace, Chrysostom rather drew from him practical ways of life.

As I have repeatedly asserted, our religion attempts to teach us about practical ways of living - to help us learn how to live as spiritual/human beings in God’s Creation.

LIFE'S PILGRIMAGE: GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

I truly and absolutely believe that life is a pilgrimage - a journey of personal growth and transformation. It is directed to becoming more like Jesus Christ. This means that we have to truly understand the *way He lived*, and, even more importantly, the *way He thought!*

He believed that all humans were created equal that that even the “limited thinking” of His religion, Judaism at that time, was not correct. When you reflect upon the stories that are contained in the Gospels, you realize that He refused to just “go along” with the thinking of His people. He embraced the Romans, the tax collectors, the lepers, the disabled, the Samaritans and all the others who were seen as “unclean” by the mainstream of His people. He knew this was wrong because he felt that all humans were somehow connected to God, His Father. He had this “expansionistic” idea of human life. Although His people felt that they were “Chosen by God”, He did not allow this belief to shut Him off from all other people.

He demonstrated through all of His actions, that it was **IMPORTANT** to love all others, regardless of what they believe or their backgrounds. He demonstrated that it is extremely important, if we want to truly be children of God, to embrace all others, regardless of how they treat you. He showed us that life becomes meaningful and wonderful when we base how we treat others on our beliefs and not on how they treat us.

I look at the life of Jesus and I find that He decided how He would live, based on how He saw His relationship with God and others. As man He saw God as His Father (Abba). He decided that He had to treat all others also as children of His Father. Therefore He decided



to treat all others with the same respect that He wanted to receive, even though He didn't always receive that respect. He decided to live in accord with His beliefs and not base His response to others on how others treated Him.

This is one of His most important teachings, I truly believe. **LIVE IN ACCORD WITH WHAT YOU BELIEVE** and not in accord with how others decide to treat you. This is a true challenge to us, I know. The real human tendency is to treat others as they treat us. This does not lead to spiritual growth. To be like Christ, we must want to love unconditionally all.

*Will you embrace the
“way” of Jesus?”*



Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

BEGINNING THIS WEEK

With this weekend we begin a five-week preparation period for the Great Fast, that time that we use to prepare ourselves for Easter. Each week the Church presents, through the readings and commemorations, the real and true characteristics of *metanoia* or, in English, *repentance*. *Metanoia* is all about doing things to change the way we think and behave - probably more importantly how we think since it is our thinking that drives our behaviors.

So, this five-week period gives us an opportunity to think about how we will spend the Great Fast - what we will do to enhance our spiritual growth and prepare ourselves to truly celebrate the life, death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Personal transformation, *metanoia*, is so essential for the true Christian, that we should spend time thinking about what we will do during Lent.

***Death is not the greatest loss in life.
The greatest loss is what dies
inside us while we live***

CALLED TO HOLINESS

As you can probably tell, when I say that we are “called to holiness” I mean that we are called to (1) come to a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of life; (2) enter into a deeper relationship with God; (3) become the person that God intended when He created us; and (4) achieve greater internal peace. The reward for responding in a positive manner to this “call” to holiness is a deep sense of contentment that cannot and is not destroyed even by the greatest and most difficult life’s challenges. When we voluntarily choose to become the person that God intended when He created us, our understanding of our place in creation becomes real.

Holiness, to me, doesn’t mean that we will be free from making mistakes. It means that we have a real vision of the meaning of our lives. We come to see that our birth into this world was not just an accident! It has true meaning and purpose. We come to know that at this very moment we complete God’s creation.

(Continued on page 8)



HOW TO BE A SINNER

Have you ever found yourself in the presence of someone who fills you with light and good? In that presence, have you perhaps simultaneously felt somehow exposed and ashamed? You don't even have to exchange words with someone like that, to know that you are in the presence of holiness. People - or places - that are pure, transparent, holy can simultaneously inspire and expose us. They give us an inkling of what it might feel like to experience the presence of God. Can we endure that degree of love and beauty?

St Paul tells us to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, worthy of praise. Why? Because they are intimations of God. They describe Jesus Christ. They are a window to his

presence. They soften our hearts. Their brilliance fills us and can act as a spotlight on our lowliness and failings. St Paul challenges us: "Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true." He continues, "When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light" (Ephesians 5:8-13)

I have found that when a person is truly at peace, their countenance

changes. You can tell that they know who they are in God's Kingdom and have discovered, to some degree, the meaning and purpose of their lives. There is a sense of contentment. This also seems to be able to more readily smile.

Tradition tells us that when people saw Jesus, they were able to see peace and contentment radiating from Him. He walked with a certain amount of self-confidence and there was no sense of arrogance or self-importance. There was a humility to His demeanor.



A crucial moment in the story of Mary of Egypt came when she put herself in the presence of the cross of Christ and an icon of the Virgin Mary. As a far-gone sex addict standing in front of holiness, salvation

and purity, she was brought to the stark recognition of how polluted her life was, such that she couldn't even enter the church. In her repentance, she began to experience a feeling - not of divine judgment, but of mercy. And so she began her decades-long odyssey to completely change her life.

We change when we finally take an honest look at ourselves. We don't feel guilty about who we are but, rather, find who we must become.

THE HOLY TRINITY: STRUCTURE OF SUPREME LOVE

As I shared, the revelation of the Trinity took place in Christ. The Son becomes man in order to be the model and the center from which a force shines out making men like Christ in their striving towards God the Father. This force, which becomes an intimate principle within all who believe yet always remains at the same time above them, is the third divine Person, the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit God becomes wholly immanent and yet imprints upon all men and women this yearning for the transcendent God. The Holy Spirit must be a Person in order to make us grow as persons ourselves, yet He must be the equal of the transcendent God in order to lead us into His presence and, by divinizing us, give us a place as true partners with God.

So in more simple language, God creates us in His image and unto His likeness, namely giving us the potential to become more like Him as expressed in the Person of Jesus since Jesus is the human expression of God. This all takes place through God's Power, namely the Holy Spirit. God directs His power, the Holy Spirit, to help us become like Jesus if only we open our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the model of what it means to be a true human being according to God's divine plan. Jesus showed us how to live as human beings in God's creation. He showed us by his teachings and the way that



He lived that it is important that we develop the power to unconditionally love others since this unconditional love IS the power of the Trinity - the power of God.

So, life is given to us to develop our ability to become a true human being in accord with our model, Jesus. If we do this, certain things happen. We come to know the true meaning and purpose of life and we become the spiritual-human beings that God intended when He created us.

This earthly experience is only meant to help us become the true beings than God intended when He created us. Do you really believe this?

Belief is absolutely important!

Schedule of Services

Saturday, February 2 - Weekend of the Encounter - Tone 4
5:30 PM - Special Intention

Saturday, February 9 - Weekend of the Publican & Pharisee - Tone 5
5:30 PM - Special Intention

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

Have you ever wondered why your life is the way that it is? The call to holiness is a call to develop a real understanding of our lives, helping us to eliminate doubts, fears and any confused ideas we might have about life. The call truly brings our lives into balance, wherein our spirits and bodies are truly in sync. We begin to understand that we are spiritual as well as physical persons and that our spiritual natures are extremely important and that portion of us that will continue beyond the grave.

We believe that Jesus' spiritual nature continued beyond the grave. This is a revelation to us about the truth of our existence. We, as persons, continue beyond the grave. **Think about this!**



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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

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

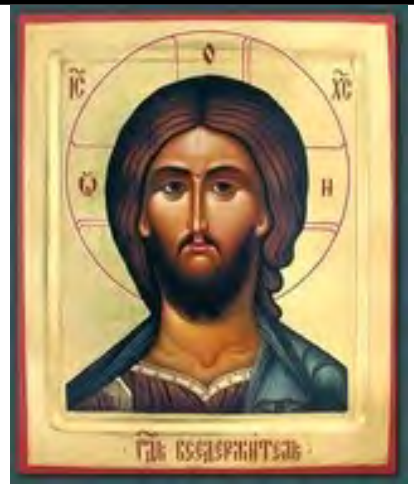
Involvement in these programs is not limited to Holy Ascension members. Family members, neighbors and friends can help.

MORE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

The Eastern Church found in the definition of Chalcedon a way of holding to the conviction that in Christ we encounter the Son, the second person of the Trinity, 'one of the Trinity', assuming a human nature and living a human life.

We encounter Christ; we understand Him to be God the Son, taking on human nature, so that He can be mortal and suffer death. In this encounter we come to recognize that all is not well with ourselves. One of the hymns that we sing on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, contemplates the mystery of Christ, His becoming human 'for the love of mankind', and that reminds us of the paradise of delight for which we are intended. As we encounter Christ, we encounter the mystery of repentance; we cry out in the final words of this Christmas Troparion, 'Lord, have mercy!' What should be our reaction? Partly it is a reaction at the wonder of God, a reaction in which we are conscious of our creatureliness, our frailty. But there is more than that. Each one of us stands before God and each one of us realizes the ways in which we need to change in order to become all that God intended when He created us. But it is not just our personal limitations or 'blind spots' of which we are conscious. We are aware that in some way we belong to a world that was created to be engaged in an ever-evolving, transformational process. We realize how easily humankind can be governed by values that are not true. We realize this, not as a way of excusing ourselves, but because it seems that we are caught up in a state of resisting the need to change.

We can see this as we look at the world of creation. There we see a created order of beings both visible and invisible, a creation which, because created out of nothing, manifests nothing but God himself, for the whole created order is to



be seen as a theophany, a manifestation of God, indeed a manifestation of God's beauty.

But as we look at the world in which we live, we realize that there is something else. There is, certainly true beauty - especially, perhaps in nature - not least human beings themselves. There is beauty, too, in what creatures make of their environment: from nests and other dwelling places, to the buildings with which humans adorn their living space.

Take time out and look around you and see the beauty that truly fills our world. That beauty is a reflection of God Himself.

MORE ABOUT HOLY SCRIPTURES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

It is necessary for us to read the Gospel of Luke not as the memoirs of some noteworthy figure from the past but as the witness of the Living One, who unceasingly continues to act and teach in his community. According to Church tradition, Luke is also the iconographer of Mary. Even though we are not able to prove scientifically that Luke did indeed write an icon of Mary on a board, however, we can see in it the preeminent iconographer of the Mother of God in his description of Mary during the time of the Annunciation and her visit to Elizabeth, in caring for her Son, especially in the hymn placed on her lips “My soul magnifies the Lord”, with which even today we praise the Lord for He has looked (already!) upon us and done mighty deeds for us.

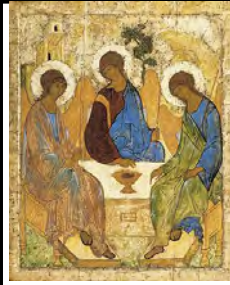
I would like to point out another interesting detail in this Gospel that assigns as much as ten chapters of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19:28), chapters which do not have parallels in other Gospels and which contain Luke’s own material. The point here is about the verb “it is necessary/must/ought/are/should/will have” (δεῖ), Luke uses it 27 times in his Gospel and in Acts, determining by it not so much the inevitability of fate but rather the confidence in fulfilling God’s plan of salvation (see Lk 24:44), to which we need to be joined (see Acts 14:22).

The third Gospel’s distinguishing quality is due to the attractive personality of its author which shines through all his work. Luke is at once a most gifted writer and a man of marked sensibility. He set to work in his own way with an eye to exact information and orderly narrative (1:3), but respect for his sources, together with his method of juxtaposing them, meant that even Luke was not in a position to arrange his traditional material in a more chronological way than Matthew or Mark. To a large extent, his plan follows Mark’s Gospel outline, but he



makes a lot of changes and omissions. Some episodes are displaced (3:19- 20; 4:16-30; 5:1-11; 6:12-19; 22:31-34). This he did sometimes in the interest of clarity and logical sequence, sometimes under the influence of other streams of tradition including, it should be noted, a tradition traceable also in the fourth Gospel.

Why not pick up your New Testament and look at this Gospel and reflect upon what is said here. That way the Gospel come alive and truly becomes a moment of grace.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

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

Vol. 65 No 5

Weekend of Zacchaeus

February 2-3, 2019

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

Eastern theology is based on the teaching and witness of the church fathers. Even though the theologizing in the Eastern wing of the Christian church is currently as vivid as it has ever been, its task is not to construct new doctrines but creatively, in light of what the Spirit is teaching, to reinterpret and help reappropriate the ancient teachings of the fathers. The doctrine of deification is a great example of this living tradition; the basic orientation of Eastern theology was fashioned during the postbiblical and patristic period.

One Eastern theologian has argued that one of the reasons for the separation of the Eastern and Western traditions since the early patristic period is their epistemological (*i.e., relating to the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion*) differences. Generally speaking, the Eastern Church, borrowing primarily from Greek philosophy, has been principally concerned with those realities that are beyond history, while the West, borrowing more from the Jewish tradition, is more conscious of the positive aspect of revelation, of all that it adds to the knowledge that man can acquire by natural reason. These epistemological differences bear upon the doctrines of anthropology and soteriology (*i.e., doctrine of Salvation*).



***Life's Journey is an Ascension
to the Heavenly Father***

While the comment of one Eastern theologian that *Theosis* is “echoed by the fathers and the theologians of every age” might intentionally be truly an overstatement, it does reflect the general mindset of the fathers. Their understanding of salvation was shaped by the idea of participating in the very essence of God.

Think about this!

Playing Dress-Up?

On Halloween we have the opportunity to enjoy and chuckle at children dressed up so innocently in their costumes. Without any hesitation most of them go eagerly from door to door. As adults, most of us would be too self-conscious; we don't like to think that people might be laughing at us.

Zacchaeus played dress-up his whole life, trying to be somebody he wasn't and not admitting what he really was - a small-in-stature, overdressed cheat. He chose to ignore the laughter he heard behind his back.

Yet it is to Zacchaeus' house that Jesus chooses to go. Jesus, surrounded by a crowd, looks up and sees Zacchaeus sitting ridiculously in

a sycamore tree. But Jesus doesn't laugh. Instead He invites himself to dinner.

And what happens there? Zacchaeus becomes a changed person. He finds his real self. He takes off his costume. He admits to being a cheat. He makes reparation by giving half to the poor and returning fourfold to those he has extorted. For that the gift of salvation becomes his.

We should ask ourselves what costumes we need to take off, how we can respond to Jesus' wanting to come into our lives and hearts. We need to start now, for Saint Paul says that the day of the Lord is at hand.