

It is well for us to be sure that although we practice every virtue with unceasing efforts, yet with all our exertions and zeal we can never arrive at perfection.

Neither is mere human diligence and toil of itself sufficient to deserve to reach the splendid reward of bliss, unless we have secured it by means of the co-operation of the Lord, and His directing our heart to what is right.

And so we ought every moment to pray and say with David "Order my steps in thy paths that my footsteps slip not;" and "He has set my feet upon a rock and ordered my goings."

We should pray that He Who is the unseen ruler of the human heart may vouchsafe to turn to the desire of virtue that will of ours, which is more readily inclined to vice either through want of knowledge of what is good, or through the delights of passion.

We read this in a verse in which the prophet sings very plainly: "Being pushed I was overturned that I might fall," where the weakness of our free will is shown.

Yet he also sings "the Lord sustained me," showing that the Lord's help is always joined to our free will, and by this, that we may not be altogether destroyed by our free will.

Saint John Cassian



Sunday 27 July 2014 is the Seventh Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

Epistle: Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 9:27-35

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Angelic Powers were at your grave, and those who guarded it became as dead, and Mary stood by the tomb, seeking your most pure Body. You despoiled Hades and emerged unscathed; you met the Virgin and granted life. Lord, risen from the dead, glory to you!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Acts 6:1-7; Matthew 16:1-6
Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon & Parmenas of the 70; Irene Chrysovalantou

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 10:5-12; Matthew 16:6-12
Martyr Callinicus; Virgin Martyr Theodota

Wednesday: Acts 15:35-41; Matthew 16:20-24
Silas, Silvan, Crescens, Epenetus and Andronicus of the 70; Julitta of Caesaria

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 10:28-33; 11:1-8; Matthew 16:24-28
Forefeast of the Holy Cross; Joseph of Arimathea

Friday: Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2; Matthew 10:16-22
Proodos of the Holy Cross; 7 Maccabean Youths, Solomone and Eleazar

Saturday: Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60; Mark 12:1-12
Translation of the relics of Stephen; New Martyr Theodore of Dardanelles



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

27 July 2014

Have Mercy on Us!

Today we hear Saint Matthew's account of another healing miracle of Jesus Christ. In today's Gospel we are told of two blind men who came to Jesus asking to be healed. This is followed by an account of a dumb demoniac who, when the devil was driven out of him, was able to speak. Both of these healing miracles showed Christ's power, and people were amazed and began to revere Him.

Blindness and dumbness are among the greatest of our human infirmities. And even those of us who can see and speak are in many ways nevertheless spiritually blind and dumb. If our spiritual eyes are darkened, then this affects not only our knowledge of God, but also how we view the world around us. It is all too easy for us to view our fellow human beings through the lenses of our own prejudices and thus to miss seeing them for what they truly are, namely beloved children of God, created in His Image and Likeness. In the same way, sin has affected our power of speech; not only do we find it difficult to communicate with God, but our communication with each other becomes distorted. When we remain caught up in our own egos, we simply project our own views onto others, without really listening to them, and real dialogue becomes impossible.



The healing that Christ offers to us requires faith, and also a willingness to see reality for what it truly is. We need to pray that the Lord will shed His Light upon us, and give us the courage to allow it to shine into those dark corners of our lives that we would rather keep hidden.

The glory of God is a human being fully alive
and the life of a human being is the vision of God.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

Having given thanks for the great gift of God to us in the Body and Blood of Christ, we prepare to leave the Church. Just as the Liturgy began with a prayer for peace, and we prayed repeatedly for the gift of God's peace throughout the service, so as the priest begins to dismiss us, he says:



Let us go forth in peace.

And we respond:

In the name of the Lord.

It is the gift of God's peace that has made the Liturgy possible, but it is also through our participation in the Divine Liturgy that God gifts us with His peace, without which, as Saint John Chrysostom reminds us, "it is altogether impossible to say or do anything." Peace and love are both the root of our worship and also its fruit and it is our task as we leave the Church to take this peace to the world.

However, we need God's strength in order to do this and in the Prayer Behind the Ambo, the priest prays that God will bless, sanctify and save His people, that He will protect the fullness of the Church and not forsake those who put their hope in Him. And in the final blessing, we realise that it is Christ Himself who blesses us as we return to our daily life. He keeps us and guards us, together with all the saints and all who have put their trust in Him.

The Fathers saw the Church as Christ's ship that journeys through the world, and sometimes encounters stormy waters on its journey to the Kingdom of God. It is assailed by dangers, but also assured of Christ's protection. As Saint Hippolytus of Rome wrote:

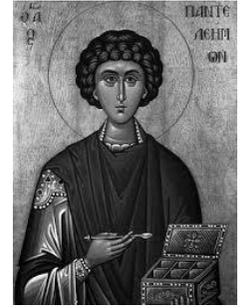
The world is like a sea on which the Church, like a ship upon the deep, is buffeted by storms but not lost; for she has Christ, the skilled helmsman, with her. And at her centre is the Cross of Christ, which she carries with her as a token of victory over death... Her tillers are the two Testaments, and the ropes that stretch around her are the love of Christ which binds the Church together... As the wind the Spirit from heaven is present, by whom those who believe are sealed... she also has mariners on the right and on the left, assistants like the holy angels.



There is nothing better than peace in Christ, for it brings victory over all the evil spirits on earth and in the air. When peace dwells in a man's heart it enables him to contemplate the grace of the Holy Spirit from within. He who dwells in peace collects spiritual gifts as it were with a scoop, and he sheds the light of knowledge on others. All our thoughts, all our desires, all our efforts, and all our actions should make us say constantly with the Church: "O Lord, give us peace!" When a man lives in peace, God reveals mysteries to him.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Today we commemorate the Holy Great-martyr and healer, **Saint Panteleimon**. He was born in Nicomedia to a pagan father and a Christian mother. His mother taught him the Christian Faith and he was baptized. He became a physician, and practiced his art with compassion and generosity, healing many through both his prayer and his medicine. His parents had named him Pantoleon ("in all things a lion"), but because of his great compassion he was re-named Panteleimon ("all-merciful"). He once healed a man of blindness by calling on Christ, which led the once-blind man to embrace the Faith. When asked how he came to be healed he named Panteleimon as his healer and proclaimed his newfound faith in Christ. For this the pagans executed him, then arrested Panteleimon, who was beheaded after being tortured in 305. He is considered the foremost of the Unmercenary Physicians.



Question Box

If you have a question about the faith and teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

Can you explain why women have to stay at home for forty days after having a baby. My children cannot understand this – I have explained about them being unclean, but they wanted more.

The Church's practice of a mother staying at home for forty days after giving birth, and of then bringing the child to Church for a special service of blessing, are rooted in ancient Jewish understandings that can be difficult to understand in the modern world. Not only is childbirth less hazardous than it once was, but the idea that a woman who has given birth is "unclean" can seem strange and even offensive.

To understand the importance of this practice, we need to realize that the Jewish tradition out of which it emerged saw "uncleanliness" as relating not only to those things that were dirty or soiled, but also to those things that were too holy to touch. This understanding of ritual purity was particularly strong when it came to the powerful symbolism of blood and its necessary relationship to all life, and this has had a deep impact on many Christian understandings and practices.

To see a woman who has given birth as ritually impure is not a moral judgment, nor a way of saying that she is dirty or unclean as we see this today. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the holiness of the task that she has participated in – in giving birth, she has co-created a human life with God. She needs special treatment not because she is dirty, but rather because she has come "too close" to that which is holy – although the chance to rest after giving birth and to bond with her baby can certainly be valuable.

These practices, then, should be seen as reminding us of the great mystery and gift of childbirth. It is not something to be taken for granted and got over as soon as possible, but rather a sacred act that should be treated with reverence and care.