

Christ our God was suspended on the Cross and, having nailed thereto the sin of the world and having tasted death, He descended into the nethermost depths of Hades.

He returned from Hades into His own immaculate body, from which His Divinity had in no way been separated as He descended thither, and at once He rose from the dead. Thereafter, He ascended to Heaven with great glory and power.

In just the same way, since we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from Heaven and enters into our body as into a grave.

He unites Himself to our souls and raises them up, though they were avowedly dead, and then vouchsafes to him who has thus been raised with Christ to behold the glory of His mystical Resurrection.

Christ's Resurrection is thus our resurrection, the resurrection of us who lie prostrate in sin.

St Symeon the New Theologian

**On Sunday, 26 May 2013,  
we commemorate the Sunday of  
the Paralytic**

**Matins Gospel:** Luke 24:13-35

**Epistle:** Acts 9:32-42

**Gospel:** John 5:1-15

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

Let the Heavens rejoice; let earthly things be glad; for the Lord hath wrought might with His arm, He hath trampled upon death by death. The first-born of the dead hath He become. From the belly of Hades hath He delivered us, and hath granted great mercy to the world.

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### **Readings and saints for this week:**

**Monday:** Acts 10:1-16; John 6:56-69  
Hieromartyr Helladius; John the Russian Confessor

**Tuesday:** Acts 10:21-33; John 7:1-13  
Martyr Eutychius; Nikitas, Bishop of Chalcedon

**Wednesday:** Acts 14:6-18; John 7:14-30  
Mid-Pentecost; Martyr Theodosia; Virgin Martyr Theodosia of Constantinople

**Thursday:** Acts 10:34-43; John: 8:12-20  
Isaacius of Dalmatus; Macrina, grandmother of St. Basil the Great

**Friday:** Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-10; John 8:21-30  
Martyr Hermias; Eusebius and Haralambos the Monk-martyrs

**Saturday:** Acts 12:1-11; John 8:31-42  
Martyr Justin the Philosopher; Righteous Pyrrus



## *Evangelion*

*A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith*

Archbishopric of Good Hope,  
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

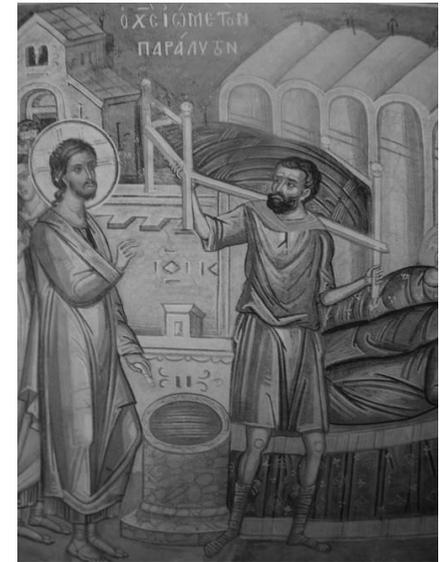
26 May 2013

### **Take up your bed and walk!**

Today we hear Saint John's account of the healing of the paralytic man by the pool of Bethesda. He had been waiting for thirty-eight years to be healed. When Jesus saw him, He asked him whether he wanted to be healed and when the man replied that he had nobody to help him into the healing waters, Jesus commanded him to get up, take up his bed, and walk.

The Church gives us this account of one of the great healing miracles of the Lord in the Easter season in order to illustrate Christ's victory over sin and death. The healing of the paralytic is a symbol of the renewal of the life of all humanity through the Resurrection of Christ. Indeed, some of the Fathers describe this event as a foreshadowing of the waters of baptism in which healing is offered to us all.

We are all spiritually sick, and this has repercussions on us in various ways, many of which we are not even conscious of. Jesus Christ came to heal us, so that we may have fullness of life in Him. The Church has been likened to a hospital, for it is the place where sick people come to be healed. God does not usually heal us instantly, nor does He heal us against our will; rather healing is a gradual process in which we need to be active participants. But through a life of prayer and repentance, through listening to God's Word and participating in the Sacraments, we too can come to share in the victory of Christ over sin and death.



By your divine presence, Lord, raise my soul, grievously paralysed by sins of every kind and by unnatural deeds, as you also raised the Paralytic of old, that saved I may cry to You: O merciful Christ, glory to your might.

Kontakion for the Sunday of the Paralytic

# A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy

Last week we saw that the Sacraments or Mysteries of the Church are the particular moments in the life of the Church which God offers to us as a means of coming closer to Him. These mysteries encompass the whole of our lives, from our birth to our death. Through them, the natural moments of our lives become bearers of a grace that is made visible and tangible through the worship of the Church.

While Orthodox Christians do sometimes speak of seven sacraments of the Church, this is more of a western understanding, for the Orthodox Church does not limit our understanding of the mysteries to these, nor do we draw hard and fast distinctions between what is and what is not a Mystery. However, we can list the following as among the chief mysteries of the Church.

## Baptism

We enter life by being born and we enter the Church by being born into new life in Jesus Christ through baptism. In Christ everything that is sinful and dead in us becomes holy and alive by the power of God.

## Chrismation

It is not enough to simply be born, however. We need power and energy to go on living and growing into this new life. In the mystery of Chrismation we are given the gift of the “all-holy and good and life-creating Spirit” who leads and empowers us to live a Christian life.

## The Holy Eucharist

Our life also needs to be nourished and sustained. Food is the nourishment that keeps us alive. But our natural food will not keep us alive forever – for this we have the true “Bread of life and cup of eternal salvation” which nourishes us for eternal life. It is this communion with the true Source of all life that we are given in the Holy Eucharist, to which we shall return at more length during this series.

## Marriage

Our human life has a natural tendency to want to transcend itself and to continue in succeeding generations. And in the mutual love of spouses for one another and for their children, they reach beyond themselves, pointing to the human need for communion with others and, ultimately, with God. However, we cannot escape from the tragic reality that our human lives and loves end in the tragedy of death. Through the Mystery of Christian marriage, human love, childbearing and family communities are transformed into realities of eternal significance. They become a means of growing in a communion that transcends even death.

## Penance and Holy Unction

Until the final establishment of God’s Kingdom, we continue to struggle against sin and against attacks from the demonic powers. The more we come to know ourselves, the more we realise that we are sick human beings who are in need of healing. In the Mystery of Penance, we are given the opportunity to turn again to God in repentance and to be assured of the forgiveness of our sins. In the Mystery of Holy Unction, we are given a remedy for our physical and spiritual illness, and the promise that our suffering is not meaningless but can be a way of uniting us with the Cross of Christ and a doorway to eternal life.

## Holy Orders

It is the mystery of the Church itself which allows us to enter into the life of Christ and which makes His life present in the world. All Christians have different roles to play in the Church, but through the mystery of holy orders, the bishops, priests and deacons of the Church are given the grace to make the Church and the Divine life of God’s Kingdom present in the world. They become a focus of unity that holds the whole Body together and manifests it to the world.

## The Feast of Mid-Pentecost

This coming Wednesday is the feast of Mid-Pentecost, where Christ “in the middle of the feast” teaches about His saving mission and offers to all “the waters of immortality.”

This feast occurs halfway between Pascha and Pentecost and both recalls the joy of the Easter and also anticipates the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, focusing us on the central theme of the entire period.

During this period we hear about the “living water” that only the Lord Himself can give, and we learn that it is He Himself who is this Living Water, of which we partake through the baptismal waters and the Cup of Life. This anticipation reaches its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost when we hear the words: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink”.



## 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](mailto:evangelion@goarch.co.za)*

### **Where do we get our information about Jesus descending into hell? I can't find anything about it in the Gospels.**

It is true that the Gospel writers do not speak directly about the descent into hell, but it is clear that it was part of the Church’s consciousness from the very beginning.

The Evangelists do not *describe* the Resurrection of Christ, for the actual Resurrection was an event that nobody witnessed and which cannot be described. Instead the Gospel writers speak of the effects of the Resurrection, such as the empty tomb, and the first Christians’ experiences of the Risen Lord, and the way they were transformed into fearless preachers of the Gospel.

It was clear to the first Christians that the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ was an event of cosmic proportions in which the power of sin and death had been definitively defeated. Saint Peter refers to this in his preaching in Acts 2 where he says that it was impossible for Hades to keep Christ in its power. And in his epistle (3:19) he tells us that after His death, Christ went to preach to the souls in prison (i.e. hell or Hades).

The early Christians knew that the righteous ones of the Old Testament had been waiting longingly for the coming of Christ, and so it was natural for them to see Him descending into hell so that they too could experience His victory over death. This theme was repeated and developed in the hymnography of the early Church and in non-canonical writings (i.e. writings that weren’t made part of the canon of Scripture, but which tell us something about what the early Christians believed). It was also included in early statements of faith such as the Creed of the Apostles which included “He descended into hell” as a statement of faith.