

For beginners prayer is like a joyous fire kindled in the heart; for the perfect it is like a vigorous sweet-scented light.

Or again, prayer is the preaching of the Apostles, an action of faith or, rather, faith itself, 'that makes real for us the things for which we hope' (Heb. 11:1) ...

the heart's assurance, hope of salvation, a sign of purity, a token of holiness, knowledge of God,

baptism made manifest, purification in the water of regeneration, a pledge of the Holy Spirit,

the exultation of Jesus, the soul's delight, God's mercy, a sign of reconciliation, the seal of Christ,

a ray of the noetic sun, the heart's dawn-star, the confirmation of the Christian faith, the disclosure of reconciliation with God ...

Why say more? Prayer is God, who accomplishes everything in everyone (1 Cor. 12:6), for there is a single action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, activating all things through Christ Jesus.

Saint Gregory of Sinai

**Sunday, 7 July 2013, is the
second Sunday after Pentecost
and the Second Sunday of
Matthew**

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5

Gospel: Matthew 4:18-23

Resurrectional Apolytikion

The stone had been secured with a seal by the Judeans, and a guard of soldiers was watching Your immaculate body. You rose on the third day, O Lord and Saviour, granting life unto the world. For this reason were the powers of heaven crying out to You, O Life-giver: Glory to Your resurrection, O Christ; glory to Your eternal rule; glory to Your dispensation, only One who loves mankind.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Timothy 4:9-15; Luke 6:17-19, 9:1-2, 10:16-22
Great Martyr Procopius; Theophilus the Myrrhbearer

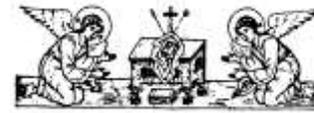
Tuesday: Romans 7:14-8:2; Matthew 10:9-15
Hieromartyr Pancratius; Dionysios the Orator

Wednesday: Romans 8:2-13; Matthew 10:16-22
45 Martyrs of Nikopolis; Bishop Gregory of Assa

Thursday: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; Luke 7:36-50
Great Martyr Euphemia; Olga, Equal to the Apostles

Friday: Romans 9:6-19; Matthew 10:32-36; 11:1
Martyrs Proclus & Hilary; Michael of Malenius

Saturday: Hebrews 2:2-10; Matthew 7:24-29; 8:1-4
Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel; Righteous Stephen



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

7 July 2013

Called to follow Jesus Christ

Today, on the second Sunday after Pentecost we begin to hear Gospel readings from St Matthew's Gospel that will take us through some of the key incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel we see how shortly after the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He calls the first apostles to follow Him and to participate in His mission. We are not told much about these men, except that they were fishermen. In other words, they were fairly ordinary people, and certainly not from the well-off or educated classes. And yet, we are told that it is these ordinary fishermen who will become co-workers with Christ and that they will in fact become "fishers of men."



We know with hindsight that these humble fishermen were transformed by Christ's teaching, and by the power of His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, to become great missionaries and, in many cases, martyrs for the faith. Yet at the time, it must have seemed far from obvious.

The call to follow Christ was not only addressed to the apostles in first century Palestine, but it is addressed to each one of us today. We might feel that we are insignificant or inadequate, yet the history of the Church shows us that God can use ordinary people, if they allow themselves to respond to His call. We are not all called to become wandering preachers, but each of us is called by God. We may not all be asked to leave our fishing nets and families, yet there may be things that we need to be prepared to lay aside, in order to focus our gaze more closely on Jesus Christ.

Sin makes man a coward; but a life in the Truth of Christ makes Him bold.

Saint John Chrysostom

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

After we have begun the Great Litany by asking God for the gift of peace, both within us, in our world, and within the Church, we pray:

“For this holy house, and for those who enter it with faith, reverence and the fear of God, let us pray to the Lord.”

This holy house

Whenever we cross the threshold of the church building, we are entering what St John Chrysostom calls “a heavenly palace.” The church building is radiant with Christ’s presence, and this is especially so when the Divine Liturgy is taking place. He is the lightning that “comes from the East and shines as far as the West.” (Matthew 24:27)



Just as the church building is a temple and dwelling place of God, which enables us to catch a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and allows us to be bathed in the peace of Christ, so each person also has the potential to become a temple of God. St Nicholas Cabasilas tells us that “Among all sensible beings, mankind alone is able to be God’s true temple and altar.” Just as Christ is present in the Divine Liturgy that is celebrated on the altar in the church building, so too He is also present on the altar of our hearts when we offer ourselves to Him in faith, reverence and the fear of God.

With faith, reverence and the fear of God

It may seem obvious that we go to church because we have faith, but there may also be other reasons why people go to church. And even when we do have faith, it can be good to be reminded of what we are doing so that it doesn’t just become habitual. The Divine Liturgy is above all for believers, those who believe in God and His revelation in Jesus Christ and accept the faith of the Orthodox Church. But faith is not just about believing in abstract propositions. It is above all about a living relationship with Christ within His Body the Church. This is a relationship that grows and develops as we are increasingly transformed into His likeness.

We enter the church with reverence. Saint Germanus of Constantinople describes the Church building as “a heaven on earth, in which the heavenly God dwells and walks about.” It is, in a sense, the threshold of our encounter with God, and the reverence that it engenders in us, is a really a reverence for the great Mystery of God.

The Liturgy, the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church speak often of the “fear of God”. This is something that can be difficult for contemporary people to understand and appreciate, especially if we have been influenced by some forms of Protestantism. This is not the fear that one would have for an angry, vengeful God who is out to get us. We know that God is a God of love who desires that all people be saved, and that “perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18) The fear of God that the Liturgy calls us to is not a negative fear, but a positive one; it is more the experience of being overwhelmed at God’s greatness. It is the experience of absolute awe that overcomes us when we become aware that we are in the presence of the All-Holy One.

We enter the church in faith, reverence and the fear of God, but we also pray that God will increase these gifts in us so that we may rightly celebrate the Divine Liturgy.

Just as a calm and sheltered harbour provides great security to the ships moored there, so does the temple of God: when people enter it, it snatches them away from worldly affairs as from a storm, and gives them the capacity to stand and listen to God’s words in calm and security. This place is the bedrock of virtue and the school of spiritual life... You need only set foot on the threshold of a church and at once you are liberated from the cares of daily life. Go on into the church, and a spiritual dew will envelop your soul. The stillness there moves you to awe, and teaches you how to live spiritually. It elevates your thoughts and prevents you from remembering things or matters belonging to the present life. It transports you from earth to heaven. And if there is such great gain from simply being in a church when no service is going on, then how much benefit will people derive from being present ... when the Holy Apostles proclaim the Gospel, Christ stands in our midst, God the Father receives the Mysteries that are performed and the Holy Spirit gives His own joy!

Saint John Chrysostom

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

Why are we told that we should dress modestly in church? If people have a problem with what I wear isn’t it their own problem? What does modesty mean anyway? I thought that God looked at the heart.

The question of what we wear to church is a complex one that may vary from society to society. However, what we wear does send a statement about how we wish to present ourselves. While God certainly looks at the heart, Christians believe that the body is important and that it plays an important role in our salvation and so it should not be surprising that the Church has certain expectations on how we dress, however varied and general they may be. We can perhaps make two points here.

Firstly, how we dress expresses the importance we attach to the Divine Liturgy and to the house of God. While the Liturgy should not become a fashion show, our dress should be respectful. Going to church is not the same as going to the beach!

Secondly, while the concept of modesty may vary somewhat from culture to culture, the Church has generally taught that we should avoid revealing and suggestive clothing. This is not simply a matter of hating the body or being prudish. Rather, it reflects our understanding that the physical and the spiritual are interrelated. How we treat the body will have an influence on our (and other people’s) spiritual lives. When we pray we seek to quiet the mind and the senses, to turn inwards and to grow in purity of heart. Seen in this way, it is not just a case of seeing revealing or suggestive dress as something that is not allowed. Rather we see that, by focusing attention on ourselves and risking arousing the passions (whether our own or other people’s), it is contrary to the movement of the Divine Liturgy and our spiritual growth.