



The one who is perfect in love and has reached the summit of detachment knows no distinction between one's own and another's, between faithful and unfaithful, between slave and freeman, or indeed between male and female. But having risen above the tyranny of the passions and looking to the one nature of men he regards all equally and is equally disposed toward all. For in him there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither male nor female, neither slave nor freeman, but Christ is everything and in everything.

St Maximus the Confessor

**On Sunday, 9 June 2013,
we commemorate the Sunday of
the Blind Man**

Matins Gospel: John 20:11-18

Epistle: Acts 16:16-34

Gospel: John 9:1-38

**Kontakion of the Sunday of the
Blind Man:**

I come to You, O Christ, as the man blind from birth. With the eyes of my soul blinded, I cry out to You in repentance, "You are the resplendent Light of those in darkness."

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Acts 17:1-9; John 11:47-54
Martyrs Alexander & Antonia; Hieromartyr Timothy

Tuesday: Acts 11:19-30; Luke 10:16-21
Apostle Bartholomew; Apostle Barnabas

Wednesday: Acts 18:22-28; John 12:36-47
Apodosis of Pascha; Onophrius of Egypt; Peter of Athos

Thursday: Mark 16:9-20; Acts 1:1-12; Luke 24:36-53
Ascension Day; Martyr Aquilina; Triphyllus, Bp of Nicosia

Friday: Acts 19:1-8; John 14:1-11
Prophet Eliseus; Methodius the Confessor

Saturday: Acts 20:7-12; John 14:10-21
Prophet Amos; Hieronymus the Righteous



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

9 June 2013

The Sunday of the Blind Man

Today we commemorate the healing of the man who had been born blind. Saint John tells us how Jesus sought him out, applied a paste to his eyes, and instructed him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. When the man returned, he was able to see.

This miracle which the Lord worked in giving sight to the blind man, is closely connected to the mysteries which we have been celebrating since Pascha. In rising from the dead, the Risen Christ has given light to the whole world and has released us from the powers of darkness. At last Sunday's Liturgy we proclaimed that Christ, "after being hidden from sight in the tomb, has risen again more brightly than the sun, and thereby illumines all believers."

However, the Resurrection of the Lord is not simply an external event that we are called to affirm, but a living reality that we need to learn to see. Like the man in the Gospel, we too are blind, although our blindness is probably more spiritual than physical. Our eyes have become darkened by sin, and by the fallen state of the world into which we are born.

The Risen Christ comes to enlighten us with His light, just as He came to the man born blind. He comes to heal us of our own spiritual blindness. However, in order to behold the true and saving light, we need to learn humility and repentance, acknowledging our own blindness and calling out to Him for healing.



Give sight, O Lord, to the eyes of my soul, maimed by gloomy sin, by grafting in humility,
O merciful, and cleansing me with tears of repentance.

From Matins for the Sunday of the Blind Man

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy is one continuous prayer; it is the place where the Church is gathered together and set apart in order to enter into and receive the mysteries of Christ's life. Yet we should not see the Liturgy as totally separate from the rest of our lives. Indeed, Saint Paul calls us to be people of constant prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) and the Liturgy is both the summit of our week as Christians, and also the source that gives us the strength to go back into the world and to witness to God's love in our everyday lives. In a sense, the whole of our week is a preparation for the Sunday Liturgy. And the whole of our week is also the place where we live out the fruits of the Liturgy, giving thanks to God for what we have received.



Preparation for the Liturgy

If we come to Church before the Liturgy has started, the likelihood is that there will already be a service underway. This is usually Matins, or the morning prayer of the Church, which in many Churches is served before the Divine Liturgy begins. In fact, the Church's day begins with Vespers the evening before and can be seen as the Church's beginning of preparation for the celebration of the Liturgy. These services, together with the smaller hours of the day, mark the times of the day. And, on a Sunday, they remind us of the crucial significance of the Resurrection of Christ. They prepare us to celebrate that Mystery which is beyond all time and space.

Before the Liturgy begins there is also the service of the *Proskomede* in which the priest prepares the Gifts which are to be offered during the Liturgy. We will describe this service in more detail next week.

Alongside these services of the Church, we also need to engage in personal preparation for celebrating the Divine Liturgy, and particularly for receiving Holy Communion. Our journey to the Kingdom of God, which is where the Liturgy leads us, begins before we ever set foot in the Church. It begins with a conscious decision to come to Church, with making the effort to get out of bed in the morning and set aside this time for God. And it begins even earlier, in focusing our attention during the week and actively preparing ourselves to participate in this work of the Church.

There are various practices in the Church relating to preparation for receiving Holy Communion, and we should follow the advice of our priest on what is best for us. Most important is the requirement that we should be actively seeking to live a Christian life and that we should approach the Chalice conscious of what we are doing. Our decision to receive Holy Communion should not just be made on the spur of the moment because everyone else is doing it; rather, it requires conscious preparation before we come to Church. This can include the examination of our consciences and praying some of the prayers for preparation for Holy Communion. It should also include fasting from all food and drink on the morning of the Liturgy (unless we are impaired for medical reasons).

More important than the details of the Church's rules (on which we should consult our priest if we are in doubt) is enkindling in ourselves the desire to meet God in the Liturgy. We are invited to the great banquet of the Kingdom of God. That is an invitation which we should take seriously, but which should also fill us with joyful expectation.

The Ascension of the Lord

This coming Thursday is the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. On Wednesday, we "take leave" of the Easter feast, commemorating the last day of the presence of the Risen Christ among His disciples. And then on Thursday we celebrate Jesus Christ's Ascension into heaven where He is exalted at the right hand of the Father.

The Ascension of Christ is really the fulfillment of His Resurrection. When He rose from the dead, He did not simply resume a normal human life, but appeared to His disciples in a glorified body which was immortal and incorruptible. Now He ascends to the Father, and is no longer present on earth in a bodily way, yet He abides with the faithful forever.

With the Ascension of Christ, we also see our own human nature being taken up into the glory of heaven. "We who seemed unworthy of the earth, are now raised to heaven," says St John Chrysostom. Through His Ascension, Christ has opened the way by which we too will be able to be taken up into the glory of the Father.

However, Jesus Christ tells us that He will not leave us as orphans. By ascending to the Father, He is opening the way for the Holy Spirit whom He promises to send to comfort and help us. The Ascension of Christ is a joyful feast, both because it assures us that Christ's work is completed, and because it encourages us to await and pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.



You were taken up in glory, Christ our God, giving joy to your Disciples by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, when through the blessing they had been assured that you are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

Apolytikion of the Ascension

How many times have I prayed for what seemed a good thing for me, and not leaving it to God to do, as He knows best, what is useful for me. But having obtained what I begged for, I found myself in distress because I had not asked for it to be, rather, according to God's will.

Saint Nilus of Sinai