

If our purpose is to fight the spiritual fight and to defeat, with God's help, the demons of malice, we should take every care to guard our heart from the demon of dejection, just as a moth devours clothing and a worm devours wood, so dejection devours a man's soul. It persuades him to shun every helpful encounter and stops him accepting advice from his true friends or giving them a courteous and peaceful reply. Seizing the entire soul, it fills it with bitterness and listlessness. Then it suggests to the soul that we should go away from other people, since they are the cause of its agitation. It does not allow the soul to understand that its sickness does not come from without, but lies hidden within, only manifesting itself when temptations attack the soul because of our ascetic efforts.

A man can be harmed by another only through the causes of the passions which lie within himself. It is for this reason that God, the Creator of all and the Doctor of men's souls, who alone has accurate knowledge of the soul's wounds, does not tell us to forsake the company of men; He tells us to root out the causes of evil within us and to recognize that the soul's health is achieved not by a man's separating himself from his fellows, but by his living the ascetic life in the company of holy men. When we abandon our brothers for some apparently good reason, we do not eradicate the motives for dejection but merely exchange them, since the sickness which lies hidden within us will show itself again in other circumstances.

Saint John Cassian



Sunday 16 November 2014 is the Feast of the Holy Apostle & Evangelist Matthew

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Romans 10:11-21; 11:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13

Kontakion of the Feast:

When thou didst cast away the publican's balance and wast united to the yoke of uprightness, then didst thou prove a merchant of great excellence, one that gathered in the wealth of the wisdom of Heaven; for this cause, the word of truth thou didst herald, O Matthew, and didst arouse the souls of sluggish men by signifying the dread day of reckoning.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Luke 14:1, 12-15
Gregory the Wonderworker; Gennadius and Maximus

Tuesday: 1 Thessalonians 3:8-13; Luke 14:25-35
Great Martyr Plato; Martyr Romanus

Wednesday: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Luke 15:1-10
Prophet Obadiah; Barlaam of Caesarea

Thursday: 1 Thessalonians 4:18-5:10; Luke 16:1-9
Forefeast of the Entry of the Theotokos; Gregory Decapolite

Friday: Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28
Entry of the Theotokos

Saturday: Philemon 1:1-25; Luke 9:57-62
Philemon & Archippus of the 70; Martyrs Cecilia and Companions



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

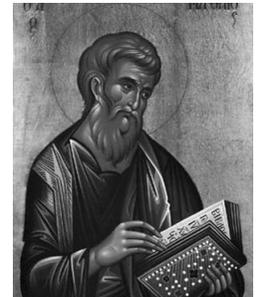
16 November 2014

Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

It is the Sick who Need a Physician

In today's Gospel on the feast of Saint Matthew, we hear the account of the calling of this great Apostle. Matthew had not been called at the same time as the other Apostles and Saint John Chrysostom tells us that this was because Jesus Christ calls us all at the time that is right for us. Saint Matthew was a tax collector and therefore a hated public sinner, for the tax collectors collaborated with the Roman oppressors and enriched themselves illegally in the process. He was hardly the obvious candidate for an Apostle.

Yet Jesus Christ knew how to speak to his heart. All He had to say was "Follow Me!" and Matthew responded. Matthew had clearly seen something in who Jesus was that he found immensely appealing, for he was to become his faithful follower, recording His works, and preaching the Gospel throughout the world after His Ascension.



We are given a clue into this identity of Jesus Christ in the incident that followed, in which He is shown eating with the tax collectors—to the horror of the Pharisees. When challenged about how He could eat with such public sinners, Jesus responded by saying: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick ... I desire mercy not sacrifice." Jesus was prepared to meet people where they were at, for it was, precisely in order to save sinners that He had come into the world.

The Church is often referred to as a hospital for sinners and sin is in many respects like a sickness. But a hospital is no good without a doctor and Christ refers to Himself here as the Divine Physician. And He shows us in this incident that He is prepared to come to us and meet us where we are at. There is no sin, and no aspect of our human brokenness, that is too much for Him. Rather than being repelled by it, as the Pharisees thought He should have been, He comes to us, shares our lives, and draws us to Himself, each in our own way and at the right time.

Sometimes people are tested by pleasure, sometimes by distress or by physical suffering. By means of His prescriptions the Physician of souls administers the remedy according to the cause of the passions lying hidden in the soul.

Saint Maximus the Confessor

Preparing the Way of the Lord

An advent series on the prophets of Israel

Yesterday the Church began the forty day period of preparation for Christmas. This is not only a time of fasting, but also a time in which the prayers and hymns of the Church remind us that the coming of Jesus Christ was the result of a long period of preparation in which God prepared the people of Israel to receive His Son. One central theme of this Advent period is how the Nativity of Jesus Christ fulfills the Old Testament prophecies about the birth of the Messiah. It does this not only to remind us about historical events, but also invites us to identify ourselves with those to whom God spoke in those events. We too are invited to respond to God – today.



The Old Testament prophets can usually be seen in the dome of an Orthodox church

Behold, the time of our salvation has drawn near. O cave, make ready! The Virgin is drawing near to give birth. O Bethlehem, land of Judah, be glad and rejoice, for from you our Lord has dawned. Listen mountains and hills, and lands around Judea, for Christ is coming to save man whom He fashioned, since He loves mankind. (Vespers of the Forefeast, 20 December)

The Old Testament can seem like a confusing collection of writings that are rather remote from us. However, if we read it with the Church, we see that it is a record of God's relationship with His people that is very relevant for our lives. Although the

circumstances differ, we too are called by God but we often prefer to go our own ways. Yet God continuously calls us back to Him, seeking out the lost sheep (see Ezekiel 34:11; Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4) through His coming among us in the Incarnation of Christ.

It is therefore not surprising that as we prepare for Christ's birth, many of the Church's liturgical texts remind us of the prophets of Israel. It is not a coincidence that many (although not all) of the prophets are commemorated during this period and their writings – especially those of the prophet Isaiah – have found their way into the Church's liturgical texts.

The development of prophecy in Israel has a long and complex history. In some ways prophecy is part of a wider human culture, but it developed in a crucially different way in Israel. Instead of simply being about revealing that which was unknown or foretelling the future, it came to be seen as speaking on behalf of God. The prophet was a human being who spoke the words of God. He was a reminder that God lived among His people and wanted to be in relationship with them. And he pointed to the ultimate coming of God among us in Jesus Christ, whose way the prophets sought to prepare.



On Wednesday the Church commemorates the prophet Obadiah. His prophecy is the shortest in the Old Testament. He prophesied the downfall of the proud Edom and proclaimed the nearness of the Day of the Lord, when the nations will be punished by fire. But he also looks to the glory of Mount Zion, the day when the Lord will rule and when the exiles will return to Jerusalem. In the midst of violence and destruction, he reminds us that God is preparing a new future for His people.

The Feast of the Entrance of the Holy Theotokos into the Temple

On Friday we celebrate the feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple, which is one of the twelve Great Feasts of the Church. According to the tradition of the Church, the Theotokos was brought into the Temple when she was three years old and consecrated to God. She was led into the Holy of Holies to be nourished by the angels in order to prepare her for her virginal conception of the Son of God.

This feast is not simply about the details of what happened to the Theotokos in the Temple, but is, more importantly, a symbolic statement about our salvation history. One of the hymns of the feast calls it “the prelude of the good will of God,” for it announces and prefigures the coming of God's salvation in the Incarnation of Christ that we will celebrate at Christmas.

In this feast we see the Holy Theotokos taken into the temple, and yet we also know that she herself will become “the living temple of the Holy Glory of Christ our God.” She is “the temple that is to hold God” and is consecrated to be the “dwelling place of the Almighty.” She enters the Holy of Holies, but will herself become the Holy of Holies and the “abode of heaven.”



Today is the prelude of the good pleasure of God, and the proclaiming of the salvation of humankind. In the Temple of God the Virgin is revealed, and beforehand she announces Christ to all. To her then let us cry aloud with mighty voice: Hail, the fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

Apolytikion for the feast

There where only the High Priest may enter, and then rarely, only once a year, it is there in this holy sanctuary of grace that Mary is offered to stay there indefinitely. Who has ever heard anything similar? Who has ever seen or heard, now or formerly, that a woman was introduced into the intimacy of the Holy of Holies, and that it was in this place, almost inaccessible even to men, that she lived and ate. Is this not a striking demonstration of the strange magnificence of which her womb would be the object? Is it not a manifest sign, an irrefutable proof?

Saint Germanus of Constantinople