



On Tuesday we commemorate the **Holy Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria**. Coming from a noble and wealthy family, she was both beautiful and intelligent and received an outstanding education. She was known for her debates with the leading philosophers of her day and when the Emperor Maximin tried to make his subjects offer idolatrous sacrifices, she objected and entered into public debate with the leading scholars and orators he could find, silencing them all with her arguments and resulting in them asking for baptism. After they had been sentenced to death, Saint Catherine was tortured on a specially constructed spiked wheel, but was freed by an angel. She was eventually beheaded outside the walls of Alexandria in 305.



Sunday 23 November 2014 is the Ninth Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Ephesians 2:14-22

Gospel: Luke 12:16-21

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

You abolished death by your Cross, you opened Paradise to the Thief, you transformed the Myrrhbearers's lament, and ordered your Apostles to proclaim that you had risen. O Christ God, granting to the world your great mercy.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Philippians 3:20-21; 4:1-3; Luke 17:20-25
Pope Clement of Rome; Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria

Tuesday: Matthew 25:1-13; Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Mark 5:24-34
Apodosis of the Entry; Great Martyr Catherine

Wednesday: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 18:15-17, 26-30
Alypius the Stylite; Nikon

Thursday: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; 3:1-5; Luke 18:31-34
Martyr James the Persian; Righteous Nathaniel

Friday: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18; Luke 19:12-28
Stephen the New; Martyr Irenarchos

Saturday: Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 10:19-21
Martyrs Paramonos & Philumenos; Nicholas, Abp. of Thessalonica



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

23 November 2014

This Night Your Soul is Required of You

Today we hear Jesus Christ issuing a stern warning on the dangers of greed. He tells the parable of a rich man who "stores up treasures for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God." Having had good returns on his harvest, this man had said to himself that he would pull down his barns in order to build bigger ones that would accommodate all his grains and his possessions. Little did he realize that he would die that very night and that all his possessions would be of no use to him.

While the fruits of the earth are good and given to us to be used wisely, our human nature has been corrupted by the fall and so we tend to hold onto them graspingly, becoming trapped by them, or thinking that they can provide us with security against the dangers that we face. This parable confronts us with the reality of death and with the fact that material wealth will be of no use to us when we die. Indeed, if we relate to it in a grasping, acquisitive way, it can even be a hindrance, for it prevents us from accumulating the spiritual treasures about which Christ speaks.



As we begin the Nativity fast in preparation for the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ at Christmas, we are called to be watchful and sober. This is a time for us to take stock of what life is really about. The reminder that we will die, possibly unexpectedly, is not meant to make us gloomy and depressed, but should rather help us to focus on the things that do endure beyond the grave. For true joy consists not in piling up possessions, but rather in being in a right relationship with God and with those around us and in using our possessions in a way that will benefit others.

He who is rich toward God is very blessed and has glorious hope. Who is he? Evidently, one who does not love wealth but rather loves virtue, and to whom few things are sufficient. It is one whose hand is open to the needs of the poor, comforting the sorrows of those in poverty according to his means and the utmost of his power. He gathers in the storehouses that are above and lays up treasures in heaven.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

Preparing the Way of the Lord

An advent series on the prophets of Israel

On Friday, on the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, the Church began to chant the Katavasias of Christmas at Matins. The Katavasias are the concluding hymns of the canon, which is usually based on nine biblical odes. The Katavasias therefore serve as a meditation on the theme of the feast that is being celebrated. (The word Katavasia literally means descent because the chanters originally descended from their stalls to chant in the middle of the church).

The Katavasias of the Nativity are full of references and allusions to Old Testament events that point to the birth of Jesus Christ, and to the salvation that is offered to us in Him. They touch us how to read the Old Testament with the Church and encourage us to meet Him with joyous expectation:

Christ is born, give glory, Christ comes from heaven, go to meet Him. Christ is on earth, be exalted. Sing to the Lord, all the earth, and sing hymns in gladness, O people, for He has been glorified. (Katavasia for the First Ode)



The Rod of the Root of Jesse

The Katavasia of the Fourth Ode reads:

*Rod of the root of Jesse,
and flower that blossomed from his stem,
You, O Christ, have sprung forth from the Virgin.
From the mount of shaded leafy trees,
You, the God who is not material,
have come to be incarnate
from her who did not know wedlock.
Glory to Your power, O Lord.*

This ode refers to one of the great prophecies of the prophet Isaiah concerning the coming of Christ:

*There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse,
and a flower shall grow out of his root. The Spirit of
God shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and
understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the
Spirit of knowledge and godliness (11:1–2).*

Jesse was the father of King David and his descendants would eventually be cut off because of their sins. However, God promised David that He would nevertheless establish his line for ever. Therefore, a “rod” or a “shoot” would arise from the dead stem of Jesse’s family tree. The opening chapter of Saint Matthew’s Gospel (which is the Gospel read on the Sunday before Christmas) tells us that the Virgin Mary is in the line of Jesse. She is the root of Jesse and Christ is the rod or flower that has blossomed from this root.

Listening attentively to the hymns of the Church helps us to uncover the deeper meaning of the Scriptures. It shows us that God had been involved with His people for many generations. He did not abandon them, but prepared the ground for His coming among them in the Incarnation. He is also at work in our lives and calls us to open ourselves to so that we too can hear His voice and welcome Him into our lives.

His fruit was mingled with us men, that in Him we might come near to Him, Who condescended to us. By the Fruit of His stem He grafted us into His Tree.

Saint Ephraim the Syrian

Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have great wealth and more glory than riches can provide.

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

In Revelation it speaks of 24 thrones surrounding God. Who is in these thrones? Are these any saints or holy forefathers?

To answer this question we need to understand what is happening in the book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse. This book describes the vision of Saint John the Theologian and is an example of a particular type of literature that was common at the time. It used symbolic language to express the central truths of our faith, and to foster hope among the early Christian community that was being severely persecuted.

The fundamental idea of the Book of Revelation is the belief that Christ is the Lamb, sacrificed for us. He who opens the seals of the book is the ruling king revered and worshipped by the Church in heaven and on earth. Christ, the sacrificed Lamb, leads the struggle with His armies, the Saints of the Church. Their weapon is their faith in the word of God to the point of self-sacrifice. The blood of the Lamb, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, and His Resurrection strengthen them and their victory over the enemy is certain.

In this context, we find references to twenty-four priests or elders, together with four living creatures. They are not so much individual figures, but representatives of the Church of the Old and New Testaments, and indeed of all creation. The thrones you ask about are the thrones of these elders for, as representatives of the Church, they share in the victory of Christ. But the central vision is that of the throne of God, and between them and the throne stands Christ, who is represented as the Lamb, who is sacrificed for our salvation.

We see here the mystery of our salvation in Christ, but also the worship of the Church. These elders are presented as praising God and the Lamb (Christ), prostrating themselves before Him, and offering Him the incense and prayers of the saints. They represent the whole Church and remind us that whenever we gather to worship God we are united to the whole company of heaven and that the saints in heaven are praying for us.