

The Kingdom of God has no price tag on it: It is worth as much as you have. For Zacchaeus it was worth half of what he owned, because the other half that he had unjustly pocketed he promised to restore fourfold. For Peter and Andrew it was worth the nets and vessel they had left behind; for the widow it was worth two copper coins; for another it was worth a cup of cold water. So, as we have said, the Kingdom of Heaven is worth as much as you have.

Saint Gregory Dialogos



Sunday 25 January 2015 is the Fifteenth Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: John 21:14-25

Epistle: Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Resurrectional Apolytikion

You came down from above, O Compassionate, You accepted burial for three days, that You might free us from the passions. Our life and resurrection, Lord, glory to You!

Seasonal Kontakion

Your birth sanctified a Virgin's womb and properly blessed the hands of Symeon. Having now come and saved us O Christ our God, give peace to Your commonwealth in troubled times and strengthen those in authority, whom You love, as only the loving One

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:1-9; Mark 12:13-17
Monday of Publican and Pharisee; Xenophon & Companions; Symeon the Elder

Tuesday: John 10:1-9; Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2; John 10:9-16
Relics of John Chrysostom; Peter the Righteous of Egypt

Wednesday: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Luke 6:17-23
Ephraim the Syrian; Isaac the Syrian; James the Righteous

Thursday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 9:33-41
Relics of Ignatius the Godbearer; Laurence the Recluse

Friday: John 10:9-16; Hebrews 13:7-16; Matthew 5:14-19
Three Hierarchs; Hippolytos, Pope of Rome

Saturday: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 13:1-8; Matthew 10:1, 5-8
Unmercenarys Cyrus & John; Martyrs Theodote, Theoctiste & Eudoxia



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

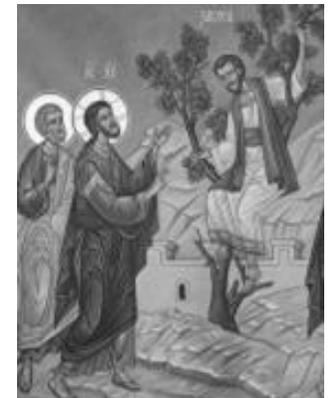
25 January 2015

I Am Coming to Your House

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of the charming and yet deeply challenging conversion of Zacchaeus. As a tax collector, he was regarded as an outcast among his own people because he collaborated with the Roman occupiers and enriched himself in the process. When Jesus came into Jericho, Zacchaeus wanted to see Him but was too short to see over the heads of others and so climbed a sycamore tree. Aware that he was there, Jesus Christ called to him to come down and announced that He was coming to his house. Zacchaeus responded with joy, welcomed Jesus Christ into his home, and committed himself to giving half of his property to the poor and paying back those whom he had cheated fourfold.

Zacchaeus was clearly curious about Jesus Christ, yet he was also uneasy. Aware of his outcast status and perhaps also awkward because of his shortness, he hid in a tree where he could see what was going on, and yet also remain at a certain distance to it. We may also feel drawn to a life of faith and be aware that something is missing in our lives, and yet we draw back, conscious of our own inadequacies or afraid of what others will think of us. Yet Jesus Christ cut through Zacchaeus' defences; He addressed him directly and knew exactly what he needed.

Jesus announces that He is coming to Zacchaeus' house. In Biblical language that meant that He was coming to share in Zacchaeus' life and to be in a relationship with him. Welcoming Jesus Christ into our lives means getting to know Him and allowing Him to get to know us, including the parts of ourselves that we would rather He doesn't see. But it is only through this that we can find true healing and peace and take the steps we need to take to be reconciled both to God and to those around us.



Repentance lifts one up. Mourning knocks at heaven's gate.
Holy humility opens it.

St John Climacus

I Confess One Baptism

A series on the meaning of Christian Baptism

We have seen that Christian baptism is the means by which we are incorporated into Jesus Christ and His Church. In baptism creation is returned to its original role as the waters of baptism both cleanse and renew us.

In many places today it is mainly children who are baptized, but this was not always the case. While it is certainly clear that the children of Christians were baptized from the time of the Apostles, with some of the earliest Fathers speaking of having been servants of Christ since childhood, the rapid growth of the early Church meant that the baptism of converts was the more common form of baptism, and it was this form of baptism that was to influence the actual baptismal service.



An example of an ancient baptismal font

The process of preparing for baptism was a serious one, with would-be converts having to undertake a formal catechumenate, which could last anything from one to three years. They were then baptized at specific times, most commonly at Easter in connection with the Liturgy of Pascha. Our present practice of processing around the Church at Pascha has its origins in the procession that the newly illumined converts made from the baptismal font to the Church for the Liturgy. Likewise, even today the Thrice-holy hymn in the Divine Liturgy is replaced by the song "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" on certain feasts during the year because

these were once days on which catechumens were baptized.

The shift from baptizing mainly adult converts to baptizing mainly the infant children of Christians seems to have been a gradual one, and the historical evidence is not always clear. At some points, especially in the fourth century, there was a trend to postpone baptism to later in one's life, or even until one was on one's deathbed. Saint Basil the Great, together with some of the other fourth century Fathers, was himself affected by this and was only baptized once he had completed his studies. However, he later regretted this and, together with Saint John Chrysostom, vigorously encouraged Christian parents to not exclude their children from the grace of baptism. Likewise, he discouraged the practice of delaying baptism for fear that they would no longer be able to continue sinning. He wrote:

Baptism is the ransom of captives, the remission of debts, the death of sin, the regeneration of the soul, the robe of light, the seal which cannot be broken, the chariot to heaven, the means to attain the kingdom, the gift of adoption. ... If sin is good, persevere in it to the end: if it is hurtful to the sinner, why do you continue in pernicious pursuits?

To be continued...

He came to save all through Himself – all I say, who through Him are reborn in God—infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore He passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age, and at the same time becoming for them an example of piety, of righteousness, and of submission; a young man for youths, becoming an example for youths and sanctifying them for the Lord.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

The Start of the Triodion

With today's Gospel describing the call of Zacchaeus, we are reminded that the period of the Triodion is about to start. We know that Pascha, or Easter, is the centre of our faith and of the Church's year, and that it is preceded by a period of preparation and fasting known as Great Lent. However, because Lent is so important for us, it is also preceded by a period of preparation. This pre-Lenten period gently reminds us that the fast is approaching and allows us to orientate and prepare ourselves for Great Lent.

The word "Triodion" refers to the main hymn book for Lent, which we start using next Sunday on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and which we continue using until just before Pascha. (Its name literally means "Book of Three Odes" because during Great Lent there are three odes that are three canticles that are chanted at Matins.) These liturgical texts are rich in meaning and are designed to lead us on our Lenten journey to Pascha. While fasting is important (and the pre-Lenten period also prepares us for the fast), there is more to Lent than fasting. Lent is above all a season of repentance, of the softening of our hardened hearts, so that we are able to enter into them and meet God there.

This time of preparation for Great Lent consists of the following:

The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (1 February) The week following this Sunday is a fast-free week in which the Wednesday and Friday fasts are suspended. The reason for this is to remind us of the danger of becoming proud about our fasting as the Pharisee did.

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (8 February)

The Sunday of the Last Judgement (15 February) This is also known as Meatfare Sunday, because it is the last day on which meat is eaten until Pascha. It is followed by Cheesefare week, in which we fast from meat only all week.

Forgiveness Sunday (22 February) This is also called the "Expulsion of Adam from Paradise" which is the theme of the liturgical texts, reminding us that we too have been exiled from Paradise and that our journey through Lent is a journey back to God. This Sunday is also called Cheesefare Sunday because it is the last day on which cheese (or dairy products) are eaten until Pascha.

The theme of forgiveness is found not only in the Gospel for the day, but also in the Forgiveness Vespers on Sunday afternoon, which is the liturgical start of Lent. During this service, all those present ask the forgiveness of everyone else, for we are reminded that we cannot expect to receive God's forgiveness if we are not prepared to forgive others.