

God is glorified by His Saints, and, in turn, the Saints are glorified by God.

The glory that God gives to the Saints is so great, that if people were to see a saint as he truly is, they would fall to the ground on account of reverence and fear, because physical man cannot endure the glory of such a heavenly appearance.

Do not marvel at this. The Lord loved man, whom He created, to such an extent that He poured the Holy Spirit abundantly upon man, and through this Holy Spirit man became like unto God.

The Lord gave His grace to the Saints, and they loved Him and completely devoted themselves to Him, because the sweetness of God's love surpasses the love for the world and its beauty.

And if things are so here on the earth, then in Heaven the saints are even more closely united with the Lord through love. ...

To many people it seems as though the Saints are far away from us. In reality, they are far from those people who have distanced themselves from the Saints;

Whereas, they are very close to the people who keep Christ's commandments and who have the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

Sunday 8 December 2013 is the Tenth Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Ephesians 2:14-22

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

You abolished death by your Cross, you opened Paradise to the Thief, you transformed the Myrrhbearers' 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: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Conception of the Theotokos; Prophetess Hannah

Tuesday: 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12; 2:1-2; Mark 8:22-26
Martyr Menas & Companions; Thomas of Bithynia

Wednesday: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Mark 8:30-34
Daniel the Stylite; Luke the New Stylite

Thursday: John 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:8-19; John 10:9-16
Spyridon the Wonderworker; John of Zichna

Friday: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18; Mark 9:33-41
Martyr Eustratius & companions

Saturday: Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 14:1-11
Martyrs Thyrsus & companions



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

8 December 2013

Becoming Truly Human

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of how Jesus Christ healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath. This woman, who had been suffering for eighteen years, was bent double and unable to stand up. When Jesus Christ healed her, she stood up straight and glorified God. However, Jesus' opponents sought to use this against Him, accusing Him of not respecting the Sabbath. In response, He pointed out the hypocrisy of those who would happily rescue their animals on the Sabbath, but were unconcerned with the dignity of a human being.

In this incident we see two different approaches to religion. For Christ's opponents, religious observances such as the keeping of the Sabbath had lost their connection to a genuine concern for human beings and had simply become mindless legalism. Many people today are inclined to see religious beliefs and practices as somehow in conflict with human freedom and human dignity. For some, God has become an oppressive tyrant who must be rejected in the name of human freedom and human dignity.

In Jesus Christ we see a totally different approach to religious observances. They do not exist to satisfy a tyrannical God, but rather to restore us to our original human dignity in which we are created in the image of God. While the Church certainly has "rules" – and calls us to a serious asceticism – this is not in order to cramp our freedom, but rather because it is only within the guidelines that God has revealed that we are able to discover what it really means to be human. The holiness to which the Christ calls us is not meant to kill our spirits, but rather to free us from all that keeps us from the vision of God which is the true purpose for which we have been created.



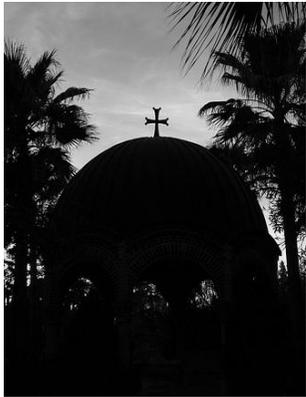
The glory of God is the human person fully alive,
and the life of a human being is the vision of God.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We have seen that it is our confession of the Creed that unites to the faith of the Church in baptism. We reaffirm this faith at every Divine Liturgy and it is this faith that becomes the gateway, as it were, to our participation in the sacrifice of the Eucharist in the second part of the Liturgy.



However, this faith is not something abstract or a matter of purely intellectual assent. For the early Christians, to say that we believe in something was the same as saying that this was where they placed their trust – something that often led them to martyrdom, which was the strongest possible witness of the authenticity of their faith.

This faith presupposes a relationship. For Orthodox Christians, we can only believe in God because we have been created by Him and in His image. There is already a link between God and us and whatever we say about God has direct consequences for our own lives.

I believe in one God

It probably goes without saying that Christians believe in God, and it is often said that, like Jews and Moslems, we believe that there is only one God, who is distinct from the material universe and who created all things. This

distinguishes us from those religions who have a multiplicity of gods, or who ultimately identify God with the world.

This is true as far as it goes, but for Christians God is more than simply a solitary being who creates and rules the world. The central affirmation that Christians make of God is that He is love. (See, for example 1 John 4:8) Love requires relationship and a communion of persons, for solitary self-love is no real love. An impersonal, abstract force cannot love us or forgive us, for only a person can love.

For Orthodox Christians, God is love because He is a communion of Persons, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, who have always existed in a relationship of loving communion. The Church teaches that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have one essence and are undivided, for there is only one God. But they exist as three distinct Persons whose mutual love shows us and what it really means to be a person. They invite us to enter into this love, and to reflect it in our lives and our relationships.

Love is the kingdom which the Lord mystically promised to the disciples, when He said that they would eat in His kingdom: “You shall eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.” (Luke 22:30) What should they eat and drink, if not love?

When we have reached love, we have reached God and our journey is complete. We have crossed over to the island which lies beyond the world, where are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: to whom be glory and dominion. May God make us worthy to fear and love Him. Amen.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

Preparing for the Saviour: The Conception of the Holy Theotokos

Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by Saint Anne. The Church’s tradition tells us that Saints Joachim and Anne were advanced in years and childless. Their barren old age is symbolic of human nature itself, weighed down by sin and death, and yet longing for a Saviour. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, it is often barren women who give birth to significant people at decisive moments in history. Thus, we have the stories of Abraham who was conceived by the barren Sarah, Samuel who born of the barren Hannah, and of course Saint John the Baptist, whose birth to the barren Elizabeth forms a prelude to the birth of Christ. All of these barren women may have been tempted to despair at their hopeless situation, yet they put their trust in God and God did great things through them.



In the Conception of the Mother of God we see not only the answer to the prayers of the barren Joachim and Anna, but the answer to all humanity’s longing for a Saviour. Since the fall of humanity God had been preparing the way for the Incarnation of Christ who would come to save us from our collective barrenness. The whole Old Testament is the account of the formation of a people who were being prepared to receive the Saviour. And in order for Christ to take on our human nature, He needed a human mother, someone who would be dedicated to the Lord, nurtured in holiness and able to become the Mother of the Messiah. The Holy Theotokos stands at the end of a long line of preparation. She is the Vessel who was chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God and so her Conception which we commemorate today is an event of great joy as we await the coming of Christ into our midst this Nativity.

Today the great mystery of all eternity, whose depths angels and men cannot perceive, appears in the barren womb of Anna.

Mary, the Maiden of God, is prepared to be the dwelling place of the eternal King who will renew human nature.

Let us entreat her with a pure heart and say: Intercede for us with your Son and God that our souls may be saved.

From Vespers of the Feast of the Conception of the Theotokos