



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

20 January 2013

**Sunday 20 January 2013 is the
Twelfth Sunday of Luke**

Matins Gospel: John 21:14-25

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Gospel: Luke 17:12-19

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.

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O Lord, my God, defend me
Like the pupil of the eye;
Be Thou my protector,
and under Thy wings
I shall be shielded from temptations.

Be a guard to mine eye,
That it look not stealthily;
Be a guard to the ear,
That it hear not wickedly.

Be a guard to the mouth,
And watch also the lips'
That my heart decline not to vile sayings,
Nor perform unrighteous deeds.

Saint Ephrem the Syrian

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Philippians 1:12-20; Luke 12:8-12
Maximus the Confessor; Martyr Neophytos

Tuesday: 2 Timothy 1:3-8; Matthew 10:32-33; 37-38; 19:27-30
Timothy of the 70; Martyr Anastasius the Persian

Wednesday: Philippians 3:20-21; 4:1-3; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5
Hieromartyr Clement; Martyr Agathangelus

Thursday: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Mark 10:17-27
Xenia, Deaconess of Rome; Hieromartyr Babylas

Friday: Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2; John 10:9-16
Gregory the Theologian; Synaxis of the New Martyrs of Russia

Saturday: Colossians 1:1-6; Luke 16:10-15
Xenophon & his Companions; Symeon the Elder

Giving thanks

Today the Church returns once more to listening to the Gospel readings according to Saint Luke, and we hear his account of how Jesus Christ healed ten lepers. Ten men suffering from leprosy came and asked Him to have mercy on them, and He told them to go and show themselves to the priests in order to confirm their healing. As they went away, they found that they were healed. On discovering this, one of the lepers, who was a Samaritan, returned to Jesus to thank Him. However, the other nine continued on their way, prompting Jesus to remark that it was only one of them who came back to give thanks.

This incident reminds us that we can all-too-easily take God's gifts for granted, and forget to thank Him for them. Cultivating a spirit of gratitude is of fundamental importance in our Christian life, for we often need to become aware of all that God does for us. We may wonder how the nine lepers could have forgotten to give thanks for their healing, yet if we are not grateful for all that God does for us in our everyday life, we can run the risk of also being blind to His more dramatic acts.

Often people think of prayer mainly as asking things from God. While we should indeed bring our needs and the needs of the world to God in prayer, true prayer begins with acknowledging who God is, with praising Him for who He is and thanking Him for all that He has done for us. For prayer is ultimately about cultivating a relationship with God as we learn to not only rely on Him for all our needs, but also recognize how He answers these needs and thank Him for it.

What words can adequately describe God's gifts? They are so numerous that they defy enumeration. They are so great that any one of them demands our total gratitude in response.

Saint Basil the Great



Orthodox Christian Symbols:

Water

Water is an important symbol in many religions because it is absolutely vital for our life on earth. It is something that we need physically, but it also comes to acquire various symbolic meanings. In the Christian tradition these are intimately related to the history of our salvation that we see portrayed in the Scriptures. They are also intimately related to the sacramental life which God provides for our salvation in the Church.



In the Old Testament water is shown as a symbol of life as well as a means of cleansing and purification. The Spirit of God is shown hovering over the face of the waters in the book of Genesis (1:2) and God commanded the water to bring out an abundance of living creatures (Genesis 1:20-21). Water is seen as in some sense close to God (Psalms 17; 28:3; 76:17, 20; 103:3; 148:4) and God's coming is compared to the rain (Hosea 6:3). In addition to bringing life, water is a powerful purifying element. It can destroy evil as seen in the accounts of the flood and the exodus from Egypt (Genesis 3:1-15; Exodus 14:1-15:21).

According to the Old Testament Law, it cleanses defilement and is used in sacrifices. Water also heals, as can be seen in the account of Naaman the Syrian who was cured of his leprosy in the water of the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-14) and the annual miracles at Bethesda in Jerusalem (John 5:1-4). However, water is also a symbol of chaos and danger and it is portrayed as the habitat of serpents whose heads God crushed (Psalm 73:13-14) and of the dragon (Job 41:25; Psalm 103:26).

In the New Testament water occupies an even more prominent place. Christ turns water into wine at Cana (John 2:1-11), and uses it to describe a new spiritual birth into the Kingdom of Heaven (John 3:5). He gives living water which is the source of eternal life (John 4:10-14; 7:38) as foretold by the Prophet Jeremiah (2:13). He came in water, blood and the Spirit, witnessing to one God (1 John 5:6-8). He commands watery baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:38). When speaking about baptism, St Paul states that in water we are buried with our sins in the likeness of Christ's death. Moreover, water is also associated with the Holy Spirit, the Divine Person who accomplishes rebirth (John 3:5-6; Acts 8:39; cf. Acts 1-2).

In the New Testament the Old Testament symbolism associated with water finds its fulfilment in Christ and it becomes a particular means of spiritual grace. As we are baptised into Christ water becomes the means whereby we die to sin, but also the means by which, to quote Saint Basil the Great, "the Spirit infuses life-giving power, renewing our souls from the death of sin to their original life."

What is the nature or the function of baptism? The changing of the person baptised in thought, word and action and his transformation according to the power bestowed on him into that of which he had been born.

Saint Basil the Great

Tomorrow we commemorate **Saint Maximus the Confessor**. He was born into a noble family in Constantinople in 580, although there is also evidence that he may have been born in Palestine. He showed uncommon piety and understanding of Christian truth from a young age, but after completing his studies with distinction he came to serve in the court of the emperor, being appointed his chief secretary. However, after only three years he withdrew to a monastery and spent many years in ascetical training, overcoming his passions and learning the life of prayer, which he also shared with others through his writings. As a result of the Persian invasions, the monks had to disperse and St Maximus embarked on an itinerant life, spending time in Crete, Cyprus and eventually Carthage.



During this time he was able to express the great depth of the Orthodox faith in his writings, presenting a magnificent synthesis which saw the human being as priest of a cosmic liturgy who is called to gather together the inner principles of all things in order to offer them to God.

However, this was also a time in which the Church was threatened by the monothelite heresy, which the emperor was attempting to impose on the Church as a compromise with the monophysites. St Maximus saw clearly that this teaching, which denied that Christ had a human will, struck at the very basis of our faith, for if Christ had not assumed our will, then He could not heal it, thus restoring human freedom to its original state. The emperor warned St Maximus to either accept the monothelite belief or else keep silent, but he was unable to avoid speaking out, and he was arrested and exiled for six years. After this he was brought back to Constantinople to face a new trial before the patriarch and his synod. 'What Church do you belong to, then?' he was asked. 'To Constantinople? to Rome? to Antioch? to Alexandria? to Jerusalem? For you see that all are united with us.' 'To the Catholic Church, which is the right and salutary confession of faith in the God of the universe,' the Confessor answered. Threatened with capital punishment, he replied: 'May whatever God has foreordained before all the ages find in me the conclusion which resounds to the glory that has been His since before all the ages.'

As a result of this witness St Maximus' tongue was torn out, his right hand was cut off, and he was again sentenced to exile in the Caucasus. He died of his wounds shortly after this at the age of eighty-two, in the year 662. The Great Horologion comments that 'at that time only he and his few disciples were Orthodox in the East.' Nonetheless, his lonely and costly stand, whose fruit he did not see in his own lifetime, preserved the Orthodox Faith when emperors and patriarchs alike had fallen away.

Saint Maximus' right hand is venerated today at the Monastery of St Paul on Mount Athos.