

How mistaken are those people who seek happiness outside of themselves, in foreign lands and journeys, in riches and glory, in great possessions and pleasures, in diversions and vain things, which have a bitter end! It is the same thing to construct the tower of happiness outside of ourselves as it is to build a house in a place that is consistently shaken by earthquakes. Happiness is found within ourselves, and blessed is the man who has understood this. Happiness is a pure heart, for such a heart becomes the throne of God. Thus says Christ of those who have pure hearts: "I will visit them, and will walk in them, and I will be a God to them, and they will be my people." (II Cor. 6:16) What can be lacking to them? Nothing, nothing at all! For they have the greatest good in their hearts: God Himself!

Saint Nektarios of Aegina

Sunday 25 August 2013 is the Ninth Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: John 20:19-31

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-34

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

You descended from on high, O compassionate One, and condescended to be buried for three days, so that from the passions You might set us free. Our life and resurrection, O Lord, glory be to You.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Matthew 21:18-22
Martyrs Adrian and Natalie; Righteous Joseph

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 15:29-38; Matthew 21:23-27
Pimen the Great; Martyr Phanurius

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 16:4-12; Matthew 21:28-32
Moses the Ethiopian; Diomedes and Laurence

Thursday: Matthew 14:1-13; Acts 13:25-33; Mark 6:14-30
Beheding of the Forerunner; Theodora of Thessaloniki

Friday: 2 Corinthians 1:12-20; Matthew 22:23-33
Apodosis of the Forerunner; Alexander, Paul & John, Pats.Of Const.

Saturday: Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28
Venerable Sash of the Theotokos; Cyprian of Carthage



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

25 August 2013

Fixing our gaze on the Saviour

Today we hear Saint Matthew's account of how Jesus Christ came to His disciples, walking across the water when they were caught in a storm while crossing the lake in a boat. The Apostle Peter asked to be allowed to come to Christ across the water, but when he took fright at the wind, he began to sink, calling to Christ who rescued him and calmed the storm.

This incident shows us that, without Christ, we are exposed to various dangers and storms. Jesus Christ comes to us in the midst of these, and He calls us to come to Him. However, even when we do respond to Him and seek to follow Him, we remain in danger of getting distracted. When we start to focus on the dangers around us, and lose our focus on Him, we begin to sink. However, even then Christ seeks to reach out to us if we are ready to turn to Him and, to cry with Saint Peter, "Lord, save me!"



The world that we live in will inevitably present us with temptations, and even when we seek to follow Christ we can find ourselves easily distracted. We can also get discouraged by own failures. We therefore need to develop the habit of constantly turning to Christ and finding ways of focusing our thoughts and our gaze on Him and not on ourselves. By ourselves we can do nothing, but with His help we can conquer our fear and overcome the difficulties that we face.

If a man has no worries about himself at all for the sake of love toward God and the working of good deeds, knowing that God is taking care of him, this is a true and wise hope. But if a man takes care of his own business and turns to God in prayer only when misfortunes come upon him which are beyond his power, and then he begins to hope in God, such a hope is vain and false. A true hope seeks only the Kingdom of God... the heart can have no peace until it obtains such a hope. This hope pacifies the heart and produces joy within it.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

As we pray the Antiphons we are preparing ourselves to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. The verses of the antiphons are taken from the Psalms which the Church has traditionally seen as helping to purify and cleanse us so that we are able to recognise and receive the Lord. Like Saint John the Baptist, they prepare the way of the Lord (Matthew 3:3) and point to Him when He comes to us, saying: "Behold the Lamb of God." (John 1:29)

As we sing to the Lord, so we invite Him to purify our hearts. Saint John Chrysostom writes:

Great benefit and abundant sanctification are to be gained from spiritual psalmody, and it can become the foundation for the whole of the spiritual life. For the words of the hymns purify the soul, and the Holy Spirit enters immediately into the soul that sings them.



We do not simply praise God as individuals, however, but as a community. In the prayer that the priest prays before the second antiphon, he prays:

Lord our God, save your people and bless your inheritance; protect the fullness of your Church, sanctify those who love the beauty of your house, glorify them in return by your divine power, and do not forsake us who hope in you.

Moreover, the refrains that are sung in response to the antiphons show how we are dependent on the prayers of one another, and especially of the Mother of God and of the saints. The response to the first antiphon is "At the prayers of the Mother of God, O Saviour, save us." The response to the second antiphon is "Son of God, wonderful in the Saints, save us who sing to you: Alleluia!" during the week, while on Sundays it is "Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to you: Alleluia!"

Our prayer is totally dependent on the work of Christ. He is our Saviour and we can do nothing without Him. But He saves us by uniting us to His Church and by making us dependent on the prayers of His Mother, of all the saints, and of one another. Jesus Christ and His saving work is the "song" that we sing, but we are called to all

sing it with one voice, joined together in harmony as members of the Church. Saint Ignatius of Antioch writes:

It is through your harmonious love that Jesus Christ is the hymn sung. May you all become one choir, so that you have agreement and concord, and become imitators of God, and in unity and with one voice sing to God the Father through Jesus Christ. Thus He will hear you and will recognise you by your good works as members of His Son.

Each of us can discuss God inasmuch as he has known the grace of the Holy Spirit; for how can we think of or discuss what we haven't seen, or haven't heard of, or don't know? The saints say that they have seen God, but there are people who say that there is no God. Clearly, they say this because they haven't known God, but this does not at all mean that He is not. The saints speak of that which they have truly seen and know.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

On Thursday we commemorate the Beheading of the Holy and Glorious Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist John. The last of the prophets, he prepared the way for Jesus Christ, recognising and baptising Him in the desert where he was calling people to repentance. He paid for his faithfulness with his life when he was beheaded for criticising the ruler Herod.

The day of his death is kept as a strict fast day.



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

Can you explain why we don't use musical instruments in the Orthodox Church? Would it not liven up our worship to introduce a few guitars or drums? I thought that the Scriptures told us to praise the Lord with trumpets and harp!

Although instruments such as these were used in Old Testament worship, from the beginning of the Church they have not been used. Instead of musical instruments, it is the human voice – and the human person – who is the primary instrument for worshipping God. Saint John Chrysostom wrote in the fourth century:

David formerly sang songs, also today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings, the Church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety. Here there is no need for the cithara, or for stretched strings, or for the plectrum, or for art, or for any instrument; but, if you like, you may yourself become a cithara, mortifying the members of the flesh and making a full harmony of mind and body. For when the flesh no longer lusts against the Spirit, but has submitted to its orders and has been led at length into the best and most admirable path, then will you create a spiritual melody

In the Orthodox understanding of worship we do not seek to "liven things up" but rather to quieten our minds and our hearts so that we are able to encounter God. Worship is not an emotional experience, much less entertainment. Rather, it is encountering the reality of God who is beyond all our thoughts and emotions.

The human body has a crucial role to play in this, and the human voice is a far more subtle musical instrument than any guitar. In worship we seek to leave behind the noisy sounds of the outside world, and the unruly voices of our own thoughts and passions. We are aided in this, not by artificial instruments but by our human bodies, the human voice and the wisdom and subtlety of a sacred musical tradition that can touch and transform us at a deep and profound level.