

Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God.

Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is illumined and enlightened by His inexpressible light.

It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and so not confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without cease day and night.

For we do not only have to withdraw to pray, and suddenly turn our minds towards God.

No, even while we are busy among the needy, either with the care of the poor or with other concerns, or useful good works – into their very midst we should also bring our desire for and remembrance of God, so that seasoned, as it were, with the love of God they may provide a most acceptable offering for the Lord of all men.

Saint John Chrysostom

Sunday 9 December 2012 is the Twentieth Seventh Sunday after Pentecost and the Tenth Sunday of Luke

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: Galatians 4:22-27

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When you went down to death, O immortal life, then you slew Hades with the lightning flash of your Godhead; but when from the depths below the earth you raised the dead, all the Powers above the heavens cried out: 'Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to you!'

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Mark 8:11-21

Holy Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, and Eustratus; Thomas the Righteous of Bithynia

Tuesday: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-4; Mark 8:22-26

Daniel the Stylite of Constantinople; Luke the New Stylite of Chalcedon

Wednesday: John 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:8-19; John 10:9-16

Spyridon the Wonderworker of Trymithous; John of Zichna

Thursday: Titus 1:5-14; Mark 9:10-15

Holy Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius, and Orestes of Greater Armenia

Friday: Titus 1:15-16; 2:1-10; Mark 9:33-41

Holy Martyrs Thyrsus, Leucius, and Callinicus of Asia Minor, and Philemon, Apollonius, and Arian of Alexandria

Saturday: 2 Timothy 1:8-18; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5

Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyricum; The Martyr Susannah the Deaconess



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

9 December 2012

Standing up straight

Today, on the Twenty Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, we hear Saint Luke's account of how Jesus Christ heals 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 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," 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. And, while the Church encourages us to a serious asceticism, such discipline is not meant to kill our spirits, but rather exists to help us recover a genuine and deep-rooted freedom.



The glory of God is the human person fully alive.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons

Different forms of the Cross

As the central Christian symbol, it is not really surprising that the symbolism of the Cross should have taken on many different forms. As the Church spread different cultures developed different ways of depicting the Cross. Sometimes pre-Christian cross-like symbols were turned into Crosses. And, while the various forms of the Cross that developed spoke primarily of the victory of Christ, they also acquired other secondary meanings. Sometimes different symbols were also combined within one image of the Cross. These are only a few of the more common forms of the Cross that we are likely to see:



The **Greek Cross** is probably the oldest form of the Cross that was used. The equal length of its arms was probably seen as having a more perfect form and expressing a symmetry and harmony that is brought about by Christ's victory over death.



The **Latin Cross** is the most common Cross in Western countries and probably began to be used in Rome in the second or third centuries. The bottom arm is longer than the other three.



The **Three-barred Cross** existed early on in Byzantium but became more common in Slavic countries and is sometimes referred to as the Russian Cross. Its three bars represent the Holy Trinity, and the sloping bottom bar is a reminder of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus and of the last judgment that we too will face.



The **Celtic Cross** developed in Celtic countries. The arms of the Cross are entwined in a circle which represents eternity.



The **Apostles' Cross** (sometimes called the Budded Cross) has three circles or disks at the end of each arm, representing the Holy Trinity. The twelve circles together are also seen as representing the twelve Apostles.

In addition we often see the following symbols that are sometimes used together with the Cross:



The **Chi Rho symbol** is formed by superimposing the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ. Like the Cross, it invokes the death and resurrection of Christ and His victory over death.



Jesus Christ Conquers. This is a Greek Cross with the abbreviated Greek words for Jesus Christ. The letters NIKA are translated victor or conqueror.



Alpha and Omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, signifying that Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all things (Rev. 22:13).

The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

The Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos

Today is 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. In the Conception of the Mother of God we see not only the answer to their prayers, but also the coming fulfillment of humanity's longing for the Saviour whose birth with will celebrate at Christmas.

Since the fall of humanity God had been preparing the way for the Incarnation of Christ who would come to save us. 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.

Note: We are sometimes asked whether Orthodox Christians believe in the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. This is a Roman Catholic doctrine that was only promulgated in the nineteenth century and which holds that by a special act of God at the moment of her conception the Holy Theotokos was exempted from the stain of original sin. The Orthodox Church is quite clear about the purity and holiness of the Theotokos. However, we do not see the need to exempt her from the effects of original sin because we do not see original sin as a stain that we inherit involving personal guilt. She shares fully in our human condition that is the result of Adam's fall, yet she remained pure and without personal sin.



O Adam and Eve, lay aside your sorrow,
Behold a barren womb today wondrously
bears fruit:
The Mother of our Joy!

O Father Abraham and all the patriarchs,
Rejoice greatly, seeing your seed blossom:
The Mother of our God!

Rejoice, O Anna! Joachim, rejoice!
Today in wondrous manner you bear to the
world
The fruit of grace and salvation!

O choir of prophets, rejoice exceedingly!
For behold, today Anna bears the holy fruit
You foretold to us.

Rejoice, all nations!
The barren Anna conceives the fruit of her
womb;
By persevering in hope, she bears our life!

Rejoice, O ends of the earth!
Behold the barren mother conceives her
Who without human seed will bear the
Creator of all!

Today a royal robe of purple and fine linen
Is woven from the loins of David.
The mystical flower of Jesse is blossoming
From which comes Christ our God, the
Saviour of our souls.

From Matins for the Feast of the
Conception of the Theotokos