

When you come out of church, do not begin to be distracted toward empty and useless matters, lest the devil come and find you occupied with them. It is like when a crow finds on the plain a grain of wheat, before it has been covered with earth, and picks it up and flies off. The devil removes the memory of these words of catechetical lectures from your hearts, and you find yourselves empty and deprived of beneficial teaching.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian



16 October is the Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

Epistle: Titus 3:8-15

Gospel: Luke 8:5-15

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

From on high didst Thou descend, O Compassionate One; to burial of three days hast Thou submitted that Thou mightest free us from our passions. O our Life and Resurrection, Lord, glory be to Thee.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the creator most constant: O despise not the voices of those who have sinned; but be quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession and speed thou to make supplication, O thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honour thee

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 17 October: Romans 9:18-33; Luke 9:18-22
Prophet Hosea; Martyrs Cosmas & Damian of Arabia

Tuesday, 18 October: Colossians 4:5-11, 14-18; Luke 10:16-21
Luke the Evangelist; Martyr Marinus the Elder

Wednesday, 19 October: Acts 2:14-21; Luke 9:44-50
Prophet Joel; Martyr Varys

Thursday, 20 October: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Luke 9:49-56
Great Martyr Artemius; Gerasimus of Cephalonia

Friday, 21 October: 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Luke 10:1-15
Hilarion the Great; Christodoulos, Wonderworker of Patmos

Saturday, 22 October: 1 Corinthians 15:39-45; Luke 7:1-10
Abercius of Hierapolis; 7 Youths of Ephesus



Evangelion

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Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

Preparing our Hearts for the Gospel

In today's Gospel we hear the parable of the Sower in which Jesus Christ recounts how a farmer generously sowed his seed on the ground. However, not all of the ground received it equally well. The seed that fell onto the road was trampled on or eaten by the birds. The seed that fell on rocky ground did not get enough nourishment and withered. The seed that grew up among thorns got choked by them. Only the seed that fell onto good ground grew well and bore fruit.

This parable is clearly concerned with our own lives. As Jesus tells us, the seed is the word of God, which God generously gives to all who will receive it. But not all people receive it equally well. Some barely pay attention to it before the devil snatches it away, while others receive it but soon give up because they become distracted by worries or the pleasures of life. But there are also others who "hear the word and hold it in a good and generous heart, and bear fruit with perseverance."

Here Jesus challenges us on how we receive the word of God. God speaks to all of us, but we do not all hear and respond to Him equally well. Sometimes this is because of the circumstances of our lives that block Him out, but we need to be aware that we can also choose to cultivate the soil of our own hearts so that we are better able to hear and receive Him. Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes:

"In these things, we must be like skillful farmers who patiently cleared away the thorns and uprooted whatever is hurtful, and then we scatter the seed in clean furrows."

As we listen to this parable, we should look at our own lives and ask ourselves: What is it that stops me from recognising and receiving God's presence in my life? And what can I do to prepare my own life to receive God's word?

He is truly the Sower of all that is good, and we are His farm. The whole harvest of spiritual fruits is by Him and from Him. He taught us this when He said, "Without me you can do nothing."

Saint Cyril of Alexandria



On the Importance of Harmony with Our Neighbours

by Saint Gregory Dialogos

Those that are at variance are to be admonished to know most certainly that, in whatever virtues they may abound, they can by no means become spiritual if they neglect becoming united to their neighbours by concord.

For it is written, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace* (Gal. 5:22). He then that has no care to keep peace refuses to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Hence Paul says, *Whereas there is among you envying and strife, are ye not carnal* (1 Cor. 3:3)? Hence again he says also, *Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord* (Heb. 12:14).

Hence again he admonishes, saying, *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling* (Eph. 4:3-4). The one hope of our calling, therefore, is never reached, if we run not to it with a mind at one with our neighbours.

But it is often the case that some, by being proud of some gifts that they especially partake of, lose the greater gift of concord; as it may be if one who subdues the flesh more than others by bridling of his appetite should scorn to be in concord with those whom he surpasses in abstinence.

But whoso separates abstinence from concord, let him consider the admonition of the Psalmist, *Praise him with timbrel and chorus* (Ps. 150:4). For in the timbrel a dry and beaten skin resounds, but in the chorus voices are associated in concord. Whosoever then afflicts his body, but forsakes concord, praises God indeed with timbrel, but praises Him not with chorus.

Often, however, when superior knowledge lifts up some, it disjoins them from the society of other men; and it is as though the more wise they are, the less wise are they as to the virtue of concord.

... of such it is rightly said through James, *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable* (James 3:14, 15, 17). Pure, that is to say, because its ideas are chaste; and also peaceable, because it in no wise through elation disjoins itself from the society of neighbours.



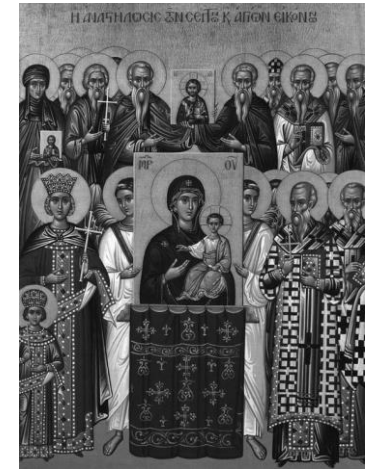
On Tuesday we commemorate the Holy Apostle and Evangelist, **Saint Luke**. He was a physician from Antioch and the disciple and travelling companion of the Apostle Paul. Thanks to him we not only have the Gospel which bears his name, but also the Acts of the Apostles which describe the growth of the early Church. Saint Luke lived some eighty six years and died as a martyr. His emblem is the calf, the third symbolic beast mentioned in Ezekiel (1:10), which is a symbol of Christ's sacrificial and priestly office. The Church also remembers him as the first iconographer who painted an image of the Holy Virgin and for this reason he is honoured as the patron of iconographers.

The Sunday of the Seventh Ecumenical Council

Today, on the Sunday that falls immediately after the eleventh of October, we commemorate the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. This council was convoked by the Empress Irene and met at Nicaea in 787, with Patriarch Tarasios presiding.

The council was called to put an end the iconoclastic heresy which was threatening to divide the Church. The council Fathers established the veneration of icons as basic to the belief and spirituality of the Church. Many of the Fathers of this council were to die as confessors and martyrs during the second iconoclastic controversy in the following century.

In defending the veneration of icons, the Fathers of the council were defending the integrity of the Church's faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God. For, as Saint John of Damascus insisted, if Jesus Christ has truly become human and has shared our material life, then it is most appropriate to depict and venerate His image and that of His saints.



You are greatly glorified, O Christ our God, who established our Fathers as luminaries upon the earth, and through them led us all to the true Faith. O Most compassionate, glory to You.

Apolytikion of the Seventh Ecumenical Council



Let us plant ourselves upon the rock of faith and the Tradition of the Church, removing not the landmarks set by our holy Fathers, nor giving room to those who are anxious to introduce novelties and to undermine the structure of God's holy ecumenical and apostolic Church. For if everyone were allowed a free hand, little by little the entire Body of the Church would be destroyed.

Saint John of Damascus