



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

5 March 2017

Let us therefore follow one and the same path, Christ's commandments, which elevate us to heaven and to God.

Even though the word shows us many paths and many ways for people to reach the kingdom of heaven, these paths are not, in fact, many, but one, though they're divided into many, according to each person's ability and disposition.

While we may begin from many and varied works and actions, just as travelers depart from different places and many cities, the destination we are attempting to reach is the same: the kingdom of heaven.

The actions and ways of godly men must be understood as spiritual virtues.

Those who begin to walk in them must head towards one goal, just as those who come from various countries and places come together, as we have said, to one city, the kingdom of heaven, where, together, they will become worthy to reign with Christ and become subjects of one King, our God and Father.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

5 March is the Sunday of Orthodoxy

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Having learned the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection from the Angel, and having cast off the ancestral condemnation, the women disciples of the Lord spake to the Apostles exultantly: Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world.

Apolytikion of Sunday of Orthodoxy:

Christ our God, begging forgiveness of our sins, we venerate Your Pure Image, O Good One. Of your own will you condescended to ascend upon the Cross in the flesh and deliver those You created from the bondage of the enemy. Wherefore, thankfully, we cry out, "When You came to save the world, Your filled all things with joy, O Our Savior."

Seasonal Kontakion:

To you, Theotokos, invincible Defender, having been delivered from peril, I, your city, dedicate the victory festival as a thank offering. In your irresistible might, keep me safe from all trials, that I may call out to you: "Hail, unwedded bride!"

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 6 March: Isaiah 4:2-5:7; Genesis 3:21-4:7; Proverbs 3:34-4:22
2nd Monday of Lent; 42 Martyrs of Amorion in Phrygia; Finding the Precious Cross by St. Helen; Hesybios the Wonderworker

Tuesday, 7 March: Isaiah 5:7-16; Genesis 4:8-15; Proverbs 5:1-15
2nd Tuesday of Lent; Holy Martyred Bishops of Cherson: Basileus, Ephraim, Eugene, Capito, Aetherius, Agathodorus, & Elpidius

Wednesday, 8 March: Isaiah 5:16-25; Genesis 4:16-26; Proverbs 5:15-6:3
2nd Wednesday of Lent; Theophylact the Confessor, Bishop of Nicomedia;

Thursday, 9 March: Luke 21:12-19; Hebrews 12:1-10; Matthew 20:1-16
The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia; Caesarios the Righteous

Friday, 10 March: Isaiah 7:1-14; Genesis 5:32-6:8; Proverbs 6:20-7:1
2nd Friday of Lent; Quadratus the Martyr & Companions; Anastasia of Alexandria

Saturday, 11 March: Hebrews 3:12-16; Mark 1:35-44
Second Saturday of Lent; Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem; Theodora the Righteous

You Will See Heaven Opened

Today, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we hear of the calling of Philip and Nathanael, and particularly of Jesus' encounter with Nathanael. Nathanael initially doubted Philip's report that he had found the Messiah. However, it was his personal encounter with Jesus Christ that convinced him that he had indeed truly found the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken.

This encounter shows us that it is only by a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that we will truly be able to see Him for who He is. However, such encounters do not usually just happen. While God can break through our defences and come to us expectedly, the reality is that our spiritual sight is often dulled so that we do not recognise the many ways in which He does come to us. Moreover, He comes to us in a particular way in the Divine Liturgy, but to what extent do we truly recognise His presence and respond to Him appropriately?



Recognising the Lord when He comes is not simply about acknowledging Him intellectually, important though this is. Rather, it is about developing the inner eye of the heart that Saint Paul speaks of when he prays,

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you. (Ephesians 1:17-18)

If we truly want to see God in this way, then we need to be prepared to purify our hearts, which is the purpose of this Lenten season. By reigning in our desires, cutting down on distractions, and spending more time with Him, we can learn to quiet our minds so that we become more receptive to the many ways in which God comes to us.

Sight will suffice for faith. All you need to do is talk with Him, and you will be all the more ready to confess and say without hesitation that He is indeed the expected One. But we must also believe that there was a divine and ineffable grace flowing from the words of our Saviour that proved alluring for the souls of its hearers... For since His word is mighty in power, it is also efficacious to persuade.

Saint Cyril of Alexandria

Death, Dying, and Eternal Life

A Series on the Orthodox Understanding of the Life of the Age to Come

We have seen that, although death is not part of God's original intention for the world and Jesus Christ has conquered death, we nevertheless still have to die. Our earthly life is a preparation for death or, better, for our rebirth into eternal life. You may have noticed that the saints are usually commemorated on the date of their death and the reason for this is precisely because it is their death that marks their rebirth into the life of the Kingdom of God.

In the words of Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, "Death is a great mystery. It is the birth of the human person from transient life into eternity." While there is much speculation about what happens to the soul after death, it is dangerous to try and specify this too precisely. However,

death does involve the parting of the soul and the body and the Church has traditionally taught that for three days after death souls remain close to the earth and visit those places that they were associated with. Moreover, Christians have always also paid particular attention to assisting the deceased by their prayers and by memorial services. We accompany the souls of the departed by our prayers as they are born into eternal life.



The body of the deceased decomposes after death. It returns to the earth from which it was formed but it is not

lost, for it awaits the last judgment when all the dead will be raised and it will face the righteous Judge. However, in the meantime, the souls of the departed ascend to God to face a sort of preliminary personal judgment, after which the souls of the righteous are taken to the threshold of Paradise to await the general resurrection and the final judgment.

The souls of the deceased do not lose their personality at death; they continue to live, but in an intermediate state, awaiting the final coming of Christ and the consummation of all things. They do not lose their ability to think or to feel, and the way they lived in this life continues to be imprinted on them. This is why the Church's tradition generally teaches that repentance is no longer possible after death. Nevertheless, it also encourages us to pray for all the deceased as they face the awesome judgment seat of God.

A Prayer for the Departed

Christ our eternal King and God, You have destroyed death and the devil by Your Cross and have restored man to life by Your Resurrection; give rest, Lord, to the soul of Your servant (name) who has fallen asleep, in Your Kingdom, where there is no pain, sorrow or suffering. In Your goodness and love for all men, pardon all the sins he/she has committed in thought word or deed, for there is no man or woman who lives and sins not, You only are without sin.

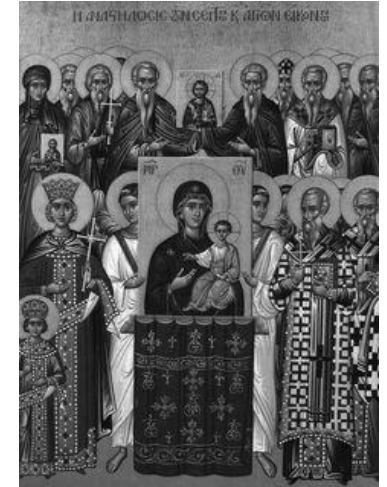
For You are the Resurrection, the Life, and Repose of Your servant (name), departed this life, O Christ our God; and to You do we send up glory with Your Eternal Father and Your All-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit; both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Today, on the first Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate the victory of Orthodoxy over the heresy of iconoclasm. In the eighth century the Church had been torn apart by those who objected to the veneration of icons, and in 787 the Second Council of Nicaea responded by affirming the role of icons in the Church, stating that "Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype." The Council distinguished between the worship that is due to God alone, and the veneration that we give to icons, and stated that when we venerate an icon we are really venerating the reality for which it stands.

Even after the Council, iconoclasm persisted until in 844 Empress Theodora established Orthodoxy anew with a solemn procession and veneration of icons on the first Sunday of Lent. This was the beginning today's feast and celebrates the victory of true doctrine over heresy.

The triumph of Orthodoxy that we celebrate today is integrally related to the earlier struggle for the Orthodox faith, for what was at stake was not simply the validity of venerating icons, but the very reality of the Incarnation of Christ that the Church had struggled to profess in earlier centuries. Because God had become fully human in Jesus Christ, matter itself had been sanctified and had become a suitable medium for portraying His Image. As Saint John of Damascus wrote "If you have understood that the Incorporeal One became man for you, then it is evident that you can portray His human image."



The grace of truth has shone forth upon us; the mysteries darkly prefigured in the times of old have now been openly fulfilled. For behold, the Church is clothed in a beauty that surpasses all things earthly, through the icon of the incarnate Christ that was foreshadowed by the ark of testimony. This is the safeguard of the Orthodox faith; for if we hold fast to the icon of the Saviour whom we worship, we shall not go astray. Let all who do not share this faith be covered in shame; but we shall glory in the icon of the Word made flesh, which we venerate but worship not as an idol. So let us kiss it, and with all the faithful cry aloud: O God, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.

From Vespers for the Sunday of Orthodoxy