

Free Indeed!

St. Joseph the All-Comely Orthodox Texas Prison Ministry Newsletter

Number 15 May 23/June 5, 2021

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed. John 8:36

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http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/newsletter-015_2021-06-02.doc http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/newsletter-015_2021-06-02.pdf
http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/newsletter-015_2021-06-02.html

Note: With God helping us, we will send many newsletters to all those we minister to in prison. We aim to send a newsletter at least twice each month. This is the 15th sent to 80 souls. Those who wish to contribute to our material needs in our ministry to Orthodox Christians may help us with donations at <http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.html>

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NOTE: Fr. David manages our ministry's distribution of Orthodox books, church calendars, icons, and service texts. Contact him if you need anything.

Ascension of Christ. Questions¹

Don't cheat! Try to answer the questions. Some of the articles in the newsletter may help you. The answers are at the end. No peeking!

This will help with the questions: the Scripture readings for the liturgy are Mark 16:9-20, Acts 1:1-12

QUESTION 1. What significance does the event of the Ascension of Jesus Christ have for the Christian? We should understand why we celebrate any feast and its inner meaning.

QUESTION 2. There is an important account of the Ascension in the scriptures that is not in the Gospels. Where is it? The story involves angels. How? Describe how a cloud was involved.

QUESTION 3. In the gospel reading for liturgy on the Ascension, two gifts are mentioned by Christ. One is given, and one is promised. What are they? Comment on their importance and meaning for a Christian.

QUESTION 4. From which mountain did Christ ascend? How will this mountain be involved in another cataclysmic event?

QUESTION 5. There is a significant occurrence in the Ascension story that can only be understood in the context of the church and the absolute need for the apostolic succession of bishops and priests. This occurrence, properly understood, should cause everyone who trusts his own interpretation of the bible outside of the context of a visible, authoritative

and dogmatic church to flee from his false, individual understanding and seek out the church.

What is this occurrence? Comment on it, and try to specify other scriptures which point out or support this critical Christian teaching.

QUESTION 6. When is Ascension celebrated? Discuss the significance of the number of days after Pascha that Ascension is celebrated.

QUESTION 7. What commemoration is the day before Ascension? Explain.

QUESTION 8. How long is the feast of the Ascension?

QUESTION 10. Detail the differences between the services of the Ascension and those of a "regular" Sunday.

QUESTION 11. Detail the differences between the services of the Ascension and those of a "regular" weekday.

http://www.orthodox.net/questions/ascension_1.html &
http://www.orthodox.net/questions/ascension_1.doc

Prison Ministry News

Fr. David has been busy making or trying to make pastoral visits. There are a lot of roadblocks. Fr Seraphim has not been as diligent but is trying to visit two prisons in the Gatesville area. We plan to have residents on parole in the new property by at least September. We have a strong possibility that a single Orthodox man is willing to move there to be a

permanent resident. We will keep you posted. We appreciate your prayers because we kind of are doing all of this by the "seat of our pants." Sometimes it's hard to bring together material for the newsletter, but it's easier if you ask questions.

A word from Fr David

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Christ is Risen!

God save and protect you! The last few months have been filled with a constant hum of activity. Serving as a priest during Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha; continued efforts to resume Orthodox study groups in TDCJ; responding to a large increase in ministry correspondence and resource requests (a good thing- keep writing and patiently waiting!); and traveling to serve at a few other parishes when needed- all has kept me busy. I've also been making a few pastoral visits to different prisons.

Update on the restart of our classes and visits:

I'm still getting mixed messages at different prison units. Some are allowing pastoral visits, and others are not; some are making room for our Orthodox classes on the schedule. Others say they can't accommodate us yet as a secondary program due to the number and size of the primary groups that are first in line. I am regularly checking in with various chaplains to remind and make a request. May God grant every good petition! Pray that we can see each other again soon... And send in I-60's asking for our Orthodox class to resume if you are at a unit that formerly had one!

Note: If your unit didn't have an Eastern Orthodox Christian program in the past, but you'd like to have one -

even if just once a month or even a quarter, depending on our availability as priests - then spread the word and get at least 4 or 5 **serious** inquirers to send I-60's along with yours, and let me know when these are on the chaplain's desk. From there, we will see what we can do with God's help.

Last week, my family and I made a pilgrimage to... California! That might sound strange, but in fact, we stayed at the beautiful and sacred Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring Greek Orthodox Convent in Dunlap, CA, in the Sierra Nevadas, with the blessing of Abbess Markella, who leads the sisterhood there. This is one of the monasteries established by Elder Ephraim of Arizona of blessed memory. The monastery is located just 30 minutes from the entrance to King's Canyon / Sequoia National Park, which we enjoyed visiting twice (glory to God for His wondrous creation!). We also attended the Sunday Divine Liturgy at Holy Virgin Cathedral, "Joy of All Who Sorrow," in San Francisco, which St. John Maximovitch built and served in. His holy relics are preserved there, and so we were able to venerate him and ask his holy prayers. I remembered you all, the imprisoned and your families, asking St. John to intercede with Christ God on your behalf.

I'll close for now, with prayer for your health and salvation in body and soul! Pray for us. With love in the Risen Lord, Fr. David

St. Paisios of Mount Athos - On Acceptance of Injustice

Spiritual Counsels, Vol. III, Excerpts from Pages 79-89

The Right Attitude Towards Injustice

Nun: Geronda (Elder), when I am wronged, my heart becomes hardened.

St. Paisios: For your heart not to be hardened, you must never think that someone else is at fault, or how much that person is at fault, but

rather, how much you are at fault. You see, when people are at odds with one another, each of them thinks that he is in the right, and each thinks that he is entitled to more rights than the other person, and so they are constantly in disagreement. For example, they go to the police, and each one says, "The other fellow beat me," without revealing how much he himself beat the other, and he presses charges.

If we only remembered that Christ suffered the greatest injustice of all, then we would be ready to accept with joy every injustice done to us. Though God, He descended to earth out of infinite love and accepted to be confined in the womb of the Panaghia ("All-Holy," i.e., Mother of God) for nine months. Then He lived quietly for thirty years. From the age of fifteen to thirty, He worked as a carpenter among the Jews. Even the tools used in those days were very rudimentary and required hard work to transform rough pieces of wood into useful furniture. It is difficult for us to imagine how difficult the work of a carpenter was in those days. And after that, Jesus endured three years of hardships, wandering around barefoot and preaching. He healed the sick, restored the sight of blind people with spittle and clay, and they still wanted Him to show them signs and miracles. He cast out demons from the possessed, but unfortunately, the ungrateful people claimed that He Himself was possessed by a demon! And while so many had spoken and prophesied about Him, and He had performed so many miracles, in the end, He was mocked and crucified.

This is why those who have suffered injustice are God's most beloved children. As wronged people, they hold the wronged Christ himself in their heart, and they rejoice in exile or in prison as if they are in Paradise, because where there is Christ, there is Paradise.

— Geronda, is it possible for someone to bear too heavy a burden?
— God does not allow a burden that is beyond our strength. Indiscreet people place unbearably heavy burdens on others. The Benevolent God often allows good people to suffer at the hands of evil people so that they can gather blessings for Heaven.
— Geronda, is complaining related to ingratitude?
— Yes. It is quite possible for someone to be unaware of the care being provided for him and complain about being wronged and treated unfairly. If he is not vigilant with himself, when he makes a mistake and people advise him to be careful, he may very easily imagine himself wronged by them and may even become impudent. For example, a Sister may use too much pesticide and burn the olive trees. Someone advises her accordingly, but instead of acknowledging her fault and asking for forgiveness, she feels wronged and begins to weep and complain. "They're unfair to me. If the locusts had come to destroy the trees, they wouldn't have said anything; but now that I am the cause of their destruction, they are shouting at me. Oh, my Lord, You are the only one Who understands me." And the tears continue to flow! She may even feel a sense of joy, imagining that she will be rewarded for enduring the injustice and express gratitude to Christ! This is a false understanding of the situation, a serious error.

The Joy in Accepting Injustice

— Geronda, when I gladly accept a reprimand for a mistake I have made, is what I am feeling pure?
— Look, if you cause damage, and people reprimand you, and you do not

complain but rather are happy, saying, "Glory be to God, I needed that reprimand," you have only half of the joy. But if you do not do any damage and are unjustly reprimanded, and you accept it with good thoughts, then you will have complete joy. I am not saying that you should seek unfair reprimands, because then the devil will entangle you in the sin of pride, but rather that you should accept injustice when it comes your way naturally, and be joyful in it.

There are four stages in confronting injustice. Let's say someone strikes you unjustly. If you are at the **first** stage, you strike back. If you are at the **second** stage, you feel very upset inside, but control yourself and do not speak. At the **third** stage, you are not agitated by the injustice. But at the **fourth** stage, you experience great joy, extraordinary spiritual gladness. When someone is wronged and proves that he was not at fault, he is justified and feels satisfied. In this case, he feels a worldly joy. But if he confronts the injustice spiritually, with good thoughts, and without trying to prove that he is innocent, he experiences spiritual joy. That's when he has divine consolation in his heart and is moving in the realm of doxology, glorifying God. Have you any idea what joy can be felt by a soul that is wronged but does not attempt to justify itself so that people will say, "Bravo" or "I am sorry"? It rejoices more in being wronged than in being justified. Those who reach this spiritual condition wish to thank the one who wronged them for the joy rendered in this life but also for the eternal life that has been secured. How different is the spiritual from the worldly!

In the spiritual life, things are in reverse: when you are left holding the short end of the stick, then you feel good; and when you give it to someone else, you feel badly. When you accept an injustice and are prepared to justify your neighbour, you accept Christ himself into your heart. Who was often wronged and maligned. It is then that Christ cannot be evicted from your heart and fills you with peace and gladness. Try it, my children, and experience this great joy! Learn to be happy with this spiritual joy, not with the worldly one, and every day it will be Pascha.

There is no greater joy than the joy you feel when you accept injustice. I wish everyone was unjust to me! I can honestly tell you that the sweetest spiritual joy I have experienced has been through accepting injustice. Do you know how much I rejoice when someone tells me that I am in error? "Glory be to Thee, O God," I say. "From this, I will get a reward, while if someone should call me a saint, I will be in debt." There is no sweeter thing than to endure injustice!

Treasure in Heaven

— Geronda, I'm upset when others don't think well of me.
— It is good that you told me! From now on, I will pray for others not to ever have a good opinion about you, for this will be to your benefit, my good child. God provides for people to wrong us or tell us some disturbing word that may help us redeem some debt of sin or to add to our treasure in Heaven. I cannot understand what you expect the spiritual life to be. You have not yet come to realise what is to your spiritual benefit, and you expect to be paid in full here; you leave nothing for Heaven. Why do you see things this way? What are you reading? Do you read the Evergetinos (monastic sayings)? Doesn't it tell you there what to do? Don't you read the Gospel? Read it every day.

A Spiritual Psalter of St. Ephraim the Syrian

Psalm 46 - To the Theotokos: I am not bold enough. Pray for me, O thou who art swift to help me.

O Virgin Lady and Mother of God, most blessed and graced by God, incline thine ear and hear my words, pronounced by my defiled and impure lips. Do not despise me, who am miserable; do not let me, thine unworthy servant, utterly perish; but use thy motherly prayers to heal my wretched soul, mercilessly shattered by my evil passions. The wicked enemy has

shattered it with the sins of sensuality and trampled it into dust. Therefore, filled with all manner of shame, I dare not; I have not the courage to ask the Lover of mankind, my God, forgiveness for the multitude of my sins, and healing for my incurable sores. For I have defiled the temple of my body; through my indecent desires I have impregnated it with a multitude

of impurities; and I have impaired all my senses with illicit acts. Thus I dare not reach up to heaven with my hands, defiled as they are with vile pursuits. Accordingly do I, who am miserable and a prodigal, submit myself to thine ineffable compassion, O immaculate Lady, for I have no other refuge but thee, who art mine only comfort and swift defender. I put my hope in thee: do not abandon me. Thy supplications are welcomed by thine

only-begotten Son; He rejoices at thine intercession and is quick to grant thy prayers for us. Despise me not who am so miserable; may the indecency of my acts not curtail thy boundless mercy, O Mother of God. Accept this my worthless supplication and by thy motherly prayers make it acceptable to thy Son and God, that He might vouchsafe me the heavenly kingdom as I praise and bless the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fr. Elpidios: The rubbish of the soul



We all like beauty and cleanliness. None of us likes the dirt and impurity in the rubbish. Besides, we all know that the impurity and the rubbish cause an outbreak of infection and diseases. For that reason, we frequently make sure to be clean and throw away the rubbish as often as we can.

But have you wondered what happens with the rubbish and impurity of the soul?

Rubbish and impurity of the soul are the various sins we commit every day. These sins, if they stay inside us, infect our soul and give power and the right to Satan to manipulate our life. If we commit a sin, we have to regret (repent) and apologize to God and appeal to our confessor to confess our sins and mistakes. This way, God forgives us and cleanses our soul from every dirt and impurity of the soul. This is a slightly edited transcript from the video: <https://youtu.be/Wk2-SvVU6DQ>

Psalm 47 - I dare not do so myself: pray for me, O ye saints. [Excerpt]

(Note: The prayer can be addressed to all the saints, as written, or you could include the name or names of particular saints- for example: "Pray, O saints of God Joseph the All-Comely and (your patron saint),...")

Pray, O saint(s) of God [name(s)], for my soul which is convulsed by all manner of passions. Inasmuch as you are able, help me, O saint(s) of God.

For I know that if you beseech God, the Lover of mankind, all will be granted you from the sea of His kindness. And, like our man-befriending God, so also when I, a sinner, beseech you, do not despise my supplication;

for I have not the boldness to pray to Him myself because of the multitude of my sins

Your role it is, O saint(s), to intercede for sinners; God's role it is to have mercy on those who despair.

O saint(s) of God, pray to the King on behalf of the prisoner. Pray to the Pastor on behalf of the sheep. Pray to Life on behalf of the corpse, that He might lend His hand to aid me and strengthen my humble soul in its feebleness. Amen.

The Heart of a Harlot

"Verka the whore" —a frightened whisper spread through the church among the elderly. Someone ran after the watchman, to get the girl out as quickly as possible. What a shame! A shameless harlot in the House of God! Someone tried to push her to the exit. It was there that Father Eugene came across them . . .

Father Eugene was not a saint. He was just a man. And, like all people, he made mistakes and did things that he was ashamed of.

But he tried, he tried very hard to be a good priest. And, believe me, he was. I know.

"You know, it's good that memory exists," he said. "You have already admitted what you did wrong, repented, got up, and dusted yourself off, but still, pictures from the past appear before your eyes. Where you were wrong, chickened out, behaved cowardly, went by someone else's grief. You know, just acting like a pig. This is necessary; it is useful to remember. So that one's conscience can sting you again and so that you'll never repeat it... I will never forget Verka ... I was young then, stupid."

It was a long time ago. In that small town, many called her Verka the whore. She did not have a father, and her drunken mother every now and then would change one drunken gentleman for another. As a result, one of them hit her on the head with a bottle. And Angela died – that was the name of her mother.

Verka stayed with her grandmother. Ever since school, she went along a crooked path. First she slept with some lustful, greasy men for dinner in a

cheap cafe, then for clothes. Sometimes they could give her some money. She also had a normal job. She sold meat in the market. But everyone knew that she could sell something else. When Verka was eighteen, her grandmother died. Her heart could not stand it, first aching for her daughter, then for her granddaughter. And she was left alone. Then she got pregnant. She herself didn't know who the father was.

"Verka told me that the news of her pregnancy struck her like lightning," Father Eugene recalled. "After all, she slept with everyone in a row, whoever did not lead a good life. What her mother did, so did she. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Only unlike her mother, she didn't drink. To the point of nausea, she had seen enough of drinking. And she also wanted to escape from loneliness. She just didn't know how. No one taught her how. She didn't even think about an abortion. Although the doctors immediately said: "Why do you need it?" And they didn't really want to deal with Verka, they shrunk away from her. But she didn't care what they said. She did not go to the examinations. She thought that her loneliness would finally end, she would love this child, and he would love her. And now everything in her life would become different. Not like her mother. Strange, isn't it? But even a "whore" needs love. Especially her. She is 'wanted' by everyone. And after all, Len, think, something inside her was pure, real, since she kept the baby. We, people, only see the shell ... But the Lord sees the heart."

But then, at the beginning of the story, no one knew. And one day Verka came to their church, drunk to oblivion. She was sobbing, smearing cheap mascara on her swollen face, and then she burst into some sinister, crazy laugh. And she was pushing a stroller in front of her, in which she was pushing a probably already three-month-old baby.

"Verka the whore" – a frightened whisper spread through the church among the elderly. Someone ran after the watchman – to get the girl out as quickly as possible. What a shame! A shameless harlot in the House of God! Someone tried to push her to the exit. It was there that Father Eugene came across them.

The young priest was out of sorts. At home, his daughter was ill, his matushka was anxious, they had fought badly. And then there's the christening, and he was late. And Verka the whore had brought another burden to him. Yes, he knew who she was.

Why Vera came to the church for the first time then, she herself did not understand. Probably because there was no place to go. She said almost nothing and still laughed and cried the same way. And she looked into Father Eugene's eyes, as if she was waiting for something that would at least slightly ease her unbearable pain. And there was a reason for her pain.

"I looked at her child then," the priest recalled, "and felt that my hair was standing on end. It was a real freak. Some kind of shapeless head, everything seemed to be out of place. Vera said that he was also blind. 'Why?' she asked me, tripping over her tongue. And the smells coming from her were so disgusting. 'What can I do?'"

Father Eugene fell silent and wiped his face with his hand several times. As if he wanted to wash away the haunting memory. But it didn't go away.

"And I ..." he spoke again and clutched his head. "Do you know what I did then? I knew about her adventures; the town was small. I said, 'What did you want? All your life you have sinned, now you must endure the consequences for your whole life !!!! Go sleep it off first, then we'll talk.' And I went about my business. Do you understand, Lena?! I went about my business! I passed her by."

"But isn't that the truth?" I asked. "Wasn't it for her sin?"

"Only the Lord knows if that was true or not!"

Vera then silently turned around and staggered away with her baby carriage. Heavily, slowly, as if crushed by a concrete slab. It was some kind of black hopelessness. She walked into emptiness. And some grandmother hissed behind her: "Look, what she came up with! The drunk decided to barge in here. And she laughs as well..." Stepan the watchman followed Verka on tiptoes. As if he were afraid that she would return. And they were driving her away from the church. Not only from the church – from life. There was no place for her in this life. None!

Father Eugene turned and looked after her. It seemed that he had said everything correctly, but everything inside him burned. "She won't come back," his heart whispered. "Well, that means she doesn't need God. Okay, it's time for me to go do the baptism."

"I didn't say anything to that hissing grandmother then, nor to Stepan, Len," Father Eugene almost moaned. "Why? I wasn't up to it. An official was having his big son baptized. A sponsor. I couldn't be late."

Father Eugene could not sleep that night. He tossed and turned in bed, got up, went into the kitchen, came back ...

"Why aren't you sleeping?" his matushka Irina muttered sleepily.

He told her. She paused, got up, set the kettle to boiling, and they sat for a long time in the kitchen. They recalled how her cousin "flew in" without a husband. And no matter how much they persuaded her, she had an abortion. But she had money and work. They remembered how their friend abandoned her daughter with hydrocephalus in the maternity hospital. "I

will not be the mother of a disabled girl!" she said then. Her husband was good, and their cup was full, but it didn't matter.

"And this little girl, a harlot, sank to the very bottom, and gave birth, and did not abandon her baby. I am not making excuses for her, but look – a loving, pure heart. You say, the child is very ill. It is clear that this hurts and scares her. So she drinks. And you go and talk to her about sin and reckoning. About "sleeping it off" ... First you should have warmed her heart, hugged her, pitied her, cried with her. She came for that. She grasped at a straw. And then, you see ... Eh, father ... Okay, let's go to bed, you have to serve early in the morning..."

In the morning, Father Eugene came to church long before the service. Lydia Ivanovna, one of the oldest parishioners, was already there. She was almost always in the church. She left later than everyone else, came earlier. And sometimes she stayed overnight – in a construction trailer. She had nothing to do at home after she lost her son and husband one by one. She barely survived it, and then Father Eugene saved her. But that is another story.

"Lydia Ivanovna, hello! Do you know Verka? You know..."

"Bless, Father. Who doesn't know her!"

"And where does she live, do you know?"

"I don't know where she lives, but right now she is sleeping at my house with her poor little Mishutka. I bought him food too."

"What?"

The day before not only Father Eugene had been watching Verka leave, thoughtfully. Lydia Ivanovna was also watching. She overheard their conversation by chance and went after the woman who was barely dragging her feet behind her stroller.

"Vera, Vera, wait!"

Verka stopped and looked at her angrily with dull eyes.

"What, have you come to talk about sins too? I already know that."

Lydia Ivanovna was silent, and then hugged this young woman, smelling of vodka, and began stroking her head, like she had once done to her son.

Verka first tried to escape, and then went limp and clung to Lydia Ivanovna. How she had always dreamed of snuggling up to her mother, but she did not hug her. Then she burst into tears, and sobbed, and sobbed. Like a child.

"He, what is he suffering for? It's because of me, right? Because of me? I wanted everything to be different. I wanted to change my life, to make him happy. To love him. And here he is, my Mishutka. The doctors say he won't last long. He eats from a syringe. He can't see. His face looks like it went through a meat grinder."

"You have already changed your life, little girl," whispered Lydia Ivanovna. "You just don't understand that yet. And love him, love him. He needs it. You need it too."

"Little girl" ... Even her mother did not call Verka that. And then everyone else just called her 'the whore'. She cried and cried ... and it seemed that it became easier for her.

Lydia Ivanovna invited Vera to her place. "We'll have tea, you'll rest, wash yourself." The old woman, *who herself had experienced inhuman grief*, felt that if she let her go now, she not only would not return to the church, but something terrible would happen.

Lydia Ivanovna quietly closed the door behind her. Father Eugene sat down next to Verka on the bed.

"Forgive me, Vera. Yesterday I said the wrong thing, not what was needed." Father's quiet words reached her.

Vera told him how she gave birth, heard a soft squeak, and it was as if the sun had risen for her. "Everything, everything will be fine now!" she thought.

And then there were the doctors' words about the fact that he was a freak, that he was doomed to die, someone even said something about an "unknown animal." And they didn't even want to show her her son. It never occurred to anyone that the "whore" would not abandon such a freak child.

She told how she rushed to the intensive care unit, but she was not allowed in: "Go home already. You gave birth here to this ... ". They didn't say anything about why he was that way. "You shouldn't have prowled around so much," and that was all.

"I was scared to look at him, it hurt. I didn't know how I could keep living. But how could I abandon him?! He was alive ... that just the way it was. I was the one to blame."

The doctors saw her off from the hospital in silence.

"Wow ... Who would have thought," the old midwife said suddenly. "Here they abandon healthy children. And she..."

Vera told how she drank from grief at home. For the first time in her life. She came to herself only when Mishutka was screaming from hunger. Her milk was gone, and she gave him a cheap mixture. He did not have the strength to suck, and she fed him from a syringe, as she had been taught in the hospital. He spit it up, and she fed him again. And so it went for hours. She didn't go out with him, she was afraid of people. She almost threw herself out of the window with her son. How could she keep living, and for what? But something stopped her.

— And I, Len, sat, listening to all of this, and it seemed to me that I had come across a miracle." said Father Eugene. "Here is a sinner in front of me, beaten, hardened, despised by all. We are so clean and decent. But all this outward layer is accidental, superficial. Under this mud is a heart, bright and kind. A brave heart. Who was not afraid to carry such a burden. She didn't think about having an abortion or leaving her Mishutka for a second. But no one expected it from her. How wrong we are about people, Len. How wrong we are! This is so scary! What a soul she has! Sick, but alive, and loving! And I said, "You sinned..." Oh Lord!"

"First love, and then teach." And Fr. Eugene also recalled the words of his old spiritual father from the Lavra: "First, love, see the image of God in a person, and then teach! Do you hear, son! Love! The very last sinner! Then your heart will tell you the right words, not official ones. We, priests, sometimes say something clever, spiritual, and go on our way—business demands. And we don't see the pain and grief of a person. We pass this pain by and forget it. And the man disappears. The soul is petrified. But he came to us as to Christ. Always remember this! God forbid that we pass by this grief, push it away. God forbid!"

The next day, several women from Father Eugene's church were cleaning up Verka's cluttered apartment. He told them everything. Someone brought an old baby cot, linen, sleepers. Matushka Irina gave her a baby carriage. They pitched in for diapers and food. Nurse Valentina Petrovna, a parishioner, came to visit Mishutka every other day. The girls from the choir ran to take him for a walk.

At first Verka just laid there and cried more and more. Then she began to come to her senses. For a long time she sat with her son in her arms, saying something to him. She kissed the blind eyes, the disfigured face. She caught his fleeting smile. It was scary for her, and good. Something unfamiliar and hot rolled up into her throat and made her heart beat. She was finally needed. And there was one whom she loved.

"Yes, everyone needs love." Father Eugene repeated.

There are no new temptations. Knowing the lives of the saints will teach us how to encounter any temptation.

Everyone should read the lives of the Saints, if possible, every day. A person familiar with the lives of the Saints in the church calendar (being *familiar* means that we not only *know* the lives but we *emulate* them according to our abilities and station in life, and we ask particular saints to

Mishutka died when he was ten months old. Early in the morning. In Verka's arms. When Valentina Petrovna came to see them at lunchtime, she was still sitting with him. She muttered something and kept kissing him on his eyes, his nose. They were barely able to take the small body from her.

The parish buried the boy. Verka was taken away by an ambulance. They all thought that she had lost her mind.

"But it was fine, after a month she got out." said Father Eugene. "First we settled her with my wife and me. We were still afraid that she would do something to herself. We took her to the church by the hand. We didn't leave her alone. And then she went home. She returned to the market. But she came to church and helped in the refectory. She ran to the grave every day, to the one who needed her. And to the one she needed. Sometimes she broke down and drank. Many things happened during this time. More than ten years passed. It's a long story."

"How is she now? I would like to see her."

"You've already seen her."

"Me?"

"Do you remember that last year you went to visit Father Dimitri in the village for a church feast? She treated you with her dumplings ... Why are your eyes so huge? That was Verka."

"I was remembering that woman. Healthy, beautiful, quiet. Peaceful. Yes, she was exactly peaceful. It was good to be next to her. Father Dimitri then boasted that Vera was their church cook and a better one could not be found in the whole diocese. She mentioned her husband, also quiet, silent. He name was Igor. He is the headman of the church. And they have three boys."

"Those are his children. He is a widower. Once he came to our parish and took a liking to Verka. She couldn't believe it for a long time. She considered herself dirty, a whore. And people were whispering to him: 'What are you doing, she . . . ' But he was stubborn, he did not listen to anyone. Now they have a family. He is silent, quiet, but God forbid that anyone look askance at his wife. And no one does. They forgot everything a long time ago.

Only I remember. And I am ashamed and hurt. I walked past Verka's grief then. And if it weren't for Lydia Ivanovna, what would have happened? It's scary to think of it, Len! Fearful! How easy it is to destroy a person. *Just by walking by*. But even the most lost sinner has a soul. It is necessary to see it, the soul. It is easy to ruin it, yes. But it is also easy to save it. Like Lydia Ivanovna. Just warm their heart. Cry together. Not looking at the outside, but at the heart. Do not be afraid to get dirty. Touch their heart with your heart. Love them. Love changes everything: life, the world, destiny. It can do anything. The main thing is not to push anyone away!" Source:

<https://russian-faith.com/heart-of-a-harlot-n4423>

Posted on February 25, 2021, <https://blog.obitel-minsk.com/2021/02/the-heart-of-a-harlot.html>

help us) will recognize the things that are happening in society today are not different or unique to our time. The only differences between our political and religious and moral problems and the ancients are that we

have more technology, and therefore, often much more pressure to submit and conform.

Of course, technology facilitates evil and good. Modern technology has caused many people to be very sleepy because they have access to constant entertainment that is mindless or even perverse. There is a continuous repetition of toxic ideas and heresies. It is possible for a person addicted to various passions and false ideas to almost continually submerge themselves in poison with electronics. The ancients did not have that problem. They were subject to temptations to do evil and perverse things and believe crazy things because their human nature was no different than our own; however, their temptations were not in the palm of their hand, or the Internet, or the 24-hour news cycle.

In many eras of human history, there has been an attempt, sometimes with great success, to persecute Christians and modify or even completely change the way they live, worship, and even think. *This is happening now.* The attempt to control the way Christians think and live is not something new. If we read the lives of the Saints carefully, we can see that there has always been pressure to believe according to the way the world is or whatever particular lies are currently being promoted as the truth. Things can also happen very fast because temptations can come like a whirlwind. If a person is not living a strong interior Christian life, their opinions can change rapidly in an imperceptible way. This can happen to you or to me! The only guard against indoctrination is an interior Christian life, fed by the grace of God and our reaction to His grace.

We are entering into a period when many Christians will fall away from the faith. There's already a mass apostasy that has been happening for many years, with people labeling as Christian things that are not remotely Christian, and espousing a faith that has absolutely no power or holiness in it. We should not kid ourselves and think that this is only happening outside of the church. There are people in the church who are busy being "woke," believing perverse ideas, and identifying themselves as the world wants them to identify. There are, lamentably, leaders in the Orthodox Church who are espousing theological and dogmatic heresies that make them more compatible with the heresies of the Pope and others outside of the church who profess some *apparent form* of Christianity. These ideas are popular even with secular and atheistic leaders because the church without power is equivalent to a church that does not believe in God.

Those who have been tricked into believing and teaching a false Christian ecclesiastical and dogmatic worldview have a weak interior life. They have very little prayer and a stronger belief in secular "wisdom" (including, supposed "science", which sometimes changes according to political and cultural whims and agendas) than Christian wisdom, of which they have very little knowledge. Reading the lives of the saints with intent will help provide this Christian wisdom, as well as, of course, reading the scriptures with intent and having a vigorous prayer life.

There is an apostasy that has the appearance of being new, a so-called "soft" apostasy that is happening among many Orthodox Christians (yes, "many," and perhaps in some areas a majority) and all who in any way believe in Jesus Christ, to deny their faith, to fit in or to not be persecuted, to keep a job, or fly on an airplane. Or even just to avoid being labeled by society or people they mistakenly esteem as hateful or non-inclusive or whatever other pejorative the world throws at weak people to cause them to comply.

Someone reading this may not believe me and may think that I'm just an extremist, a "Chicken Little" saying the sky is falling. That person does not know the lives of the Saints. The pressure to comply with anti-Christian and evil ideas and priorities while maintaining the appearance of Christian

belief is a constant theme throughout church history. The sky has fallen many times, and many times it was without warning.

We are called to be watchful. We are called to evaluate everything we encounter – events, ideas, rhetoric, behavior, ecumenical ideas and novel theological teaching, opinions of political leaders talking heads, and supposed experts – and see in those things that most of them have the appearance of life but are actually dead. These dead things are the rejection of Christian dogma and believing in a secular way, putting our hope in secular things, and modifying our faith and practices according to secular wisdom or pressure.

If you believe as I do that great temptations are coming for Christians, with tremendous pressure to change the way we live and think, and even to deny truth and dogmas, then you will be edified by what I am about to suggest. And even if you only believe me a little, it is beneficial to beg the saints to pray for us. They are the ones who fought the good fight and finished the course. They went through temptations similar to our own and immensely greater than our own. Some of them fell and sinned grievously and terribly and even apostatized and found their way back to holiness through repentance. They are our models, our standard of belief and behavior that we should strive to reach.

Everyone knows that if you are around people that believe and do certain things, you are likely to in some way adopt those beliefs and practices. Do not fool yourself! Even if you do not do certain things, being around them and not knowing or practicing the way of life will lead you to tacitly accept them, which is just as much an apostasy as if you were doing them. We should be "around" the saints by remembering them daily and asking their help, and reading their lives in marveling at how the grace of God worked in them through circumstances that are sometimes not very much different than our own.

We all have obsessions, and some of us have many obsessions that lead to sins, such as addictions and things that we cannot stop doing or thinking or saying. However, not all obsessions are bad.

We should be obsessed with showing love to our neighbor and our enemies.

We should be obsessed with daily prayer that is from the heart, when we give our tears if we have them, and at least our vigorous effort and blood to God.

We should be obsessed with grieving the time of apostasy we are in when the truth is called a lie and is called truth.

We should be obsessed with questioning whether or not our loved ones or we would still stand if a great temptation came upon us.

We should be obsessed with destroying within ourselves that lie that we and so many others have accepted so often that: *"it will not happen to us."* Many people have been caught unawares because they felt that some great temptation or struggle or difficulty would never happen to them, and then it came upon them, and they were at a loss.

And even if no temptation comes upon us personally, surely someone we know and love will be tempted terribly, and some will fall. **I am obsessed** with this idea, and therefore I pray every day to martyrs who had previously fallen. Some had fallen because they had apostatized by becoming Muslims, but some also had into some sexual depravity or murder, or just becoming secular. In most of the cases, their conscience tormented them, and God arranged things so that they could alleviate their conscience by making a witness.

I pray to these men and women because it's possible that I might fall into a snare, and I want them to be familiar with me and to beg the Lord on my behalf. I have started a series where I tell you of the various saints that I prayed to every day. Some of them are well-known, but most of them are

not. The world does not know them well, but God knows them and calls them by name, and they are in Paradise. I started making a list when I got a particular Synaxarion series that is very good (<https://sebastianpress.org/the-synaxarion-the-lives-of-the-saints-of-the-orthodox-church-complete-set/>). I recommend that everybody get it if they have three hundred bucks to spend. I started reading it in mid-September, and almost immediately started writing down the names of great confessors in martyrs and strugglers, most of whom previously had a great fall. I will send the list of the Saints to anybody who wants them. They are always on the Internet at the following link. <http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/saints-pray-for-us+former-apostates-sinners-secret-christians.docx> <http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/saints-pray-for-us+former-apostates-sinners-secret-christians.pdf>

That is a working document, as I am adding to it constantly. My goal is to eventually have a short life of every single one of the names. Anybody can look up their names and read the full life, or get them in the many published Synaxaria. I'm not trying just to retell their life, but to tell of their life in the light of the possibility that we could have great temptations, and

Prayer to the Saints. The Resurrection. Catechetical Letter 03

Why do Christians pray to the Saints? Describe their attitude and expectations in these prayers. Why is this prayer so misunderstood by non-Orthodox?

Whether they be Orthodox or not, all who profess Christ commonly ask one another to pray for them. It is a duty of Christians to pray for one another. This duty is easily seen in scripture. St Paul professes his intention to pray for his flock in every letter. James, the Brother of the Lord tells us: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

We will see that this instruction also helps explain why we ask those who have departed to pray for us – it is a very important verse. Christians live in the knowledge that those who have passed on are not dead or insensible. And since "God is the God of the living, and not the dead", they naturally turn to the Saints for intercession and place more confidence in their prayers than those fellow Christians who have not completed their earthly sojourn.

Jesus Christ came that we might have life. The church has always understood that all life comes from God, and the soul, which is created at the moment of conception, never ceases to exist after its creation. Death of the soul is not being blotted out of existence, but its separation from God – not a literal separation because, of course, the scripture teaches that God is everywhere – but in the presence of God, a sinner cannot endure the light. This is what we mean by separation from God.

The point is this: the soul remains aware, and can see and hear, and think and know and understand after the death of the body. At the consummation of all things, the soul will be reunited with the body. St Paul clearly teaches this, and the church has always understood it:

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1Th 4:15-17)

Let's return to the verse we quoted above, that "God is the God of the living and not the dead." This is an expression, directly from the lips of our Lord, that states that the soul will never cease to exist. It was a surprising and provocative statement to those He said it to, especially the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection. Jesus said it as part of His reply to

then we may need help from God to recover from a fall. I'm always thinking: "what can we learn the life of the saint that may save us?" That's why I also pray to the saints because their "effective and fervent prayer" will be heard by God, Who will increase my meager wisdom so that I can learn something from their life.

No one should consider themselves so powerful or with so much faith that they could never fall. We can, however, believe that there is no temptation that comes upon us that is too much if we have faith. The trick is, pursuing this faith, which is an active collaboration between our weak efforts in the grace of God. And even if there is a temptation that is too much for a season, the lives of the Saints show that God does not even abandon someone who apostatizes. There is a way back from everything. There is nothing too terrible that we can think or do that God will not forgive. There was no sin that we can commit that makes us incorrigible and not worth saving. All we need to do is beg the Lord to help us when we in the depths of our temptation, and He surely will.

the ridiculous example given to him, about the woman who had 7 husbands:

"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, (24) Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. (25) Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: (26) Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. (27) And last of all the woman died also. (28) Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. (29) Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. (30) For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (31) But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, (32) I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.** (33) And when the multitude heard this, **they were astonished at his doctrine.**" (Mat 22:23-33)

To this day, there are many still "astonished at His doctrine," even among Christians. The implications of the resurrection are not well understood by these people. Those who die in the flesh are not dead – their soul lives and is aware. The church has always understood this.

There are many who profess faith in Christ but have almost no knowledge of the intercession of the Saints, and even eschew this intimate knowledge and heavenly intercourse as blasphemy. There are several reasons for this, including prejudice, a lack of grounding in Christian Tradition, misunderstanding of Scripture, the abuses of Rome and reactions to those abuses, but the *primary reason is that they do not fully understand the resurrection, and its implications!*

The Saints are not asleep or "dead". Our Lord Himself told us clearly that "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*" (Mat 22:32). The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob (Cf. Mat 22:32) once appeared transfigured on a mountain, with two of his favored ones (Moses and Elias) appearing very much alive next to Him. This clearly shows that the "dead" are even more filled with knowledge and activity than the living, as the apostles Peter, James and John could not withstand the uncreated light which came forth from Christ, but Moses and Elijah basked in it. Therefore, the departed Saints have greater vision and knowledge and their intercessory boldness is greater for them without their bodies, than when they were in the flesh. This important understanding is elementary knowledge for the Church, but has passed from many of those outside of her.

A Christian has great reverence in approaching the Saints, since the Saints have been shown by God to be "more than conquerors". Of course, the word "saint" means "holy" and we are all called to be saints in the scripture (Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:2), but it is very clear that among Christians, some have "fought the good fight" more than others, and some have borne fruit more than others: "some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mat 13:23)

We are in awe of their exploits and recognize the grace of God clearly in their witness and struggle. This is also natural, even in the world. Men honor others who have performed great deeds, such as a brave general, or wise statesman. Since we are in awe of the Saints, we render them honor when we ask their intercession, even more so than we would honor a great man in the flesh. In every communication with the Saints, we see the light of Christ, and rejoice in it, and do it honor.

We know that prayer to the Saints, (or put in a way that is less offensive to those who do not live fully in the knowledge of the resurrection and the Saints, "*asking their intercession*") is pleasing to God, because of the witness of the Scriptures and the abundant experience of the church. Because we are assured that such prayers are pleasing, and because we recognize the great grace that God has bestowed upon His Saints, we have great confidence when we ask their intercessions.

"In invoking the intercession of the saints, the Church believes that the saints, who interceded with the Lord for the peace of the world and the stability of the holy churches of Christ while living, do not cease doing this in Christ's heavenly, triumphant Church, and listen to our entreaties in which we invoke them, and pray to the Lord, and become bearers of the grace and mercy of the Lord." St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, *Modern Orthodox Saints*, Vol. 7 by. Constantine Cavarnos

"We ought to have the most lively spiritual union with the heavenly inhabitants, with all the saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, prelates, venerable and righteous men, as they are all members of one single body, the Church of Christ, to which we sinners also belong, and the living Head of which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This is why we call upon them in prayer, converse with them, thank and praise them. It is urgently necessary for all Christians to be in union with them, if they desire to make Christian progress; for the saints are our friends, our guides to salvation, who pray and intercede for us." St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*.

Partially because they do not understand that the Saints are alive, conscious and active, those who eschew prayer to the Saints misinterpret the reverence Orthodox show to the saints. Many get stuck on the word "pray", thinking that this word only applies to God, and any other use of it should make them rend their clothes. This is, of course, a misunderstanding, brought about by centuries of sectarianism and prejudice. "To pray" is merely "to ask". We ask the Saints to intercede for us, and any examination of our writings and liturgical texts shows that we understand that worship is for God alone.

MAY 1 Holy New Martyrs Euthymius , Ignatius, and Akakius of the Skete of the Forerunner on Mount Athos.

These three new martyrs are all associated with Mount Athos and made their confessions in the same generation. Martyrs Euthymius and Ignatius were spiritual sons of the Elder Nicephorus of the Skete of the Forerunner, and they accomplished a glorious martyrdom before the Martyr Akakios knew anything about them. It is he whom we are especially taking note of.

Akakios had several Falls, but these did not prevent him from obtaining a glorious martyrdom and converse with all of the great Martyrs and confessors and holy ones in heaven. I think that he found his way back to repentance because he had an innate personal holiness. Even though he fell significantly by falling into apostasy, he did not wholly give up living the Christian Life and still had a moral compass. This is an essential lesson for us. We may fall considerably, but that does not mean we need to fall in

The abuses of Rome also had a deleterious effect on the Protestant understanding of prayer to the Saints. Rome became very corrupt after the schism, both morally and theologically. A doctrine of "superogatory works" was invented, and "indulgences" were sold. This false doctrine, perhaps more than any other abuse of Rome, has poisoned the understanding of Protestants regarding the Saints.

In very simple terms, this false doctrine is as follows: A certain amount of "good works" are supposedly needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us affix this as some arbitrary number, say 1000 points. The Saints far exceeded this number, and had "points to give". The poor sinners, such as you and me, who cannot attain to all these good works, may pay to be granted "indulgences", which increase our "point total". Although this explanation may seem silly and mocking, it is essentially the doctrine of Rome till this day. The original "Protestants" reacted quite rightly against this abuse, but they did not understand the correct view concerning the intercessions of the Saints, and over time, their disavowal of this Latin abuse became a caricature of itself, and most now spout almost mantra-like that a Christian "needs no mediator" save Jesus Christ, believing that the scripture they refer to ("*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim 2:5)) forbids prayer to the Saints.

It is ironic that those who refuse to ask the Saints to intercede for them on ideological grounds ask those who are still among the living, among their family and friends, to pray for them. This latter action is wholly correct, as fellow believers naturally want to pray for those they love. The prayer of the living, however, is not as powerful as the prayer of the Saints, as the Scripture tells us: "... *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" (James 5:16) Therefore, those who do not want to settle for "second best", and therefore pray "directly to God", actually DO settle for second best, when they ask their sinful companions, who are still struggling with their passions in the flesh, to pray for them, instead of asking those who have passed on and are more righteous.

There is much more, and the experience of the church bears this out. We are a living body, and therefore, God continues to reveal Himself, among and with His beloved. We have a comprehensive calendar of Saints, and remember them, and read about their exploits, and strive to emulate them. Of course, this is wholly scriptural, as Paul told his beloved flock:

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1Co 11:1)

<http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/catechetical-letter-03+prayer-to-the-saints-because-of-the-resurrection.doc>

<http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/catechetical-letter-03+prayer-to-the-saints-because-of-the-resurrection.pdf>

Reference: http://www.orthodox.net/questions/sunday_of_all_saints_1.html

other things as well! We may have done a bad thing, but that does not mean that we should do more terrible things!. The Christian life is not all or nothing. If a person sins, there is always the opportunity for repentance, and God will certainly help the one who sins and does not continue to sin or add more new sins.

Akakios's martyrdom also illustrates that there may be terrible things that have happened in our childhood, but they need not mark us forever. It is very hard to overcome temptations that have come from childhood. They may come to us because of abuse or neglect or the introduction into our lives of great sins when we were young, but we can overcome all of them. This bears repeating. A person may have certain behaviors because of childhood abuse or trauma or experiences, but if he can avoid falling

completely into the abyss of sin, by, for instance, being kind or avoiding fornication, or even the smallest good work, God will heal the heart of the person who wants to be healed.

Akakios was from a village near Thessalonica and was apprenticed at the tender age of nine to a cobbler. His master was cruel and beat him often. Even though this master was a Christian, he didn't act in any way like Christ, and finally, the boy ran away on Holy Friday. Two Muslim women comforted him, but their comfort also caused him, in his traumatized state, to convert to Islam. He was immediately circumcised and was put into service with a family of Turkish dignitaries. They treated him like an adopted son; however, when he reached eighteen, his mistress had lewd desires towards him. When she attempted to seduce him, he became like a second Joseph! Even though he had apostatized from his Savior and no doubt bore the guilt of that sin upon himself every day, he did not turn away from Christian morality.

Opposing a person in authority is a perilous thing to do. Look what happened to Joseph! Potiphar's wife accused him of what she was trying to do. This is the same thing that happened to Akakios. It would've been much easier for Akakios to give in to her advances because, after all, he had already apostatized, which is a much worse sin even than fornication. But this blessed man did not think in that way. *He did not add sin to sin.* The wife accused him to her husband, and he was driven from the house. These Turks actually did him a good turn because they could have just had him executed, and he was not ready to make his witness yet.

He went back home and, after a while, at the urging of his mother, he went to Mount Athos to make his confession there and live a life of penitence.

During the Turkish Yoke (when large parts of Orthodox territory were taken over by the Moslems), conversion to Islam and subsequent repentance regarding that conversion was a common thing. Sometimes people were forced into it, or sometimes it was something they said that was foolish, or sometimes they were fooled by kindness or something else that caused them to accept Islam. Probably, the vast majority of those Christians that accepted Islam remained in their apostasy for the rest of their days, but many young men found their way to Mount Athos. The majority of those young men remained on the mountain to the end of their days, living in repentance. The fathers always encouraged them to live a life of repentance and assured them that God would forgive them their

MAY 3, 1682 Holy New Martyr Ahmad (Christodoulous), the Calligrapher

Ahmad was from Constantinople and was born into a Muslim family. He was, of course, raised Muslim, and if he had a high school yearbook, his picture would *not* have had the inscription "most likely to become a Christian." He obtained a high social position in the Sultan's chancery as a calligrapher. He was, therefore, surrounded by luxury and privilege.

He had no Christian influences except, by the grace of God, he took a Christian slave as a concubine. God can turn evil into good. His slave was a Russian, and she went to church on feast days. Evidently, Ahmad was, despite his cultural bias, which considered Christians as slaves, a kind man who allowed his slave to go to church.

God can turn evil into good. His slave was a Russian, and she went to church on feast days. Evidently, despite his culturally inbred bias to consider Christians as slaves, Ahmad was a kind man in that he allowed his slave to go to church. His slave had come back from church one Tuesday after having eaten some prosphora, and Ahmad noticed that her mouth had a lovely fragrance. He asked about it, and it took a lot of urging, but finally, his slave told him what she had done.

Ahmad desired to see how the Christians received this bread, and to fulfill this desire, he took significant risks. He dressed in Christian clothing

apostasy, but some begged to make a final witness. This is what eventually happened with Akakios.

When he was on Mount Athos, he heard about the Glorious Martyrdom of Martyrs Euthymius and Ignatius. He wanted to go to the Skete to put himself under the direction of an elder and prepare himself to imitate them. This he did, but he was beset with another fall, a great spirit of cowardice, and left his elder and began to wander from Monastery to Monastery. Finally, he returned to the Skete and was put under the direction of Elder Akakios. The elder gave him obediences to complete many rigorous ascetical feats during the Great fast. The fathers would always test such a person who had stated that he wanted to go before the Moslems for martyrdom to see if his resolve was steadfast and strong. They eventually were sure Akakios had the resolve to become a martyr and sent him, together with the Elder Gregory, who had trained his predecessors, off the mountain and into a Turkish city to achieve his martyrdom.

Arriving in the city, he dressed as a Turkish sailor and went to the Vizier's Palace. There he threw his turban on the ground and trampled upon it, and publicly had confessed his return to the true Faith. This was an unmistakable sign to the Turks, and they immediately put him in prison. His captors began with flattery, but found him unshakeable, so they proceeded with various tortures, but by the grace of God, he did not weaken in his resolve. He was put back in prison and given a sentence of death. Gregory was able to bring him communion in prison, and on the 1st of May 1815, he went to his place of execution, showing no weakness whatsoever and indeed even telling the executioners to "strike me with courage to cut off my neck. Don't have any Mercy!"

Akakios had two great falls in his life, one of apostasy and the other of cowardice, but God delivered him from them both. It does not matter how many times we fall if we have the resolve to get up and repent. We must remember from the Saint's glorious life that even though he had fallen into apostasy, he did not abandon Christian morality.

Take that as a lesson! If you fall, do not fall in other ways! Struggle to find your way back according to whatever strength you have. If you require greater strength than you possess, God will provide it if you are struggling *according to your abilities* at all times.

Through the prayers of the holy new Martyrs Euthymius and Ignatius, and Akakios, who was inspired by their exploits and found grace to recover from his mistakes, may the Lord have mercy on us and save us, Amen!

and went to church to follow the Divine liturgy. He did not know it at the time, but he had been touched by divine grace and would shortly see something that would make him so ardent he would be willing to be killed because of it. During the Great Entrance, he saw the priest walking with the chalice above the ground, bathed in the uncreated light. When the patriarch blessed the people, Ahmad saw rays of light shooting from his hands and touching the heads of the faithful, but he saw that his head was deprived of this divine light.

It's one thing to see a miracle; many Christians have seen miracles. If our behavior does not change, it does not matter if we see miracles. Ahmad started debating with his colleagues about the superiority of the Christian faith. Of course, eventually, he was summoned before a tribunal and interrogated. He told his judges that he had embraced the Christian faith after a revelation and hoped that his colleagues would also embrace Christianity.

The judge threw him into prison, and he was without any food or drink for six days. Rather than being weakened by the fast, Ahmad told his interrogators that the fasting brought about his purification because Christ had revealed mysteries of the faith to him during his fast, completely

confirming him in the Christian faith. He even told the magistrate it would be easier for him to mold rock and fire with his hands rather than make him change his mind.

This blessed man was brought before the Sultan and threatened with beheading, but his resolution was not altered, and he received a baptism in his own blood, with the name of Chrystodulus.

It was rare for Muslims to be converted to the Christian faith because if the authorities found out, this ensured a certain death, likely by torture. It's

MAY 7 Holy New Martyr Pachomius of Ussaki

Pachomius was from Ukraine and was captured as a boy by the Tatars and sold into slavery to a Turkish Tanner in Asia Minor. He worked for his master for 27 years and resisted all attempts to convert him to Islam, including refusing to marry his master's daughter. The Tanner finally decided to set him free but, by God's Providence, it was arranged the Pachomius would be set "free indeed," and not just free from slavery in the world. How this journey to complete freedom began was that he became very sick, and during his delirium, the Turks made him believe that he had been converted to Islam and dressed him in Muslim clothing.

Once he recovered, he fled to Mount Athos and lived for 12 years in the monastery of St. Paul. He learned of the ascetic, St. a cocky us (12 April), and he settled there with his spiritual father to learn from the Elder. During this time, as his ascetical feats increased along with his love for God, he had a great desire to offer his life for Christ. He was rigorously tested for a year by fasting and prayer and vigils, and St Akakius gave him a blessing to leave the mountain and seek martyrdom.

also unlikely for someone raised with a sense of superiority and privilege, and luxury to adopt a faith that is mocked by his culture. The glorious new martyr Ahmad/Chrystodulus overcome all of these impediments in his now radiant in the heavens.

With his elder Joseph, he went to the town where he had been formerly enslaved and made himself known to the Turks near the house of his former master. When he was questioned, he said he had never denied Christ that he was ready to endure torture for His name. He was thrown into prison, and on the third day of his imprisonment, Ascension Day 1730, he was told of the death sentence. After he was beheaded, his executioner went mad.

Everyone has setbacks in life. What we do when we have a fall or a great difficulty? Pachomius had many incentives to apostatize during his years of slavery and never gave way, and then he was tricked into thinking that he had apostatized. He could have become bitter because, on the eve of his apparent release from slavery, he was told he had become a Muslim, an even worse slavery, because that slavery is eternal. Pachomius did what a pious person should do. He fled, seeking a place for repentance, and his obedience and ascetical life and veneration for St. Akakius and listening to his teachings all contributed to him obtaining the strength to make his final witness.

NM Gideon, monk of Karakallou +12-30

Saint Gideon was kidnapped when he was 12 and forced into service by a Moslem. Of course, this would mean that he was also forcibly converted to Islam. He was given the Islamic name Ibrahim. In two months, he fled to his parents' house, and they sent him further away to Crete. He worked with stonemasons, who were very brutal and ran again. A priest on the island adopted him, received his confession, and helped him very much. Only three years later, the priest died, and Gideon went to Mount Athos. He was a monk in the monastery of Karakallou with the name of Gideon, and he lived for 35 years with great asceticism. No doubt he remembered his apostasy every day. He longed for martyrdom.

One of the things about him that caught my eye is that he would read the lives of the saints and look for those martyrs who had previously apostatized, looking to them for inspiration. I do not doubt that he also took down their names and made prostrations begging their help, just as I do.

Eventually, he went off the holy Mountain and announced his Christianity. He went before the judge holding Pascha eggs and telling him, "Christ is risen." When he was offered a coffee, he threw it in the judge's face. He scorned the religion of Mohammed and called him a fraud, but

they thought he was mad because they thought nobody in their right mind would put themselves at such risk.

After his first attempt at martyrdom, he went to a cave to pray for an extended period and went back to my Mount Athos for a year. Then he went to a Turkish town and announced his conversion back to Christianity. He was brought before the Pasha and was ridiculed in various ways, and then his limbs were cut off with an ax. He did not call out in pain throughout all of his torture, was unafraid, and encouraged the executioner who was intimidated by him. He did not die even after all four of his limbs were cut off, so the Pasha ordered 4 Christians to throw him into the palace cesspit. What would we do if we were one of those Christians? Of course, he would die because he was bleeding out, but what a terrible task it is to take a martyr and throw him into a cesspool. I wonder if those Christians found their way to paradise. I am certain that the holy martyr Gideon prayed for them. The martyr's body was ransomed the day after his death, and fresh blood flowed from his wounds for two hours, working many miracles. Through the prayers of the holy martyr Gideon, may we have strength even when we falter.

A Paschal Miracle: Saint Nectarios of Aegina Descends From Heaven to Serve Liturgy



The peasants in a mountainous village of Aegina had been without a priest for years. Time was going by, but nothing was changing. Lent came, but they still had no priest. The people were worrying. In the first and final weeks of the Great Lent, most Greeks put their work and daily business on hold to dedicate themselves to prayer. Everywhere, they lower the flags as if in mourning for the crucified Christ. Every day, the people stand long hours at the Lenten services, walk in processions around their parishes, keep a dry fast (this means that they don't have any cooked food), and some do not eat at all. Few in the village could imagine spending all this time without a priest.

The peasants wrote a letter to the bishop asking him to send them a priest. "Your Holiness, could you please appoint us a priest, at least for the Bright Week and the Pascha," they implored. *"We need him to lead and guide us in our preparation, prayer and repentance, and in the celebration of the Bright and Holy Pascha. Do not let your flock go without a shepherd, do not let our pleas go unanswered. Your Holiness, please send us a priest of Your choosing."*

The bishop read the letter and conveyed the request of the mountain dwellers to the participants in the next episcopal meeting. *"Fathers, who can travel to this village for the Lenten weeks?"* he asked. But none of the priests could, and each gave a valid reason. As the meeting continued, the request from the mountain dwellers was lost among the other agenda items and the current documents. Everyone forgot about the letter, busy with the other errands and preparations for the Pascha.

Finally, the Great and Holy Pascha came, which all Greeks celebrate together in great awe and piety. Because Orthodox Christianity is Greece's official religion, it is also a public holiday upheld at the governmental level. The Pascha week was over, and the episcopate's priests were back at work. The bishop saw a letter on his table, and again it was from the mountainous village. It read, *"Your Holiness, we have no words to convey to you our gratefulness and deep appreciation for your consideration and attention to the needs of our parish. Forever we will praise the Lord and be thankful to you, Your Holiness, for sending in this pious and blessed priest to*

lead our Paschal celebrations. Never before have we prayed together with a priest of such exceptional grace and humility."

At the next episcopal meeting, the bishop asked the attending priests, *"Last time, I read our a letter from the peasants of a mountainous village who requested a priest. Who travelled there?"* Everyone was silent, no one said a word. The bishop was intrigued and curious. So he put together a delegation and days later, dust was clouding over the mountainous village on Aegina Island as the bishop and his group approached the village. It was the bishop's first visit there with such a large group of people. The parishioners greeted him with paschal cakes, festive drinks, painted eggs and bunches of flowers. In a solemn procession, they all went to the small church.

In Greece, all priests are civil servants, and they are required to enter their names in a designated logbook of the church, even they serve there only once. The bishop bowed before the icon of the church's patron saint and went into the altar. The Royal Doors were open, and all the people at church saw him pick up the logbook and take it to the nearby narrow window. Hastily, he paged through it and found the last entry. The inscription, made in elegant handwriting and beautiful ink, read, *"Nectarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis."* Awe-stricken, the bishop dropped the book and fell on his knees right where he was standing.

As the news of the great miracle sank in, everyone was awe-stricken. After some moments of ringing silence, everyone was overwhelmed with emotions. The people fell on their knees, raised their hands, hugged, wept and gave thanks to Jesus and Saint Nectarios. Only now were they beginning to realise what had happened. The Almighty Lord had heard the tearful prayers from His people in a remote mountainous village and sent them a shepherd from His Kingdom of Heaven. Their shepherd on earth had forgotten about his smaller flock, but not the Lord of the Heaven and Earth. It was the moment of truth. Metropolitan Nectarios who departed this world in the 1920s, spend an entire week in the flesh with the simple shepherds and their families. He headed their processions of the Cross and to the Empty Tomb, sang hymns and said prayers, gave them comfort and guidance. He spoke to them about the Lord as nobody else had ever spoken to them before.

Only now did the people begin to realise what had filled their hearts with heavenly joy, inspired them to repent tearfully and made them cry with endearment, unrestrained and unashamed. Now they knew what was keeping them awake and eager to stand in prayer. The icon of Saint Nectarios was displayed at their church in a visible location, but nobody recognised him. Perhaps God had willed to hide from the people the identity of their good priest while he was with them. <https://blog.obitel-minsk.com/2021/05/a-paschal-miracle-saint-nectarios-of-aegina-descends-from-heaven-to-serve-liturgy.html>

The Samaritan Woman - This well is very deep. 5th Sunday of Pascha

How to acquire the Holy Spirit.

The Lord puts Himself in our path.

Knowledge comes to us by degrees, a little bit at a time.

- John 4:5-42

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Brothers and sisters, as the Samaritan woman said, "This well is very deep." And there is much in the story; we could speak for days and not exhaust the story of the conversion of Saint Photini², Equal to the Apostles, the Samaritan Woman.

As in all scripture, it is good to see the part that is the most important. The story here is about how to obtain the Holy Spirit. And the Samaritan Woman did obtain the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is referred to sometimes as water, sometimes as fire. Because as water, it washes clean. As fire, it warms, and it burns away sin. In this case, the Lord referred to the Holy Spirit as Living Water.

And he met the Samaritan woman where she was, going to the well when no one else was going at about noon, the sixth hour, because she had had five husbands and now was living with a man who was not her husband. So for her to get water at the normal time would subject her to ridicule. So she would sneak to the well at noon to get water. And the Lord knew this because the Lord knows all things.

The Lord puts Himself in our path.

We continually see in the Gospels where the Lord puts Himself in the path of someone who needs His help. The woman whose son had just died, the man left by the road half dead (parable of the Good Samaritan), the woman with an issue of blood. He made Himself to be present for them in their time of need. This woman didn't even know she had a need. She was getting by day-to-day and life was not easy for her. Anyone who goes to get water in the heat of the day obviously has some problems. Although she didn't know what she needed, the Lord knew, and so He spoke to her on her level.

First, He did something rather amazing for a Jew. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be like dogs and were very racist about them. And yet He spoke to her and said, "Give me to drink." - an amazing thing! She noted that, that: "The Jews don't have anything to do with us, and You're asking me to drink." That was the beginning, so that they could have a conversation, so that she could learn about the Living Water.

Knowledge comes to us by degrees, a little bit at a time.

And of course I told you, the whole period of Pascha is speaking about enlightenment and how it occurs. Now, it's different for different people.

The myrrh-bearing women, they went to the tomb thinking they were going to anoint a dead man, not even knowing how the stone would be rolled away. But, because of their great love, they came.

Thomas couldn't believe, but then he couldn't go away either. He had too much love, too much yearning in his heart. So he received that which he didn't even know that he desired, because he believed the one whom he thought might be the Christ was dead.

The paralytic first was healed; then he knew that God was with him, and he knew that the cause of his illness had been his sins and that he was not to sin anymore or else a worse thing would befall him.

In every case, the common thread is that man, when presented with God, must react. We must listen. We must change because God is not some static thing, some fact which we can believe. God is life. So when we are presented with God, we must change. And certainly in the case of the Samaritan Woman, the proper reaction to God is perhaps illustrated more than even all the rest.

Because this woman who was a sinner, who was basically an outcast in a society of outcasts, this woman, when she started to speak with Jesus and He told her bit by bit about the truth in words that she could partially understand, she had her view that was not correct. There are theological questions here that are interesting to look at, but they are a side issue. Suffice it to say that this woman like us had misconceptions; We have many

misunderstandings, things we don't know; and we don't know that we don't know them. But the Lord enlightened her.

Enlightenment does not complete until we change.

So the woman knew some things of the truth. He offered this Living Water, this tantalizing opportunity to not thirst again. He told her something of true worship, and then he told her to go call her husband. And she was ashamed; our services speak of it. She said, "I don't have a husband." That's the truth, but not the whole truth, because she was ashamed to say what her true life circumstances were.

But the Lord gently told her, "Yes, you've had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband, and this you spoke truly." So He praised her for being truthful and gently, and ignored that she wasn't completely truthful. He didn't legally upbraid her for it.

And what did she do? She said, "I perceive you are a prophet." I am sure at this moment there was something in her heart that felt hope because she was living in a way she didn't want to live, but she didn't know how to get out of it. She was trapped. She lived a sinful life for many years, but she did believe she knew something of the law. She was a careful person; she asked intelligent questions, according to her level of understanding. She needed healing. And then when the Lord told her of her life, her heart must have felt this flicker of hope and warmth and maybe she could get relief.

Now, most people would not feel that. They instead would be angry that their sins had been shown. The Jews were like that, the Pharisees and Sadducees did not like when the Lord showed their hypocrisy. The people of the Gadarenes had been raising pigs unlawfully. Then the Lord removed this source of sin from them. And they knew that they had been sinning. What did they do? They were afraid but also angry, and they told the Lord to leave because they didn't want their sins to be exposed.

The Samaritan Woman had her sin exposed. She was glad. In fact, she was so glad that she felt such relief, such hope in her heart, that she, the one who, as our services say, the Renowned One, went into the city and told everyone, "Here is a man who told me everything I did."

Now, let's be realistic here. If she tells someone that, they are going to say, Well, what did He tell you? So she would have to tell people of her sins in order to show that this man had told the truth about her. What nobility of soul! To be presented with your sins and to not be angry, but instead to be glad.

This is an amazing, story. There aren't many like it in the scriptures. This is how we must be. Yes, we know something of God. Okay. We know he's Trinity. We know Jesus is born of a virgin. We know Jesus Christ is God and man. We know all these things. But do we live them? Have we become them?

The Lord said at one point to her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is who sayeth unto thee, give me to drink, thou would ask, and I would give you Living Water." Do we know the gift of God? It is not possible to know the gift of God without becoming like God, without changing as God reveals himself to us. This is what the story tells us.

If we want to have the Holy Spirit abiding in us -- and the Holy Spirit is life; without the Holy Spirit there is no life -- To have the Holy Spirit abide in us, we must, when God reveals himself to us, change. Not slink back, not be angry, not hide ourselves from God, and not cause ourselves to be distracted by this and that in life. But we must be like the Samaritan Woman. This is what the story tells us. This is the way of life.

Because salvation is not just forgiveness.

How in the world did that idea come about? A person forgiven seventy times seven is still a sinner and still bears wounds of sin and still is incomplete and hurting. Salvation is to become changed, to become holy.

To become one who used to have five husbands and lives with someone who is not their husband, to someone who becomes equal to the apostles.

We have been presented with the way of life. How is it then that we do so many things that are not the way of life? Because we have not met God as she has. God has presented Himself to us, just as He did to her: On our level, according to our understanding. But we have not reacted to Him as she did. She turned her life upside down. She changed completely.

She reminds me of Mary of Egypt, when Mary saw that she had been a sinner and she made the promise to the Mother of God. From that point on her life was completely changed.

Ascension. The whole of our faith is Jesus Christ .Two prophesies, one fulfilled, one being fulfilled

Just a few quick words about the Ascension today because of the time and people having to work and such. This Ascension can only be spoken of with Pascha and with Pentecost. They are all part of the same ministry.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was born and became a man in every way. The Gospel shows us today He ate; He showed them that He was not a phantom, not a spirit, but a man, after being risen from the dead in the human flesh that He possessed, just as we possess human flesh. He showed us how to live. He made us capable of living. Then He ascended into Heaven. This is our flesh that ascends into Heaven. He shares the same flesh as we do, so therefore this is a prophesy of things to come.

And He had said to His disciples previously, if He did not go away, the Holy Spirit would not come.³

And the Holy Spirit is what causes us to be able to know these things, to feel these things, to accomplish these things because the Holy Spirit abides in us and tells us of all things concerning God.⁴

So our salvation is not just a stream of events. It is Jesus Christ⁵. In fact, if one were to describe the Orthodox faith, one need only say "Jesus Christ." The whole of our faith is our Lord Jesus Christ. Truth is Jesus Christ. Holiness is Jesus Christ, and peace is Jesus Christ. And this peace that He bestowed upon apostles is peace is accomplished from our flesh becoming purified and deified and perfected. And today we see what happens to perfected flesh. It arises and sits at the right hand of the Father.

The Blind Man. Sixth Sunday of Pascha

You can't be saved unless you have character. God will not give it to you.

John 9:1-38 2010

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, brothers and sisters, it's already the fifth Sunday of Pascha and the Sunday of the blind man, and in keeping with all the other Sundays it is a day in which we read about someone who is enlightened and the process of their enlightenment, and we have another important characteristic of enlightenment especially shown today. It is shown in some of the others too, in St. Thomas, in the Samaritan Woman, but especially here we see incredible courage; we see incredible character.

You can't be saved unless you have character. God's not going to give it to you. You can't be saved unless in your heart you want to be honest and in your heart you want to be courageous. Don't depend on God to give you good character to you. You have to have it. You have to have a desire to be good. Whether or not you make mistakes and you have sins - that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about what is it that you desire and what is it that you value, and how do you order your life?

The blind man shows us how we should live. Put yourself in his position for a moment. The question that the disciples asked, everyone else would have been asking too. Who sinned, this man or his parents? So he was persona non grata in that society. They thought there must have been

When we meet God, we must change. That is what I want you to learn from this story. If you are to have the Holy Spirit in you, you must listen to what God is telling us and change.

And God help you to listen and to change. Amen.

(Grateful acknowledgement to the handmaiden of God Helen for transcribing this homily.)

Priest Seraphim Holland 2009. St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-05_2009-05-17.html

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-05_2009-05-17.doc

and in audio: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-05_2009-05-17.mp3

2009

So this is our destiny, brothers and sisters, if we are willing to accept it. All we need do is believe and struggle, and God will help us. This is what the Ascension tells us today.

But just like everything in life, when the Lord said "Peace"⁶ to them, they were not peaceful at that time, or during those ten days before Pentecost. There were many times during their life when they were not peaceful. So the peace that comes to us, *comes in stages*, comes bit by bit by our struggles. That's the way it is with everyone. It's not some sort of magical wand that the Lord waves over us. He enables us, makes us capable, and then we accomplish with His help.

So, brothers and sisters, if we are like the men of Galilee gazing into the Heavens⁷, let's not gaze just with confusion because now we know the full story. When we gaze into the Heavens, we see our destiny if we are willing to accomplish it. And all things can be accomplished through Christ.

May God help us to accomplish this destiny, to ascend into the Heavens and to be with God, in our flesh as Jesus Christ is with God in the flesh. God bless you.

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-thursday-06_2009-05-28+ascension.html

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-thursday-06_2009-05-28+ascension.doc

Audio: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-thursday-06_2009-05-28+ascension.mp3

some sin that he had committed, or his parents, something that marked him as untouchable.

We also know from our tradition that he didn't even have eyes⁸, just sockets with holes in them. So he must have looked very strange, and he would beg for his daily bread, and of course he wouldn't get much, and he was alone.

Then comes Jesus and He heals him. He heals him in a very strange way. He takes clay and spits on it, makes it into little balls and makes eye balls for him, smashing them into his sockets and then tells him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam, which of course is indicative of baptism. It's a type⁹ of baptism, to go to the water and to wash and to be cleansed.

And even there we see that baptism is not just the remission of sins; it's also the cleansing of sinful nature, typified here by his blindness. It does not just remit our sins; it makes us capable of not sinning.

So he goes to the Pool of Siloam to wash. It wasn't easy. It's not like he had a Seeing Eye dog or anything. He had to stumble there, people looking at him with mud on his face, wash and then he saw, a great miracle.

Now, just as we see good character in the blind man, we see horrible character in the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We should pause a moment to wonder why did they wonder if this man was the one who was healed.

They knew it. Oh yes, I'm sure he looked quite different with eyes now, whereas before he had no eyes. But it was a small town; it's not as if they didn't recognize him. But they didn't want to recognize the healing which occurred on the Sabbath day, so they had some pretense for questioning him because there's not supposed to be work done on the Sabbath day.

But the Lord had already addressed this question, perhaps not until this time. I don't know when He said this, but remember when He said that if you have an ox or an ass and it falls into the ditch on the Sabbath day, what are you going to do? You're going to pull it out¹⁰. Are you going to feed your animals on the Sabbath day? Well, of course. It's never wrong to do any good on the Sabbath day.

We don't have a Sabbath day, as it were, anymore, but certainly we have excuses we can make for ourselves about what we do or don't do. Let not us make any kind of excuse as to whether or not we should do good. We should always do good, no matter what¹¹. No matter what day it is or time it is or no matter what the consequences of doing that good are.

The Jews made a pretense that He healed on the Sabbath day, so they were questioning the man, trying to determine if this really was the one. And so they asked him questions and they're hostile. I am sure he noticed it, and he knew that if he didn't answer the questions in the right way, what he had hoped for all of his life, was going to go away in an instant because he wanted to be part of the community again, to be part of the synagogue, to be one with his people again, to be considered a peer instead of some sort of outcast. But they were questioning him vehemently, and he was standing up to their questioning.

Now, if you look at the questioning, we won't go into great detail, but it's interesting to see how he progressively learns, progressively understands. Part of his understanding comes from the vehement opposition against Jesus Christ. But first they question him, and he told them how he got his vision. He says, a man named Jesus told me to wash in the Pool of Siloam, and now I see. And then he comes up with the idea that he must be a prophet if He healed him. And then they call his parents because they still don't want to believe. They're blinded with envy. They're blinded with their own false priorities, their own hidden agendas.

Brothers and sisters, don't think we are so far from the Pharisees. Any time that you do something with an ulterior motive, you're like the Pharisees. Any time that you do something dishonestly for your own gain but making it appear that it's for something else, you're a Pharisee. This is a common human condition, to be full of pride and to be jealous and to manipulate things. This is what they were trying to do.

So just as we see the blind man as exemplary in character and we should try to have his type of character, we should also see what the Pharisees do. And then we should try to avoid such things. Look in your life carefully. If you're careful, you'll see. There's a lot of dishonesty there. You may not tell a lie, but will you act in a way that's a lie? Christianity is always about telling the truth or actually, I should say, Christianity is always about being the truth. Jesus Christ is the truth¹², and we are supposed to become like Him. So we should be the truth in everything we do, in the things we say and the things we do, in our motivations. They're the most important thing to check of all. Because from your motivations comes everything.

So they continue to question him, and they really bring him to an understanding that since they really hate this man Jesus so much, there must be something to this. So he says to them that it has never been known since the beginning of time that a man blind would receive sight. If this man were a sinner, He couldn't give me sight. And then they cast him out.

It takes great courage for him to say what he said. He had been denied by his parents. He saw that the authorities were about to cast him out if he

didn't say the right things. He could have said the right things and they would have left him alone. He could have either feigned ignorance or he could have -- what is the saying? -- thrown Jesus under the bus, somehow, and he could have skated by. It would not have been that hard to do. But instead he spoke, not only the truth, but he spoke with great courage and showed the Pharisees and the Sadducees how false they were in the way that they were speaking.

Brothers and sisters, we live now in a time that takes great courage. Perhaps it will become worse. You know, there are places in the world where it is very, very hard to be a Christian. Just think of places like Egypt where rape is an everyday occurrence for Christians. But in this society it comes more in little things where the society, our business, or other institutions, try to make us think in a certain way. No, we must think in a Christian way. We must have the courage to think in this way and not be afraid to say what is the truth and to live the truth. That's what this blind man is teaching us. You can't be saved unless you have courage. I looked over some of my old sermons and I guess I always said that, because it's critically important. If you don't have courage, you can't be saved. It won't happen. If you don't have personal integrity, you won't be saved.

Now, God will help you in all things. But *He will not give you integrity*. You must have it. If you have the desire to do well, He will help you to do well. But if you don't have that desire, He will not give it to you. [READ THE FOOTNOTE!¹³] You must have good character to be saved. And the blind man shows us this.

Enlightenment comes to those who have the capacity to understand. Certainly our sins and our passions obscure the truth from us; there's no doubt; it happens to every human being. But if we don't even have the right priorities, we are lost completely. We must have the right priorities in how we live our life. Honesty and courage are among the greatest of these priorities. The blind man had them. This is what this really teaches me every time I read it. It takes a lot of courage to be a Christian. I hope you know this. I hope you feel sometimes the pull on you and you pull back, because you can't be saved unless you have good character.

May God help us to be like the blind man. There will come many times in your life where you will have to stand up and be counted. And you know, the way things are going in our society, it could be that there will be repression in some period of time. You can look at the signs. Things are happening. Things are becoming more controlling. There's more possibility of control.

I don't want to speak politically here, but if you just have eyes to see and ears to hear, you can see that the world is moving in such a way that controlling people will be easier and easier. And you can see in our society how things that used to be unthinkable and unspeakable now are codified in law. And now we are under pressure to accept these things, sometimes



not only with our silence but even with our acquiescence in the work place and the school and other places.

It takes courage to be a Christian. Do not be afraid to speak the truth. And if you're not afraid to speak the truth, then God will help you in everything. But if you refuse to speak the truth, then you are denying Jesus Christ. And you know what the Scripture says: If we deny Him, He will deny us¹⁴.

I've told you many times before, don't be afraid of sin; Be afraid of not repenting of sin. If you have good character, God will help you with your

sin. If you're a little sketchy, as far as your morality, if you're a little dishonest here and there, then you might not get help.

So let us be honest, let us be courageous like the blind man, because it is only if we have good character that God will do everything, with His grace, to make us truly good in everything. God help us.

Priest Seraphim Holland 2010.

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-06_2010-05-09+the-blind-man.html

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-06_2010-05-09+the-blind-man.doc

AUDIO: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-06_2010-05-09+the-blind-man.mp3

Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. 7th Sunday of Pascha
The high Priestly prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane
The Entire Content of the Christian Faith is Jesus Christ
This is salvation: To become like Jesus Christ.

2009

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today, brothers and sisters, we celebrate the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, just one week before Pentecost. This reading is really the quintessential, shall we say, "Proof-text" against Arianism, which is the heresy that was defeated in the First Ecumenical Council. Now, when I say "proof-text," you have to put quotes around it, because really there are no "proof-texts;" that's really a Western idea, however since we are in the West, you may have heard that term.

The sum total of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ, His whole life, His whole self, everything He did, everything He said, everything He is. To know the Christian faith is to know Christ.

This truth is shown in His "high-priestly" prayer, which we have heard today: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

This is eternal life: To know Jesus Christ. To know Him, we must become like Him. To know Him and become like Him, we must understand Him and do the things that He did. Therefore, salvation is not just knowledge, or even being forgiven our sins. Salvation is change.

Salvation is to become like the God-Man Jesus Christ so that we would know Him from having shared in the things that He is.

He loves; we love.

He humbled Himself; we become humble.

He has no respect for persons; He Loves everyone equally; so we would learn to love our enemies as much as our friends.

This is salvation: To become like Jesus Christ.

And why? Because in the very end of His prayer, He says: "And now I come to Thee" -- speaking to His Father -- "and these things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves."

What the world does not understand, but what Christians do, is that to love is the greatest joy, to be filled with love, consuming love, full love, unconditional love, as the Father loves the Son; and the Son, the Father; and the Spirit, the Son; and the Spirit, the Father. As the Holy Trinity loves Himself, so we would learn to love God. That is joy.

The world thinks of joy in terms of things we acquire or the way people think about us, or the relationships that we have that are beneficial to us, or the money we have or the fame or the good health or the house with the picket fence. None of those things is true joy.

True joy is when we have changed, so that there is no darkness in us. And with love there is no darkness. So this is salvation. This is having our Lord's joy fulfilled in ourselves, to know Him.

This gospel is very deep theologically. It is important for Christians to have some knowledge of the deep things of theology. Of course we are trying to define the indefinable and so we can't really understand God.

Except ... Only as He reveals Himself to us do we understand Him, and He only reveals Himself to the pure. So the Scriptures say: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God!"

Only as we become pure can we really know God. Otherwise, we can only speak about Him, as for instance, a man and a woman, can speak about having children and about parenthood, but until they become parents, mothers and fathers, they do not understand what it is to have a child, to love a child, to worry for a child, to be all things that a parent is to a child.

No one can know the love of God until they have loved.

No one can know the extreme condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ who had all things in equality with the Father before the world was, as He states explicitly in this prayer, and yet He humbled Himself to become a little lower than the angels, to become a man, to live a life where he is degraded and slandered and eventually crucified -- No one can understand this type of humility without becoming humble.

No one can understand compassion unless they become compassionate.

You can't understand purity until you become pure.

And then when you have become these things, there is great joy in them. Because then we are with God. This is the whole purpose of our life, to be with God.

But the dirty cannot be with the clean. So our life is spent on this earth attempting to become more pure. Of course, this is not of our abilities; God will help us. But if a man does not make an effort, then he will not become clean.

We should know something about theology. It is not necessary that we can all read the volumes of St. John Chrysostom and understand them explicitly. No one understands them. St. John himself did not understand some of the things he spoke about, because God is above our understanding. But we can understand some things. And we can understand the important things that the church has chosen, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to remind us about.

The Arian heresy is one of those things. This heresy seemed a little thing to a lot of people. Arias said: Jesus Christ was a creation of the Father, the



greatest of all creations, holy and God-like, but there was a time when He was not.

So what do we say? Jesus Christ says it. He comes from the Father. That is His reference - now that's in our symbol of faith - that He is begotten of the Father, begotten, not made. Jesus Christ is eternally born of the Father, not as human children - there is a time they are not and then a time that they become. There is no man who fully understands this, but this does not mean it is not an important thing to adhere to, because He made reference to it in this prayer, and it's really all over the Scriptures, including the Old Testament included.

Jesus Christ had all things with the Father. All glory because He is of God just as the Father is of God. We only know a little bit about the differences between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We know that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. We know that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, sent by the Son.

Some people would think this is not important and that they're just words, even though many people died for these words. And these words are expressed in this prayer, somewhat darkly; but if you read it carefully, He is referring to His equality with the Father and yet also His inferiority (as a human being) to the Father.

What happened when He was crucified? Did He bleed? Did He thirst? Did His heart eventually fail and did He die? Yes. Those are the aspects of flesh, of humanity. And then He was put in the grave, and of his own power, with His Father and with the Spirit present, made His flesh alive, and therefore our flesh can be alive. His flesh, which was human and therefore corruptible, was made incorruptible. And our flesh also will be made incorruptible.

We just celebrated the feast that exemplifies this, more than Pascha. In the Ascension, Jesus Christ in the flesh ascends to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God. The Church understands this to mean that our flesh also will ascend to be with God. It is capable now because of what Jesus Christ does.

He said to His Father: "I finished the work which Thou hast given me to do." That is the work He was sent to do: To teach and to make capable of following that which He taught.

And after saying this, He says: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

And when He asks the Father to glorify Him, this is not because He as God is lacking in glory; this is because as man, he was asking the Father to make manifest His resurrection and His change as a man from corruptible to incorruptible.

There are many silly ideas about salvation. All that we need to know is this. Salvation is to know Jesus Christ and God the Father, and the only way to know Him is to become like Him. This is the Christian life: to become like our Savior, for our flesh which is corruptible to become it incorruptible, with God's power and grace, but also absolutely with our efforts.

There is no contract between us and God. Instead, there is a bond of love. God loves us so much, He wants us to know Him. So He sent His Son as God and man to walk upon the earth and to show us the way to know Him, and to make us capable of following this way. It is a great gift that Jesus Christ has given to us, to have the way to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. The way of life. The way of change. The way of light replacing the darkness.

May God help us to know Jesus Christ. The path is clear. I know life gets complicated and difficult. As human beings we get confused about a lot of things, but let this always be uppermost in your mind. The purpose of your life is to know Jesus Christ, and the only way to know Jesus Christ is to become like Him. May God bless us. Amen.

Priest Seraphim Holland 2009. St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-07_2009-05-31.doc

http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pascha-sunday-07_2009-05-31.mp3

Questions about Ascension -Answers

ANSWER 1 Christ ascended to Heaven as man and as God. Once He became a man, being at the same time, as always, perfect God, He never put off His manhood, but deified it, and made it and us capable of apprehending heavenly things.

The Ascension is a prophecy of things to come for those who love God and believe in Him in an Orthodox manner. Those who believe and live according to this belief will be in the heavens, in the flesh, with Him, just as He now abides in the Heavens in the flesh. Our flesh and souls will be saved, because Christ made human flesh capable of deification.

We also call to mind the promise of the Holy Spirit, since Christ mentions this promise He had made before to them, and its advent is tied to His Ascension thusly:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: **for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.** {8} And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: {9} Of sin, because they believe not on me; {10} Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; {11} Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." (John 16:7-11)

What Christ has done for human flesh and our souls is impossible to understand, but the church, with sweet melody, meditates with fervor and thanksgiving and precise theology in her services.

"O Christ, having taken upon thy shoulders our nature, which had gone astray, thou didst ascend and bring it unto God the Father" (Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 7)

"Having raised our nature, which was deadened by sin, Thou didst bring it unto Thine own Father, O Savior" (ibid.)

"Unto Him Who by His descent destroyed the adversary, and Who by His ascent raised up man, give praise O ye priests, and supremely exalt Him, O ye people, unto all the ages." (Matins canon for the Ascension, Ode 8)

Since the disciples were "filled with great joy", we who are Orthodox in belief and way of life should naturally be this way also and should hasten to the temple. There we can meditate upon the magnificent truths and promises in the Ascension by listening carefully to the divinely inspired theology, sung in sweet melody. If we pray with care, and expectation, having valued divine worship above our worldly cares, surely God will enlighten us and noetically teach us the true meaning of Christ's Ascension.

ANSWER 2 St. Luke, who wrote an account of the Ascension in his Gospel, also wrote a slightly different account in his Acts of the Apostles. In this account, he describes two angels who speak to the Apostles as they are gazing at Christ going up into the sky:

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10-11)

St Luke also mentions a cloud in his account in the Acts:

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9)

"Thou Who art immortal by nature didst arise on the third day, and didst appear unto the eleven and all the disciples, and riding upon a cloud, didst hasten back unto the Father, O Thou creator of all." (Matins canon for the Ascension, 1st Ode, Irmos)

ANSWER 3 When Christ saw his disciples in the upper room, he told them:

"Peace be unto you." (Luke 24:36).

This peace is not a worldly peace, but is the gift of God, and **the attainment of it is the purpose of our life**. The only way to understand this peace is to live the Christian life and be changed. **It is freely given, but not freely received** - not until a man is purified by intense effort, war against his passions, and desire to fulfill the will of God.

Shortly after this, Christ promised:

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49).

This, of course, is the **promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit**, to be given only ten days later, on Pentecost.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is so profound, it cannot be described adequately.

He convicts concerning sin and righteousness, He gives strength, He gives wisdom, and the words to say when being persecuted. Ignorant and weak fisherman and all those who make an abode for Him wax bold in their witness of the gospel. He guides the church, and enlightens every man concerning the truth. Without Him, the Christian life cannot be lived.

ANSWER 4 Christ ascended by the Mount of Olives. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey." (Luke 1:12). Holy tradition understands that Christ will come to judge the world at the culmination of all things "from the East" over this very same mountain.

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; {11} Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, **shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.**" (Acts 1:10-11)

ANSWER 5 It is clear that the scriptures are a dark book, unless God gives illumination. The Jews did not understand the book they gave appearances to love, and Jesus corrected their misunderstandings numerous times. The Holy apostles themselves had to be taught in numerous private sessions with their Lord, an important one which is described in the Ascension story:

"**Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,** {46} And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: {47} And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. {48} And ye are witnesses of these things. {49} And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:45-49)

There much that the apostles were taught that was not written in the scriptures, and which has become part of the mind of the church, through the teaching of the apostles, and all their successors, who remained true to their teachers as the apostles had to one great teacher. St. John alludes to this hidden wisdom, held so closely to the bosom of the church, when he says:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." (John 21:25)

St. Peter admonishes us and reminds us of our own frailty and the sure reliability of the church when he tells us:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." (2 Peter 1:20)

ANSWER 6 Ascension is always on a Thursday, exactly forty days after Pascha, just like it occurred in the Scriptures. The Jewish (and Orthodox) way of reckoning days is to count the first and last days. So, Pascha is the first day, and Ascension Thursday, in the 6th week after Pascha, is the Fortieth day.

In the same way, Christ was in the tomb three days, although not even one and a half days in terms of hours. Good Friday, the first day, He was buried in the late afternoon. The second day, Saturday, His body lay in the tomb the entire day, then at some point in the very early hours of the third day, He rose from the dead.

The number 40 is the product of the multiplication of four and 10. The mystical meaning of this number is the perfection of the soul, which is obtained by following the commandments in the light of the revelations of the four Gospels. The feast of Ascension more than any other feast of the year shows us what our final condition will be. We will have perfect bodies united with perfect souls which are perfectly at peace and perfectly free to follow the commandments.

ANSWER 7 The Apodosis of Pascha is celebrated on the Wednesday before Ascension Thursday (according to the Russian Typicon).

All Great Orthodox feasts, according to the Jewish model, have three phases.

There is a preparation phase, which may be very long. The preparation for Pascha is the whole of Great Lent, and especially Holy Week. Great Feasts such as Theophany and Nativity have pre-festal Vespersal divine liturgies served the day before. Many feasts are preceded with certain hymns, such as the katavasia of the matins canon, sung for a period before a feast.

The feast itself is the ultimate celebration, and then there is a post-festal period, where the truths of the celebration are meditated upon at length in the services.

For Pascha, this period is forty days, and ends on the "Apodosis", or "leave-taking" of the feast, on the Wednesday before Ascension.

ANSWER 8 The feast of the Ascension lasts until the Friday before Pentecost, when its Apodosis occurs. This makes perfect sense, as we are waiting for Pentecost, just as the disciples were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus promised would come to them.

ANSWER 9 One the eve of the Ascension, Wednesday evening, an All Night vigil is served. This is a service which combines Great Vespers, Litya, Matins and the First Hour, with slight changes to the beginning and end of Great Vespers and Matins from their form when they are served alone.

The "rank" of commemoration is "Vigil" The rank indicates somewhat the importance of the feast, and how much the regular formats for vespers and matins will be modified. Two other "ranks" are "single commemoration" and "double commemoration".

On Thursday morning, the Third and Sixth hours and Divine Liturgy are served.

To serve the Great vespers, Litya, matins, the hours, and Divine liturgy the following service books are needed.

- The Horologion - the fixed parts of vespers, matins, the hours and the Divine liturgy
 - The Psalter - needed for the kathisma readings at vespers and matins. Usually any other psalms that are read are in the Horologion
 - The Apostolos - for the epistle reading at liturgy.
- The Old Testament - Great vespers has 3 OT readings. They are usually contained in the service texts in the
- Gospel - read in matins and the liturgy.

- The Pentecostarion - texts for the feast, such as the stichera at Lord I have cried, the Aposticha, the matins canon, etc.
- The priest's liturgikon - used by the priest for services like vespers, matins, Compline, the midnight office, the hours and divine liturgy.

ANSWER 10 On a "regular" Sunday, vigil is appointed, just as for Ascension. The services are very similar, with these differences (and some, similarities, listed for comparison purposes):

Vespers:

Both have ten stichera at Lord I have cried. All of the stichera for the Ascension are about the feast, as is the case for all "great feasts of the Lord". For "regular" Saturday night vespers, there are at most 7 stichera about the Resurrection (sometimes 6, sometimes 4), with the rest being concerned with a Saint(s) or another event. At the end of the Lord I have cried stichera, for the Ascension, "Glory ... Both Now ..." is sung all at once, and one sticheron, about the feast, is sung. In a regular Sunday vigil, there are usually two stichera here, the first one preceded by "Glory to the Father and the son and the Holy Spirit", the second being preceded by "Both now and ever, and to the ages of ages, amen". The second Sticheron is a "Theotokion", which is about the Theotokos and the incarnation.

Three OT readings are read for the Ascension. OT readings are not read in most Sunday vigil services.

Litya is appointed in the Ascension services. This service is usually omitted in a regular Sunday service (but the Old Believers always do a litya on every Sunday)

At the end of vespers for the Ascension, the troparion of the feast is sung three times (this is just before the blessing of the loaves, wheat, wine and oil). In regular vespers, "O Theotokos and virgin rejoice" is sung three times.

Matins

The Ascension matins has the "Polyeleos", followed by the "magnification" (the latter is in Russian usage only), whereas a regular

Sunday matins usually has in stead of the Polyeleos, the 118th kathisma (known as "the blameless"), and there is no magnification.

Just before the praises, on Sunday, an exostilarion, "Holy is the Lord our God", is sung. This hymn is omitted on the Ascension.

Liturgy

The Ascension liturgy replaces the regular antiphons with festal ones.

ANSWER 11 On a "regular" weekday", vespers is served on the eve, and matins in the morning, and no vigil service is sung, as there is for Ascension, Sundays, and most great feasts of the Lord (Pascha being a special exception).

Daily vespers, which is usually served on a weekday is a far simpler service than Great Vespers, with no small entrance, "O Gladsome light" being chanted instead of being sung, and less "Lord I have cried" stichera (there are usually 6). In addition, the last two litanies of both vespers and matins are reverses (read in a different order), and the first two petitions of the second litany in regular (daily) vespers and matins are omitted.

There are numerous other differences, because daily services are much simpler and shorter. Here are a few, off the top of my head.

Vespers

The kathisma for Great Vespers on a feast is "Blessed is the man". A different kathisma is read at a daily vespers for every day of the week

No Small entrance, OT readings, at a daily vespers

No litya at the end of a daily vespers.

Less "Lord I have cried stichera" at a daily vespers

Matins

No gospel, "Save O God" intercession at a daily matins.

That is enough for now. The best place to understand these services and their differences is to study the service books and chant or sing in the chanters stand.

¹ This document is a list of ten (more or less) questions & answers about a particular topic. More "Questions and Answers" topics may be found at <http://www.orthodox.net/questions>. They are also posted to the blog of [St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney Texas](http://www.orthodox.net/redeemingthetime), called "Redeeming the Time" – <http://www.orthodox.net/redeemingthetime>. Use anything you wish, but please indicate authorship, with the URL.

² Photini, Russian: "Svetlana", "light"

³ "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7)

Previous to this saying, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come, and the Evangelist John parenthetically explains that He would come after Jesus was glorified (ascended into heaven): "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. (38) He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (39) (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39 KJV)

Here is another promise: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26)

⁴ Here is one of the best explanations of the ministry of the Holy Spirit: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. (8) And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. (12) I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (13) Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (14) He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (15) All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John 16:7-15 KJV)

⁵ Jesus Christ is our example of how to live. He made us capable of living according to His example, but his death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. He made it clear that He is the only way to the father. Since He came to show us the way to perfection, following Him is paramount.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (7) If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." (John 14:6-7 KJV)

⁶ "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." (John 20:19 KJV)

⁷ “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (10) And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; (11) Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11 KJV) Acts 1:1-12 is read at liturgy on the Ascension.

⁸ The service texts make this clear. Vespers and Matins are critical for the Christians because they contain the bulk of teaching. Divine Liturgy is not primarily for teaching. We are mediocre as a people because so few Orthodox value the evening services.

⁹ “Type” – something that foreshadows or “points to” an important event or doctrine, such as baptism, the cross, the resurrection, etc. Examples: the “sign of Jonah”, which of course is a type of the resurrection, Moses holding the staff with the serpent on the top, which the people looked upon to be healed, which is a type of the cross. There are hundreds and perhaps thousands of types in the OT and even in the NT also.

¹⁰ Luke 13:15 KJV The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou* hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or *his* ass from the stall, and lead *him* away to watering?

¹¹ Here is a favorite little aphorism” “It is always right to do the right thing.”

¹² “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

There are many other scriptures. *When we lie, or act in a way that is a lie, we are not in Christ, we are choosing to have our Father be Satan*, as Christ said: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44 KJV)

¹³ I tell my flock this all the time, and it scares some people. The people who are scared are not the ones in danger; the one’s who do not think they have a problem are in grave danger. If we do not feel the desire for doing good, we must at least beg God to give us this desire. In other words, we must “want to want to”. God will always answer this prayer, but He will not help those who do not feel anything lacking in themselves.

¹⁴ Mat 10:33 KJV But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.