

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.

Saint John of Kronstadt

Sunday 29 June 2014 is the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 11:21-33; 12:1-9

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-19

Apolytikion:

First-throned of the Apostles and teachers of the inhabited world, intercede with the Master of all things to give peace to the world and to our souls his great mercy.

Kontakion:

O Lord, receive unto the enjoyment of Your good things and Your rest, the steadfast preachers of Godly words, the pinnacle of Your Disciples. Receive their pain and death above every sacrifice, for You alone know the hearts of men.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16; Matthew 9:36, 10:1-8
Synaxis of the 12 Apostles; Michael the New Martyr of Athens

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 13:1-8; Matthew 10:1, 5-8
Unmercenary Cosmas & Damian; New Martyr Constantine of Cyprus

Wednesday: Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 1:39-49, 56
Robe of the Theotokos; Juvenal, Pat. of Jerusalem

Thursday: Romans 11:13-24; Matthew 11:27-30
Martyr Hyacinth & Companions; Anatolius, Abp. of Constantinople

Friday: Romans 11:25-36; Matthew 12:1-8
Andrew the Hymnographer; Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites

Saturday: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Matthew 11:27-30
Athanasius of Athos; Lampadus the Wonderworker



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

29 June 2014

Who Do You Say I Am?

Today, on the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, we hear Saint Matthew's account of the Apostle Peter's confession of Jesus Christ. Jesus asked his disciples who people thought that He was. In reply, they told Him that some thought He was John the Baptist, others Elijah or Jeremiah or another of the prophets. He then asked them who they thought He was and Peter responded: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

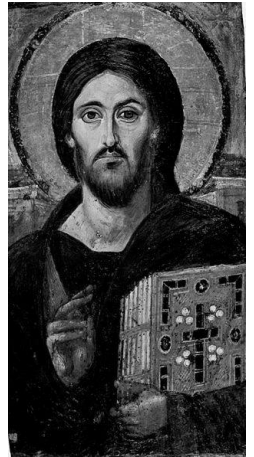
We are surrounded by people who have differing ideas about who Jesus was and is. Some view Him as a prophet, but for many of our contemporaries He was simply a good man, a moral teacher, an important figure from the past. And yet the Church's faith, which is grounded on Peter's confession of faith, is that He is something much more than this. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is the Messiah, the Saviour of the world – the One whom the people of Israel had been long awaiting, the One who changes all of history.

This confession of faith is not something that the Apostle Peter arrived at on his own. Yes, he had seen Jesus close-up, but even that was no guarantee of recognising His true identity. It was not simply a matter of weighing up the facts. Rather, the ability to see who Jesus Christ truly is was a gift that was given to him by God. "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

This gift of faith – the possibility of seeing who Jesus Christ truly is – has been handed on to us today in the gift of the Church, which is grounded on the faith of the Apostles. The faith of the Church is not based simply on what we may think about who Jesus was or is, but rather on the sure foundation of what is given to us by God. It is this that enables us to confess with the Apostle Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

We do not boast in wisdom, strength and wealth, but in you, O Christ, in Person the Wisdom of the Father, for none is holy but You, Lover of mankind!

From Matins for the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul



A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We have seen that our spiritual preparation for Holy Communion involves cultivating faith, hope and love within us, for when the priest emerges from the altar and holds the Chalice on high, he calls us to draw near *"With fear of God, with faith and love."* Faith is not simply an intellectual understanding, but is about making space for God in our lives and learning to trust in Him. And the fear of God is not ultimately about fear of punishment, but is rather a deep awe and relationship of love, and the fear that we should lose this.



Love Poured Out for Us

What we encounter in the Divine Liturgy is nothing other than God's love poured out for us. In Holy Communion, Jesus Christ unites Himself to us, allowing His Life to enter into our lives. Saint John Chrysostom tells us that He:

...was not content to become man, to be buffeted and killed, but He also comes into us. He changes us into His own Body, not only in faith, but in reality.

And, as Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain writes, Jesus Christ:

...desires to come into our hearts by means of this Mystery ... O love truly divine and inexorable! Or I should rather call you the flames of love rising up to heaven!

God reaches out to us in love, desiring that we return this love. Saint John Chrysostom encourages us to:

Dedicate yourself entirely to God by means of this Mystery, receiving with love that beloved Jesus, who out of His exceeding love ordained such a beloved sacrament, that a heavenly and covetable union should take place between God who loves and you who are loved.

This love of God is the whole point of our journey to the Kingdom of God. As Saint Isaac the Syrian tells us:

The love of God is paradise ... When we find love, we are nourished on heavenly Bread ... One who has found love eats Christ every day and every hour, and from this becomes immortal ... Blessed is he who eats the Bread of love which is Jesus ... Love is the Kingdom which the Lord promised to His disciples in a veiled manner, saying that they would eat in His Kingdom. So what is it that He says they will "eat and drink at the Table of His Kingdom" if not love? For love is able to nourish a man in place of food and drink. Love is the wine that makes glad the heart of man. And he is blessed who has drunk of that wine.



Repentance is the ship, fear is its helmsman and love is the divine harbour. So fear places us in the ship of repentance, conveys us across the sullied sea of life and brings us to the divine harbour which is love, to which all those who are weary and heavy laden attain through repentance. Once we arrive at love, we have arrived at God.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

Today the Church commemorates the Holy, Glorious and All-Praised Leaders of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

During His earthly life, Jesus Christ chose Apostles to carry on His work and to lead and guard the new Christian community. Saint Peter was the leader of this band of Apostles. He was an impetuous fisherman who, despite misunderstanding and denying Christ, had nevertheless played a key role in acknowledging who Jesus Christ was and was given the task by the Risen Christ "feed my sheep." After the Resurrection he preached the Gospel in Judea, Antioch, parts of Asia, and finally in Rome where he was martyred.

Saint Paul had not known Christ during His earthly ministry and had actively persecuted His followers. However, he had such a dramatic encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus that his whole life turned around and he became one of the most outstanding missionaries of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read about how he travelled widely throughout the empire, preaching the Gospel especially to the Gentiles.

Both saints were actively involved in spreading the faith and in teaching the early Church, and both were martyred in Rome. By commemorating them together the Church reminds us of how God uses very different people to work together to build up the Church.



Let us praise as champions of all the world those leaders Peter and Paul: The disciples of Christ, and founders of the Church,

True foundations, pillars and trumpets of inspiration,

Sounding forth the teachings and sufferings of Christ!

They indeed went out into all the earth as husbandmen spreading the seed of the faith,

Planting for all mankind divine understanding,

Revealing the Word of the Trinity.

Peter, rock and foundation!

And Paul, the chosen vessel!

You were Christ's yoke of oxen, drawing all to the knowledge of God:

The gentiles, men of the cities and islands, and returning the Jewish people to Christ.

Now you both intercede that our souls may be saved!

From Vespers for the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul

The one who has acquired divine love in himself does not grow weary of closely following after the Lord his God.

Saint Maximus the Confessor