

Learn the humility of Christ and the Lord will give you to taste of the sweetness of prayer. And if you would pray purely, be humble and temperate, confess yourself thoroughly, and prayer will feel at home in you. Be obedient, submit with a good conscience to those in authority. Be content with all things, and your mind will be cleansed of vain thoughts. Remember that the Lord sees you, and be fearful lest anyway you offend your brother. Neither dispraise nor grieve him, even by a glance, an expression on your face, and the Holy Spirit will love you and Himself be your help in all things.

Saint Silouan the Athonite



Sunday 6 July 2014 is the Fourth Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Romans 6:18-23

Gospel: Matthew 8:5-13

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let everything in heaven rejoice, let everything on earth be glad, for the Lord has shown strength with His arm; by death He has trampled on death; He has become the first-born from the dead; from the belly of Hades He has delivered us, and granted the world His great mercy.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Mark 5:24-34
Great Martyr Kyriake; Thomas of Malea

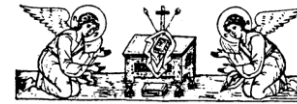
Tuesday: 1 Timothy 4:9-15; Luke 6:17-19, 9:1-2, 10:16-22
Great Martyr Procopius; Theophilus the Myrrhbearer

Wednesday: Romans 15:7-16; Matthew 12:38-45
Hieromartyr Pancratius; Dionysios the Orator

Thursday: Romans 15:17-29; Matthew 12:46-50; 13:1-3
45 Martyrs of Nikopolis; Bishop Gregory of Assa

Friday: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; Luke 7:36-50
Great Martyr Euphemia; Olga, Equal to the Apostles

Saturday: Romans 8:14-21; Matthew 9:9-13
Martyrs Proclus & Hilary; Michael of Malenius



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

6 July 2014

Just Give the Word

Today we hear Saint Matthew's account of how a Roman Centurion's came to Jesus Christ, asking Him to heal his servant. When Jesus offered to go with him to heal the man, he responded by saying that he was not worthy to have Christ come to his house. Instead, he asked Him to "Just give the word and my servant will be cured."

This man was an outsider; he was not part of the people of Israel. And yet Jesus praised his faith and said that nowhere in Israel had He encountered such faith.

The centurion did not give any intellectual statements about who Jesus was. Yet he clearly acknowledged the authority of Christ and he submitted himself to this authority. He also humbly recognized his own true place in front of Jesus Christ, considering himself unworthy to have Christ come to his house.

Here we see his great faith in the power of Christ's word. He not only respects the word of the Lord, but he actively seeks it, for he recognizes its great power. He recognizes that this word of the Lord is alive and active and cuts like a two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), and that it is something that will permeate his whole life.

The Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers are absolutely clear that humility is a prerequisite for true prayer. Prayer is not simply asking favours of God, but is rather acknowledging who He is, who we are before Him, and His authority over our lives. This is true prayer, but it requires a humility that we need to learn and so we pray that we may be given faith like that of the Roman centurion.



If you see a man pure and humble, that is a great vision. For what is greater than such a vision, to see the invisible God in a visible man, the temple of God.

Saint Pachomius the Great

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We have seen that our reception of Holy Communion is the high point of the Divine Liturgy – it is what the whole of the Liturgy has been preparing us for. And, as we approach the Chalice, what we are approaching is nothing less than God’s love which is poured out for us and which calls us to be united to Him in love. This love of God is not something abstract or impersonal, but is addressed to us as unique individuals – as persons who are called to a personal relationship with God.



He Calls His Sheep by Name

When we receive Holy Communion from the priest, he addresses each of us by name, saying:

The servant of God (Name) receives the Body and Blood of Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Holy Communion is the moment of our personal encounter with the Lord and so we are addressed by name, by the name given to us in our baptism. Names are very important in the Scriptures and in the life of the Church.

Sometimes names are changed to indicate someone’s new identity or calling,

as in the case of Abraham in the Old Testament, or as happens when a person is tonsured as a monk.

Names are never simply arbitrary, but are given by God and establish a relationship. Speaking someone’s name means to look them in the face and see them. There is a relationship between the name and the face, and by looking at someone and speaking their name, we acknowledge that they exist, that we need to treat them with respect, and that they have claim on us. This is how God relates to us: He sees us, He looks on us in love, and, as Saint John tells us, He knows each one of us by name. (John 10:3)

When we receive Communion from the hand of the priest, we are really receiving it from Christ Himself. And when the priest addresses us by name, it is really Jesus Christ, who is speaking to us and establishing us as His own. In the words of Saint John Chrysostom:

When you see the priest giving you the Holy Mysteries, do not think that it is the priest doing this; believe rather that the hand stretched out is that of Christ.



What shepherd feeds his sheep on members of his own body? And why do I say shepherd? There are many mothers who, after the pangs of childbirth, hand their children over to wet-nurses. Yet Christ could not endure to do that, but Himself nourishes us with His own Blood and in every way intertwines us with Himself. ... Through the Holy Mysteries, He mingles Himself with each believer, and those He has begotten He feeds with His own Self, not handing them over to anyone else.

Saint John Chrysostom

“To Attain Purity of Mind and Speak from that Purity”

Today the Church commemorates **Saint Sisoës the Great**, one of the great fourth century Fathers of the Egyptian Desert. An Egyptian by birth, he was a disciple of Saint Anthony the Great and, following Saint Anthony’s death, departed for the Inner Mountain where Saint Anthony had lived deep in the desert. Here he laboured for sixty years, attaining spiritual purity and being granted the gift of wonderworking, so that his prayers even restored a dead child back to life.

Abba Sisoës was known as extremely strict with himself, but merciful and compassionate to others and he received everyone with love. He saw humility as absolutely central to the Christian life, but one of the most difficult things to achieve. For him, it is not pious thoughts about God that are most important, but rather seeing ourselves as we truly are. We see this in the following saying:

A brother said to Abba Sisoës, “I am aware that the remembrance of God stays with me.” The old man said to him, “It is no great thing to be with God in your thoughts, but it is a great thing to see yourself as inferior to all creatures. It is this, coupled with hard work, that leads to humility.”



This fresco depicts an incident when Saint Sisoës passed by the tomb of Alexander the Great. He contemplated the vanity of all earthly glory and began to weep for all of humanity.

The saint was also convinced of God’s compassion towards those who truly repent. Asked by the monks whether one year is sufficient for repentance if a brother sins, Abba Sisoës said, “I trust in the mercy of God that if such a man repents with all his heart, then God will accept his repentance in three days.” When Abba Ammon complained to Abba Sisoës that he could not memorize the wise sayings that he read, Saint Sisoës replied: “That is not necessary. It is necessary to attain purity of mind and speak from that purity, placing your hope in God.”

When Saint Sisoës was dying, his disciples saw that his face shone like the sun and asked him what he saw. He replied that he saw Saint Anthony, the prophets, and the apostles. His disciples then saw that he was speaking and asked him, “With whom are you speaking, Father?” He said that angels had come for his soul, and he was entreating them to give him a little more time for repentance. The monks said, “You have no need for repentance, Father.” But Saint Sisoës replied, “I do not think that I have even begun to repent.” After these words the face of the holy elder shone so brightly that the brethren were not able to look upon him. Saint Sisoës told them that he saw the Lord Himself. Then there was a flash like lightning, and a fragrant odour, and Abba Sisoës departed to the Heavenly Kingdom.