



Everyone knows that a church calls for reverence, for a collecting of thoughts, for deep thinking about God, and for standing in the presence of God, but who fulfils this? People go to church with a desire to pray, to stand in it for a while with warm fervour; but then thoughts begin to wander, and bargaining begins in one's head even louder than that which the Lord found in the Jerusalem temple.

Why is this so?

Because the way one stands in church is a reflection of one's entire life. As people live, so do they behave in church. A church influences and somewhat supports spiritual movements; but then the usual course of one's spiritual constitution takes over.

Therefore if you want your time in church to consist of worthily standing in the face of the Lord, prepare for this in your ordinary life; walk, as much as you can, in a prayerful frame of mind.

This labour will bring you to the point that in church also you will stand reverently all the time. This reverence will inspire you to be reverent in your ordinary life as well. Thus you will walk ever higher and higher. Say, 'O Lord, help' — and begin!

Saint Theophan the Recluse

Sunday 24 August 2014 is the Eleventh Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: John 21:14-25

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 9:2-12

Gospel: Matthew 18:23-35

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When You went down to death, O immortal life, then you slew Hades with the lightning flash of Your Godhead; but when from the depths below the earth You raised the dead, all the Powers above the heavens cried out: 'Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Titus 1:1-5; 2:15; 3:1-2, 12-15; Matthew 5:14-19
Apostle Bartholomew; Titus of the 70

Tuesday: Hebrews 6:9-12; Mark 1:16-22
Martyrs Adrian and Natalie; Righteous Joseph

Wednesday: 2 Corinthians 6:11-16; Mark 1:23-28
Pimen the Great; Martyr Phanurius

Thursday: 2 Corinthians 7:1-10; Mark 1:29-35
Moses the Ethiopian; Diomedes and Laurence

Friday: Matthew 14:1-13; Acts 13:25-33; Mark 6:14-30
Beheading of the Forerunner; Theodora of Thessaloniki

Saturday: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2:1-5; Matthew 20:29-34
Apodosis of the Forerunner; Alexander, Paul & John, Pats.Of Constantinople



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A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

24 August 2014

Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

Forgiving from the Heart

Today, on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, Saint Matthew recounts the parable that Jesus Christ told about the unforgiving debtor in order to teach us something about the forgiveness that God grants to us, but also expects us to show to others.

Forgiveness is at the very heart of our Christian faith. It is not only something that we receive from God, but also something that God expects us to share with others. It is something that can be excruciatingly difficult and yet it is also the test of whether our faith is genuine.



However, simply to view forgiveness as a moral command, as something that we are expected to do, is not always very helpful. If forgiveness is to be genuine and not simply hollow words, then we need to find the resources within ourselves that can enable us to forgive others.

In today's parable, Jesus Christ gives us a clue to the mystery of forgiveness by pointing to the forgiveness that we have received from God. It is only when we are able to see ourselves as sinners who have been granted God's forgiveness that we will in turn be able to forgive others. When we contemplate our own sins, and the greatness of God's mercy, we are able to see what others have done in a different perspective. And, as we recognize ourselves as sinners who have been forgiven, we can perhaps even eventually acquire a certain sympathy for others as we recognize them as suffering from the same passions that we too suffer from.

God's grace, our universal mother, will give us gentleness,
so that we begin to imitate Christ.

Saint Peter of Damascus

Joining Heaven and Earth

An Introduction to the Orthodox Understanding of Icons

Most of us know that icons are important to Orthodox Christians. It has been said that it one cannot imagine even the smallest liturgical rite in the Orthodox Church without icons. Icons are an inseparable part of both our liturgical worship and our personal prayer lives.



Yet there are also many misconceptions about icons. Some see them as idols, but, as will become clear in the course of this series, this has no basis in reality. Others see them as decorations – beautiful objects that are there to add atmosphere and ambience – but this is also to miss the point and it is, in fact, disrespectful to treat an icon simply as a collector's item or interesting knick-knack. Yet others see them as a teaching aid, a means of religious instruction for the illiterate. While it's true that the truths of our faith are passed on through the Church's iconography, this is still an inadequate explanation.

If you google the word "icon," you will probably find entries for the images that one finds on a computer screen. In one sense this is not surprising – the Greek word *eikona* means "image"

and it is hardly surprising that it should be applied to all sorts of images. But the word "image" also has a particular history in Christian thinking. It is intertwined with our understanding of Jesus Christ who is "the Image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and of human beings who are created in God's Image (Gen. 1: 27).

If we look at how the Church's understanding of icons developed, we see that they were integrally related to our understanding of who Jesus Christ is and of the salvation that He calls us to. On the first Sunday of Great Lent, we celebrate the triumph of Orthodoxy, which was the triumph of the Orthodox approach to icons (against the iconoclasts who had objected to their use). It is significant that this triumph is seen as the triumph of Orthodoxy, for this shows us that the icon is part of a much bigger story and that tampering with the icon means tampering with the very truth of our faith.

In the church building, the iconostasis is situated between the altar, which represents heaven, and the nave or body of the church, which represents earth. This is significant, for the icon is the great witness to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ who Himself united heaven and earth. And the icons are themselves a means of uniting heaven and earth, for they offers us a door, or a gateway. They invite us in and they lead us into the life of the Kingdom of God, together with Christ and the saints. They are not simply objects to gaze on, but they make present to us all of our companions and supporters on our journey to God.

To be continued...

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Hebrews 12: 22-24

Saint Poemen the Great

On Wednesday the Church commemorates Saint Poemen the Great, one of the great Fathers of the Egyptian desert in the fourth century. Even as a youth he had lived in an ascetical way and when he was fifteen years old, he joined a monastery in Scetis, together with two of his brothers.

Saint Poemen was very strict on himself, but he valued the importance of discernment and moderation. He emphasised the importance of the "royal way" that avoids extremes and taught that "over-excess is always from the demons." He became known as the "lamp of discernment" and reminded his followers that, "We have learnt to kill, not the body but the passions."

Saint Poemen became known as a wise spiritual elder and people often came to him seeking advice. His "Sayings" are among the most quoted in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and, while mainly directed at monks, include advice that is relevant to all Christians.

Like other Fathers, Saint Poemen emphasized the importance of guarding our thoughts and of what we should do when they trouble us. When someone asked him about troubling thoughts, he replied:

Is the axe any use without someone to cut with it? (Is. 10:15) If you do not make use of these thoughts, they will be ineffectual too.



Saint Poemen taught that people can be saved wherever they are and whatever work they do if they have the right inner disposition, living in faith, with love towards others and with pure hearts.

If three men meet, of whom the first fully preserves interior peace, and the second give thanks to God in illness, and the third serves with a pure mind, these three are doing the same thing.

Like all of the Fathers, Saint Poemen taught the importance of repentance and emphasised weeping for our sins. But he showed great love towards those in his care and treated them with gentleness. This is seen in the following account:

Some old men went to Abba Poemen and asked, "If we see brothers sleeping during the common prayer, should we wake them?" Abba Poemen answered, "If I see my brother sleeping, I put his head on my knees and let him rest." Then one old man spoke up, "And how do you explain yourself before God?" Abba Poemen replied, "I say to God: You have said, 'First take the beam out of your own eye and then you will be able to remove the splinter from the eye of your brother.'"