

Every genuine confession humbles the soul. When it takes the form of thanksgiving, it teaches the soul that it has been delivered by the grace of God. When it takes the form of self-accusation, it teaches the soul that it is guilty of crimes through its own deliberate indolence. Confession takes two forms. According to the one, we give thanks for blessings received; according to the other, we bring to light and examine what we have done wrong. We use the term confession both for the grateful appreciation of the blessings we have received through divine favor, and for the admission of the evil actions of which we are guilty. Both forms produce humility. For he who thanks God for blessings and he who examines himself for his offences are both humbled. The first judges himself unworthy of what he has been given; the second implores forgiveness for his sins.

Saint Maximus the Confessor



Sunday 1 February 2015 is the Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Romans 8:28-39

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14

Resurrectional Apolytikion

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews, and while soldiers were guarding Your most pure Body, You rose, O Saviour, on the third day, giving life to the world. Therefore the heavenly Powers cried out to You, Giver of life: Glory to Your Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to Your Kingdom! Glory to Your dispensation, only lover of humankind!

Seasonal Kontakion

On this day doth Symeon receive with gladness God, the Giver of the Law, and he doth cry to Him in fear: Let me depart now, O Master Christ, for I have seen Thee, the Glory of Israel.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Luke 2:25-32; Hebrews 7:7-17; Luke 2:22-40
Presentation of Our Lord; Gabriel the New Martyr

Tuesday: Hebrews 9:11-14; Luke 2:25-38
Symeon & Anna; New Martyrs John, Nicholas and Stamatios

Wednesday: 2 Peter 3:1-18; Mark 13:24-31
Isidore of Pelusium; Nicholas the Confessor

Thursday: 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-6; Mark 13:31-37; 14:1-2
Martyr Agatha; Polyectus, Pat. Of Constantinople

Friday: John 10:1-9; Hebrews 7:26-28; 8:1-2; John 10:9-16
Photius, Pat. Of Constantinople; Bucolus, Bp. Of Smyrna

Saturday: 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 20:46-47; 21:1-4
Parthenius, Bishop of Lampsacus; Luke the Righteous



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

1 February 2015

Archbishopric of Good Hope
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa

God, be Merciful to Me a Sinner

Today, on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Church begins to prepare us for the coming Lenten Fast. In today's parable we see two very different responses to God. The Pharisee considered himself a righteous man. He thanks God for this and points out that he is not like other sinners, and especially not like the Publican (or tax-collector) in whose presence he was praying. The Publican, by contrast, did not even dare to lift his eyes to heaven, but could only repeat: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus says of him: "This man, I tell you, went home justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up."

This parable presents us with a warning. We do need to pray and to fast, to keep the commandments and to give alms. These are all good things. But with them comes the danger of pride, for it is very easy to use the good that we do to prop up our own egos and make us feel superior to others. Such pride really blinds us to our own reality and to all that we need to repent of. It is not for nothing that the early Fathers regarded pride it as the most dangerous of the vices, for it prevents us from doing the one thing necessary, which is turning to God in sincere repentance.

But this parable also presents us with an example of true repentance in the person of the Publican who knew his need for God and could only say: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He did not compare himself to anyone else, but was only conscious of his own situation before God, knowing his great need of God. Growth in humility can, for many of us, be one of the most difficult things that there is to learn, for we so easily compare ourselves to others or seek to justify what we do. Yet growth in humility lies at the very heart of our Christian life, for only in knowing and accepting who we truly are before God can we turn to Him in genuine repentance. And the point of our Lenten prayer and fasting is precisely to help us to open ourselves to God in this way.



Let us not pray as the Pharisee: for he who exalts himself shall be humbled. Let us humble ourselves before God and with fasting cry aloud as the Publican: God be merciful to us sinners.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

I Confess One Baptism

A series on the meaning of Christian Baptism

We saw last week that both adults and infants were baptized in the early Church, for God desires that all people be incorporated into the Church. However, the actual baptismal rite developed out of the practice of catechizing and baptizing adults and the baptismal service that we now use is comprised of parts that were once spread out over a longer time. This service consists of three major parts and shows us the Church's understanding of what it means to be a Christian and to be incorporated into the Body of Christ.



Catechesis and Exorcisms

The first part of the baptismal service is preparatory in nature. It begins in the narthex or entrance to the church in order to show that the one to be received is not yet a member of the Church and still has to be brought into the Church. The one to be baptized (or their sponsor) is asked to renounce the devil and all his works:

Do you renounce Satan, and all his angels, and all his works, and all his services, and all his pride?

The renouncing of Satan is done facing west because the west is where the sun sets, and was seen as symbolizing the gates of Hades by the ancient Greeks. The candidate for baptism is asked to spit on the devil. The priest then turns the candidate to the east, which symbolizes the rising sun and the light of our salvation. He asks the candidate for baptism:

Do you unite yourself to Christ?

By turning from west to east and expressing their faith in Christ, the candidate for baptism indicates that they have transferred their loyalty from Satan to Christ and are ready to enter the Church. They are then signed with the sign of the Cross and express their faith by reciting the Creed.

The Importance of Godparents

When infants are baptized it is the godparents who answer these questions on their behalf. The godparents originated in the early centuries when Christians were persecuted. They promised to bring the child up in the Orthodox faith in the event of the parents being killed. They therefore make the baptismal commitments on behalf of the child and are responsible for seeing that the child will be brought up instructed in the faith so that he or she is able to make this commitment to Christ their own. This is why it is so important to choose godparents who will care for the development of the child's faith and why the Church insists that godparents should be Orthodox Christians.

To be continued...

Christians, have we understood the great responsibility that we have taken on before God through baptism? Have we come to know that we must conduct ourselves as children of God, that we must align our will with the will of God, that we must remain free from sin, that we must love God with all our hearts and always patiently await union with Him? Have we thought about the fact that our heart should be so filled with love that it should overflow to our neighbor? Do we have the feeling that we must become holy and perfect, children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven? We must struggle for this, so that we may not be shown unworthy and rejected. Let none of us lose our boldness, nor neglect our duties, nor be afraid of the difficulties of spiritual struggle. For we have God as a helper, who strengthens us in the difficult path of virtue." – Saint Nektarius of Aegina

The Meeting of the Lord in the Temple

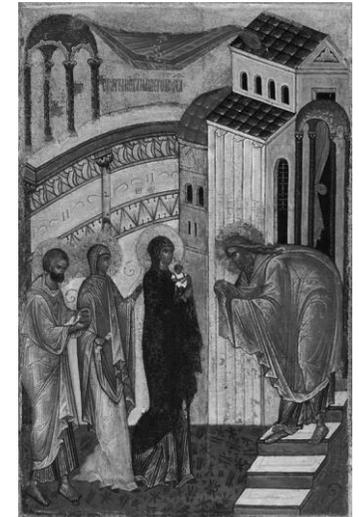
Tomorrow we celebrate the Great Feast of the Meeting, or the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. This feast comes forty days after the birth of the Saviour, for Saint Luke tells us (2:22ff), that the infant Christ was taken to Jerusalem to be presented in the temple in keeping with the law of Moses. The Church understands that Christ had to fulfil all the requirements of the Law of Moses, in order to complete them and to bring the law to its fulfilment in Him.

This feast is called the Meeting, for it is the meeting of the Old and the New Testaments. In the Gospel for the feast we encounter the devout Symeon who had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah and the prophetess Anna who spoke of the Child to all who had been looking forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. They represent the longing of the people of Israel, which they now see fulfilled in the Child whom Symeon takes in his arms as he prays:

Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people; A light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.

This meeting of the old and the new covenants is very significant for us. It tells us that God's long work of preparation in the history of Israel is now complete. Israel has accomplished its God-given task and has given us the Messiah. The promises made to Abraham have now been fulfilled and Israel's glory has dawned in the Person of Christ who is now presented as a "light to enlighten the Gentiles." In Him the whole world is illumined and saved.

The elderly Symeon and Anna represent the old rituals and customs which are passing away because that which they prepared for has now arrived. For, as the Apostle Paul says, the ancient laws were "only a shadow of what was coming: the reality is the Body of Christ." (Colossians 2:17)



Hail, full of grace, Virgin Mother of God, for from you there dawned the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, who enlightens those in darkness. Be glad too, righteous Elder, for you received in your embrace the Liberator of our souls, who grants us also resurrection.

Apolytikion for the Meeting of the Lord