

Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God.

Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is illumined and enlightened by His inexpressible light.

It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and so not confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without cease day and night.

For we do not only have to withdraw to pray, and suddenly turn our minds towards God.

No, even while we are busy among the needy, either with the care of the poor or with other concerns, or useful good works – into their very midst we should also bring our desire for and remembrance of God, so that seasoned, as it were, with the love of God they may provide a most acceptable offering for the Lord of all men.

Saint John Chrysostom



**6 December 2015 is the
Thirteenth Sunday of Luke**

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: Hebrews 13:17-21

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When Thou didst descend unto death,
O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay
Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity.
And when Thou didst also raise the
dead out of the nethermost depths, all
the powers in the Heavens cried out: O
Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to
Thee.

Seasonal Kontakion:

On this day the Virgin cometh to the
cave to give birth to God the Word
ineffably, Who was before all the ages.
Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing the
gladsome tidings; with the Angels and
the shepherds now glorify Him Who is
willing to be gazed on as a young Child
Who before the ages is God.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Luke 20:27-44
Ambrose, Bp. Of Milan; Martyr Athenadorus

Tuesday: 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-4; Luke 21:12-19
Conception of the Theotokos Forefeast; Patapius of Thebes

Wednesday: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Conception of the Theotokos; Prophetess Hannah

Thursday: Titus 1:5-14; Luke 21:28-33
Martyr Menas & Companions; Thomas of Bithynia

Friday: Titus 1:15-16; 2:1-10; Luke 21:37-38, 22:1-8
Daniel the Stylite; Luke the New Stylite

Saturday: John 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:8-19; John 10:9-16
Spyridon the Wonderworker



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

6 December 2015

You Are Freed of Your Infirmary

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of how Jesus Christ heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath. This woman, who had been suffering for eighteen years, was bent double and unable to stand up. When Jesus Christ healed her, she stood up straight and glorified God. However, Jesus' opponents sought to use this against Him, accusing Him of not respecting the Sabbath. In response, He pointed out the hypocrisy of those who would happily rescue their animals on the Sabbath, but were unconcerned with the dignity of a human being.

In this incident we see two different approaches to religion. For Christ's opponents, religious observances such the keeping of the Sabbath had lost their connection to a genuine concern for human beings and had simply become mindless legalism. Many people today are inclined to see religious beliefs and practices as somehow in conflict with human freedom and human dignity. For some, God has become an oppressive tyrant who must be rejected in the name of human freedom and human dignity.

In Jesus Christ we see a totally different approach to religious observances. They do not exist to satisfy a tyrannical God, but rather to restore us to our original human dignity in which we are created in the image of God. While the Church certainly has "rules," this is not in order to cramp our freedom, but rather because it is only within the guidelines that God has revealed that we are able to discover what it really means to be human. And, while the Church encourages us to a serious asceticism, such discipline is not meant to kill our spirits, but rather exists to help us recover a genuine and deep-rooted freedom.

The heart of the Lord is directed towards the humble, to benefit them. The face of the Lord is set against the proud, so as to humble them. Humility receives compassion continuously, whereas a hard heart and absence of faith continuously meet with endless difficulties.

Saint Isaac the Syrian



God Renewed the Power of Love

by Saint Maximos the Confessor (continued from last week)

Since the deceitful devil at the beginning contrived by guile to attack humankind through his self-love, deceiving him through pleasure, he has separated us in our inclinations from God and from one another, and turned us away from rectitude.

He has divided nature at the level of mode of existence, fragmenting it into a multitude of opinions and imaginations.

He has set up the means through which each vice may be discovered, and with time established a law, to which all our powers are devoted, introducing into everything a wicked support for the continuance of vice — namely, irreconcilable inclinations.

By this he has prevailed on humankind to turn from the natural movement he once had and to move his longing from what is permitted to what is forbidden.

Thus humankind has brought into being from itself the three greatest, primordial evils, and (to speak simply) the begetters of all vice: ignorance, I mean, and self-love and tyranny, which are interdependent and established one through another.

For out of ignorance concerning God there arises self-love. And out of this comes tyranny towards one's kin: of this there is no doubt. For by the misuse of our own powers — reason, desire and the incensive power — these evils are established.

For reason, instead of being ignorant, ought to be moved through knowledge to seek solely after God; and desire, pure of the passion of self-love, ought to be driven by yearning for God alone; and the incensive power, separated from tyranny, ought to struggle to attain God alone.

And the divine and blessed love, which is fashioned from these and through which these come to be, will embrace God and manifest the one who loves God to be God himself.

Since these have turned out evil, because of man's own will and the devil's deceit with regard to human beings, God, who made nature and wisely healed it when it was sick through wickedness, through his love towards us, emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7), and without change united himself to this [nature] hypostatically.

For our sake and from us and through us he became wholly man to such a degree that unbelievers thought that he was not God, while existing as God to such a degree that to believers was granted the ineffable and true meaning of reverent religion.

In this way the works of the devil were dissolved, and nature restored to its pure powers, and by again bringing about union with him and of human beings with one another, God renewed the power of love, the adversary of self-love.

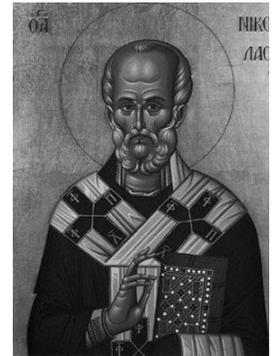


Saint Nicholas of Myra

Today we commemorate Saint Nicholas of Myra. Throughout the centuries, devotion to him has spread around the world. In the secularized West he has even been transformed into the red-suited Father Christmas who has lost all connection to the original saint. However, the holy bishop from Myra can be a helpful guide as we prepare to celebrate Christ's Nativity.

Saint Nicholas was bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the fourth century. He was imprisoned during the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian, but also experienced the new freedom that the Church was granted under St Constantine. St Nicholas was a strong opponent of the heretic Arius and was present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 where Arianism was condemned.

St Nicholas is best known, however, for his care and compassion for his flock. He was, quite simply, a genuinely good man, a true shepherd through whom Christ's love was able to shine. And he is best known by the many miraculous accounts of how he helped others. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us pray that we may learn something of the virtue and compassion of St Nicholas.



The Conception of the Holy Theotokos

Wednesday is the feast of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos by Saint Anne. The Church's tradition tells us that Saints Joachim and Anne were advanced in years and childless. Their barren old age is symbolic of human nature itself, weighed down by sin and death, and yet longing for a Saviour. In the Conception of the Mother of God we see not only the answer to their prayers, but also the coming fulfillment of humanity's longing for the Saviour whose birth with will celebrate at Christmas.

Since the fall of humanity God had been preparing the way for the Incarnation of Christ who would come to save us. The whole Old Testament is the account of the formation of a people who were being prepared to receive the Saviour. And in order for Christ to take on our human nature, He needed a human mother, someone who would be dedicated to the Lord, nurtured in holiness, and able to become the Mother of the Messiah. The Holy Theotokos stands at the end of a long line of preparation. She is the Vessel who was chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God and so her Conception which we commemorate today is an event of great joy as we await the coming of Christ into our midst this Nativity.