

For beginners prayer is like a joyous fire kindled in the heart; for the perfect it is like a vigorous sweet-scented light.

Or again, prayer is the preaching of the Apostles, an action of faith or, rather, faith itself, 'that makes real for us the things for which we hope' (Heb. 11:1) ... the heart's assurance, hope of salvation, a sign of purity, a token of holiness, knowledge of God, baptism made manifest, purification in the water of regeneration, a pledge of the Holy Spirit, the exultation of Jesus, the soul's delight, God's mercy, a sign of reconciliation, the seal of Christ, a ray of the noetic sun, the heart's dawnstar, the confirmation of the Christian faith, the disclosure of reconciliation with God ...

Why say more? Prayer is God, who accomplishes everything in everyone (1 Cor. 12:6), for there is a single action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, activating all things through Christ Jesus.

Saint Gregory of Sinai



3 July is the Second Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Romans 2:10-16

Gospel: Matthew 4:18-23

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When the stone had been sealed by the Jews and the soldiers were guarding Thine immaculate Body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Saviour, granting life unto the world. Wherefore, the powers of the Heavens cried out to Thee, O Lifegiver: Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ. Glory to Thy Kingdom. Glory to Thy dispensation, O only Friend of man.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, mediation unto the creator most constant: O despise not the voices of those who have sinned; but be quick, O good one, to come unto our aid, who in faith cry unto thee: Hasten to intercession and speed thou to make supplication, O thou who dost ever protect, O Theotokos, them that honour thee.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 4 July: Romans 7:1-14; Matthew 9:36-38; 10:1-8
Andrew the Hymnographer; Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites

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

Wednesday, 6 July: Romans 8:2-13; Matthew 10:16-22
Sisoës the Great; Archippus, Philemon & Onesimos

Thursday, 7 July: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Mark 5:24-34
Great Martyr Kyriake; Thomas of Malea

Friday, 8 July: 1 Timothy 4:9-15; Luke 6:17-19, 9:1-2, 10:16-22
Great Martyr Procopius; Theophilios the Myrrhbearer

Saturday, 9 July: Romans 3:28-31; 4:1-3; Matthew 7:24-29; 8:1-4
Hieromartyr Pancratius; Dionysios the Orator



Evangelion

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Come, Follow Me!

Today, on the second Sunday after Pentecost we begin to hear Gospel readings from St Matthew's Gospel that will take us through some of the key incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel we see how shortly after the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He calls the first Apostles to follow Him and to participate in His mission. We are not told much about these men, except that they were fishermen. In other words, they were fairly ordinary people, and certainly not from the well-off or educated classes. And yet, we are told that it is these ordinary fishermen who will become co-workers with Christ and that they will in fact become "fishers of men."



We know with hindsight that these humble fishermen were transformed by Christ's teaching, and by the power of His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, to become great missionaries and, in many cases, martyrs for the faith. Yet at the time, it must have seemed far from obvious.

The call to follow Christ was not only addressed to the Apostles in first century Palestine, but it is addressed to each one of us today. We might feel that we are insignificant or inadequate, yet the history of the Church shows us that God can use ordinary people, if they allow themselves to respond to His call. We are not all called to become wandering preachers, but each of us is called by God. We may not all be asked to leave our fishing nets and families, yet there may be things that we need to be prepared to lay aside, in order to focus our gaze more closely on Jesus Christ.

Sin makes man a coward;
but a life in the Truth of Christ makes Him bold.

Saint John Chrysostom

Prayer in Our Daily Lives

Saint Theophan the Recluse on Prayer

Why is it, you ask, that one can pray for so many years with a prayer book, and still not have prayer in his heart? I think the reason is that people only spend a little time lifting themselves up to God when they complete their prayer rule, and in other times, they do not remember God. For example, they finish their morning prayers, and think that their relation to God is fulfilled by them; then the whole day passes in work, and such a person does not attend to God. Then in the evening, the thought returns to him that he must quickly stand at prayer and complete his evening rule. In this case, it happens that even if the Lord grants a person spiritual feelings at the time of the morning prayer, the bustle and business of the day drowns them out. As a result, it happens that one does not often feel like praying, and cannot get control of himself even to soften his heart a little bit. In such an atmosphere, prayer develops and ripens poorly. This problem (is it not ubiquitous?) needs to be corrected, that is, one must ensure that the soul does not only make petition to God when standing in prayer, but during the whole day, as much as possible, one must unceasingly ascend to Him and remain with Him.



In order to begin this task, one must first, during the course of the day, cry out to God more often, even if only with a

few words, according to need and the work of the day. Beginning anything, for example, say 'Bless, O Lord!' When you finish something, say, 'Glory to Thee, O Lord', and not only with your lips, but with feeling in your heart. If passions arise, say, 'Save me, O Lord, I am perishing.' If the darkness of disturbing thoughts comes up, cry out: 'Lead my soul out of prison.' If dishonest deeds present themselves and sin leads you to them, pray, 'Set me, O Lord, in the way', or 'do not give up my feet to stumbling.' If sin takes hold of you and leads you to despair, cry out with the voice of the publican, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' Do this in every circumstance, or simply say often, 'Lord, have mercy', 'Most Holy Theotokos save us', 'Holy Angel, my guardian, protect me', or other such words. Say such prayers as often as possible, always making the effort for them come from your heart, as if squeezed out of it. When we do this, we will frequently ascend to God in our hearts, making frequent petitions and prayers. Such increased frequency will bring about the habit of mental conversation with God.



Prayer is a request for what is good, offered by the devout of God. But we do not restrict this request simply to what is stated in words... We should not express our prayer merely in syllables, but the power of prayer should be expressed in the moral attitude of our soul and in the virtuous actions that extend throughout our life... This is how you pray continually — not by offering prayer in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer.

Saint Basil the Great

A Message of Hope to the World

The Message of the Holy and Great Council

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was recently held from 19 to 26 June at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. In keeping with the tradition of the Orthodox Church that the Church is a universal communion of Churches that are gathered in unity by bonds of love and communion, the bishops of the various autocephalous (self-governing) Churches met together to discuss matters of common concern. However, they were not simply inward-looking in their concern, but insisted that the Church has a duty to be a witness of hope to the world. Here is an extract from the Council Encyclical:



The Holy and Great Council of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church constitutes an authentic witness to faith in Christ, the God-man, the Only-begotten Son and Word of God who, through His Incarnation, through all His work on earth, through His Sacrifice on the Cross and through His Resurrection, revealed the Triune God as infinite love. Therefore, with one voice and one heart we address this message of “the hope that is in us” (cf. 1 Pet 3.15) not only to the sons and daughters of our most holy Church, but also to every human being, “whether near or far off” (Eph 2.17). “Our hope” (cf. 1 Tim 1.1), the Savior of the world, was revealed as “God with us” (cf. Matt 1.23) and as God “for our sake” (Rom 8.32), who “desires that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Tim 2.4). Proclaiming His mercy and not concealing His great blessings, in remembrance of the Lord’s words that “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt 24.35) and “filled with joy” (1 John 1.4), we announce the Gospel of faith, hope and love, looking forward to that “day without evening, without succession and without end” (Basil the Great, *On the Hexaemeron II*, PG 29.54). The fact that we have “our citizenship in heaven” (Phil 3.20) in no way negates, but rather strengthens our witness in the world.

In this we follow the tradition of the Apostles and of the Fathers of our Church who proclaimed Christ and the saving experience through Him of the Church’s faith, and who spoke of God in the “manner of fishermen casting a net,” that is to say in an apostolic manner, to the people of every age in order to transmit to them the Gospel of freedom “for which Christ has set us free” (cf. Gal 5.1). The Church lives not for herself. She offers herself for the whole of humanity in order to raise up and renew the world into new heavens and a new earth (cf. Rev 21.1). Hence, she gives Gospel witness and distributes the gifts of God in the world: His love, peace, justice, reconciliation, the power of the Resurrection and the expectation of eternal life. (See www.holycouncil.org for more).