

Whatever the soul may think fit to do itself, whatever care and pains it may take, relying only upon its own power, and thinking to be able to effect a perfect success by itself, without the co-operation of the Spirit, it is greatly mistaken. It is of no use for the heavenly places; it is of no use for the kingdom – that soul, which supposes that it can achieve perfect purity of itself, and by itself alone, without the Spirit. Unless the man who is under the influence of the passions will come to God, denying the world, and will believe with patience and hope to receive a good thing foreign to his own nature, namely the power of the Holy Spirit, and unless the Lord shall drop upon the soul from on high the life of the Godhead, such a man will never experience true life, will never recover from the drunkenness of materialism; the enlightenment of the Spirit will never shine in that benighted soul, or kindle in it a holy daytime; it will never awake out of that deepest sleep of ignorance, and so come to know God of a truth through God's power and the efficacy of grace.

Saint Macarius the Great



24 July is the Fifth Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:13-35

Epistle: Romans 10:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 8:28-34; 9:1

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Having learned the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection from the Angel, and having cast off the ancestral condemnation, the women disciples of the Lord spake to the Apostles exultantly: Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world.

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, 25 July: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 8:16-21
Dormition of St. Anna; Olympias the Deaconess

Tuesday, 26 July: Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-5; Mark 5:24-34
Hermolaus, Hermippus, & Hermocrates; Martyr Paraskeve

Wednesday, 27 July: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; John 15:17-27; 16:1-2
Great Martyr Panteleimon; Nicholas of Novgorod

Thursday, 28 July: Acts 6:1-7; Matthew 13:36-43
Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon & Parmenas of the 70; Irene Chrysovalantou

Friday, 29 July: 1 Corinthians 4:5-8; Matthew 13:44-54
Martyr Callinicus; Martyr Theodota & her Children

Saturday, 30 July: Acts 15:35-41; Matthew 9:18-26
Silas, Silvan, Crescens, Epenetus & Andronicus of the 70; Julitta of Caesaria



Evangelion

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What Have You to Do with Us, O Son of God?

Today we hear Saint Matthew's account of how Jesus Christ cast the demons out of two demoniacs who had been living in the tombs in the territory of the Gadarenes. We hear that they were so fierce that nobody could pass near them. When Jesus appeared they recognized Him and challenged Him saying: "What have you to do with us, O Son of God?" Sending the demons into a herd of swine, Christ healed the two men, restoring them to their senses.

Such accounts may seem strange to our modern ears. Yet Saint Matthew clearly shows us that the demons had taken possession of these men in a fairly dramatic way, that they recognized the authority of Christ, and that He had authority over them.

It is significant that these demoniacs were living in the tombs, for that is the place of the dead. And the fact is that the presence of the demonic, of evil, of the devil himself, leads to death. It also leads to violence, which is another characteristic of the devil, in total contrast to the peace which comes from God.

Today's Gospel account might sound like an extreme encounter with the demonic. While such encounters exist, the reality is that, for most of us, our encounter with the demonic comes in a much more subtle manner. The Fathers teach us that people are not possessed by demons overnight; rather such possession comes after first surrendering our free will and allowing our thoughts to be distracted by ideas that are evil, and from there it is a slippery slope as they increasingly come to exercise control over us. We need to guard our thoughts from evil and to ask for Christ's help in not allowing evil habits to take control over us.



Baptism does not take away our free will or freedom of choice, but gives us the freedom no longer to be tyrannized by the devil unless we choose to be.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

Question Box

If you have a question about the faith or teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

I keep seeing Orthodox writers speak about passions as something negative. Isn't it good to be passionate about something? What are they trying to say?

You are right in noting that the way Orthodox teachers usually use the word “passions” is somewhat different from how it is generally used in daily life. For the early Christians, the meaning of the word “passion” (πάθος) meant “to suffer,” as we seen in the way we speak of Christ’s Passion.

Orthodox teachers on the spiritual life generally understand the passions to be the tendency to sin that has come into our lives as a consequence of the fall. They have to do with our desires, and the fundamental orientation of our hearts and represent a distortion of our true nature. In this sense, they are a sort of spiritual sickness that we suffer from, but which we are also called to struggle against as we seek healing in Jesus Christ.

The Church has traditionally identified eight passions that affect different key areas of our lives. (The western concept of the “seven deadly sins” is derived from this). These passions affect areas of our lives that are in themselves good, but which have become subject to corruption due to the fall. As Saint John of the Ladders states, “We have taken natural attributes of our own and turned them into passions.” For example, lust is the unnatural use of sexuality, which is itself good, just as gluttony is the unnatural use of food that is given to us by God for our good.

The struggle against the passions includes the development of the virtues, and each passion has its corresponding virtues. These are sometimes listed slightly differently, but the general principle is the same. Here is Saint John of Damascus’ advice on how to deal with the passions:

These eight passions should be destroyed as follows: **gluttony** by self-control; **unchastity** by the desire for God and longing for the blessings held in store; **avarice** by compassion for the poor; **anger** by goodwill and love for all men; worldly **dejection** by spiritual joy; **listlessness** by patience, perseverance, and offering thanks to God; **vainglory** by doing good in secret and by praying with a contrite heart; and **pride** by not judging or despising anyone in the manner of the boastful Pharisee, and by considering oneself the least of all men. When the intellect has been freed in this way from the passions we have described and been raised to God, it will henceforth lead the life of blessedness, receiving the pledge of the Holy Spirit. And when it departs this life, dispassionate and full of true knowledge, it will stand before the light of the Holy Trinity and with the divine angels will shine in glory through all eternity.

The Mission of the Church in 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 recent weeks, we have seen something of what it says of our identity as Christians and as the Church. Here is what it says about the Church’s mission in the world.

The apostolic work and the proclamation of the Gospel, also known as *mission*, belong at the core of the Church’s identity, as the keeping and observation of Christ’s commandment: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28.19). This is the “breath of life” that the Church breathes into human society and makes the world into Church through the newly-established local Churches everywhere. In this spirit, the Orthodox faithful are and ought to be Christ’s apostles in the world. This mission must be fulfilled, not aggressively, but freely, with love and respect towards the cultural identity of individuals and peoples. All Orthodox Churches ought to participate in this endeavor with due respect for canonical order.



Participation in the holy Eucharist is a source of missionary zeal for the evangelization of the world. By participating in the holy Eucharist and praying in the Sacred Synaxis for the whole world (*oikoumene*), we are called to continue the “liturgy after the Liturgy” and to offer witness concerning the truth of our faith before God and mankind, sharing God’s gifts with all mankind, in obedience to the explicit commandment of our Lord before His Ascension: “And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1.8). The words of the Divine Liturgy prior to Communion, “Dismembered and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is dismembered and not divided, ever eaten, yet never consumed,” indicate that Christ as the “Lamb of God” (John 1.29) and the “Bread of Life” (John 6.48) is offered to us as eternal Love, uniting us to God and to one another. It teaches us to distribute God’s gifts and to offer ourselves to everyone in a Christ-like way.

The life of Christians is a truthful witness to the renewal in Christ of all things – “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5.17) – and an invitation addressed to all people for personal and free participation in eternal life, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the love of God the Father, in order to experience the communion of the Holy Spirit in the Church. “For the mystery of salvation is for those who desire it, not for those who are being coerced” (Maximus Confessor PG 90.880). The re-evangelization of God’s people in contemporary secularized societies, as well as the evangelization of those who have not yet come to know Christ, is the unceasing duty of the Church. (See www.holycouncil.org for more).