

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



28 August is the Tenth Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: John 21:1-14

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

Gospel: Matthew 17:14-23

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:

In your holy birth, Immaculate One, Joachim and Anna were rid of the shame of childlessness; Adam and Eve of the corruption of death. And so your people, free of the guilt of their sins, celebrate crying: "The barren one gives birth to the Theotokos, who nourishes our life."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 29 August: Matthew 14:1-13; Acts 13:25-33; Mark 6:14-30
Beheading of the Forerunner; Theodora of Thessaloniki

Tuesday, 30 August: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 3:1-3; Matthew 23:23-28
Apodosis of the Forerunner; Alexander, Paul & John, Pats. of Const.

Wednesday, 31 August: Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28
Venerable Sash of the Theotokos; Cyprian of Carthage

Thursday, 1 September: 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 4:16-22
Beginning of the Indiction; Synaxis of the Recovery of the Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos

Friday, 2 September: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18; Matthew 24:27-33, 42-51
Martyr Mammias; John, Abp. Of Constantinople

Saturday, 3 September: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Matthew 19:3-12
Hieromartyr Anthimus; Righteous Theoctistus & Euthymius



Evangelion

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Faith as a Mustard Seed

Today, on the tenth Sunday of Matthew, we hear the account of the healing of an epileptic boy. This incident occurs just after the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor, and is particularly concerned with the power of faith in our lives.

This boy is brought to Jesus by his father after the apostles had been unable to heal him. Jesus Christ rebukes them for their lack of faith and when they later ask Him why they had not been able to cast the demon out of the boy, He blames it on their lack of faith, declaring that, if we have faith like a mustard seed, we will be able to move mountains.

The image that Jesus evokes here is that of the contrast between a mustard seed and the mountain. The mustard seed is a tiny little seed, but Christ's point is that even a tiny bit of faith, if it is genuine, can do great things.

We are sometimes inclined to think of faith in intellectual terms as assent to particular doctrines. But the faith that Christ speaks of here is far deeper than that. It is an attitude of total trust in the all-powerful goodness of God. It is the humility to place our whole lives and all our desires before God, trusting that He knows what is best for us.

If we have even a little of this sort of faith, new possibilities will open up for us and for those around us. It is this sort of faith that we see in the lives of the saints and it is such faith that was to enable the apostles to do such great and unexpected things.



Christian religion is not a certain philosophic system, about which learned men, trained in metaphysical studies, argue and then either espouse or reject, according to the opinion each one has formed. It is faith, established in the souls of men, which ought to be spread to the many and be maintained in their consciousness.

Saint Nektarios of Aegina

Our Responsibility for Creation

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. Having discussed the challenge posed by secularization and scientific progress, the Council Fathers continue to outline our responsibility to care for creation:

In a global society, oriented towards ‘having’ and individualism, the Orthodox Catholic Church presents the truth of life in and according to Christ, the truth freely made incarnate in the everyday life of each man through his works “till evening” (Ps 103), through which he is made co-worker of the eternal Father [“We are co-workers with God” (1 Cor 3.9)] and of His Son [“My Father is working still, and I am working” (John 5.17)]. The grace of God sanctifies in the Holy Spirit the works of the hands of the man who works together with God, revealing the affirmation in them of life and of human society. Christian asceticism is to be placed within this framework; this differs



radically from all dualistic asceticism that severs man from life and from his fellow man. *Christian asceticism and the exercise of self-restraint*, which connect man with the sacramental life of the Church, do not concern only the monastic life, but are characteristic of ecclesial life in all its manifestations, as a tangible witness to the presence of the eschatological spirit in the blessed life of the faithful.

The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical, inhering within the heart of each man. This crisis has become more acute in recent centuries on account of the various divisions provoked by human passions – such as greed, avarice, egotism and the insatiable desire for more – and by their consequences for the planet, as with climate change, which now threatens to a large extent the natural environment, our common “home”. The rupture in the relationship between man and creation is a perversion of the authentic use of God’s creation. The approach to the ecological problem on the basis of the principles of the Christian tradition demands not only repentance for the sin of the exploitation of the natural resources of the planet, namely, a radical change in mentality and behavior, but also asceticism as an antidote to consumerism, the deification of needs and the acquisitive attitude. It also presupposes our greatest responsibility to hand down a viable natural environment to future generations and to use it according to divine will and blessing. In the sacraments of the Church, creation is affirmed and man is encouraged to act as a steward, protector and “priest” of creation, offering it by way of doxology to the Creator – “Your own of your own we offer to You in all and for all” – and cultivating a Eucharistic relationship with creation. This Orthodox, Gospel and Patristic approach also turns our attention to the social dimensions and the tragic consequences of the destruction of the natural environment. (See www.holycouncil.org).

Nothing created by God is evil. It is not food that is evil but gluttony, not the begetting of children but unchastity, not material things but avarice, not esteem but self-esteem. It is only the misuse of things that is evil, not the things themselves.

Saint Maximos the Confessor

A New Church Year

This Thursday marks the beginning of a new Church year. In the Roman Empire, the first of September was the day on which the emperor would announce a decree of taxation. But it was also the time (in the northern hemisphere) for harvesting the fruits of the earth and for beginning a new agricultural cycle as we also see in Jewish worship. The Church took over this calendar but gave it a deeper significance.

The Christian liturgical year comprises different cycles and feasts and we need a calendar in order to give them some cohesion and order. As the year unfolds it enables us to follow the various events in the life of Christ and in the history of our salvation. It shows us something of the power of the Holy Spirit which is made real for us in the lives of the saints. This is not simply a matter of giving us intellectual knowledge; instead, the events and people are made present to us today.

Ultimately, the liturgical year exists in order to draw us closer to Christ and to be united with Him in the Church. By following the various events of His Life and His ministry, by hearing the Gospels read during the course of the year, by entering with Him into His suffering, death and resurrection, we are called to be conformed to Him as we gradually allow the Holy Spirit to form and refashion the Image of God in us. We are invited to unite ourselves with His birth, His growth, His suffering, His death and His triumph.

During the course of the year we are also drawn into the cycle of the saints who are the glorified members of Christ’s Body. Their light is really an extension of the light of Christ, and their sanctity is an extension of His sanctity. To celebrate the feast of a saint is to celebrate a special grace that flows from Christ to that saint, and in which we too are called to participate.



Apolytikion - Beginning of the Indiction

Creator of the universe, setting times and seasons by Your sole authority, bless the cycle of the year of Your grace, O Lord, guarding our rulers and Your nation in peace, at the intercession of the Theotokos, and save us.

Kontakion - Beginning of the Indiction

You who created all things in Your infinite wisdom, and set the times by Your own authority, grant Your Christian people victories. Blessing our comings and goings throughout this year, guide our works according to Your divine will.