

Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind which remains the same in honour and dishonour. Meekness is the rock overlooking the sea of irritability which breaks all the waves that dash against it, remaining itself unmoved. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the mother of love and the foundation of wisdom, for it is said, "The Lord will teach the meek His way." (Psalm 24:9) It prepares the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. "But to whom shall I look," says the Lord, "to him who is meek and quiet and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2) In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is the seat of the devil.

Saint John Climacus

Sunday 15 September 2013 is the Sunday after the Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross.

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Galatians 2:16-20

Gospel: Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let the Heavens rejoice; let earthly things be glad; for the Lord hath wrought might with His arm, He hath trampled upon death by death. The first-born of the dead hath He become. From the belly of Hades hath He delivered us, and hath granted great mercy to the world.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; Luke 7:36-50
Great Martyr Euphemia; Sebastiana, Disciple of Paul

Tuesday: 2 Corinthians 8:16-24; 9:1-5; Luke 3:23-38, 4:1
Joachim, Patriarch of Alexandria; Martyrs Sophia, Pistis, Elpis & Agape;

Wednesday: 2 Corinthians 9:12-15; 10:1-7; Luke 4:1-15
Eumenius, Bp. of Gortyna; Martyr Ariadne

Thursday: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18; Luke 4:16-22
Martyrs Trophimus, Sabbatius, & Dorymedon; Afterfeast of the Holy Cross

Friday: Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 21:12-19
Martyr Eustathius & His Companions; Eustathius of Thessalonica

Saturday: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2:1-5; John 8:21-30
Saturday after Holy Cross; Apodosis of the Holy Cross; Apostle Quadratus



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

15 September 2013

Taking up our cross

Today, on the Sunday after the Feast of the Elevation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross, the Church continues to focus our attention on the Cross of Christ. In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus Christ's challenging words calling us to renounce ourselves, take up our own cross and follow Him.

In the Cross of Christ we see the extent to which God's love is poured out for us, as Jesus Christ enters into the very depths of our human need. We cannot adequately explain the Mystery of the Cross and it presents us with a paradox, for, as Saint Paul tells us, God's power is shown forth in weakness. The Cross of Christ shows us the power of suffering love, and proclaims that it is this love that ultimately conquers sin and death.

In some ways, our life as Christians is also based on a paradox. Jesus' call to us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, may seem like a crazy and even irresponsible thing to do. Yet He tells us that it is only by doing this that we will be able to have true life.

Christ is not calling us to be killjoys who are unable to enjoy the good things in life. But He is challenging us to evaluate what it is that we really live for. Anything that is really worthwhile will inevitably involve suffering in one way, and as we choose to follow Christ we also need to be prepared to share in the Mystery of His Cross, for it is only through the Cross that we can find true life.



What is the will of God that Saint Paul urges and invites each of us to attain? It is total cleansing from sin, freedom from the shameful passions and the acquisition of the highest virtue. In other words, it is the purification and sanctification of the heart that comes about through fully experienced and conscious participation in the perfect and divine Spirit.

Saint Makarios of Egypt

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

The singing of the antiphons precedes and leads into the entrance with the Gospel Book, which is also known as the Little Entrance. Until seventh century the Divine Liturgy used to begin with the Procession of the Gospel, and the antiphons had been sung while people processed to the Church. Earlier, during the times of persecution, the Book of the Gospels was not kept in the Church, for fear that it might be stolen. Instead, it was brought to the Church for every Liturgy and enthroned on the altar.



Today the Book of the Gospels is kept on the altar and during the Little Entrance the clergy bring it out of among the people in order to solemnly process with it, formally entering into the sanctuary and enthroning it on the altar. During this procession the Beatitudes or a third antiphon are sung.

This procession with the Gospel Book is the first significant movement in the Divine Liturgy. It is a profound moment that highlights for us the importance of the Gospels. The central focus of the first part of the Liturgy is the reading of the Holy Gospel, and the Little Entrance is part of our preparation for this. This is crucially important, for the whole of the Church's life is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, on the Good News of the love that He showed by coming among us and destroying death by death.

In the entrance with the Gospel Book, we see how the Church, having already gathered together for worship, moves together with Jesus Christ who is her head. The Book of the Gospels is an image of Christ, and the Little Entrance is the movement of the whole Church, represented by the clergy, towards the Kingdom of God which is represented by the altar. This movement is only possible because Christ has come among us, inviting us to follow Him and to share His life in His kingdom.

*On Sundays the **Beatitudes** are sung during the entrance with the Gospel Book. These contain Jesus Christ's own words and come from His opening words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12). They are traditionally considered to contain the most precise summary of our Christian spiritual life. By singing them during the Little Entrance the Church shows us that we enter into the mysteries of Christ by following His teachings and allowing our lives to be shaped by His example.*

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil
against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

If you want to cure your soul, you need four things. The first is to forgive your enemies. The second is to confess thoroughly. The third is to blame yourself. The fourth is to resolve to sin no more. If we wish to be saved, we must always blame ourselves and not attribute our wrong acts to others. And God, who is most compassionate, will forgive us.

Saint Kosmas Aitolos

Question Box

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

I have friends who have been reading books showing that there were other gospels (other than the four in the New Testament) and arguing that the Church suppressed these because they give a different view of Jesus. Is this true? I find it difficult to know how to respond.

In recent years there has been a marked rise in interest in apocryphal gospels and in alternative views of Christian history and the attitudes that you describe have become fashionable both in some academic circles and in the popular media. However, much of this rests on dubious scholarship and media hype and is only taken seriously because people are ignorant of Church history.

The writings that are referred to here are writings that were not accepted by the Church as part of our canon of Scripture and are known as apocryphal. Some of these are harmless and contain background material that has been taken up into the tradition of the Church, such as the information on the birth and childhood of the Theotokos, or the descent of Jesus Christ into hell. However others, and it is these that have become popular today, came out of heretical circles and often reflect heretical beliefs, especially those of the Gnostics.

It is important to note that these so-called gospels are all considerably later than the Church's canonical Gospels which were all written in the second part of the first century. Moreover, they have a very different "feel" to them. While the Church's Gospels are all centred on the public preaching of Jesus Christ and His victory over death through His crucifixion and resurrection, these alternative writings tend to stress secret knowledge and disjointed sayings. This seems to be appealing for people who want to reconstruct Jesus according to their own contemporary agendas.

For the Church, however, our understanding of Jesus Christ has never been a matter of personal preference or secret knowledge. Already in the second century, Saint Irenaeus of Lyon addressed such claims by showing that our pattern of faith has been passed on from the Apostles and that this has always been done in a visible tangible way. It is in the visible Church, which can trace her origins directly to the apostles, that the true Gospels have been preserved from the earliest times.