

Christians, have we understood the great responsibility that we have taken on before God through baptism? Have we come to know that we must conduct ourselves as children of God, that we must align our will with the will of God, that we must remain free from sin, that we must love God with all our hearts and always patiently await union with Him? Have we thought about the fact that our heart should be so filled with love that it should overflow to our neighbour? Do we have the feeling that we must become holy and perfect, children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven? We must struggle for this, so that we may not be shown unworthy and rejected. Let none of us lose our boldness, nor neglect our duties, nor be afraid of the difficulties of spiritual struggle. For we have God as a helper, who strengthens us in the difficult path of virtue.

Saint Nectarius of Aegina

Sunday 28 July 2012 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:

When the women Disciples of the Lord had learned from the Angel the joyful message of the Resurrection and had rejected the ancestral decision, they cried aloud to the Apostles triumphantly: Death has been despoiled, Christ God has risen, granting His great mercy to the world.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Romans 16:17-24; Matthew 13:10-23,43
Martyr Callinicus; Virgin Martyr Theodota

Tuesday: Acts 15:35-41; Matthew 13:24-30
Silas & Silvanus of the 70; Julitta of Caesaria

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; 3:1-8; Matthew 13:31-36
Forefeast of the Holy Cross; Joseph of Arimathea

Thursday: Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2; Matthew 10:16-22
Proodos of the Holy Cross; 7 Maccabean Youths

Friday: Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60; Mark 12:1-12
Translation of the relics of Stephen; New Martyr Theodore of Dardanelles

Saturday: Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 9:18-26
Righteous Isaacius, Dalmatius, Faustus; Salome the Holy Myrrhbearer



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

28 July 2013

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.



In truth there is only one freedom - the holy freedom of Christ, whereby He freed us from sin, from evil, from the devil. It binds us to God. All other freedoms are illusory, false, that is to say, they are all, in fact, slavery.

Saint Justin Popovich

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

Having prayed for our country and its rulers, and for all the inhabitants of the world, the Great Litany continues by asking:

For favourable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and temperate seasons, let us pray to the Lord.

For modern people with a scientific mentality this may sound like a quaint relic of a bygone era – after all, we can predict weather patterns and implement sound farming techniques. Moreover, expecting God to give us good weather for our holidays while the farmers actually need rain may strike us as a little superstitious. Yet this petition is fundamentally important, for it shows the deep interconnection between all created things and is rooted in the conviction that all we have comes from God.



We believe that the earth was created good. It was intended as a blessing for human beings who in turn gave thanks to God for it. Man was made a king and priest of the cosmos and was given the task of offering it back to God.

However, with the entrance of sin into the world, our peaceful coexistence with both God and with the material world was disrupted. The world became corruptible and our relationship to it was changed. Instead of being kings and priests of the world, we became its slaves.

In His mercy God limited the consequences of our rebellion and held back the forces of destruction. Moreover, with the coming of Christ, peace returned to the world and the whole of creation is called to welcome Him. At the feast of the Annunciation we sing: “Let creation be glad, let nature dance... Dance you mountains, for Christ is born!”

Saint Paul tells us that creation itself is longing to be set free from the corruption into which it has fallen (Romans 8:20-21). In the Divine Liturgy this peace of Christ becomes more and more real as we ascend to the Kingdom of God. We therefore call out to God for His great gift of harmony so disruptions may cease and that we may live in harmony with all creation.

When all of the created world which God had brought out of non-being into existence saw Adam leave Paradise, it no longer wished to be subject to the transgressor. The sun did not want to shine by day, nor the moon by night, nor the stars to be seen by him. The springs of water did not want to well up for him, nor the rivers to flow. The very air itself thought about contradicting itself and not providing breath for the rebel. The wild beasts and all the animals of the earth saw him stripped of his glory and, despising him, immediately turned savagely against him. The sky was moving as if to fall justly down on him, and the very earth would not endure bearing him on its back... [But God’s love] restrains everything by His own power and compassion and goodness, suspends the assault of all creation and straight away subjects all of it again to fallen man. He wills that creation serve man for whom it was made, and like him become corruptible, so that when again man becomes spiritual, incorruptible and immortal, then creation, too, will be freed from its slavery ... and, together with man, be made new, and become incorruptible and wholly spiritual.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

Everything that lives and breathes is sacred and beautiful in the eyes of God. The whole world is a sacrament. The entire created cosmos is a burning bush of God’s uncreated energies. And humankind stands as a priest before the altar of creation, as microcosm and mediator. Such is the true nature of things; or, as an Orthodox hymn describes it, “the truth of things,” if only we have the eyes of faith to see it.

His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople

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

Can you please say something about asceticism? I get confused when I hear that creation is good, and yet we are told that we should be denying ourselves. If God has created creation as good, shouldn't we just enjoy it?

God has indeed created creation as good, indeed as “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) The things of the world have been given to human beings to use rightly and to enjoy. The idea that matter is evil is not a Christian one, but stems from early Gnostic heresies.

Asceticism does not involve a rejection of matter and of the created world, but rather involves a training in which we learn to use matter rightly. It involves a growing in freedom in which we learn how to appreciate things without being controlled by them. We may not realise how dependent we have become on things until we try to do without them!

The self-denial involved in asceticism is not because the world is evil, but rather because our own desires have become corrupted by sin and got out of hand. Asceticism is a tool that the Church gives us for healing our wayward passions. It is the effort that we need to make to conform our wills to the will of God and to allow ourselves to be changed by this.

The Fathers of the Church speak of the ascetical practices of watchfulness, study, prayer, self-control and stillness. While the Church gives us some guidelines in this, such as in her fasting practices and in the services she encourages us to attend, how we engage in these things will depend on our situation in life and on the advice of our confessor. Ascetical practices are a medicine for our illness, and the type and the measure of the medicine will vary from person to person.