

Let us therefore follow one and the same path, Christ's commandments, which elevate us to heaven and to God.

Even though the word shows us many paths and many ways for people to reach the kingdom of heaven, these paths are not, in fact, many, but one, though they're divided into many, according to each person's ability and disposition.

While we may begin from many and varied works and actions, just as travelers depart from different places and many cities, the destination we are attempting to reach is the same: the kingdom of heaven.

The actions and ways of godly men must be understood as spiritual virtues.

Those who begin to walk in them must head towards one goal, just as those who come from various countries and places come together, as we have said, to one city, the kingdom of heaven, where, together, they will become worthy to reign with Christ and become subjects of one King, our God and Father.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

Sunday 9 March 2014 is the Sunday of Orthodoxy

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:1-12

Epistle: Hebrews 12:1-10

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Apolytikion:

We venerate your most pure icon, loving Lord, as we ask pardon for our offences, Christ our God. For by your own choice you were well pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, to deliver from the slavery of the enemy those whom you had fashioned: therefore with thanksgiving we cry to you: You have filled all things with joy, Our Saviour, by coming to save the world

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 4:2-5:7; Genesis 3:21-4:7; Proverbs 3:34-4:22
Martyr Quadratus of Corinth and the 5; Anastasia of Alexandria

Tuesday: Isaiah 5:7-16; Genesis 4:8-15; Proverbs 5:1-15
Sophronius, Pat. Of Jerusalem; Theodora the Righteous

Wednesday: Isaiah 5:16-25; Genesis 4:16-26; Proverbs 5:15-6:3
Theophanes the Confessor; Symeon the New Theologian

Thursday: Isaiah 6:1-12; Genesis 5:1-24; Proverbs 6:3-20
Nicephorus, Pat. Of Constantinople; Pouplios the Martyr, Bishop of Athens

Friday: Isaiah 7:1-14; Genesis 5:32-6:8; Proverbs 6:20-7:1
Benedict of Nursia; Euschimonus the Confessor

Saturday: Hebrews 3:12-16; Mark 1:35-44
Martyr Agapius & Companions; Manuel the New Martyr of Crete



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

9 March 2014

Learning to See

Today, on the first Sunday of Great Lent, which is also the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we hear Saint John's account of the calling of the first disciples. Today's Gospel tells us how Jesus called Philip and how he then went and called Nathanael, who sceptically questioned whether anything good could come from Nazareth. However, his eyes were opened when the Lord told him how He had seen him sitting under the fig tree. Jesus Christ told him: "You will see greater things than that ... you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man."



We read this Gospel at the beginning of Lent because it shows us where our Lenten journey is headed. In the early Church, Lent was the time in which new converts were prepared for baptism, which was referred to as illumination, for becoming Christian is learning to see with the eyes of faith.

Most of us are already baptized and have had our eyes opened to the truth of the faith. And yet our sight tends to become darkened and we all need to learn to see with the eyes of faith. In setting out on a journey to Pascha, the great feast in which the Light of Christ conquers all darkness, we need to be able to prepare ourselves to receive that light. We need to be purified so that Christ's light does not consume us, but rather gives us life and leads us to the vision of God.

The purpose of our Lenten discipline is to help us to enter into the depths of our own hearts, so that we may learn to see with "the eye of the heart" so that, beholding God there, we may receive life in Him.

When he had been cleansed by fasting, great Moses saw the God for whom he longed. Eagerly follow his example, O my humble soul; make haste to cleanse thyself from evil in the day of abstinence, and so thou shalt behold the Lord who grants thee forgiveness, for He is all-powerful and loves mankind.

From Sunday Evening Vespers on the Sunday of Orthodoxy

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

In the last article in this series, we began to discuss the Holy Anaphora or Oblation as we move into the most sacred part of the Divine Liturgy. We saw how we are called to “stand with awe” so that we will be able to offer the Holy Oblation in peace. We then hear the priest giving the blessing:



*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God the Father,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.*

To this we respond:

And with your spirit.

And the priest then urges us:

Let your hearts be on high.

To which we respond:

We have them with the Lord.

From the beginning of the Divine Liturgy we have been reminded that our true destiny is the Kingdom of Heaven. The liturgy takes us “on high” and as we prepare to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice we are aware that we do so with all the angels and saints.

But we are also reminded here that this Kingdom that we are approaching is the “Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, Liturgy announced. In the Divine Liturgy we are invited to enter into a real communion with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. We become partakers of the gifts of the Holy Trinity. We share in:

- the love of God the Father, who is the Source of all that is;
- the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way and the door through which we enter this love;
- the communion of the Holy Spirit, who comes upon the Church to bind its members together and unite them to God.

The communion that we experience in the Church is a reflection of the communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God enables and invites us to share in His own communion, for our very life comes from Him. As Saint Basil the Great tells us: “Our life is given by God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.”

It is only by being in a relationship of love and communion with both God and with those around us that we can be truly human as God intended us to be. For we were created for communion. And we were created to receive the gifts of God and to offer them back to Him.

The celebrant does not touch the Gifts which lie before him until he has invoked the grace of the Lord upon you and you have replied, “And with your spirit.” With this response, you remind yourselves . . . that the Gifts offered are not the work of man; rather, it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is present and hovers over all, that prepares this mystical Sacrifice.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Today, the first Sunday of Lent, is known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when we commemorate the victory of the Orthodox faith over the heresy of iconoclasm. In the eighth century the Church had been torn apart by those who objected to the veneration of icons, and in 787 the Second Council of Nicaea responded by affirming the role of icons in the Church, stating that “Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype.” The Council distinguished between the worship that is due to God alone, and the veneration that we give to icons, and stated that when we venerate an icon we are really venerating the reality for which it stands.



Even after the Council, iconoclasm persisted until in 844 Empress Theodora established Orthodoxy anew with a solemn procession and veneration of icons on the first Sunday of Lent. This was the beginning today’s feast and celebrates the victory of true doctrine over heresy.

The triumph of Orthodoxy that we celebrate today is integrally related to the earlier struggle for the Orthodox faith, for what was at stake was not simply the validity of venerating icons, but the very reality of the Incarnation of Christ that the Church had struggled to profess in earlier centuries. Because God had become fully human in Jesus Christ, matter itself had been sanctified and had become a suitable medium for portraying His Image. As Saint John of Damascus wrote “If you have understood that the Incorporeal One became man for you, then it is evident that you can portray His human image.”



One prayer that characterises the season of Lent is the Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian. It sums up the whole purpose of Great Lent and teaches us what true repentance means. It reminds us of the passions that we are called to turn away from, and holds before us the virtues that we are called to grow in. Moreover, the prayer also reminds us of the dangers that await those who take repentance seriously.

The Prayer of Saint Ephrem is usually prayed together with prostrations and is not only a prayer but also a lesson. For, by praying it repeatedly, we become more aware of how we do not in fact follow what we are asking. It leads us to self-knowledge, making us more aware that we need God’s help if we are to repent in a genuine way.

**Lord and Master of my life,
Do not give me a spirit of sloth,
despair, lust of power,
and idle talk.**

**But give rather a spirit of
chastity, humility, patience,
and love to Your servant.**

**Yes, Lord and King,
Grant me to see my own faults
and not to judge my brother, for
You are blessed unto ages of
ages. Amen.**