

SAINT ANTHONY ORTHODOX CHURCH



Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

www.orthodoxbutler.org

ADDRESS: 400 S. Sixth Avenue, Butler, PA 16001

RECTOR: Rev. Bogdan Gabriel Bucur

CONTACT: 412.390.8208; frbogdan@orthodoxbutler.org

The 27th Sunday after Pentecost (28 November 2010)

FIRST ANTIPHON

*It is good to give praise unto the Lord, and to chant unto Thy Name, O Most High! **Refrain:** Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us!*

*To proclaim in the morning Thy mercy, and Thy truth by night! **(Refrain)***

*Upright is the Lord our God and there is no unrighteousness in Him **(Refrain)***

*Glory... Now and ever... **(Refrain)***

SECOND ANTIPHON

*The Lord is King, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed with strength and hath girt Himself! **Refrain:** Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"!*

*For He established the world which shall not be shaken! **(Refrain)***

*Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, unto length of days! **(Refrain)***

Glory... Now and ever... (Only begotten Son and Word of God ...)

THIRD ANTIPHON

*Come let us rejoice in the Lord, let us shout with jubilation unto God our Savior! (Ps. 94:1) **Troparion of the Resurrection***

THE LITTLE ENTRANCE

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ. Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee, "Alleluia"!

TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION, Tone 2: When Thou didst submit Thyself unto death, O Thou deathless and immortal One, then Thou didst destroy hell with Thy godly power. And when Thou didst raise the dead from beneath the earth, all the powers of heaven did cry aloud unto Thee: O Christ, Thou giver of life, glory to Thee!

TROPARION OF SAINT STEPHEN THE NEW, Tone 4: O blessed Stephen, thy training in the ascetic life on the mountain and the power of the Cross made thee capable of routing thy spiritual enemies. By thy courage in battle and thy strong faith, thou didst defeat Copronymos. For both these reasons, God has crowned thee with immortal life, O martyr among the Saints, Stephen, worthy of all praise!

TROPARION OF ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT, tone 4 (Russian): Like the zealous Elijah thou didst become, and followed John the Baptist in his upright ways. A dweller in the wilderness, thou didst steady the world by prayer. O Father Anthony, intercede with Christ our God for our souls' salvation.

KONTAKION AT THE PREPARATION OF THE NATIVITY, Tone 3: Today the Virgin cometh to the cave where she will give birth in an ineffable manner to the Word Who is before all the ages. Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it heralded: with the angels and the shepherds, glorify Him Who hath chosen to be seen as a newborn babe: the God Who is before all the ages.

Saints commemorated today: Monkmartyr and Confessor Stephen the New (8th c.); Martyr Irinarchos of Sebaste in Armenia and those with him (+ 303).

LIVING: We pray for the health and well being of Sula, Dolores (Sipos), Dolores (Bingham), Angelica (Georgia's mother), Diane, Karyn, Rodolphe, Brian, Maria, Marius, the hieromonk Alexander, and the baby Christina.

DEPARTED: Mariana, James, Mary Ann, Joseph, Katherine, Ștefan.

TODAY'S APOSTLE READING

Prokeimenon:

*The Lord is my strength and my song;
The Lord has chastened me sorely.*

The Reading is from the Epistle to the Ephesians
(Ephesians 6:10-17)

Brethren: draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The Christians in Ephesus, who received this letter, must have understood this passage very well because they crossed paths daily with Roman soldiers wearing their armors and weapons. We can also see that Saint Paul is drawing an analogy between the weapons and armor of a soldier and the spiritual equipment of a Christian. It is good, however, to point out two elements that we might overlook.

First, the metaphor of warriors and weapons suggests that Christianity is not for wimps. It is not easy, it is not comfortable, it requires discipline and constant vigilance. Indeed, there is a war—not a war “out there” with external enemies, not a war with the body, but a war raging within the recesses of our minds and hearts: Christians are at war with the evil of their own sins and shortcomings, which are constantly attracting the activity of a host of evil spirits. Saint Anthony the Great, seeing these spirits roaming all over the earth and interfering with us, was brought to near despair: “who can possibly avoid them?”, he asked. The answer he received—“humility!”—connects well with another important point in today’s Apostle reading.

Soldiers receive their uniforms, weapons, and supplies from the army; they execute certain tactical maneuvers, as received through the army's chain of command; their activities are part of a military strategy devised by their army superiors. Finally, the individual effort of a soldier is effective only inasmuch as it is part of a larger endeavor, involving various army units.

Christian life is also never about the individual detached from the community. This is why we Orthodox don't speak of "my faith," "my Bible," "my prayer," "my confession," "my weekly Eucharist"; it is always about confessing and participating in the faith of the Church, hearing the Scriptures of the Church, joining in the prayer of the Church, tearing down (in the Sacrament of Confession) the invisible walls that separate me from the Church, entering (through Communion) into the great banquet of the Church. We fast together and feast together, and gradually learn to enter the communion of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As for the "armor of God," the breastplate of righteousness, and the shield of faith that Saint Paul urges us to put on as equipment for our Christian life—all of these are *gifts*: we *receive* them when we enter the Church. To the extent that we nurture it, this grace (another word for gift) is activated in us, and cooperates with our effort of leading a life in Christ. "Put on!"; "Take!" "Be clothed in!": as today's Gospel states clearly, it is impossible for humans to be saved; yet, if we allow God to clothe us, if we accept the garment of grace, God Himself works in us to make the impossible possible.

TODAY'S GOSPEL READING

The Reading is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke

(Luke 18:18-27)

At that time, a man came testing Jesus and asking, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.'" And the man said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the man heard

this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus, seeing him sad, said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus said, “What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.”

Here is a man who, by any standards of human morality, is a pretty decent person: he does not cheat on his wife, he behaves well with his parents, he does not steal, he does not slander or bring false accusations against others, and he did and most likely never will kill anyone. We can assume that there many other good things to be reported about him—for one, he is a deeply religious person (his concern here is “how to inherit eternal life”), who shows appropriate respect for teachers of the Law (note how politely he addresses Jesus); and there probably are many vices that he has managed to avoid. Moreover, he’s acted like that “since his youth”! A decent person, whom we would do well to emulate.

And yet, even while we recite the litany of this man’s qualities, the Gospel seems to sets him forth as an example of *what to avoid*. The word this man receives from Christ comes as a hard blow to his self-esteem: what he has been doing is far from enough, and what he needs to do is impossibly hard for him. A very depressing answer, indeed, because Jesus puts his finger on a raw nerve: this man was very rich (and liked it), and he would have to give everything up. “The man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich.”

Had the man not been terribly attached to money, but instead sexually promiscuous, the answer would probably been different; perhaps something like “One thing you still lack. Cut out your promiscuity, start living in chastity as of right now, and you will have treasure in heaven.” And the man would have become sad, imagining himself unable to remain faithful to a single woman (chastity in marriage) or faithful to a vow of abstinence (as in monastic chastity). Had he been under the control of vanity, Jesus would have proposed the practice of humility; had he been plagued by anger or violence, the answer would have pointed to *that* problem, and proposed the appropriate spiritual medicine.

In short, the Gospel is not about a particular rich man unwilling to part with his riches; and it is not singling out riches as the major impediment to salvation. In truth, the Gospel applies to each and every one of us. There is

no “objective” scale of sins, and no “objective” greatest sin: the greatest sin is always *my* sin. And the word of Christ is not easy to swallow: “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for *you* to enter the kingdom of God.” When Jesus spoke these words to the rich man, those around him were positively shocked: “In this case, who can be saved?” Obviously, nobody; it is, as the Lord states, “impossible for human beings.”

Before speaking to the rich man about his salvation, the Lord points to the goodness of God: “No one is good but God alone!” We should therefore not react like the rich man, who became sad and preferred to leave as soon as he realized that God was not offering him a confirmation of his decent life, but a call to radical change. Note the encouragement: the very impossibility of our salvation and life in God is made possible for us by God himself. The call of today’s Gospel is echoed by our Liturgy, again and again: “let us commit ourselves and all our life to Christ our God ... for You are a good God and You love humankind”! In other words, deny yourself and your sins, entrust yourself to Christ, allow Him to clothe you with His grace (for details, see today’s Apostle reading), allow Him to make possible that which is impossible.

The Nativity of Christ for which we have started our preparations is the joyous event of the beginning of our salvation: the Virgin prepares to give birth, the Son of God prepares to become one of us, our salvation draws near. To paraphrase the Kontakion sung today, *Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it heralded: “What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.”*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **HOUSE BLESSINGS:** The blessing of the house is an opportunity to invite God’s presence into our homes and families. Given the academic calendar at Duquesne, Fr. Bogdan has been given permission to start house blessings immediately after Christmas.
- **FOR CHILDREN GRADES 5-9:** if you would like to send your children to the St. Herman Retreat at the Antiochian Village (Dec 10-12), please talk to Georgia. The retreat program is fun, educational, and spiritually formative.
- Sundays around 9:30: Psalm singing; Vespers on Saturday is at 6:00 pm.