



PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 21—27 OCTOBER 2018

SUNDAY 21 OCTOBER	6th Sunday of Luke, Luke 8: 26-39 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
<p>***** SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES *****</p> <p>(A free voluntary program organised by the Church)</p> <p><i>Immediately after Holy Communion until Church dismissal, in the building behind the Church, Religious Instruction lessons take place for our children. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years, which are given in a relaxed, friendly environment. The understanding of our faith through the religious instruction lessons brings our children closer to God and the joy and peace of His Love.</i></p>	
MONDAY 22 OCTOBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9.00am Service of Holy Unction• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall.
TUESDAY 23 OCTOBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord, Coburg Youth Group will meet in Coburg Church Hall.
WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Paraklesis to the Theotokos
FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER St Demetrios, Myrrh-Bearer and Great-Martyr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.00– 9.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.45pm Service of Vespers
SUNDAY 28 OCTOBER	GOSPEL READING: Luke 8: 41-56 EPISTLE READING: Galatians 6: 11-18



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Fr Athanasios and
Fr Ephraim
are available at the Church
every Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

"Be ever more obe-
dient to God and
He will save you."

St. Pachomius

VOICE OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

Saint Peter the Damascene writes: "We all receive God's blessings equally. But some of us, receiving God's fire, that is, His word, become soft like beeswax, while the others like clay become hard as stone. And if we do not want Him, He does not force any of us, but like the sun He sends His rays and illuminates the whole world, and he who wants to see Him, sees Him, whereas the one who does not want to see Him, is not forced by Him. And no one is responsible for this privation of light except the one who does not want to have it.

God created the sun and the eye. Man is free to receive the sun's light or not. The same is true here. God sends the light of knowledge like rays to all, but He also gave us faith like an eye.
The one who wants to receive knowledge through faith, keeps it by his works, and so God gives him more willingness, knowledge, and power."

The Good Witness of Becoming our True Selves

If you are like me, you often do not recognize yourself in your own words, thoughts, and deeds. Sometimes we see how we fall short in an instant, while other times it becomes clear to us in retrospect, perhaps even years later. Regardless, it is so easy for us all to be so consumed by anger, pride, lust, envy, and other disordered desires that we lose control of ourselves and act more like a bundle of inflamed passions than like a person created in God's image and likeness. And then when we calm down and come to our senses, we are understandably ashamed and embarrassed. It is a great blow to our egos to recognize how easily our sense of self disintegrates before the passions that so often run wild within us.

When we recognize this difficult truth about ourselves, we can understand at least a bit why the man in today's gospel lesson wanted to leave his hometown and follow Jesus Christ. He had been so filled with demons that he said his name was Legion. He had not lived a recognizably human existence, for he was naked, in a cemetery, and without family or friends. Everyone was terrified of him, and even shackles and chains could not restrain him. He had become a monster and people fled from him in fear. But after the Lord delivered him from the forces of evil, this fellow was clothed and in his right mind. The transformation was so shocking that his neighbours were terrified to the point of asking Christ to leave town.

Imagine how this poor man felt at that point. Even as he must have been overjoyed at his deliverance, he knew that everyone he encountered was well aware of his miserable past. They had seen him as a crazy, dangerous, and evil person and had wanted nothing to do with him. Instead of simply thanking Christ for delivering him, these people asked the Lord to leave their region. They were deeply disturbed by what had happened. Of course, this man was at the centre of the controversy and he wanted to put it all behind him. So he wanted to follow the One Who had given him back his life and his true identity.

That is not what the Lord had in store for him, however, for He told him to stay in his town and tell everyone about what God had done for him. Perhaps that was because there could have been no greater witness to the good news of Christ's salvation than the living testimony of someone who had so obviously been set free from the forces of evil, who had so obviously been given back his life as a human being. The people of that region did not understand Who Christ was or what it meant to encounter Him in their lives. They had been simply afraid of Him. But perhaps through the persistent witness of someone who had been so wretched and depraved and then became a healthy and whole person again, their eyes would be opened. Perhaps then they would come to see that they too needed the blessing of the One Who restored "Legion" to his true self.

Surely, one of the reasons that many people do not take Christianity seriously today is that they do not encounter people whose lives are visibly different because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. Many in our culture equate being a Christian with simply being a good citizen or a nice person. Many have realized that it is quite possible to be a good citizen and a nice person without being a Christian. Some who claim to be Christians do not attend a church of any kind. Some who do attend services do not live in ways different from anyone else in our culture. If we water down our Orthodox Christian faith to the point that it concerns only what we do for a couple of hours on Sunday, we will fit right in with the dominant trends of our culture that lead people not to take Christ seriously. If our participation in the Body of Christ does not strengthen, heal, and transform us for lives of holiness, then we will not bear witness to what happens when human beings become their true selves through the blessing of our Saviour.

St. Seraphim of Sarov said, "Acquire the Spirit of peace and a thousand souls around you will be saved." In other words, those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and healed of their passions will live in such a way that their example will draw others to the Lord. They will exist as human persons healed, fulfilled, and transformed. They will move from being "Legion" to being themselves in God's image and likeness. They will become living icons of our Lord's salvation. Whether we like it or not, we all bear witness to Jesus Christ every day in all that we say and do, whether for good or bad. Family, friends, co-workers, and classmates probably know that we are Orthodox Christians, and they likely take pretty seriously the example that we give them. If we identify ourselves with Christ and do or say this or that, then that is what we encourage them to believe about our Lord. If we do not become living icons of holiness, then we are sending the wrong message to everyone we encounter. If we do not bear powerful testimony by how we live each day of the healing power of the Saviour, then we are being unfaithful witnesses to Him.

Contrary to popular opinion, we do not fulfil a religious obligation simply by attending services on Sunday morning, though we obviously should do so. For Orthodox Christians to think about fulfilling or meeting perfectly what God desires for us by a particular action is a contradiction in terms, for our Lord teaches that we are to "be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) To become a partaker of the divine nature by grace is an infinite journey, a process of healing and transformation for which there is no upward limit, for God is infinitely holy. (2 Pet. 1:4) Instead of imagining that we are mastering a skill or checking off a box, we must remember that our calling is truly to become like God in holiness. No matter where we are on the journey, we have an infinite distance yet to go. And if we ever think that we have arrived or completed the course, we should think again.

Remembering that the Saviour told the man to stay in his village and proclaim the good news, we must embrace the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life with integrity if we are to offer faithful testimony to our Lord. We must fast and deny ourselves if we are to have any hope of living in a way that shows that human beings are called to something higher than slavery to self-centred desires. We must forgive those who offend us and reconcile with those from whom we have become estranged if we are to model an alternative to the anger, fear, and hatred so powerful in the world today. We must open our hearts to God in prayer on a daily basis if we are to find the strength to become our true selves in Christ as opposed to a bundle of inflamed passions. We must regularly receive the Holy Mystery of Confession in order to find healing from our sins as we prepare to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord which enable us to participate even now in the banquet of heaven, the complete fulfilment of all things in Christ. And then we must make a liturgy of every moment of our lives, offering ourselves and all our blessings back to the Lord for Him to use as is best for the salvation of the world.

Whenever we are embarrassed to do so out of shame for our failings, weaknesses, and ongoing struggles, we must remember that formerly demon-possessed man. He obeyed Christ by staying in a place where he did not want to be, among people who probably were not comfortable around him. Still, he obeyed and proclaimed the good news by his words and deeds. If we are truly in Christ and want to bear faithful witness to Him, then we must swallow our hurt pride and do the same.