





PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 30 JUNE - 6 JULY 2019

SUNDAY 30 JUNE	SYNAXIS OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES, Matthew 9: 36—10: 1-8 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
<div> SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES (A free voluntary program organised by the Church)</div> <p>Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at the time of Holy Communion until Church dismissal. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment. Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.</p>	
MONDAY 1 JULY Holy Unmercenaries Saints Cosmas and Damian	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall.
TUESDAY 2 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord Youth Group will meet in our Church Hall.
WEDNESDAY 3 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Paraklesis to the Theotokos followed by Bible Study
THURSDAY 4 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30—8.30pm <div> TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP (Ages 13-19) In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church <i>* ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME *</i></div>
SATURDAY 6 JULY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.45pm Service of Vespers
SUNDAY 7 JULY	GOSPEL READING: Matthew 6: 22-33 EPISTLE READING: Galatians 3: 23-29, 4: 1-5



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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.

"We must consider all
evil things, even the
passions which war
against us, to be not our
own, but of our enemy
the devil. This is very
important. You can only
conquer a passion when
you do not consider it as
part of you."

+ St. Nikon of Optina

VOICE OF THE HOLY FATHERS

St. John Maximovitch: . . . God saves His fallen creature by His own love for him, but man's love for his Creator is also necessary .

Now the Church consists of both her earthly and heavenly parts, for the Son of God came to earth and became man that He might lead man into heaven and make him once again a citizen of Paradise, returning to him his original state of sinlessness and wholeness and uniting him unto Himself.

This is accomplished by the action of Divine grace graced through the Church, but man's effort is also required. God saves His fallen creature by His own love for him, but man's love for his Creator is also necessary; without it he cannot be saved. Striving towards God and cleaving unto the Lord by its humble love, the human soul obtains power to cleanse itself from sin and to strengthen itself for the struggle to complete victory over sin.

+ St. John the Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco, "The Church as the Body of Christ," *Man of God: Saint John of Shanghai & San Francisco*

SYNTAX OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES— Hearing and Responding to “Follow Me”

Two weeks ago we celebrated the great feast of Pentecost at which the Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord's followers, making them members of His Body, the Church. A week ago we celebrated the Sunday of All Saints, remembering all those who have become living icons of our Lord's salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since then, we have begun the Apostles Fast, a period in which we embrace a fairly light discipline of self-restraint in our diets in order to gain the spiritual strength that we need to become more like the apostles who responded faithfully to Christ's command “Follow Me.”

When the disciples first heard that command, they were involved in their daily work as fishermen. But the Saviour called them to the fulfillment of their fishing, for they were to learn how to catch people for the Kingdom, how to draw them into the blessing of God's salvation. That required leaving their homes and occupations in order literally to follow Christ around in His ministry and to learn from His teaching and example as best they could. Of course, it was not until after His resurrection that they really understood who He was and were empowered by the Holy Spirit for their unique ministry.

Nonetheless, it was essential that the first disciples obeyed the command to leave home and follow the Messiah. Even though their understanding was quite limited, they were prepared by their close association with Christ for what was to come. Had they not obeyed that initial command, they would not have become His disciples. Literally leaving home and following Christ were necessary dimensions of their preparation to unite themselves with the risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as for their leadership of the Church. Their discipleship provided the context within which they would find the healing of their souls.

We live well after Christ called His first followers to leave their nets and become fishers of men. Many centuries have passed since the day of Pentecost when our ascended Lord sent the Holy Spirit to empower the Church. As members of the Body of Christ, however, we participate in the eternal truth and reality of these events. They are present to us in the life of the Church, especially as we enter into the heavenly banquet in the Divine Liturgy. That means that He calls us as He called them. That means that He enables us to share in His life as He did for those gathered at Pentecost. The Apostles Fast provides us all with a good opportunity to consider whether we are placing our lives in a context that enables us to follow their example of faithfulness to the Lord.

Even small acts of self-denial, such as abstaining from meat in the Apostles Fast, remind us that our strength comes from God, not from our own will being accomplished or our desires for pleasure being fulfilled. We humble ourselves when we put our own preferences for food or anything else aside in order to orient ourselves more fully to the Kingdom. Fasting periods are times of training, of learning to say “no” to our self-centeredness so that we will find it easier to say “yes” to Christ, especially when He calls us to follow Him in ways that challenge our inclinations to place our own comfort and desires before the demands of serving Him faithfully.

In some ways, we may think that the disciples had it easy when Christ walked up to them and told them straightforwardly what to do. They had to leave home and their livelihood, but at least the Lord made that crystal clear to them. Our challenge is a bit different because we encounter Him in our hearts and souls, which are not pure and so easily misinterpret what He wants us to do. We typically get so caught up in our thoughts and self-centered desires that we hear only what we want to hear. It is much more appealing to make God in our own image than to take up the cross of truly becoming more like Him in holiness. It is so tempting to fill our minds with whatever fuels our passions such that we have little interest in devoting ourselves to prayer, Bible reading, or the lives and teachings of the Saints. It is so easy to fill our eyes and ears with entertainment that denigrates the holiness of the intimate union of man and woman, that celebrates violence and hatred, and that worships at the altar of money and what it can buy.

In so many ways, we are caught up in nets that make it difficult for us to follow the example of the apostles who left everything behind in order to follow Christ. The good news, however, is that we have all we need in the life of the Church in order to hear and respond faithfully to the call of our Lord. The path that leads to the healing of our souls is open to all and quite obvious. We have died to sin in baptism and risen with Christ into a new life of holiness. We have received the Holy Spirit personally in chrismation and are nourished with “the medicine of immortality,” our Lord's own Body and Blood, in the Eucharist. When we fall short of living faithfully as those who are in Christ, He Himself receives us through repentance and forgives us through Confession. Through our life together in the Church, we have innumerable opportunities to serve and love Him in one another. In a world so obviously corrupted by the worship of the false gods of power, pleasure, and possessions, we have tremendous resources in the Church for a radically different way of living in which self-righteous judgment and self-centered indulgence have no place at all.

It is tempting to think that all this is fine for the Saints, but not for people like you and me who have spent decades weakening ourselves spiritually in one way or another. We all bear the burdens of our brokenness, both personally and collectively. The Church is a hospital for us all, and the therapy is not always easy or pleasant. Old habits are hard to break, and pursuing a life of holiness can be as difficult as undergoing physical therapy for muscles that have grown weak through disuse or become mangled by disease or accident. So it is rarely going to be easy or appealing for us to embrace the healing of our souls. Work and sacrifice are required, but this is not simply a journey of self-help. It is, instead, always a matter of opening ourselves as fully as possible to the gracious healing energies of the Holy Spirit by embracing the humble path of discipleship as best we have the strength to do at this point in our journey.

It really is a simple path. If you want to discern faithfully what Christ is calling you to do in life, devote at least a few minutes regularly each day to prayer. As your physical health allows, fast as best you can according to the guidelines of the Church. Give as generously as you can to the needy and in support of the Church's ministries. Read the Bible each day and turn your attention away from entertainment that inflames your passions. Learn more about the teaching and example of the Saints and give less attention to the rich and famous of this world. Confess your sins in humility and strive to reorient your life to Christ. Pray for those who have offended you every day and do your best to mend broken relationships. Ask forgiveness of those you have wronged. When someone asks for your forgiveness, give it readily. Pray for the departed and for everyone in need. Refuse to judge anyone else and focus on repenting of your own sins. Prepare to receive the Eucharist with prayer, fasting, and regular Confession.

Do these things persistently throughout your life as you call upon the mercy of the Lord with the humility of the Jesus Prayer. If you do so, you will be able to hear and respond to His command “Follow Me.” And, by His grace, you may even become a Saint.

Fr. Philip LeMasters