



## Parish Information Bulletin

### SUNDAY 31 MAY

Sunday of the 1st Council, John 17: 1-13

- 8.00am

Orthros and Divine Liturgy

### SATURDAY 6 JUNE

*Saturday of Souls*

- 8.00am

Orthros and Divine Liturgy

### SUNDAY 7 JUNE

Epistle Reading: Acts 2: 1-11

Gospel Reading: John 7: 37-52, 8:12

### Telephone Contact Numbers

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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.

'And so let us be glad  
and bear with  
patience  
everything the world  
throws at us,  
secure in the  
knowledge that  
it is then  
that we are most in  
the mind of God.'



St Basil the Great

### Prayers for the Dead

Why do we pay for the dead? It is true that the dead are judged by how they lived. Generally, the Church teaches our future in eternity is based on our faith, life, deeds, virtues, love, compassion and goodness (or their absence) in this life, before our death- Yet, since we are never fully sure of the place of each soul before God, and because God Himself is merciful and loving, we pray for any help which might come to the soul of the deceased. The Church teaches that our prayers help the deceased in some way. We do not know how or how much.

There is an interesting passage in 2 Maccabees which addresses this question. Some soldiers of Judas Maccabees, the Jewish leader, fell in battle and were found to have idols on their persons, a grave sin. Their death was blamed on their sin (12:42). A collection was taken for funds to be sent to the temple "to provide for a sin offering" (12:43). The book comments on this by connecting this act with the resurrection. "For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore, he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin" (2 Maccabees 12:44-45). These words were written about 50 years before the birth of Christ.

- *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions & Answers*— S. Harakas

### Holy Tradition

If someone wants to be protected from tricks and remain healthy in the faith, he must confine his faith first to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and secondly to the Tradition of the Church. But someone may ask, is not the canon of Scripture sufficient for everything, and why should we add thereto the authority of Tradition? This is because not everyone understands the Scriptures in the same way, but one explains them this way and another that way, so that it is possible to get there from as many thoughts as there are heads. Therefore it is necessary to be guided by the understanding of the Church ... What is tradition? It is that which has been understood by everyone, everywhere and at all times ... that which you have received, and not that which you have thought up ... So then, our job is not to lead religion where we wish it to go, but to follow it where it leads, and not to give that which is our own to our heirs, but to guard that which has been given to us.

- St. Vincent of Lerina, *Notes of a Pilgrim*

"Our religion is perfectly and profoundly conceived. What is simple is also what is most precious. Accordingly, in your spiritual life engage in your daily contest simply, easily, and without force. The soul is sanctified and purified through the study of the Fathers, through the memorization of the psalms and of portions of Scripture, through the singing of hymns and through the repetition of the Jesus Prayer.

Devote your efforts, therefore, to these spiritual things and ignore all the other things."

— St. Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love*

### On Not Escaping the World, But Being Holy in It

It is so easy to diminish ourselves by serving the false gods of pleasure, power, and pride. It is so tempting to allow our pursuit of these passions to obscure the holy calling that we have as those created in the image and likeness of God. Our Lord's Ascension into heaven, forty days after His resurrection, makes clear that we find true fulfilment as human beings by participating in His blessed, eternal life. Anything else falls well short.

Jesus Christ has fulfilled our ancient calling to grow in the likeness of God, for in Him humanity and divinity are united in one Person. In His Ascension, He goes up into heaven as the God-Man, sharing in the glory that He had with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity. Rising with His body and bearing the wounds of His crucifixion, He brings us with Him into the divine glory. Here is a brilliant icon of our salvation that makes clear that our Lord has raised us, not only from the grave and Hades, but into the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. Here is a clear sign of the completion of our vocation to become partakers of the divine nature by grace.

Today we commemorate the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, who proclaimed that the One Who brings human beings into the eternal life of God is Himself truly divine and eternal: the only begotten Son of the Father. They recognized that even the best angel, prophet, or teacher could not do that, for only One Who is divine and eternal can bring us into the divine, eternal life of the Holy Trinity. That is a key reason why the Council of Nicaea rejected the teaching of the heretic Arius, who did not think that the Son was fully or eternally God. That is why the Orthodox Church has always disagreed with those who seek to reduce Christ to a great religious teacher or moral example, or who view the Kingdom of God as a mere extension of an earthly kingdom of whatever kind. Our salvation comes not merely through instruction or social change, but through the New Adam Who conquers death and ascends to heavenly glory as the God-Man.

Even if we know the words of the Nicene Creed by heart, we may still be tempted to turn Christ into a Saviour who fits with our preconceived notions about what we would like from a religion. After all, it is much easier to follow a Lord Who serves our own pursuit of pleasure, power, and pride than it is to embrace One Who calls us to holiness in every dimension of our existence. Even as He is fully divine, He is also fully human. He went up into heaven with a glorified human body. To share in His life is to share in His holiness in ways that make us shine with the divine glory in body, soul, and spirit in the world as we know it. That does not mean becoming less human, but becoming more truly ourselves in God's image and likeness.

Some think that salvation will come to the world through changes of this or that kind in politics, culture, or economics. Others focus their hopes on changing how people think, feel, or otherwise adjust themselves in relation to various challenges in life. Some ways of addressing such matters are clearly better than others, but none of them fulfils our vocation to be in God's image and likeness. None of them conquers death and makes us participants in the eternal life of our Lord. None of them can ascend to heaven.

Contrary to some popular notions, ascending with Christ to heavenly glory is not about escaping or abandoning the world, its people, or its problems. The Lord said to His Father concerning His disciples: "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." (John 17: 15) He prayed for their holiness: "Sanctify them by Your truth." (John 17: 17) Christ's prayer shows that we find the fulfilment of our humanity when we unite ourselves with Him through a holy life, when we become radiant with the divine brilliance in how we live in this world in tangible, practical ways.

St. Paul is a good example of what such a life looks like. He obviously did not place his own personal tranquillity above the needs of others or the ministry of God's Kingdom. He was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and ultimately killed for his faith in Christ. He dealt with difficult challenges of all kinds in the churches that he founded and oversaw. In today's reading from Acts, he warned the elders "that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." That is certainly not the way of life of someone who thought that religion was a way to escape from problems and difficulties.

St. Paul also said that he "coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" This apostle manifested his union with Christ by living in a Christ-like way, taking up his cross and serving others, regardless of the cost. That is how he was sanctified in God's truth and came to know the holy joy of true participation in the divine life to the depths of his soul.

St. Paul's background as a fierce persecutor of Christians before his conversion did not keep him from ascending to holiness in Christ Jesus. Neither was he held back in this regard by the multitude of grave and even life-threatening challenges that he faced throughout his ministry. After the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness," St. Paul wrote "I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12: 9-10)

Like the apostle, we will ascend with Christ in holiness as we offer our weaknesses, failings, and challenges to Him, struggling as best we can to be faithful as we call on His infinite mercy. Unlike some commercialized forms of spirituality, genuine Christianity is not about making us happy on our own terms or somehow convincing ourselves that all is well when it is not. Instead, it is about being sanctified, becoming holy, by uniting every dimension of our life to Christ, including those which we find so hard to offer to Him for healing.

When doing so reveals our weakness, we will be in the position to receive the strength of the One of Who created us in His image and likeness, and Who has united humanity and divinity in His own Person. To ascend in holiness in Him is the fulfilment of what it means to be a human being. It not to escape the world, but to enter into the holy glory for which He made us by turning away from evil and corruption. An angel, a prophet, a political leader, or any mere creature could not do that for us sinners. No, that is something only God can do, and something that we can participate in only if we, like St. Paul, offer ourselves to the Lord in humble obedience amidst the pains and challenges of life in the world as we know it, including our own personal brokenness. That is how we may ascend in Christ to heavenly glory, not by escaping the world, but by opening our weakness to His strength.