



Parish Information Bulletin

SUNDAY 16 AUGUST

10th SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matthew 17: 14-23

• 8.00am

Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 23 AUGUST

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 9: 2-12

Gospel Reading: Matthew 18: 23-35

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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.

The soul that
loves God
has its rest in God
and in God alone.
In all the paths that
men walk in
in the world,
they do not attain
peace until they
draw nigh to hope
in God.



St. Isaac the Syrian

THE CHILD WHO WAS RESCUED FROM THE RIVER

There was a very virtuous couple who had great reverence for the Panagia. This couple had an icon of the Mother of God painted on one of the walls of their home. They had taken great care and had spent a good sum of money to ensure that it turned out impeccably beautiful, and, every time they passed by this holy icon, they would venerate it and recite the "Greeting of the Archangel." On account of their good habit, the Panagia sent Her grace and many blessings into their lives. Indeed! They lived with such virtuous conduct, united in complete agreement with each other, and without ever quarrelling with or upsetting any of the neighbours, that everyone referred to them as "the peaceful ones." This couple had a three year old child, who, seeing his father and mother frequently stopping to pray before the holy icon with reverence, also acquired this habit.

Eventually he learned the "Greeting of the Archangel" as well, and he would repeat this prayer each time he would pass by the icon. Of course, this was not on account of reverence, but out of habit. As an infant, he thought that the Panagia (who was depicted in the icon sitting on a throne) was the lady who owned the house. For this reason he respected Her and prostrated himself before Her, as he would see his parents do.

One day, while this child was playing with other children close to a river bank, (due in part to demonic spitefulness), he fell into the waters and vanished. The other children immediately ran to his mother and announced to her that her son had drowned. With many tears, the mother, followed by the neighbours, rushed to the river. When they arrived, two men dove waters, for the river was exceedingly deep. However, though they spent much time searching carefully, they did not find the child. In the meanwhile, as the mother stood further down the river, she unexpectedly saw her son sitting upon the water in the middle of the current, and she exclaimed, "My child, how are you?" The boy responded, "Good, The lady is holding me; I'm not scared."

On account great joy at the time, the mother did not comprehend whom her son was referring to. When the people had retrieved the child from the river, they handed him to his mother, who returned to her home with ineffable joy.

Her husband, unaware of the events, happened to be returning home at the same time. When he heard what had happened, he asked the child to tell them how he had been saved. The child then pointed with his finger to the icon of the Theotokos and responded, "As soon as I fell into the river, the lady who is in our house came and grabbed me from the water. She held me until the people came to get me. At the sound of these words, everyone present was awestruck, especially when they saw the child pointing to the icon. They immediately fell to their knees, gave glory to the Ever-Virgin's power, and continued for the remainder of the night offering up prayers and thanksgiving.

Even though he normally slurred his words and spoke unclearly not like all the other children his age, whenever anyone would ask the boy how he fell into the river, he would relate this miraculous event clearly and articulate, the words distinctly, causing all the listeners to marvel.

Of course, not only this child, but everyone who honours the sacred icons with faith and reverence is delivered from temporal dangers and becomes worthy of the ineffable, eternal bliss in the age to come. May we all achieve this, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom belongs all glory unto ages. Amen

- *The Unrivalled Protectress*, St Nektarios Greek Orthodox Monastery NY

“Lord Have Mercy” As a Way of Life

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew. (17:14-23)

Today we hear the story of the man who brings his son (an epileptic) to the Lord Jesus Christ for healing. The man, a devout and caring father, comes and falls on his knees before the Lord and he cries out with a familiar cry “Lord, have mercy!” This is the proper way to worry about our children and loved ones, not with fruitless anxieties, but with heartfelt prayer to God with the cry “Lord have mercy!” Often people who come to the Orthodox Church for the first time are quite amazed at the number of times they will hear us pray “Lord have mercy” at every service and especially at the Divine Liturgy. This is no accident but a purposeful habit that the Church, our mother, is trying to form within us.

This prayer is not simply to be said with our mouths, but with our hearts. It is not to be said only on Sundays during the Divine Liturgy, but every day and if possible, every waking moment of the day. This prayer found in passages such as this one, is foundational for our understanding of the Jesus prayer. This prayer is often spoken of by the early fathers of the Church as simply “the prayer.” The full Jesus prayer is said as follows “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.” Often this will be shortened to “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.” An even shorter form is simply what we are already saying here every day “Lord have mercy.”

This prayer needs to be foundational in our lives. We build a life of prayer upon these words which are short, sweet and go directly to the point. The repetition of the Jesus prayer allows us to fulfil the teaching of St. Paul who tells us to “pray without ceasing.” So it is possible to pray in such a way, and this practice gives us a prayerful disposition, and connects us to Christ. This prayerful disposition makes it easier for us to pray at other times and to keep a warm connection with God as we go through our day.

Many of the fathers of the Church tell us that the ultimate power of the prayer comes from the repetition of the name of Jesus Christ. It is for us the holiest of all words. It is the very name of the word of God made flesh. It is the name above all names, and it is extremely powerful. This is why it is a very great and grievous sin to use the name of Jesus Christ in vain.

Speaking about the Jesus prayer, the holy elder Father Sophrony said that the monks he met while living on Mt. Athos, pray while “Their attention is concentrated on harmonizing their life with the commandments of Christ.” He continues saying, “According to ancient tradition, mind unites with heart through Divine action when the monk continues in the ascetic feat of obedience and abstinence (please note that the abstinence spoken of here is specifically for monks and those who are not united in holy matrimony. At times abstinence is also permitted within a marriage, as is spoken of by St. Paul in 1 Cor 7:5 when he writes “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.)

But continuing on, Father Sophrony writes “According to ancient tradition, mind unites with heart through Divine action (the grace of the Holy Spirit) when the monk continues in the ascetic feat of obedience and abstinence; when the mind, the heart and the very body of the ‘old man’ to a sufficient degree are freed from the dominion over them of sin; when the body becomes worthy to be ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’.” Of course we know that one never actually becomes worthy of this, but the Holy Spirit comes as a gift.

Through the prayer we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is our master and the lord of our life. We acknowledge His true identity as the divine Son of God. Finally, we also recognize our fallenness, our sinfulness. It is both a prayer of acknowledging the Lord for who He really is, and for acknowledging who we really are.

We notice that the Lord is quick to respond to the cry of this desperate father. The Lord responds as one who takes a genuine interest in the problem and especially in the people involved. Glory to God for His compassion and love of mankind. He offers this same compassion and this genuine interest in each of us and our situations, no matter how difficult, no matter how complicated, no matter what we are dealing with. His powerful love is not only for those who lived 2000 years ago, who are remembered in the gospel accounts. Christ is an unending fountain of love to those who fall on their knees and cry “Lord have mercy.” One does not even have to fall on his knees, so much as he has to bring his demeanour and his attitude low. This humble cry to the Lord cannot be ignored. No matter how often you’ve tried and failed, no matter how often you’ve sinned and fallen short, God can forgive and wipe away the stain of sin from your life.

The Lover of mankind goes beyond our limitations, and beyond our needs to supply more of His grace than we ever thought possible. But again let me remind you that this requires what we’ve already mentioned above, real humility and obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and this is all necessary to have genuine faith. Without these, there can be very little genuine progress in our prayer life and in our general spiritual life. Without increasing our prayers, our repentance and fasting, we will be like the disciples in today’s passage, whom the Lord said were faithless. Perhaps we can each resolve to make a new start today and daily to call upon the name of Jesus Christ with this prayer and to couple this with repentance and a firm desire to obey all of the teachings of the Lord. These are just a few of the important steps that a Christian must take to be found as people of great and dynamic faith. And Glory be to God forever AMEN.

FR. JAMES GUIRGUIS