



## Parish Information Bulletin

SUNDAY 11 OCTOBER

Sunday of the 7th Ecumenical Council, Luke 8: 5-15

• 8.00am

Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 18 OCTOBER

Epistle Reading: Colossians 4: 5-11, 14-18

Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 16-21

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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.

### Freedom

God can do  
everything,  
except compel a  
man to love him.

Man is free,  
for he is in the image  
of divine liberty,  
and that is why  
he has the power  
to choose.



Paul Evdokimov

### October 16: Holy Martyr Longinus the Centurion

Saint Longinus lived in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (AD 15-34). He came from Cappadocia and served as a centurion in the Roman army, under the orders of Pilate, the Governor of Judaea. He and his men were commanded to carry into effect Pilate's sentence regarding the holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to guard the tomb for fear the disciples should come and steal away His body to lend credence to His resurrection. So it came about that Longinus witnessed all the astonishing miracles that accompanied Christ's Passion: the earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the rending of the veil of the temple, the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the graves and the appearance, in their risen bodies, of many of the Saints of ancient times. The eyes of the centurion's heart were opened at the sight of these portents, and he cried with a loud voice: *Truly, this man was the Son of God!* (Mk. 15:39; Matt. 27:54). On the third day, when the guards witnessed the Angel appearing to the holy women at the tomb, they shook with fear and became as dead men. Some of them went to tell the chief priests of the Jews all that had happened. The chief priests and elders met and decided to give Longinus and his men a large sum of money, if they would put it about that the disciples had come by night and stolen away Christ's body while the guards were asleep. But Longinus and two of his soldiers refused this money, for they were now and forever illumined by the light of faith in the Resurrection. So, leaving the army and his military duties behind him, Longinus went back to his home country of Cappadocia, where he preached the Good News just as the Apostles were doing. When Pilate learnt of this he wrote to the Emperor Tiberius denouncing Longinus, which the chief priests, bent on vengeance, had prevailed on him to do by giving him money and presents.

The men the Emperor sent in search of Longinus called, in God's providence, at the house where he had taken refuge; they asked for hospitality and for information as to the whereabouts of the deserter, who was unknown to them by sight. It was the Saint himself who received them, with the care for strangers customary among disciples of Christ. As they talked, Longinus was exceedingly joyful on learning the purpose of their journey, and he redoubled his efforts to put his guests at their ease. Then he left them, and with complete serenity prepared his grave and everything necessary for his burial. He went to look for the two companions who had fled from Palestine with him, and they decided to offer themselves to martyrdom at his side. He then went back to his guests and told them that he was the Longinus they were looking for to put to death. The Emperor's agents were astounded at the calmness of his manner and, considering the hospitality they have received, deeply distressed because of the dark deed they had come to do. But the Saint implored them to make haste in uniting him and his companions to their Lord and Master. Sick at heart, they beheaded the three disciples of Christ and sent the head of Saint Longinus to Jerusalem to certify Pilate and the chief priests that he had indeed been put to death. His head was then thrown into a cesspit outside the city.

Many years later, a wealthy Cappadocian lady, who had fallen ill and lost her sight, came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray for healing, accompanied by her only son. But upon their arrival in the Holy City her son died suddenly, adding a yet greater sorrow to the anguish of the unfortunate lady. One night, Saint Longinus appeared to her in a dream and revealed the spot where his head was buried, with the assurance that she would receive healing from this precious relic. After an assiduous search, the pious woman found the holy Martyr's head, and her blindness was indeed taken away by the divine grace resting upon the relic. Not only were her bodily eyes opened but God granted her to see, with the eyes of her soul, that her son had his place beside Saint Longinus in the abode of the blessed. Comforted and full of gratitude to God, who knows how to render a hundredfold to those whom he chastens, she placed the relic of the holy Martyr and the body of her son in a feretory that she took back to Cappadocia and placed in a church that she built in the Saint's honour.

Source: *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998*

### The Parable of the Sower

There is a beautiful story I read this week about a German scholar who once toured many monasteries throughout Asia Minor before eventually coming to the Monastery of the Holy Virgin of Soumela. As he was walking through the monastery, he noticed the beautiful and vibrant gardens of flowers that were spread out in front of the monastic cells. Anyone who has been to a monastery knows that this is a rather common sight—monasteries are truly “escapes into paradise” for us. They offer us the ability to run away from this darkened world and back into a “Garden of Eden.”

The scholar was so struck by the beauty and fragrance of the various flowers and greens, that he stopped for a moment to take it all in. The monk who was keeping the gardens noticed him and came out to greet the visitor asking, “Do you know where all of these flowers come from?” The scholar shook his head, “No.” The monk quietly retreated back to his cell and returned with a small bag. He said to the scholar, “Inside this bag are seeds of every flower single one of those flowers which you have been admiring. Now I ask you, isn’t it an incredible miracle that these colorful, sweet smelling flowers come from these small and simple seeds?”

Have you ever taken a minute to pause, look out a window, and take in all of the beauty and power that is found in creation? Every tree, every blade of grass, all the plants and flowers that you see, have all come from simple seeds. These tiny miracles are something that we often are too busy to stop and appreciate.

In the Gospel (Luke 8:5-15), we learn about a different and more powerful seed than the ones we find in our backyards. Our Lord speaks of the Divine Seeds in the parable of the sower who went and planted them in various types of soil. The first set was trampled and eaten by birds. The second set landed on some rock and eventually withered and died. The third set fell in the middle of thorns, and the plants were choked and withered away. The last set fell on “good soil” where the power of those seeds was able to take affect and yield a crop that was a hundred fold.

At the end of the parable, Christ doesn’t leave any room for personal interpretation. He says that the seed that he spoke about is the word of God—the words and teachings given to us by our Lord then repeated by hundreds of thousands of Saints throughout the centuries.

It is interesting that right around the time we hear this Gospel lesson, the Orthodox Church also remembers and celebrates the Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council. Remembering Church History, this was the council that defended the use of Icons within the Church. We are grateful for their wisdom every time we enter into the Church. Just as we are able to look outside our windows at home to see the power of earthly seed at work, we have the added blessing in the Orthodox Church to look at the “windows into heaven” that are found inside the Church. Icons allow us to see the incredible crop that has sprung up from the Divine Seed that has fallen on the Good Soil.

We can look to St. Matthew—a man who led a truly sinful life as an unjust tax collector. When he heard those two simple words from the lips of Christ, “Follow Me,” the Divine Seed took to the good soil of his heart and produced the fruit that is the Gospel of St. Matthew.

We can say the same about St. Paul—a man who was present at the murder of St. Stephen the Deacon. He had a horrible reputation amongst the Christians because the Chief Priests gave him the authority to bind and punish those who mentioned their faith in Christ. Yet while on his way to go and persecute more Christians in Damascus, he heard the word of God who asked him, “Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

God’s words were a Divine seed that once again took root in the heart of a broken man and eventually produced many flowers in a “garden of epistles.” Paul’s epistles have brought so many people to the foot of Christ throughout the centuries.

We can say the same about our own patroness, St. Mary Magdalene. After our Lord expelled seven demons from her, St. Mary became one of the most ardent followers of our Lord. She followed Him not only throughout His earthly ministry, but also long after He Ascended into Heaven. In a roundabout way, if we want to see the crop that sprung from the Divine Seed in her life, we need simply to look around us this morning. St. Mary serves as our patroness and our example. Two-thousand years later, by her prayers, we are still producing fruit here in Fenton, MI.

For St. Matthew, St. Paul, and St. Mary Magdalene, all it took was one moment. One word, one “seed” from our Lord, not only changed the direction of their lives in the present, but effected the entire world millennia after they fell asleep in Christ. This same power and miracle is available to us here today! Regardless of how we individually have lived our lives in the past, how many times we have missed the mark, how often we have spent our lives in darkness, we are reminded today that all it takes is one moment, one Divine Liturgy, or one word from THE Word, to penetrate the soil of our existence so that we can bear Divine Fruit to others.

May we all strive to make the soil of our hearts fertile ground for the word of God, and allow our parish community to prosper, flower, and become that Garden of Eden that stands amidst the chaos of this life!

- Fr. Gabriel , St Mary Magdalene Orth. Church, USA