



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 13—19 June 2021

#### SUNDAY 13 JUNE

Fathers of the First Council, John 17 : 1-13

- 7.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy
- 10.00am—Divine Liturgy

#### SATURDAY 19 JUNE

- 7.00am  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy

#### *Saturday of Souls*

#### 2021 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES

(A free voluntary program organised by the Church)

Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am 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.

#### SUNDAY 20 JUNE

GOSPEL READING: John 7: 37-52, 8: 12

EPISTLE READING: Acts 2: 1-11

#### THE 318 HOLY FATHERS ... The Power of Example

The holy fathers, gathering all the spiritual knowledge and meeting together in the Holy Spirit, outlined by divine inspiration the blessed and sacred Creed of Faith.

In it they expounded most clearly that the Logos, begotten of the Father, is in every way eternal and of the same essence as the Father.

In this manner they plainly followed the teachings of the apostles.

Thus they proved themselves to be truly honourable, blessed, and God-minded.

Hymn of Praises

Sunday of the Church Fathers, Source: *A Year of the Lord*, Theodore Stylianopoulos

#### WHY WE PRAY FOR THE DEAD

Just as we love and respect our living brethren, so do we love and respect those of our brethren who have departed this life. We express our love for our departed friends and relatives through prayer. Just as we pray for the living that the Grace of God may be upon them, so do we pray for the dead that they may become worthy of the vision of God. At death no man leaves the world to appear before God free of sin, perfect, holy, so that he does not need the mercy and Grace of God. The Holy Church is composed not only of the living, earthly members but also of the faithful departed. All of us, living and dead, are members of one Church and are bound together by one Faith, by common love, and are unworthy sons of the merciful God. It is therefore our duty to ask God, each of us separately, and all together are one Church, to be merciful toward the sinful soul of our departed brother.

Death and burial cannot sever the Christian love which united the living with those once living and now deceased. We continue to love our parents even after death. We continue to express this Love for Them and it becomes real when we commemorate them in our prayers. We can communicate with the living members of the Church in both a visible, physical manner and a spiritual manner, ie: we can talk to them and do things for them materially and spiritually. We can communicate with the faithful departed in a spiritual manner only-through prayer, in which we ask for the forgiveness of their sins and for their establishment in God's Heavenly mansions. We pray for them in the spirit of love, knowing that no one will be saved otherwise than by the prayer of all the Church in which Christ lives, knowing and trusting that so long as the end of time has not arrived, all the members of the Church, both living and departed, are being continually perfected by mutual prayer.

How can we but not pray for our deceased parents who brought us into this world, who cared for us in our childhood and looked after our upbringing, who fed us and clothed us? How can we not remember in our prayers our brothers and sisters and our friends, the companions of our life who have departed into eternity? How can our hearts not be possessed with the insatiable desire to pray for them as our expression of thanks, devotion and love. How else, if not by prayer, we express our feelings of unity and fellowship with our brethren in the Faith who have gone to their rest before us?

**O Lord, remember the souls of Your servants, my parents (their names), and of all my kinsmen in the flesh, and of all our fathers, brethren and sisters who are fallen asleep in the hope of the Resurrection and life everlasting; pardon their transgressions, both voluntary and involuntary. Grant them Your Heavenly Kingdom, and a portion of Your eternal blessings, and the enjoyment of Your unending and blessed Life.**

- Fr David Abamtsov

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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.

## **Ascending in Holiness Through the Body of Christ: Homily for the Sunday of the After-Feast of the Ascension and the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council**

We are now in the season of the Ascension in the Orthodox Church, when we celebrate our Lord's ascent into heaven forty days after His resurrection. It is easy for us to pass over this feast without paying much attention because it comes between Pascha and Pentecost. The danger of doing so, however, is that if we do not attend to the importance of uniting ourselves to Christ as He ascends into heavenly glory, we will have a very impoverished understanding of how to share in the eternal life of our Saviour even as we remain in the world as we know it.

Contrary to much popular opinion, the aim of Christianity is not simply to find a way for our souls to be in a better place after we die by escaping the limitations of our bodies. Forty days after His resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven as a whole, complete human being with a glorified body that still bore the wounds from His crucifixion. He remained fully human, even as He sat down at the right hand of the Father. The Saviour's ministry did not end with His victory over death, but extends to making us participants by grace in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. He raises us up not only from the tomb, but into heavenly glory in every dimension of our existence. His Ascension manifests the complete fulfilment of what it means to be a human being in God's image and likeness.

The good news of this season is that, even as we live and breathe in this world with all of its and our problems, we may participate already in the life of heaven. We may ascend with Christ into the holiness for which He created us in the first place. In praying to the Father, the Lord said, "And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom you have sent." The Saviour has healed every aspect of our corruption and brought us into full, personal union with Himself, making us "partakers of the divine nature" by grace. He enables us truly to know God, not as an idea or concept, but through personal spiritual encounter. By ascending in glory as the God-Man, He calls us all to embrace the blessedness of the Kingdom.

The question that the Ascension presents to each of us is whether we will answer that call by rising up with Him into the life of heaven even as our feet remain firmly planted on the ground. If we do not do so, we simply cannot celebrate this feast with integrity. We celebrate feasts of the Lord by participating more fully in the particular dimension of the life of Christ that the feast manifests. In this light, the Ascension is neither only a past memory nor a future hope, but an epiphany of what it means to unite ourselves to the Saviour. If we do not recognize the extraordinary calling presented to us by this feast, we will miss the point entirely.

At the very heart of what it means to ascend with Christ in holiness is our participation in the life of His Body, the Church. Next Sunday is the feast of Pentecost, when we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit on our Lord's followers, which transformed them into the Church. The Lord prayed to the Father that His followers "may be one even as We are one." As hard as it may be to believe, our unity in faith, worship, and spiritual discipline in the Orthodox Church manifests the unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Our life together in the Church is our life in God, our unity with the Lord and one another in the new life of the Kingdom. He is the vine and we are the branches, organically sharing a common life with Him and one another.

As our epistle reading makes clear, we must never take this unity for granted. We must always be on guard against anything that would weaken the common life of the members of Christ's Body. St. Paul warned of those who would attack the Church like "fierce wolves" to divide the flock. Paul lived a very difficult life, struggling for many years to build up and maintain the unity of the Church despite persecution, opposition from false teachers, and disagreement at times even with other apostles. He supported himself through his own labour, even as he was consumed with the challenges of ministry. Through his many struggles, Paul showed "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.'" With all of his other cares, this saint did not neglect to share with the poor and needy.

St. Paul's work was not easy, but his example shows us that a life of difficult challenges is no barrier to ascending with Christ into holiness. Indeed, it was through his awareness of His own weakness and inadequacy before the problems that he faced that Paul knew the Lord's strength and peace. That is how he offered his life, literally to the point of martyrdom, for the well-being of the Church and became a great saint. Remember that our Lord ascended in glory still bearing the wounds of crucifixion in His glorified body. No matter how painful our wounds may be in any area of life, they do not preclude us from sharing in the holiness of the Saviour. They do not keep us from knowing God. If anything, they should make us even more aware of our dependence on His mercy, of our weakness and need for His grace. We will never ascend with Christ into heavenly glory purely on the basis of what we have earned by our own power or virtue. The more that we know our brokenness and weakness, the more we will have the humility to expose even our deepest wounds to Him for healing that we cannot give ourselves. In order to ascend with Him in holiness, we must recognize our own inability to rise up by ourselves from the weakness and corruption that remain so powerful in our lives.

Today we also commemorate the 318 Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, at which the Church taught that the Son is truly divine, begotten of the Father eternally, and of the same nature or essence as Him. This proclamation was necessary because the heretic Arius had denied the full divinity of Christ, and thus threatened to make it impossible to proclaim how the Lord could make us participants in eternal life by grace. For only One Who is truly God may conquer death and enable us to ascend with Him into the divine glory. If Christ were not truly the God-Man, He would not be able to share the divine life with us. The rejection of Arius' teaching by the Fathers of Nicaea is absolutely crucial for giving an account of how we may ascend with Christ, of how we may be united with Him and one another in His Body, the Church for our salvation.

In every celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we ascend mystically into the eternal worship of the heavenly kingdom. Our small offerings of bread and wine are fulfilled by the power of the Holy Spirit as the Body and Blood of Christ; we commune with Him as members of His own Body, even as His Bride. We become not only "one flesh" with the Saviour, but also with one another. We grow in union with the Lord as we grow in union with our fellow members of His Body. Like St. Paul, we must offer ourselves to Christ for the strengthening of the Church. Despite our sufferings and imperfections, that is how we will unite ourselves to Him and one another in holiness; that is how we will receive healing and fulfilment beyond what we can give ourselves. There is no other way to manifest the life of heaven in the midst of our world of division and corruption. There is no other way to celebrate the Ascension than to embrace our calling to be one even as are the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, One God, to Whom be glory, laud, and honour, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

- Fr Philip LeMasters