



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 4—10 July 2021

SUNDAY 4 JULY

2nd SUNDAY OF MATTHEW, Matt. 4: 18-23

- 7.30am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

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.

WEDNESDAY 7 JULY

St Kyriaki, Great-Martyr

- 7.30am

Orthros and Divine Liturgy

SUNDAY 11 JULY

GOSPEL READING: Matthew 6: 22-33

EPISTLE READING: 2Corinthians 6: 1-10

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.

The Holy Great- Martyr Kyriake

The Holy Great- Martyr Kyriake suffered for Christ at Nicomedia during the time of a persecution under Diocletian. She was the only daughter of the pious Christians Dorotheos and Eusebia, who had given a vow to dedicate their daughter to God.

At the beginning of the persecution Saints Dorotheos and Eusebia were separated from their daughter and given over to trial under the governor Justus, but Saint Kyriake was sent to Nicomedia to the co-ruler of Diocletian -- Maximian Hercules. The holy martyr firmly endured the tortures, praying to God. The Lord worked many miracles to bring the idol-worshippers to their senses: idols fell down in the pagan temples, just as they brought the saint there; wild animals brought to the martyr lay down peacefully at her feet. Seeing this, many pagans were converted to Christ. When the sentence of death was read, Saint Kyriake requested time for prayer. After a final prayer she peacefully died, delivered by the Lord out of the hands of the Roman executioners.

Veneration of the Saints

“Greet one another with a holy kiss...” – Romans 16:16

An Orthodox young man was once in Winchester Cathedral near the Shrine of St Swithun. There are icons above the shrine, including one of the saint. When he was sure no-one was looking he crept around the rope cordon and venerated the icons. He said a few prayers at the shrine and then went to leave. Unbeknown to him, one of the Cathedral Stewards had seen him kissing the icons and praying. She went up to him afterwards looking rather stern. The young man braced himself for a telling-off. But instead, the Steward asked him very politely why it was important for him to kiss the icons.

When I meet a close friend or relative, we exchange a kiss. More than this, St Paul instructs Christians to ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’. The Orthodox Church doesn’t distinguish between those Christians who are alive and those who have died. All are alive in Christ. We recognise that some of our Christian brothers and sisters who have passed on before us are certainly alive in Christ by their answers to our prayers, and we therefore honour them as ‘Saints’. It is important to affirm that they continue to live only through the saving grace of Our Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection. Without the resurrection of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, all are truly dead. It is by His saving grace alone that we enter into eternal life.

So what of the icons? It is not seen as unusual for a bereaved wife to kiss a photograph of her late husband, or for a fiancé to kiss a photograph of her intended groom. This is quite natural – they are conveying their love for the person depicted, not their love of a piece of paper! With icons it is the same. The Word ‘icon’ simply means ‘image’; we kiss the image of the one we love. Since the Saints are alive to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it seems right that we should talk to them. We are not offering them praise and worship, which is due to God alone. It is more like chatting with our friends and asking for their prayers. I often ask my Christian friends to pray for me, so why should I not ask the Saints to do likewise? They have gone before me into the resurrected life in Christ, and as such are currently closer the Risen Lord than I am!

When an Orthodox Christian enters the temple, he would usually kiss the icons of Christ and of Mary (the greatest Saint), plus any other Saint of his choosing. He may also then kiss and greet other people within the temple. Unlike in the West, this is not done in a formal way as part of the liturgy. It is far more spontaneous.

In the world as well as in the temple, we are surrounded by a great army of the Saints, those who have gone before us. It is only right that we continue to love them and honour them as much now as we did before they died.

Hear, Follow, and Obey : Homily for the Second Sunday After Pentecost in the Orthodox Church

Most of us like to find ways to make things easier on ourselves and harder on others. We enjoy coming up with excuses to justify not fulfilling demanding and inconvenient requirements, even as we judge our neighbours for not meeting them perfectly. That tendency is both common and difficult for many to resist, but it is diametrically opposed to the way of life to which our Lord calls us.

St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome that “God knows no partiality.” He taught that it is not those who know God’s requirements who are pleasing to Him, but those who actually obey them. Against his fellow Jews who thought that their ancestry and heritage made them necessarily superior to the Gentiles, he pointed out that all people have God’s law “written on their hearts,” such that God would judge them according to whether they obeyed His law as known through their conscience. “For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified.”

St. Paul strongly challenged the pride of anyone who thought that merely knowing what God requires justifies someone in looking down upon another. Remember also that, in the parable of the Last Judgment, Christ welcomed into His Kingdom those who had cared for Him when they cared for the poor and needy, even though those who did these righteous acts had absolutely no idea that they were serving Him. (Matt. 25) The key matter is not simply how much people know, but how conscientious they are in living faithfully to the measure of God’s truth that they have grasped. Christ taught that “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” (Luke 12:14) That means that the clearer our knowledge of what God requires of us is, the more responsible we are. And the temptation to waste our time in evaluating others or looking for excuses for ourselves is precisely that: a temptation that we must resist.

In today’s gospel reading, the Lord made His immediate requirements for Peter, Andrew, James, and John quite clear: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They left behind their occupation of fishing and their families in order to follow Christ as “He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people.” As we know from elsewhere in the gospels, the disciples did not fully understand who Jesus Christ was until after His resurrection. They did not have a full grasp of His identity, teaching, and mission during the three years that they literally followed Him around. The Lord certainly chastised them for their spiritual confusion and weakness, but He never abandoned them or cast them out. Perhaps it was through their years of doubt and misunderstanding that they were prepared to receive the fullness of the truth of His resurrection with humility, joy, and gratitude.

Those first disciples had nothing like perfect knowledge or understanding when Christ called them, but they were still responsible to respond to the command: “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” By obeying that instruction, they began the journey that would lead them to become pillars of Christ’s Body, the Church, and martyrs who gave the ultimate witness for their Lord. Throughout the course of their time with Christ, they were given much—and much was required of them.

He says something very similar to teach of us who have put Him on in baptism, been filled with the Holy Spirit in chrismation, and nourished with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist. We enter mystically into the Heavenly Wedding Banquet in every celebration of the Divine Liturgy. As the God-Man, He has made us participants in the divine life by grace. We are members of one Body with all those from all generations who have become shining examples of holiness. He has provided us with all that we need to follow their path to the Kingdom in His Body, the Church.

How tragic it would be, then, for us to think that these undeserved blessings are somehow signs that we such special favourites of God that it does not really matter if we actually obey Him, if we actually hear and respond to His calling in our lives each day. Had the first disciples congratulated themselves on being told by Christ to follow Him, but then not actually done so, they would not have fulfilled their calling and become great saints. The Virgin Mary became the Theotokos by agreeing freely to obey the message from the Archangel Gabriel that she would be the virgin mother of the Saviour: “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” She had prepared for that moment through her childhood in the Temple, and then she lived accordingly, loving and serving her divine Son for the rest of her days.

It is true that God calls and equips particular people for particular ministries, but there is no doubt that He calls us all to embrace the new and holy life that He has brought to the world. He wants us all to shine with holy light as living icons of His salvation. There is no predestination in Orthodox Christianity such that God wants to save some, but not others. As St. Paul taught, “God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4) There is no partiality in God. He calls each of us to be responsible for the measure of His truth that we have received.

It is up to God, not us, to determine how well those outside the visible boundaries of the Church have served Him. It is very much up to us, however, to make sure that we ourselves respond faithfully to the fullness of God’s truth that we have received in the Church. At the end of the day, no one else can do that for us. And as with most endeavours in life, it is good to start with the most obvious matters, such as prayer. In order to hear and obey the Lord’s calling, we must open our hearts, giving Him our attention in stillness and silence each day. When our minds wander in prayer, as they will, we should simply draw them back to focusing on God and pay no attention to our distracting thoughts. The deeper our communion with the Lord in daily prayer, the more clarity and power we will have in discerning His will in our lives.

Since addiction to self-centred desire challenges our faithfulness in many ways, we also need to practice appropriate forms of fasting and self-denial on a regular basis. The strength that we gain in refusing to gratify every desire for pleasure will help us in turning away from many sins, including the self-centred excuses that we use to rationalize serving ourselves instead of the Lord and our neighbours in whom we encounter Him. As St. James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (Jas. 1:27) By denying ourselves, we cultivate the spiritual and material resources necessary to serve Christ in those who struggle, suffer, and mourn. There is no question that we serve Him by sharing our time, energy, and resources with “the least of these.”

Prayer, fasting, and generosity to the needy are not practices reserved for Lent, but basic building blocks of Christian faithfulness. Without them, we will lack the spiritual strength to do what Christ calls us to do. He says “Follow Me” to each of us. We need to pay attention to that call daily and do what is necessary to strengthen ourselves spiritually so that we will be able to respond responsibly to the great blessings that we have been given in His Body, the Church. Remember what St. Paul wrote: “God knows no partiality... it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified.” So let us not only hear God’s truth, but actually live it out each day of our lives.

-Fr Philip LeMasters