

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of the Blind Man

May 25, 2014

**Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor;
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors**

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ This Thursday is the solemn feast of the Ascension of our Lord. In anticipation, the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 9:00 AM that day. Please come and join us in prayer and praise.

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first

shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

+++ Next Sunday the special offering for flowers for the coming feast of Pentecost, the Birthday of our blessed Church, will take place. Please be generous.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Barbara, Betty, James, Yevlogia, Maria, Pani Anna Marie and Father George.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$601.00; Candles, \$43.00; Food Coupons, \$40.00; Kitchen, \$142.00; May Web Site, \$25.00; May Bulletin, \$25.00, for a total of \$876.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleanor Korba, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1809.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5750 on this project to date!

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.

+++ We invite all pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory. May we all be so enriched that this Passion Week is particularly rewarding for each of us, to triumph in Resurrection joy!

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

LORD



TEACH
US

Comfort From Heaven

And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. For this corruptible body must put on incorruption and this mortal body must put on immortality 1 Corinthians 15: 49 – 53.

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that he may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God 2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we still have a building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens 2 Corinthians 5: 1.

But I would not have you ignorant, brothers, concerning them who are asleep that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even they who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him 1 Thessalonians 4: 13, 14.

I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me on that day; and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing 2 Timothy 4: 7, 8.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on; Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them Revelation 14: 15.

A Grand Reunion

*We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them
in the clouds to meet the Lord
! Thessalonians 4: 17.*

There is a rich and poignant story told about fishermen in the early centuries of Christianity along the Adriatic Sea. Each evening their wives would go down to the shore to await their husbands' return after a long and perilous day.

Standing there, they would sing the first verse of one of the antiphons from the Divine Liturgy, then pause and listen intently. They knew their husbands were safe when they heard them singing the second verse as it was carried by the wind across the waves.

So it is entirely true, that today, if we would only pause and listen, we might also hear – in this storm-tossed world of ours – some sound, some whisper, some message borne from loved ones afar. As we contemplate the Saviour's return and being united with our faithful loved ones, it is as if we can almost hear the echo of their voices breaking in celebratory music upon the sands of time.

Even as we long to see our loved ones who have passed on to eternity, they, too, are eagerly awaiting the day when we shall be together again. One of these days, whether we are "caught up together with them in the clouds," or we pass through the gateway of death, we who believe are going to have a great and grand vision. What rejoicing there will be since death cannot separate those who are one in Christ.

Friends will be there I have loved long ago
and joy like a river around me will flow.
Yet, just a smile from my Saviour, I know
will through the ages be glory for me.

Taste and See

The Psalms are the source of hymns traditionally sung in the Church while communicants receive Holy Communion. Though the Psalms are a book of the Old Covenant, written long before the Divine Liturgy revealed by Christ, they are still prophetic and enlighten us about the meaning of Holy Communion. Very often, those who arranged the worship of the Church chose Psalms because of a key verse that is appropriate for the occasion. For example the Entrance Hymn for the feast of the Ascension of our Lord is from Psalm 46, "God ascends amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid trumpet blasts" Psalm 46: 6. Before the coming of Christ, for the Jewish believer, this meant that the one true God was king over all the world, glorified and exalted above all. The Christian saw and understood in this prophecy about our Lord, who after the glory of his Resurrection, would return to the manifest glory He has with the Father.

In the same way, psalms were chosen for chanting during Holy Communion. The first psalm chosen for this purpose was Psalm 33, because of its ninth verse, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The writer of this psalm, living centuries before Christ, did not necessarily have the Eucharist in mind. It meant that we must experience the goodness of God, with our whole being, with all our senses. For Christians, who knew of the Lord's gift of his very Body and Blood at the Mystical Supper, this verse takes on new and enduring meaning. It was an affirmation of faith on the part of believers. The bread that we eat, the wine we drink, food we see with our eyes, is truly the Lord by his very testimony. He is good food for our bodies and souls, wholly nutritious and life-imparting. Early Christians believed unconditionally in the reality of the mystery of Communion. This verse would have been chosen because its prophecy has been fulfilled in the mystery of the Divine Liturgy in a most dramatic way. God is truly present to our human senses, not in a gross way, as if we experienced eating human flesh and drinking human blood, but in the form of savory bread and sweet wine, so that we know our whole being, physical and spiritual is united with the true and eternal mystical God. Some see the emphasis on the reality of Communion, that the bread and wine for the Divine Liturgy become truly the Body and Blood of Christ, as a later theological development. However, this is not at all true. As we see from the choice of Psalm 33, this faith extends back to early times. In fact, we find it in the Gospels themselves. Not only in the stories of the Mystical Supper, where Jesus proclaims bread to be his body and wine to be his blood, but also in the Bread of Life discourse in the gospel of St. John, we see plainly that this teaching and accepted understanding goes back to Jesus himself. Here our Lord teaches us, "I am the living bread...the bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world...unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you." John 6: 51 - 53.

So strong was this saying that some of his followers were “shocked” and “no longer accompanied him.” John 6: 66. Believers saw this as the fulfillment of: Psalm 33. This same Psalm is still used in the Divine Liturgy and is the standard Communion Hymn for the Presanctified Liturgy, which often preserves the most ancient traditions. It is most properly a Communion Hymn, but it is also used whenever bread and wine are distributed. These distributions are symbols of the Eucharist, which is the reality of the presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the gifts of the Divine Liturgy. Though ordinarily done in our churches now, the bread and wine that was offered but not consumed on the previous Sunday Divine Liturgy for Communion, is distributed to the faithful at the end, when people were leaving after veneration of the cross.. It is called *antidoron*, which means “in place of the gifts.” because it was offered to all, even those who could not receive Communion as a spiritual hospitality gesture and reminder to seek forgiveness of the separating sinfulness which does not permit us to come forward and receive the Body and Blood. When the *antidoron* was distributed, this psalm was sung, and it is still found in the service books of the early Church. Though the key verse was verse 9, the rest of the psalm fit into the theology of Communion. Though the hymn, “May our mouths be filled with your praise...” was taken from Psalm 70: 8, it begins with a similar concept, “I shall bless the Lord at all times, forever shall his praise be in my mouth.” Being filled with God, our whole being is filled with his praise.

The Psalm ends with a note of hope, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, and from them all the Lord provides rescue” verse 20. Psalm 33, therefore, is the most appropriate Communion Hymn. The Church has used other such hymns as well. The most common one is the Sunday Communion Hymn, “Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the highest” Psalms 148: 1. This is the beginning of the well – known “Psalms of Praise,” which are sung in Matins, the morning office of the Church. It builds on the beginning of Psalm 33, “I shall bless the Lord at all times...” As we receive Communion, our whole being is filled with God’s glory, and we express this in our song of praise. The communion hymn for the Resurrection shows that not all Communion Hymns are from the psalms, for this is a composition of the Church. “Receive the Body of Christ, drink the Source of immortality.” There were also other verses to complement it. This hymn again emphasizes the reality of the Eucharist, that it is truly the Body of the risen Lord of glory that we receive, and that when we taste of the wine, we also receive the immortality of the Resurrection., especially when it is blessed with warm water to show it is the living and eternal God we receive. The communion hymn chosen for the feasts of the Birthgiver of God is from Psalms 115: “I shall take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” Just as God dwelt in the womb of Mary, so He dwells in us when we receive the chalice of his precious Blood, poured out for our life. Again and again, it is the reality of our union with the living and triumphant God that is proclaimed because we are created in his image.

The Ascension of our Lord

Every notable event in the earthly life of our Lord is recalled, solemnized and celebrated by his Body, our blessed Church. Today we celebrate the final, but certainly not the last significant happening.

The gospels paint a simple, but inspiring picture of the Lord's return to the Father. The event we celebrated a few days ago seals and completes his time among us for the sake of our salvation.

The Lord gathered his followers on the mount in Bethany. He most seriously and lovingly speaks with them and leaves them a particular legacy: "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And then, before the disciples know it, Christ is leaving them. He raises his hand in a final blessing upon them and as they stare heavenward, He is lifted upward and shortly hidden from their view by the clouds.

In the book, *Acts of the Apostles*, we see that as the friends of the Lord gazed upward, two men in white appeared and said "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking toward heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven shall return in the same way as you saw him go...."

And St. Luke tells us the apostles returned to Jerusalem "...with great joy" after the ascension. We know it is not customary to rejoice at a farewell, but time shows there was much reason for their happiness on this occasion. So we are impelled to ask, "Why did the Lord leave? Why didn't He remain among his disciples and friends? But as we see, there are a number of reasons for the ascension of Christ into heaven and why his followers were happy as they witnessed this event.

Jesus ascends to the Father because his work on earth is done. Initially He came among us as an infant child to grow into our humanity to seek and save the lost. He has completed the work of our salvation. "It is finished!" He cried out from the cross. Just as we who have come to worship today are dismissed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy and we gather to fellowship in the hall, and just as certainly as the worker lays aside his tools and returns home after his workday is completed, just as the soldier, once war has been won, puts away his arms and rejoins his loved ones; now Christ,

having completed the redemptive work for which He came into the world to achieve, returns home to reign at the right hand of the Father.

Christ ascends that He might send the Holy Spirit. It is plain from Scripture the Lord did not leave his Body, the Church orphaned; God the Holy Spirit soon came to take up his dwelling in us. At the Mystical Supper our Lord shared with us: "Now I am going to him who sent me...It is to your advantage that I go. If I do not go, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

It is an astounding and marvelous provision the Lord has made here. If Christ remained on earth in glorified body, He apparently would have been out of place since his vocation was fulfilled. Now would be the time and vocation of the Holy Spirit, vital for our sanctity and salvation. Now the work of the Church begun by the Lord is continued in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord returned to the Father to prepare a place for us. On the very night prior to his crucifixion and death, He opened his loving heart to the group of disciples: "I go to prepare a place for you...and I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, you may also be." That is why St. Paul writes to his parishioners in Corinth: "For we know that when our earthly house is destroyed, that is when death comes, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Christ ascends to take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. This is the descriptive language the Church uses in the Creed to tell us the Lord continues now to intercede before the Father. Having achieved our redemption, He now prays continually that we remain faithful to what He has done and that we take advantage of heavenly grace and use it for the salvation of our souls. Christ told us, "If you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Up until now you have asked nothing in my name; but ask now and you will receive, your joy may be complete." And of course, St. Mark tells us simply, "Jesus was taken up into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father." What is different now is that our frail and frugal humanity is present in heaven. Christ in his human nature ascended as well. For the first time, therefore, humanity is spiritually and physically present before the eternal Father, pleading our cause.

And of course, Christ ascends into heaven to prepare for his grand and glorious return on the last day. In the farewell discourse at the Mystical Supper, our Lord reminds us, "I will come again." At his ascension, two angelic messengers tell us, "This Jesus...shall

return." The profession of faith we make in the Nicene Creed makes it clear: "And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead." The Lord returns to the Father to make ready for the day of reckoning. Initially He came in all humility and departed in triumph, now He shall return and come in all glory.

We cannot permit the Ascension of our Lord to mean He has left us to our own devices. His return to the Father means He is with us in all places, in all times. He comes to us in reality in the Blessed Eucharist. He is with us in prayer and worship. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." The Lord taught us, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world." He assures us we can do all things in him who strengthens us. The most common liturgical greeting emphasizes this reality: "Christ is among us!" as we signify our awareness, and concurrence, "He is and shall be!"

For us, the hymnology of the Church expresses it succinctly and best: "When you fulfilled the plan of salvation for us and united all things on earth to those in heaven, O Christ our God, You ascended in glory, never leaving us, but remaining ever-present. For You proclaim to those who love you, 'I am with and no one else has power over you.'" Kontakion, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.



Man Born Blind

Blindness, which has always been tragically present in the near East, was apparently rather common in Israel, a reason for which we are not aware. Some were born blind as in today's prescribed gospel narrative, or became blind in infancy; others were accidentally blinded later in life as was Tobit in the Old Covenant (Tobit 2: 9). The sad lot of the blind is referred to in varied books of Scripture. Isaiah accounts, *That is why right is far from us and justice does not reach us. We look for light and lo, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in gloom! Like blind men we grope along the wall, like people without eyes we feel our way. We stumble at midday as at dusk, in Stygian darkness, like the dead. We growl like bears; like doves we moan without ceasing. We look for right but it is not there, for salvation, and it is far from us. For our offenses before you are many, our sins are witness against us. Yes our offenses are present to us, and our crimes we know* Isaiah 59: 9 - 13; *Behold I will bring them back from the land of the north; I will gather them from the ends of the world, with the blind and the lame in their midst, the mothers and those with child; they shall return as an immense throng. They departed in tears, but I will console them and guide them as I lead them to brooks of water on a level road so that none shall stumble because I am Father to Israel* Jeremiah 31: 8, 9.

What these succeeding revelatory passages teach us is that our own sinfulness, eagerly adopted, leads us into spiritual blindness, blindness of soul, not of the eyes. We boast we can physically see, but not at all mind if our soul is so wrapped up in its own bandages of sinfulness that it sees, understands and perceives none of the values our Creator God wishes to teach us. We impose eager spiritual blindness on ourselves, even welcome it in our shallow and illicit stupidity. God forbid our lens not be able to recognize and appreciate the light of day, but we care not at all if our soul is so wrapped up in itself it as wanders blissfully into the very confines of the devil himself!

While Mosaic Law expressly forbids cruelty or maltreatment of the blind, varied examples of charity towards them is offered throughout God's revelation in Scripture. Inflicting blindness on a criminal was never a penalty in Israel. Priests were disqualified from officiating at or offering the sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple if they were blind. Even blind animals were unfit to be offered as sacrifice to God. The plucking out of the eyes of a son who is flagrantly disobedient to his parents is no doubt reminiscent of earlier customs such as that mentioned in the code of Hammurabi. (Proverbs 30: 17) Among the Babylonians, blinding was practiced as a penalty to some crimes. It is true that even devout Hebrews believed that only God could inflict

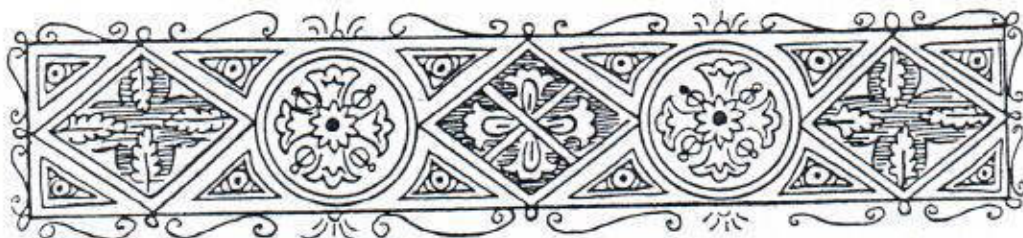
blindness (Exodus 4: 11) and that He did so in punishment for sin. Thus we see the questioning of the disciples to determine if it was the sin of the parents or the actual sin of the individual which was responsible for this unfortunate man's condition today.

The recovery of sight by a blind man was such a rare occurrence and extraordinary miracle that the works of Christ were literally astounding regarding the physically blind.

Far more demeaning and even damaging is spiritual blindness, the inability to see what is right and good what is moral and virtuous, evil and detrimental, has been recorded in Scripture as being an affliction delivered by God as punishment for taking bribes (Exodus 23: 8; Deuteronomy 16 19), for proud self-complacency (Matthew 15: 14; for hatred (1 John 2: 11 and for a host of other sins (Isaiah 6: 10).

So we see just how much distance from reality and truth people who do not have any faith can travel, how much distance they can put between themselves and the source of salvation. Old Testament so-called believers were not willing to pursue God's truth, but were eager to substitute their own version of truth. They like superstition better than salutary redemption.

But it is important to know our God can also deliver us from both physical and spiritual blindness. Listen attentively and very carefully to the testimony of our God in his own words: *I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon those who live in darkness. I am the Lord, this is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the earlier things have come to pass, new ones I now foretell* Isaiah 42: 7; *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore he has anointed me...to announce a year of favor from the Lord... Luke 4: 18, 19).*



At The Right Hand

Who shall condemn them? Christ Jesus, who died, or rather was raised up, who is at the right hand of God and who intercedes for us
Romans 8: 34?

To him the Ascension comes as the culminating divine assurance the salutary work He came among us to do is finally completed to the entire satisfaction of the eternal Father, to whose right hand He is now exalted. "The right hand of God" is metaphorical language for divine omnipotence. "Sitting" does not imply He is resting, but reigning solemnly as King of salvation and exercising divine omnipotence. The celebration of the feast of the Ascension is divine affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of Christ over the whole universe which is why believers are excited about celebrating it, understanding their participation in its grace of the victory of Christ and certainly praising his Holy Name as the fest is recalled in our parish churches.

For the devout believer, the Ascension of our Lord has blessed implications. Though appearing physically remote, He is always spiritually near. Now free from earthly limitations, his life above is both the promise and guarantee of our own. "Because I live, you shall also live," He assures the disciples (John 14: 19). His ascension anticipates our glorification and leaves us the assurance that He has gone to prepare a place for us. "I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you may also be" John 14: 3.

How it brings him very near to us as we remember He carries his humanity back with him to heaven. Having left a pure Spirit, He now returns in the fullness of his nature, with a physical body as well.

"Now since the children are men of blood and flesh, Jesus likewise had a full share in ours, that by his death he might rob the devil, the prince of death, of his power, and free those who through fear of death had been slaves their whole life long. Surely, he did not come to help angels, but rather the children of Abraham; therefore he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God on their behalf, to expiate the sins of the people. Since he himself was tested

through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are tempted Hebrews 2: 14 – 18; “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession of faith. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned. So let us approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need” Hebrews 4: 14 – 16.

In our very human nature, the Son of God now reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in triumphal victory. What awesome dignity He confers on those who follow him! What joy He shares with the soul of the faithful believer! What assurance He provides the pilgrim soul!

“When he ascended on high he took a host of captives and gave gifts to man” Ephesians 4: 8. His Ascension is his triumphant return to heaven and indicates the tyrannical reign of sin and subsequent death is emphatically ended. Upon the faithful believer is bestowed the priceless gift of forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

From abysmal sin in the mud of the earth, to spiritual sublimity and triumphal victory, man is exalted and elevated on this feast day and restored to his original created dignity.

What greater reason could man have to celebrate Christ!



GO INTO THE WHOLE
WORLD AND PROCLAIM
THE GOOD NEWS
MK 16:15

Hail! Victorious Jesus!

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight

Acts of the Apostles 1: 9.

**Hail! Victorious Jesus, hail!
On your cloud of glory sail
In long triumph through the sky
Up to waiting worlds on high.**

**Heaven unfolds its portals wide,
Glorious Hero, through them ride;
King of glory mount your throne,
Your great Father's and your own!**

**Praise him all you heavenly choirs,
Raptured, sweep your sounding lyres;
Sons of men, in humbler strain,
Sing your mighty Saviour's reign.**

**Every note with wonder swell;
Sin overthrown and captive hell!
Where to now, O death, your sting?
Where your terrors, vanquished king!**

He Will Return

They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And one day, just as you saw him go, he will return"

Acts of the Apostles 1: 11.

The all-merciful and generous giving Father is tender toward those who love and fear him and kindly and lovingly gives good things to those who come to him with a trusting disposition. Therefore, let us not be double-minded; neither let our souls be proud on account of his exceedingly great and glorious gifts. It is written, "Wretched are those who are of double-mind and of doubting heart, who say, "These things we have heard even in the time of our fathers, but, behold we have grown old and none of them has happened to us." The significance of the Ascension of our Lord is that reality occurs according to the will of the eternal Father, not because we ardently desire it or need its manifestation for our mental health.

Far be it from us you foolish ones! Instead, you ought compare yourselves to a tree: for instance, the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves and then it flowers; after that comes the sour grape and then finally follows the ripened fruit.

You see how in a little time the fruit of a tree comes into maturity. So shall God's will be accomplished, soon and suddenly as the Scripture also bears witness teaching us, saying, "Speedily will He come and will not wait." And "The Lord shall suddenly come to his temple, even the Holy One, for whom you look and expect."

St. Clement of Rome.



WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE!

All you people, clap your hands; shout to God with cries of gladness. Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Saviour, save us! First Antiphon, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

God ascends His throne amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sound of trumpets. Entrance hymn, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, and You delighted the disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through this blessing, they were assured that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. Troparion, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

When You fulfilled the plan of salvation for us and united all things on earth to those in heaven, O Christ our God, You ascended in glory, never leaving us, but remaining ever present. For You proclaim to those who love You: "I am with you, and no one else has power over you." Kontakion, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

Be exalted above the heavens, O God, and let Your glory be over all the earth. Prokimenon, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

O my soul, extol the Lord Who in glory ascended bodily into heaven. O you who are the Mother of God in manner beyond understanding and beyond words, who gave birth in time to the Lord Whom time cannot contain; we the faithful magnify you with one accord. Hymn instead of 'It is truly Proper,' Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

God ascended His throne amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sound of trumpets. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Communion Hymn, Feast of the Ascension of our Lord.

When You came to the Mount of Olives, O Christ, completing the favorable plan of Your Father, the angels in heaven were moved with wonder, and the demons trembled beneath the earth. The apostles were filled with both fear and joy when You were speaking with them. A cloud was prepared before You as an awaiting throne; heaven opened its gates, shining with beauty; and the earth uncovered its deep abyss to show the fall of Adam and his rising up to You again. As an unseen power raised You from the earth, You gave Your blessing in a loud voice; the cloud carried You away, and heaven opened to receive You. Such is the great work that is beyond words, O Lord, that You accomplished for the salvation of our souls. Vesper Hymn, Ascension of our Lord.



AS HE BLESSED THEM
HE LEFT THEM AND
WAS TAKEN UP TO *
HEAVEN & LK 24-51

Did You Know That ...

- ...sensitivity to difference starts as early as infancy?
- ...self acceptance is the first step toward tolerance of difference in others?
- ...we should not overprotect our children , but face feelings openly?
- ...believers model tolerance and respect in their families?
- ...Orthodoxy teaches a positive, realistic sense of self?
- ...everyone can learn and be encouraged from the unique strength disabled children have had to develop?
- ...balancing truth with compassion contributes to marital happiness?
- ...regardless how much we earn, there is still such a thing as wasteful spending?
- ...lying to avoid conflict only leads to greater conflict?
- ...honesty in marriage is self-disclosure, not slamming your spouse?
- ...too many people have to stop stressing and start living?
- ...friends who enjoy commiserating together do not help each other?
- ...teaching a child he is loved by God builds the right kind of self-esteem?
- ...happiness is the reflection of the quality of our connection with other people and that is mainly influenced by the kind of person we are?
- ...certain price tags are just too outrageous?
- ...there ought to be things a child is taught to do for himself or as part of serious responsibility to the family without being paid?
- ...giving a child a generous allowance with no strings attached is foolish and expensive nonsense?

Three Glorious Realities

Because I live, you shall also live John 14: 19.

Whenever we as believers pay our respects to a departed friend in the funeral home, or attend funeral services in our parish church and are in the presence of a dead body, a house of clay, we acknowledge

The Reality of Death

***Death's* victory is only temporary.**

***Death's* only flowers are faded garlands on the casket lid.**

***Death's* only music is the sob of broken hearts.**

***Death's* only pleasure fountains are the falling tears of the world.**

***Death's* only palace is a huge sepulcher.**

***Death's* only gold are bones scattered at the mouth of a grave.**

***Death's* only light is the darkness of the tomb.**

***Death* is a king of terror with no rival.**

***Death* often mocks our hopes like a coarse comedian.**

***Death* is an inexorable jailer who imprisons many in heavy torpor and slumber.**

***Death*- once in the centuries long gone – closed the eyes, stilled the heart, folded the hands, and stopped the feet of Jesus.**

***Death* limited and confined Jesus to the tomb behind a large stone.**

***Death* for a time halted the lofty aspirations of Christ's followers.**

For all who loved Him, dark and bleak and comfortless was the night after Jesus died.

But we think, too, of

The Astounding Reality of Christ's Resurrection

**"But now is Christ risen from the dead" 1 Corinthians 15: 20.
So it is a living Christ we have today. Christ Is Risen!**

***Christ is Risen!* No mere shadow Christ of legend and man-made myth.
Christ is Risen! No hypothetical Christ of sentimental conjuring.
Christ is Risen! No immanent Christ of nature.
Christ is Risen! No pale Christ of historical imagination.
Christ is Risen! No mere dream Christ of culture and romance.
Christ is Risen! No created Christ, the product of our weary mind.
Christ is Risen! No mere heroic Christ of the poet's imagination.
Christ is Risen! No mere concept Christ of the painter's dreams.
Christ is Risen! No cold marble Christ of the sculptor's chisel.
Christ is Risen! No mere ivory Christ on a crucifix.
Christ is Risen! No dead-figure Christ protected by a sarcophagus.
Christ is Risen! No mere eulogized Christ of the orator's rhetoric.
Christ is Risen! No radiant apparition of the Christ of yesterday.
Christ is Risen! No confined Christ in a sealed tomb.
Christ is Risen! Not temporary, but an eternal and irreversible reality!**

Triumphantly and victoriously alive is our great Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Son of the Eternal Father – linking the exploits of the pious fathers to the holy achievements of their children, acknowledging supreme humble mastery in hostile circumstances, offering the inexhaustible fountains of His strength, rejuvenating and transforming human lives, vitalizing the hidden mysteries of our own being, lightening our burdens and brightening our narrow roadway.

Then we must, moreover, think seriously of our own Resurrection.

"Because I live, you shall also live" John 14: 19.

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive" 1 Corinthians 15: 22.

The life-beating pulse of immortality gives forth vibrations in the grave. The sheeted dead shall come forth with the dead in Christ the very first. God will literally drag the deep for His beloved. God will ransack the tomb and torture the mountains to receive His very own, and He will find us and bring us up to participate in His glorious victory. And we shall come up with perfect eyes, with perfect hands, with perfect feet, with perfect body; all our weaknesses left behind. We shall then bear a distinct kinship to our perfect Saviour. Not only is the resurrection of our bodies embraced in the work of redemption, but our soul will near the perfection of our Lord as well. How likened to Him shall we be! And as Jesus' Resurrection was necessary to complete the work of redemption He came to fulfill, so by a parity of reason our resurrection is necessary to complete the work with reference to individual faithful believers.

And He will complete it, let no one fear!

As believers, we abandon our sins. We become totally emancipated children of grace. They who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished. They open their eyes in the Saviour's presence on the last day and in the company of His loveliness heaven is begun. Our horizon shines with the light of eternal hope! The glorious dignity of the Resurrection belongs to us because then the Sun never sets!

Ours is the destined inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. Listen to the invigorating upbeat heartbeat of the Apostle Peter across centuries as we fervently join with him in proclaiming: "Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who in his great mercy gave us a new birth; a birth to hope which draws its life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; a birth to an imperishable inheritance, incapable of fading or defilement, which is kept in heaven for you who are guarded with God's power through faith, a birth to a salvation which stands ready to be revealed in the last day" 1 Peter 1: 3 - 5.

Christ Is Risen!

Indeed He Is Risen!

Crying Babies

It is good for our church when it is alive with crying babies. We love to hear the cry of babies in our parish church for Christ Himself said, "Bring the children to me and forbid them not...." Luke 18: 16. We are certain our heavenly Father accepts their hymns of praise as readily as He does those of devoted adults.

We commend mothers and parents who always bring their small children to church for worship. They are showing genuinely their appreciation to our God for the gift they have received in this child. They do not foolishly complain it is difficult to undergo the entire ritual of preparing for worship, dressing the children and of supervising them in the pew and in classes arranged for their benefit.

Parents who show their appreciation to our loving Father for the gift of a child they are given are certainly richly blessed by the Lord. They in addition utilize the grace provided by the Holy Spirit and so open themselves to be blessed even more.

Parents who do not utilize the gift of a child to complain about how difficult it is to bring that child to God have insights which God's blessings provide. The child is bestowed upon parents as a means of strengthening a spiritual relationship with God. If a child is used as an excuse for separation, for estrangement from God, the parents are not worthy of the gift in the first instance and the child is being abused by neglectful parents. Children cannot be made an excuse for staying away from the Lord because the gift of a child is given to foster closer unity with the Giver, God!

The bird that soars on the highest wing,
builds on the ground its lowly nest.
And she that does most sweetly sing,
Sings in the shade when all things rest.
In lark and nightingale, we see
what great honor has humility.

THE MANY FORMS OF "BLINDNESS"



In the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, the Church commemorates the Sunday of the BLIND MAN. A touching tale is related to us in the Gospel lesson, as we witness another miracle performed by Christ, Who gives sight to a man who had been blind from birth. How thrilling it must have been for this poor soul to have a whole new world opened up to him! How he must have rejoiced at his first experience of beholding the beauty of God's creation!

Others, however, continued to exhibit another curious form of "blindness" long after this man was given the ability to see by our Lord. The pharisees and scribes "closed their eyes" to the reality of this miraculous event! They refused to "see" the Hand of God in this matter. Instead, they insinuated that the Blind Man was lying: that perhaps he had his sight all along! The hardness of their hearts would not allow them to view Jesus for what He truly was: THE LIGHT THAT HAD COME TO ENLIGHTEN THE WORLD.

The message placed before us is a simple one. Only Christ can open the "eyes of our souls" and make us children of light. Only Christ can illuminate and overshadow the darkness caused by sin, making visible to us the eternal joys of Heaven. We must, therefore, never allow ourselves to be "blinded" by the temptations of this world.

If we are temporarily afflicted in this manner, we would be wise to heed these words: "IN REPENTANCE, I CRY TO YOU: YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF SUPREME BRIGHTNESS FOR ALL OF THOSE WHO ARE IN DARKNESS."

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