



*Without leaving Rome, thou didst come to us
by the precious chains which thou didst wear,
O foremost of the Apostles.
And worshipping them with faith, we pray:
By thine intercessions with God, grant us great mercy.*

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Thirty First Sunday after Pentecost

January 22, 2012

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

+++ The next Pirohi Sale will be Saturday, February 4. Please secure orders to assure its success.

+++ Those who would like their homes sanctified with the newly blessed water of Christ's baptism, please advise Father as soon as possible.

+++ 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 this past week: Tithe Offering, ~~\$420.00~~, Candles, ~~\$65.00~~, Parish Dues, ~~\$75.00~~, Holyday, ~~\$25.00~~, Diocesan Dues, ~~\$60.00~~, Energy, ~~\$65.00~~, Pennies from Heaven, ~~\$1.00~~, Food Coupons, ~~\$500.00~~, Christian Fellowship, ~~\$1.00~~, for a total of ~~\$1230.00~~. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ 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, Pani Lucas, Maria Idromenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleni Pallas, Debra Szmaida, Paul Szmaida, 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 ~~\$1600.00~~ from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals ~~\$5000.00~~. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

+++ 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 ~~\$1000.00~~ 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 remember only those who are present for the entire Divine Liturgy should come forward to receive Communion. The entire Liturgy means "Amen" to "Amen."**

+++ **Please pray the Lord our God grant us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.**

+++ **We need a volunteer to be in charge of arranging trips to the Lancaster Co., Pa. Theater for our parish. Please see Father immediately.**

+++ **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!**



Priestly Example

Hope comes with each dawn; are you not faithful, Lord to your promises Lamentations 3: 23?

My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish the task he gave me John 4: 34.

Nor may you yourself fail to set them a good example. Your teaching must have the integrity of serious, sound words to which no one can take exception. If it does, no opponent will be able to find anything bad to say about you and hostility will yield to shame Titus 2: 7, 8.

Two things claim your attention, yourself and the teaching of the faith; spend your care on them; so will you and those who listen to you achieve salvation 1 Timothy 4: 16.

Have I not chosen him as one who will teach his children...to follow the paths which the Lord shows them and to do what is just and right, winning him the fulfillment of all the Lord has promised him Genesis 18: 19?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God who gives all encouragement. He it is who comforts us in all our trials; and it is this encouragement we ourselves receive from God which enables us to comfort others who have trials of their own 2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4.

Since we live by the spirit, let the spirit be our rule of life; we must not indulge vain ambitions Galatians 5: 25, 26.

The All-Powerful God

Heaven's revelation to us in Scripture teaches that the all-powerful God sometimes performs signs, miracles through dead, lifeless matter as for instance:

Through the rod of Moses The Lord therefore asked him, What is in your hand? A staff, he answered. The Lord then said, Throw it on the ground. When he threw it on the ground, it was changed into a serpent and Moses shied away from it Exodus 4: 2 - 4.

Through the serpent of brass Moses accordingly made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered Numbers 21:9.

Through the bones of Elisha Once some people were burying a man, when suddenly they spied such a raiding band. So they cast the dead man into the grave of Elisha and everyone went off. But when the man came in contact with the bones of Elisha, he came back to life and rose to his feet 2 Kings 13: 21.

Through the garments of Christ As they were going, a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. If only I can touch his cloak, she thought, I shall get well. Jesus turned around and saw her and said, Courage, daughter! Your faith has restored you to health. At that very moment the woman got well Matthew 9: 20 - 22.

Through the mud, spittle and water of Siloam With that Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with his saliva, and smeared the man's eyes with the mud. Then he told him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam...So the man went off and washed and came back able to see John 9: 6, 7.

Through the shadow of St Peter *The people carried the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mattresses so that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. Crowds from the towns around Jerusalem would gather too, bring their sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits, all of whom were cured* Acts of the Apostles 5: 15.

Through handkerchiefs and cloths of St. Paul *Meanwhile God worked extraordinary miracles at the hands of Paul. When handkerchiefs or cloths which had touched his skin were applied to the sick, their diseases were cured and evil spirits departed from them* Acts of the Apostles 19: 11, 12.

As a result, there is no doubt in the mind of any believer that the Almighty Lord God performs signs and miracles through the Holy Cross, Holy Icons and Holy Relics.

These signs are to be understood as the mercy of God being directed toward the infirm and suffering; and further, as testimony of the eternal Father that He is an all-present, loving God, watching over us and our all our activities. These signs are also God's warnings that the more we see and witness his miracles, the more firmly we ought to believe in him with genuine fear and enduring responsive love. It is also a sign to us to correct our moral life according to his commandments. Otherwise we are in danger of being condemned with those at whose sight Jesus *...did so many miracles, yet they did not believe in him* John 12: 37.

Therefore, our Lord recapitulated: *If I had not done among them works which no other man did, they would have no sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father* John 15: 24.

By ourselves, on our own, in our frail, however, meagerly sincere interpretation of Christ's way of life in the Church, we are abject failures. *Apart from me you can do nothing* John 15: 5, but with him and in him...*nothing will be impossible to you* Luke 1: 37, because *...for man it is impossible, but for God all things are possible* Matthew 19: 26; Mark 10: 27.

Look UP

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

Psalms 36: 7.

A devoted father speaks about his son and how he performs at football half-time shows. He is always totally focused on him. Consequently, he does not always see the big picture of the show because he does not want to lose sight of him in the sea of other band members. Of course, he realizes, the son cannot always see him, even if he specially tries. The son is focused on his own particular task at the moment and certainly not thinking about the father. However, occasionally amid the roar of the crowd, he does look up and they make eye contact.

As we reflect on this insight from a loving father and a devoted son, we think, *Maybe this is how our heavenly Father feels when looking at us.* We certainly are aware of the love our God has for us, but quite honestly we find God's unconditional love, mercy, grace, forgiveness upon repentance for our sins, and presence in our lives not only mind-boggling, but almost incomprehensible. How is it that our heavenly Father and Creator knows us so intimately when there are so many other people in the world? God's revelation to us in Scripture and the life of His Body, our blessed Church, assures us that God's eyes are on each of us individually. "Are not five sparrows sold for a few pennies? Yet not one of them is neglected by God. In very truth, even the hairs of your head are counted! You are worth more than a flock of sparrows" Luke 12: 5.

How many times, when we look up from our tasks, we are aware our heavenly Father is clearly present and we seem to make eye contact, even as the son wishes to make eye contact with his earthly father. Often, however, like the son looking for the father at a vastly crowded football game, we do not see God. Even so, we do trust that our loving Creator is there, seeing us and smiling, certainly proud of us as his creation.

How thankful must the pious believer be that our Creator God always has his eyes on us, always loves us and is present with us even when we are not consciously aware of it. Because our God sees each of us individually, we return that enduring love. We seek always, under all circumstances to manifest not just our dependence on him, but to proclaim his presence in our daily living by duplicating his good works and witnessing to his love in the world for all mankind!

History Repeats Itself

They traveled over the whole island as far as Paphos, where they came across a Jewish magician named Bar-Jesus who posed as a prophet. He was attached to the court of the proconsular governor Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence who had summoned Barnabas and Saul and was anxious to hear the word of God. But Elymas – “the magician,” – for that is what his name means – opposed them and sought to turn the governor away from the faith. Saul, also known as Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit; he stared at him and exclaimed: “You are an impostor and a thorough going fraud, you son of Satan and enemy of all that is right! Will you never stop trying to make crooked the straight paths of the Lord? The Lord’s hand is upon you even now! For a time you shall be blind, unable to so much as to see the sun.” At once misty darkness came over him, and he groped about for someone to lead him by the hand. When the governor saw what had happened, he believed, so impressed was he by the teaching about the Lord

Acts of the Apostles 13: 6 – 12.

St. Paul shows himself a devoted follower of the Saviour. He is intent on bringing souls to the Lord. This is the first use in the early history of the Church of the name Paul for Saul, the result of his conversion. Paul is a Roman name while Saul was his Hebrew name and means “little.” His ministry was now becoming more focused on the Gentiles. St. John Chrysostom suggests the name change was the result of his ordination, just as Christ gave Simon the new name of Peter. It was a sign of his new life vocation.

The hand of the Lord acts not to inflict punishment for punishment’s sake, but to bring repentance and conversion which proves fruitful in the case of the proconsul. This is the first recorded instance of conversion to Christ of a high Roman official. The temporary blindness was a dramatically visible sign of the man’s falsity in character and belief which drove him to interfere in the working of God’s grace.

Bar-Jesus is Aramaic for *son of Jesus*, also called Elymas as meaning *sorcerer* which even in the ancient Syraic means *malevolent*. He was Jewish magician and false prophet, who was attached to the court of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus at Paphos on the island of Cyprus. When he tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith preached by Paul and Barnabas, Paul cursed him and inflicted blindness on him. Some identify him with

the Cyprian magician Atomos whom the procurator Felix used as his agent to win the hand of Drusilla in marriage.

Impressed not only by his initial encounter with the truth and salvation of Christ, the pro-consul, after witnessing God's power manifested through St. Paul, accepts Christianity in spite of the devil manifesting himself in the magician.

Similar encounters were experienced by the other apostles. Simon Magus is a classical example. *A certain man named Simon had been practicing magic in the town and holding the Samaritans spellbound. He passed himself off as someone of great importance. People from every rank of society were paying attention to him. "He is the power of the great god," they said. Those who followed him had been under the spell of his magic over a long period, but once they began to believe in the good news that Philip preached about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike accepted baptism. Even Simon believed. He was baptized like the rest and became a devoted follower of Philip. He watched the signs and the great miracles as they occurred, and was quite carried away. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. They went down to these people and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. It had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The pair upon arriving imposed hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Simon observed that it was through the laying on of hands that the apostles conferred the Spirit, and he made them an offer of money with the request, "Give me that power too, so that if I place my hands on anyone he will receive the Holy Spirit." Peter said in answer, "May you and your money rot, thinking that God's gift can be bought! You can have no portion or lot in this affair. Your heart is not steadfastly set on God. Reform your evil ways. Pray that the Lord may pardon you for thinking the way you have. I see you poisoned with gall and caught in the grip of sin. Simon responded, "I need the prayers of all of you to the Lord, so that what you have just said may never happen to me" Acts of the Apostles 8: 9 – 19.*

The tour of the entire island was made by Barnabas and Paul. Sergius Paulus, like many Romans, was interested in religious matters. His good sense is shown by his recognition of the fullness and superiority of Christianity. The event begins with the friendliness of Roman authority in some instances to Christ and his willingness to distinguish it from mere Oriental magic and superstition. In the old Jewish environment Barnabas resumes his old position, but in the Gentile world Paul, in virtue of his qualifications of birth, culture, citizenship and name, takes the lead. The gospel message remains victorious.

A priest tells the story of a similar modern day contemporary occurrence. There was a deacon in a parish which witnessed the augmentation of their numbers with three different Western families into the Church of Jesus Christ. For whatever reason, he felt it was his responsibility to go beyond the parish priest's authority and question each family, after having specifically invited them to his home, allegedly for dinner. After questioning them, he told each family group they were very foolish for leaving their western persuasion and should never have followed the instructions and teaching of the parish priest in becoming Orthodox. When told by the converts they trusted the truth of what they were taught, he further observed that was worst reason for changing their religion. Like the sorcerer, the deacon thought he was smarter than those who embraced Orthodoxy, but was more deficient than simply being blinded by his own obtuse lack of understanding the mysterious workings of grace.

In another instance, where the case was more complicated than mere leaving behind western error, at one session in which he was entrusted to answer some questions when the parish priest could not keep the appointment and delegated him to take the session, he told the couple the priest was too demanding and could baptize, Chrismate and marry them without further expectations, but would not do it because he was trying to enforce his priestly authority, that he was a control freak and no servant of Christ. Needless to say, the misguided couple stopped their instructions and left.

Yes, the devil was victorious once. No doubt the magician in his relationship with St. Paul thought he would be as successful in putting on a verbal show as were the sorcerers in the time of Moses, for a moment. We are reminded our all-powerful God always has the last word. *Behold, you scoffers and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a day you will never believe if one declares it to you* Acts of the Apostles 13: 41. There is no eternal reward for the backbiter, the unprepared and unformed non-believer. *He was filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul and reviled him...it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles, For so the Lord has commanded us, saying I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth* Acts of the Apostles 13: 46, 47.

Christ must be sought for the right reasons. Orthodox believers must remain within the security of salvation by their own fixed intention of will and faith. If we are not eager to learn the truth of Christ, we will be misled into perdition!

We are reminded of the Old Covenant incident when the pagan Philistines overran the Jews because of their lack of fidelity. The faithless priest Eli had two sons who were also priests who committed every imaginable sin. They were but a reflection of the daily lives of the people. Eli was commanded by God to correct them, but never assumed his responsibility seriously, so God permitted the pagans to rampage the Hebrew civilization. A great slaughter of the people occurred and the two priest sons were killed. Having been spiritually dead for some time, our God simply recognized their actual condition in physical death. In hearing the news, Eli, in shock, fell over and banged his head hard enough to put himself out of his earthly misery.

The pagans took the Ark of the Covenant and placed it in their own temple of Dagon who was the chief idol of the Canaanites and was referred to as the father of Baal in their mythology. They wanted to subject the one true God to servitude before pagan stone gods. God destroyed this idol as a sign that the God of Israel could not be possessed and subjected to their pagan beliefs. The Philistines moved the ark to three of their five cities, hoping that eventually it would be subjected by a local pagan god.

Our God exhibited his power and precedence over all creation even in this time of captivity. The temple to Dagon was finally completely destroyed in Maccabean times by Jonathan.

But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod 1 Kingdoms 5: 6. The glory and power of the living God would be made manifest until they realized they had exceeded and gone beyond the lesson the Creator would allow. They interfered and it finally came to their minds, *What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel* 1 Kingdoms 5: 8?

Finally they concluded, *Send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place so it does not kill us and our people...and the living and those not dying were struck in their private parts, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven* 1 Kingdoms 5: 11, 12.

So, all must answer the question posed by our God: *Why do you yet harden your hearts as did Egypt and Pharaoh hardened their hearts* 1 Kingdoms 6: 6? Our God desires to be where He belongs. He has come among us to remain in our hearts and souls. It is He who decides our destiny and we cannot individually or as a group determine our future. He has created us for himself and it is to him that we subject our will and our lives. It is to him we owe our first and lasting loyalty and faith response. We are being called upon to renew our devotion and faith, to destroy whatever temples we may have erected within ourselves that detract from the loving truth of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

THE CHAINS OF THE HOLY APOSTLE PETER

From the earliest days of the Christian Church, relics have played an important role in the spirituality of her faithful. In addition to the bodies of the saints, items widely identified with them were also revered and treated with upmost respect. Legends and sacred traditions have given us some fascinating tales to ponder concerning relics. One such story centers on the "Chains of the Holy Apostle Peter."

In the Book of Acts, we read how Herod Agrippa had the Apostle Peter arrested and cast into prison. The ruler intended to keep Peter there until after the Passover feast, at which time he would kill him, gaining the people's favor. One night, an angel appeared to Peter in his jail cell and commanded him: "Arise quickly." When Peter stood up, the chains with which he was bound fell from his hands. The angel then miraculously led him out into the streets of Jerusalem to freedom.

It is said that the early Christians kept the chains, not only as a means of remembering Peter, but because they had healing powers - many of the sick were cured simply by touching them. They were handed down in the Christian community from generation to generation.

Centuries later, St. Juvenal reportedly made a gift of the chains to the Empress Eudocia, who divided them in half. She sent part to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and the other portion to her daughter in Rome, who built the Church of St. Peter and placed these chains in it, along with those with which St. Peter was shackled in a Roman prison before his death.