

Readings & Hymns

First Sunday of Great Lent

Sunday of Orthodoxy



Troparion, Sunday of Orthodoxy, from the Triodion - Tone 2

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One;
and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God.
Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh
and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the Enemy.
Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee:
“Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior, //
for Thou didst come to save the world.”

Kontakion, Sunday of Orthodoxy, from the Triodion - Tone 8

No one could describe the Word of the Father;
but when He took flesh from thee, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described,
and restored the fallen image to its former state by uniting it to divine beauty.//
We confess and proclaim our salvation in words and images.

The Prokeimenon

The Prokeimenon in the 4th Tone: Blessed are Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and
praised and glorified is Thy name forever! (*Fathers*) (*Song of the three Holy Children, v. 3*)
verse: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (*v. 4*)

Epistle

§ 329 from the center: Hebrews 11: 24 – 26, 32 – 12: 1 (Sunday of Orthodoxy)

The eading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Hebrews.

BRETHREN, By faith Moses, when he came of age,
 refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God
 than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,
 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt;
 for he looked to the reward.

And what more shall I say?

For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and of Barak and Samson
 and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the [other] Prophets.
 who by faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises,
 stopped the mouths of lions,
 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword,
 out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle,
 turned to flight the armies of the enemies.

Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured,
 not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.
 Still others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings,
 yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain by the sword.
 They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins,
 being destitute, afflicted, tormented;
 of whom the world was not worthy.

They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
 And all these, having obtained a good report through faith,
 did not receive the promise,

God having provided something better for us,
 that they should not be made perfect without us.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
 let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,
 and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
 looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Alleluia - Tone 4

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who
 called on His Name. *(Sunday of Orthodoxy) (Ps 99 [100]: 6)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: They called to the Lord and He answered them. *(Ps 99 [100]: 6)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Gospel

§ 5; John 1: 43 – 51 (*Sunday of Orthodoxy*)

AT THAT TIME, JESUS would go forth into Galilee,
and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.
⁴⁴ Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
⁴⁵ Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him,
We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write,
Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
⁴⁶ And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?
Philip saith unto him, Come and see.
⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him,
Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!
⁴⁸ Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?
Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee,
when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.
⁴⁹ Nathanael answered and saith unto him,
Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.
⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said unto him,
Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou?
thou shalt see greater things than these.
⁵¹ And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you,
Hereafter ye shall see heaven open,
and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

Hymn to the Theotokos – Tone 8

(Instead of "It is truly meet ...," we sing the following)

All of creation rejoices in thee, O Full of Grace:
the assembly of angels and the race of men.
O sanctified temple and spiritual paradise, the glory of virgins,
from whom God was incarnate and became a child – our God before the ages.
He made thy body into a throne,
and thy womb He made more spacious than the heavens.
All of creation rejoices in thee, O Full of Grace. Glory to thee.

Communion Hymns

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest! (*Sunday*) (*Ps 148: 1*)
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! (*Fathers*) (*Ps 32 [33]: 1*)
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

*Sunday of Orthodoxy hymns:**from the Triodion, for the Sunday of Orthodoxy*

On "Lord, I Call ..." **Tone 6** The prophets, inspired by Thy Spirit, O Lord, foretold that Thou, whom nothing can contain or grasp, and who hast shone forth in eternity before the morning star from the immaterial and bodiless womb of the Father, wast to become a child, taking flesh from the Virgin, being joined to men and seen by those on earth. Through the prayers of these Thy prophets, in Thy compassion count us worthy of Thy light, // for we sing the praises of Thine ineffable and holy Resurrection.¹

The divinely-inspired prophets preached Thee in word and honoured Thee in works, and they received as their reward life without end. For they steadfastly refused, O Master, to worship the creation instead of Thee, the Creator; they renounced the whole world for the Gospel's sake, and in their suffering they were conformed to Thy Passion which they had foretold. Through their intercessions, count us worthy to pass through the period of the Fast without offence, // for Thou alone art rich in mercy.²

O Master, who art boundless in Thy divine nature, Thou wast pleased in the last times to take flesh and be bounded; and in assuming flesh, Thou hast also taken on Thyself all its distinctive properties. Therefore we depict the likeness of Thine outward form, venerating it with an honor that is relative. So we are exalted to the love of Thee, and following the holy traditions handed down by the apostles, // from Thine icon we receive the grace of healing.

As a precious adornment the Church of Christ has received the venerable and holy icons of the Savior Christ, of God's Mother and of all the saints. Celebrating now their triumphant restoration, she is made bright with grace and splendor, and drives away all heretics. With great rejoicing she gives glory unto God who loves mankind, // and who for her sake has endured His voluntary Passion.

Tone 2. *Glory...* The grace of truth has shone forth upon us; the mysteries darkly prefigured in the times of old have now been openly fulfilled. For behold, the Church is clothed in a beauty that surpasses all things earthly, through the ikon of the incarnate Christ that was fore-shadowed by the ark of testimony.³ This is the safeguard of the Orthodox faith; for if we hold fast to the ikon of the Savior whom we worship, we shall not go astray. Let all who do not share this faith be covered with shame; but we shall glory in the ikon of the Word made flesh, which we venerate but worship not as an idol. So let us kiss it, and with all the faithful cry aloud: O God, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.

1 Ps. 109 [110]: 3.

2 Rom. 1: 25; Phil. 3: 10.

3 Exod. 25: 22.

Apostikha, Tone 2. *Glory ...* Advancing from ungodliness to the true faith, and illumined with the light of knowledge, let us clap our hands and sing aloud, offering praise and thanksgiving to God; and with due honour let us venerate the holy ikons of Christ, of the all-pure Virgin and the saints, whether depicted on walls, on wooden panels or on holy vessels, rejecting the impious teaching of the heretics. For, as Basil says, the honour shown to the ikon passes to the prototype it represents.⁴ Through the prayers of Thine undefiled Mother and of all the saints, we beseech Thee, Christ our God, to bestow upon us Thy great mercy.

1st Sunday of Great Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy

The first Sunday of Great Lent is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy because it commemorates the restoration of the Holy Icons and the triumph of the Orthodox Faith against the terrible heresy of the Iconoclasts, i.e. those heretics who refused to honor the Holy Icons. For more than a hundred years the Church was disturbed by the evil doctrine of iconoclasm.

The first Emperor to persecute the Church was Leo the Isaurian, and the last was Theophilus, the spouse of Saint Theodora (February 11), who reigned after her husband's death and re-established Orthodoxy in the time of Patriarch Methodios (June 14). Empress Theodora proclaimed publicly that we do not kiss the Icons as a sign of worship, nor do we honor them as "gods," but as images of their prototypes.

In the year 843, on the first Sunday of the Fast, Saint Theodora and her son, Emperor Michael, venerated the Holy Icons together with the clergy and the people. Since that time this event has been commemorated every year, because it was definitively determined that we do not worship the Icons, but we honor and glorify all the Saints who are depicted on them. We worship only the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and no one else, neither a Saint, nor an Angel.

Originally, the Holy Prophets Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were commemorated on this Sunday. The Alleluia verses appointed for today's Liturgy reflect this older usage. *oca.org*

The Troparion was a rallying hymn of the Orthodox Icon venerator. In the life of St Theodore the Studite it is recorded that St Theodore organized a procession of icons when St Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople was exiled in 815 for the veneration of Icons, St Theodore the Studite had a procession of the monks of the Studite monastery holding Icons high and singing this Troparion.

Troparion, Sunday of Orthodoxy, from the Triodion - Tone 2

We vererate Thy most pure image, O Good One; / and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God. / Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh / and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the Enemy. / Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee: / "Thou hast filled all with joy, O

⁴ St. Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, §xviii (45).

our Savior, // for Thou didst come to save the world.”



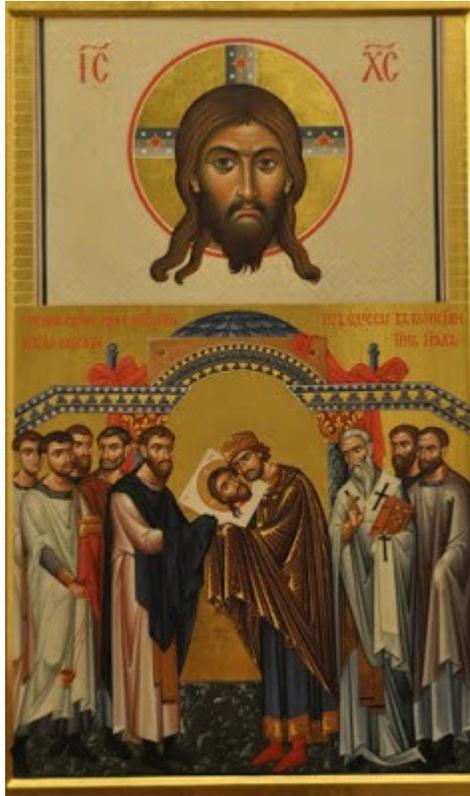
Aaron and Hur support the arms of Moses

The Holy Prophets

Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, this Sunday was dedicated to all holy Prophets, as can be seen in the Alleluia verses: “Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. They called to the Lord and He answered them.” (*Ps 99 [100]: 6*) The Slavonic Menaion preserves the Canon and stikhera of this commemoration, and the troparion as a sessional hymn during the Canon, for use at Small Compline on Sunday Evening. In Greek the Troparion of the Prophets is found with the Canon of the Synodikon, a composition of St Patriarch Methodios sung in procession before the reading of the Synodikon (declaration of Orthodoxy against heresy).

Troparion of the Prophets, 1st Sunday of Great Lent - TONE 2

The choir of the Prophets
 gladly rejoices today with Moses and Aaron,
 for the Cross, by which you saved us, shines forth,
 bringing the fulfillment of prophecy. //
 By their supplications, O Christ our God, save our souls.



SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

Archpriest Alexander Schmemmann

Rejoicing today in the triumph of Orthodoxy on this first Sunday of Lent, we joyfully commemorate three events: one event belonging to the past; one event to the present; and one event which still belongs to the future.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rejoicing today in the triumph of Orthodoxy on this first Sunday of Lent, we joyfully commemorate three events: one event belonging to the past; one event to the present; and one event which still belongs to the future.

Whenever we have any feast or joy in the Church, we Orthodox first of all look back — for in our present life we depend on what happened in the past. We depend first of all, of course, on the first and the ultimate triumph — that of Christ Himself. Our faith is rooted in that strange defeat which became the most glorious victory — the defeat of a man nailed to the cross, who rose again from the dead, who is the Lord and the Master of the world. This is the first triumph of Orthodoxy. This is the content of all our commemorations and of all our joy. This man selected and chose twelve men, gave them power to preach about that defeat and that victory, and sent them to the whole world saying preach and baptize, build up the Church, announce the Kingdom of God. And you know, my brothers and sisters, how those twelve men — very simple men indeed, simple fishermen — went out and preached. The world

hated them, the Roman Empire persecuted them, and they were covered with blood. But that blood was another victory. The Church grew, the Church covered the universe with the true faith. After 300 years of the most unequal conflict between the powerful Roman Empire and the powerless Christian Church, the Roman Empire accepted Christ as Lord and Master. That was the second triumph of Orthodoxy. The Roman Empire recognized the one whom it crucified and those whom it persecuted as the bearers of truth, and their teaching as the teaching of life eternal. The Church triumphed. But then the second period of troubles began.

The following centuries saw many attempts to distort the faith, to adjust it to human needs, to fill it with human content. In each generation there were those who could not accept that message of the cross and resurrection and life eternal. They tried to change it, and those changes we call heresies. Again there were persecutions. Again, Orthodox bishops, monks and laymen defended their faith and were condemned and went into exile and were covered with blood. And after five centuries of those conflicts and persecutions and discussions, the day came which we commemorate today, the day of the final victory of Orthodoxy as the true faith over all the heresies. It happened on the first Sunday of Lent in the year 843 in Constantinople. After almost 100 years of persecution directed against the worship of the holy icons, the Church finally proclaimed that the truth had been defined, that the truth was fully in the possession of the Church. And since then all Orthodox people, wherever they live, have gathered on this Sunday to proclaim before the world their faith in that truth, their belief that their Church is truly apostolic, truly Orthodox, truly universal. This is the event of the past that we commemorate today.

But let us ask ourselves one question: Do all the triumphs of Orthodoxy, all the victories, belong to the past? Looking at the present today, we sometimes feel that our only consolation is to remember the past. Then Orthodoxy was glorious, then the Orthodox Church was powerful, then it dominated. But what about the present? My dear friends, if the triumph of Orthodoxy belongs to the past only, if there is nothing else for us to do but commemorate, to repeat to ourselves how glorious was the past, then Orthodoxy is dead. But we are here tonight to witness to the fact that Orthodoxy not only is not dead but also that it is once more and forever celebrating its own triumph — the triumph of Orthodoxy. We don't have to fight heresies among ourselves, but we have other things that once more challenge our Orthodox faith.

Today, gathered here together, Orthodox of various national backgrounds, we proclaim and we glorify first of all our unity in Orthodoxy. This is the triumph of Orthodoxy in the present. This is a most wonderful event: that all of us, with all our differences, with all our limitations, with all our weaknesses, can come together and say we belong to that Orthodox faith, that we are one in Christ and in Orthodoxy. We are living very far from the traditional centers of Orthodoxy. We call ourselves Eastern Orthodox, and yet we are here in the West, so far from those glorious cities which

were centers of the Orthodox faith for centuries — Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow. How far are those cities. And yet, don't we have the feeling that something of a miracle has happened, that God has sent us here, far into the West, not just in order to settle here, to increase our income, to build up a community. He also has sent us as apostles of Orthodoxy, so that this faith, which historically was limited to the East, now is becoming a faith which is truly and completely universal.

This is a thrilling moment in the history of Orthodoxy. That is why it is so important for us to be here tonight and to understand, to realize, to have that vision of what is going on. People were crossing the ocean, coming here, not thinking so much about their faith as about themselves, about their lives, about their future. They were usually poor people, they had a difficult life, and they built those little Orthodox churches everywhere in America not for other people but for themselves, just to remember their homes, to perpetuate their tradition. They didn't think of the future. And yet this is what happened: the Orthodox Church was sent here through and with those poor men. The truth itself, the fullness of the apostolic faith — all this came here, and here we are now, filling this hall and proclaiming this apostolic faith — the faith that has strengthened the universe. And this leads us to the event which still belongs to the future.

If today we can only proclaim, if we can only pray for that coming triumph of Orthodoxy in this country and in the world, our Orthodox faith forces us to believe that it is not by accident but by divine providence that the Orthodox faith today has reached all countries, all cities, all continents of the universe. After that historic weakness of our religion, after the persecutions by the Roman Empire, by the Turks, by the godless atheists, after all the troubles that we had to go through, today a new day begins. Something new is going to happen. And it is this future of Orthodoxy that we have to rejoice about today.

We can already have a vision of that future when, in the West, a strong American Orthodox Church comes into existence. We can see how this faith, which for such a long time was an alien faith here, will become truly and completely universal in the sense that we will answer the questions of all men, and also all their questions. For if we believe in that word: "Orthodoxy," "the true faith"; if for one moment we try to understand what it means: the true, the full Christianity, as it has been proclaimed by Christ and His disciples; if our Church has preserved for all ages the message of the apostles and of the fathers and of the saints in its purest form, then, my dear friends, here is the answer to the questions and to the problems and to the sufferings of our world. You know that our world today is so complex. It is changing all the time. And the more it changes, the more people fear, the more they are frightened by the future, the more they are preoccupied by what will happen to them. And this is where Orthodoxy must answer their problem; this is where Orthodoxy must accept the

challenge of modern civilization and reveal to men of all nations, to all men in the whole world, that it has remained the force of God left in history for the transformation, for the deification, for the transfiguration of human life.

The past, the present, the future: At the beginning, one lonely man on the cross – the complete defeat. And if at that time we had been there with all our human calculations, we probably would have said: “That’s the end. Nothing else will happen.” The twelve left Him. There was no one, no one to hope. The world was in darkness. Everything seemed finished. And you know what happened three days later. Three days later He appeared. He appeared to His disciples, and their hearts were burning within them because they knew that He was the risen Lord. And since then, in every generation, there have been people with burning hearts, people who have felt that this victory of Christ had to be carried again and again into this world, to be proclaimed in order to win new human souls and to be the transforming force in history.

Today this responsibility belongs to us. We feel that we are weak. We feel that we are limited, we are divided, we are still separated in so many groups, we have so many obstacles to overcome. But today, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we close our eyes for a second and we rejoice in that unity which is already here: priests of various national churches praying together, people of all backgrounds uniting in prayer for the triumph of Orthodoxy. We are already in a triumph, and may God help us keep that triumph in our hearts, so that we never give up hope in that future event in the history of orthodoxy when Orthodoxy will become the victory which eternally overcomes all the obstacles, because that victory is the victory of Christ Himself.

As we approach the most important moment of the Eucharist, the priest says, “Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess....” What is the condition of the real triumph of Orthodoxy? What is the way leading to the real, the final, the ultimate victory of our faith? The answer comes from the Gospel. The answer comes from Christ Himself and from the whole tradition of Orthodoxy. It is love. Let us love one another, that with one mind we may confess . . . confess our faith, our Orthodoxy. Let us, from now on, feel responsible for each other. Let us understand that even if we are divided in small parishes, in small dioceses, we first of all belong to one another. We belong together, to Christ, to His Body, to the Church. Let us feel responsible for each other, and let us love one another. Let us put above everything else the interests of Orthodoxy in this country. Let us understand that each one of us today has to be the apostle of Orthodoxy in a country which is not yet Orthodox, in a society which is asking us: “What do you believe?” “What is your faith?” And let us, above everything else, keep the memory, keep the experience, keep the taste of that unity which we are anticipating tonight.



The Chludov Psalter, the iconoclast John the Grammarian whitewashes an Icon of the Lord beneath an image of the giving of vinegar to the Lord at the Crucifixion.

This illustrates the verse, "The gave me gall for food and vinegar to drink", Psalm 68 [69]:21.

At the end of the first century – when the Church was still a very small group, a very small minority, in a society which was definitely anti-Christian when the persecution was beginning – St. John the Divine, the beloved disciple of Christ, wrote these words: "And this is the victory, our faith, this is the victory." There was no victory at that time, and yet he knew that in his faith he had the victory that can be applied to us today. We have the promise of Christ, that the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church. We have the promise of Christ that if we have faith, all things are possible. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit, that He will fill all that which is weak, that He will help us at the moment when we need help. In other words, we have all the possibilities, we have everything that we need, and therefore

the victory is ours. It is not a human victory which can be defined in terms of money, of human success, of human achievements. What we are preaching tonight, what we are proclaiming tonight, what we are praying for tonight, is the victory of Christ in me, in us, in all of you in the Orthodox Church in America. And that victory of Christ in us, of the one who for us was crucified and rose again from the dead, that victory will be the victory of His Church.

Today is the triumph of Orthodoxy, and a hymn sung today states solemnly and simply: "This is the Apostolic faith, this is the Orthodox faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the faith that is the foundation of the world." My dear brothers and sisters, this is also our own faith. We are chosen. We are elected. We are the happy few that can say of our faith, "apostolic," "universal," "the faith of our fathers," "Orthodoxy," "the truth." Having this wonderful treasure, let us preserve it, let us keep it, and let us also use it in such a way that this treasure becomes the victory of Christ in us and in His Church. Amen.



Triumph of Orthodoxy Sunday
Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh 4 March 1990

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Week after week in the period of preparation for Lent, we have been confronted with parables in which our own condition is so clearly, so sharply, so accusingly depicted; and also with stern warnings that there is no middle way between the way of life and the way of death, that we can live on earth in a twilight of unconsciousness, but a moment will come when the full light will shine before us, and then it will become clear whether we, ourselves, have been children of light or prisoners of darkness. And the culminating point of this process is the reading of the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete in which both sin and repentance are so powerfully depicted.

But now we enter into a new phase of our preparation for Easter; we enter into Lent which is an old word that means 'spring', the beginning of life; a period when we will no longer be confronted with our twilight or the darkness which still has power over us, but with the light of God, the light that dispels darkness, the light that makes all things to shine and to be light itself according to the word of Christ.

And today we remember the day of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, the day when the Church recognised in its last Ecumenical Council, in the 9th century, that all that was essential to the Christian faith had been proclaimed. And what had been proclaimed was our hope, our absolute, unshakeable hope, because what it proclaimed was that God had become Man; that God had chosen, in an act of love for us, of solidarity with us, however sinful, however fallen, however darkened we were, had chosen to become a man in our midst, taking responsibility – yes, responsibility! – for His act of creation performed without our ascent, and the freedom He gave us that is the *absolute* condition for our being able to love and to chose life rather than death, but at the same time which is the frightening condition of our fall.

And today we have read the Gospel, in which St. John proclaims, in the words of Nathaniel, that Christ is the Son of God, the King of Israel, that Salvation has come, that God is in our midst, that all things are possible if we only, *if we only* believe.

We have read or heard today in the Epistle how before us millions of people have believed in the unbelievable: that God can love us in such a way, that God can love each of us and all of us with His life and His death, that God can love us however unlovable we feel within ourselves and seem to others. We are called to believe the unbelievable, to be sure that God has a heart deep and wide enough to contain us; or, if you prefer, that His love is sacrificial; that He not only became a man to share with us all our condition, including the horror of having lost God: My God, My God, why hath Thou forsaken Me? but He is prepared day in day out to seek us out, to take us upon His shoulders as the shepherd takes the lost sheep, or if necessary, to take us upon His shoulder the way He, in Holy Week, took up His cross to walk, to fall under

it, to be crucified upon it, and because in His *free* gift of Himself He could obtain the power to forgive: Forgive them, Father: They don't know what they are doing.

And we are looking now towards the vision of Holy Week, step after step; but this Holy Week is not a Week of horror: we know that this Holy Week is suffused with the glory of the risen Christ, that the Holy Week is a week when we are confronted, each of us, all of us together and singly, with love Divine, with the extent, the depth of Divine Love, a personal love, a love addressed to each of us.

And we will see in the course of these weeks two things: today, that God has come in our midst, He, the Light is in the midst of the twilight of history, or in the darkness of the darkest soul and the most sinisterly dark situation!

If that is true, then all things are possible! Then indeed we can believe the unbelievable! And more than this: we will be shown week after week what God can do. Next week, on the day of St. Gregory of Palamas, we will hear proclaimed by him the fact that God does not only cherish us as it were, from the outside, ... but He gives us His grace which like fire pervades us, making us gradually, if we only accept it, to be like the Burning Bush in the desert that burnt without been consumed, because God does not consume, does not destroy, unless we turn against Him. Yes, He is the consuming fire until and unless we accept Him. But accepted, He makes us partakers of His Divine nature, He fills us with His own life, He is life itself in us, and we in Him.

These are the two messages that come now; and then we will see that St. John of the Ladder teaches us how to move Godwards, how to overcome the twilight or the darkness which is in us. And we can see the result of this struggle, of this cry of the soul, of this hunger for life and for light in the person of St. Mary of Egypt and of other sinners who received Christ and were transformed, transfigured, saved.

This is the way that leads us step by step to meet Holy Week, a Week so holy when the love of God has been expressed not in words, not in blessings, not in tenderness, but in the vision of the cost of love to God Himself, the cost of our falling away from Him to the Son of God become the Son of Man.

How can we respond to it? What is then the message of this period? In the first period which I have mentioned we were confronted with evil in us, been challenged by it: This is what you are! And *this* is what is bound to happen. But *now* we are confronted with this vision of unutterable beauty and hope: how can we respond to it?

By gratitude! Gratitude is the next stop; gratitude is what must carry us through all this week: gratitude, a sense of wonder: how can God be as He is? How can He love me as I know myself, and indeed, horror of horrors, as others know me!

And if that is understood by us, then the only answer we can give to God is gratitude. To express our gratitude, is to say, "Lord, however weak I am, however imperfect, however sinful, however unworthy" from the depth of my gratitude for Who You are and what You do, I will do all within my power, however frail my will, however weak my power, I will do all I can to show you that I have understood the message of love, the message of the cross, the message of mercy, that I have understood with all my being and that I want to prove it by living in such a way that would be a proof of my understanding, live in such a way that I should be a joy to You, a joy to God, a consolation to God!

O God! To think that we can do this! Aren't we going to do it? Let us enter into these weeks of Lent really as one begins to live in spring! Enter into newness of life, and throughout, throughout these weeks, in gratitude, to give joy to God. And then we will be able to face Holy Week not as the ultimate horror that condemns the ungrateful, the murderer of Christ; no: as a Week that is a full and perfect revelation of a love understood, received, and insofar as we can enacted by us.

O, let us gather all our strength, and when our strength will not suffice, let us remember the promise of Christ: "My strength deploys itself in weakness; all things are possible to me" as Paul puts it "in the power of Christ that sustains me". And the words of Christ: What is impossible to men is possible to God. Let us surrender to God to give Him joy! And all will be of God, and all will be well. Amen.



“ISLANDS DEDICATED TO GOD.” THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

A word from Met. Tikhon (Mollard, OCA) Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America & Canada

Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, San Francisco, California, March 17, 2019

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: We gather this evening to celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy and to pray together at this peaceful yet glorious Vespers service sung so beautifully by the Cathedral choir and those who have joined them. Especially in North America, this day has become a day for Orthodox Christians to come together with thanksgiving to Almighty God in order to celebrate our unity and our common joy at the restoration of the holy icons. I am grateful to His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin for his great kindness in inviting me to be with you this evening, and for our concelebration this morning, together with His Grace, Bishop Daniel at the Divine Liturgy at St Seraphim Cathedral in Santa Rosa.

It is also a great joy to welcome His Eminence, Archbishop Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, with whom I recently had the honor of serving with – along with several hundred other hierarchs – in Moscow for the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of enthronement of His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill. Your Eminence, we are grateful for the brotherly relations that exist between the Orthodox Church in America and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and in particular for the strong fraternal relations that exist particularly here in the Diocese of the West.

We are blessed to hold this evening’s service here at the historic Holy Trinity Cathedral, which just recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. I was here for those celebrations last October and offer my thanks to Archpriest Kirill Sokolov and the Cathedral Community for their hospitality once again.

When he arrived in North America in 1898, my namesake, St Tikhon, the Enlightener of North America, came to San Francisco, and offered the following words in this very cathedral, recalling the words of the prophet Hosea:

“By the will of God, I, too, in my unworthiness, was called to apostolic service here, and so now I too *will say to those called ‘not my people,’ ‘You are my people;’ I will call ‘beloved’ the one called ‘not my loved one.’* Until now, we had been strangers to each other, and did not know each other. Henceforth, the Lord Himself is placing us into a bond of closeness, into a mutual relationship of bishop with his flock and flock with her bishop.”

It is those same bonds of closeness that we experience today in our Churches, especially as we celebrate the eternal truths of Holy Orthodoxy as conveyed particularly through the icons. The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* speaks of “islands

dedicated to God,” quoting from another prophet, the prophet Isaiah (41:1), and clarifies that these islands refer to “the Churches from the nations and, by Churches, not splendid Church buildings, but the fullness of those who perform acts of reverence in them and worship the Divine with hymns and praises.”

For many years the Orthodox Church in America has held firm the faith of the Apostles, the faith of the Fathers, the faith of the Orthodox, the faith that makes fast the inhabited world. In our Churches, Chapels, monasteries, seminaries, and institutions throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, places where “Churches from the nations” are also now found, our communities give glory, honor, and worship to the one God and Father, to our Holy Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. Our bishops oversee our Church life, ministering to the flock entrusted to us by the grace of God, with all canonical strictness and in fidelity to the tradition of the Church. At every level of our ecclesial experience, we seek to resolve our internal problems conciliarly with the fullness of our Church according to the tradition we have received. Our Church, sojourning here in North America, gives thanks to God for the great blessings he has given us, and also to the communion he has allowed us to maintain in our common faith with the other local Orthodox Churches.

All of this brings us back to our common missionary calling, which St Tikhon also spoke of in 1898. Contrasting the aggressive ways of non-Orthodox missionaries, he points out that “Orthodox missionaries, on the other hand, act differently: they go to their holy task not in order that through it they might obtain glory among men, but in order they themselves might reap mercy from God as well as salvation for others. They do not trumpet their success before the whole world, and, indeed, do not ascribe success to themselves but to the power of God.” In another place he would add: “But most importantly, the Orthodox Church accomplishes her [missionary] task in silence, with humility and godliness, with an understanding of human frailty and divine power.”

What we accomplish this evening is an example of what St Tikhon spoke of. Regardless of the divisions and conflicts that take place in the world around us, it is through our humble worship and fervent prayer that we make the light of Orthodoxy shine on the darkness around us. Today’s commemoration, the restoration of the veneration of the holy icons, is truly a Resurrectional feast, a Paschal celebration and a source of encouragement for us in our Lenten struggles. It is in this way that we share the glory of Orthodoxy that is revealed in our theology, our hymnography, and our iconography. And we do so here in North America, as it done throughout the Orthodox world.

In the same year that he preached in San Francisco, St Tikhon also spoke in New York thanking everyone for their kindness in welcoming him and saying that his sincere and most heartfelt prayer at this moment was the petition in the Lord’s Prayer,

“Thy Kingdom come!” He went on:

What better missionary goal is there than this? And God has already shown his great mercy to America in no small measure. The Kingdom of God has already arrived here: the building of Orthodox work has already begun and is gradually strengthening and expanding. A good feeling is taking root among the widely dispersed members of the church here. And the surroundings to which divine Providence has brought us to carry out our life and work are not hostile to our high goal.

Although our challenges today might be externally different, Saint Tikhon’s words about both the difficulties and the opportunities facing the Church are an encouragement to us today. As we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and reflect upon the blessings and struggles of the past, let us be inspired by the true icons of the Kingdom, such as St Tikhon, who reminds us to be grateful to our merciful God for the gift of one another and for the freedom to witness to the Orthodox Faith, which has been proclaimed in North America for more than two hundred years. By God’s grace, all of these accomplishments have been achieved through the various Orthodox Churches in North America and by the dedication and initiative of Orthodox Christian men and women of vision. We should be grateful for what has been accomplished and also be mindful of the task still before us, with all its challenges and obstacles.

Christianity is about movement and vision (“come and see” as we heard in today’s Gospel), movement and vision that are not limited to the physical realm or in the confines of the mind, but rather take our hearts, which have been overshadowed by the grace of the Holy Spirit, on the journey that introduces us into the heavenly kingdom. We make this journey in the place that we have been planted and in the community we are a part of, but our goal should be to persevere and support one another on our common journey towards the heavenly kingdom, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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