

Sunday of the Blind Man

Sixth Sunday of Pascha

30 April / 13 May

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 5: Let us, the faithful; praise and worship the Word, / Co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, / born for our salvation from the Virgin; / for He willed to be lifted up on the cross in the flesh, / to endure death, / and to raise the dead / by His glorious Resurrection!

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 5: Thou didst descend into hell, O my Saviour, / shattering its gates as Almighty, / resurrecting the dead as Creator, / and destroying the sting of death. / Thou hadst delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, / and we cry to Thee, O Lord, save us.

Kontakion of The Sunday Of The Blind Man, Tone 4: Blinded in the eyes of my soul, I draw nigh unto Thee, O Christ, like the man blind from his birth, and in repentance I cry to Thee: Thou art the exceeding radiant Light of those in darkness.

Kondak of Pascha, Tone 8: Though Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades. And didst arise as victor, O Christ God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women: Rejoice! and giving peace unto Thine apostles: Thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.



Matins Gospel VIII

Epistle: St. Acts of the Apostles 16: 16-34

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; And they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptised. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

THEY SEIZED PAUL AND SILAS AND THREW THEM INTO PRISON

What could equal these souls? These men had been scourged, had received many stripes; they had been misused, were in peril of their lives, were thrust into the inner prison, and set fast in the stocks: and for all this they did not suffer themselves to sleep, but kept vigil all night. Do you mark what a blessing tribulation is? ...That the earthquake should not seem to have come of itself, there was this concurrent circumstance bearing witness to it: the doors were opened, and all their bonds were loosed. And it appears this happened in the night time, for the Apostles did not work for display but for men's salvation ...Here, they no sooner showed the doors standing open, and it opened the doors of the jailer's heart. It loosed two sorts of chains. That prisoner kindled the true light: for the light in his heart was shining ...He says immediately, 'What must I do to be saved?' What then does Paul answer? 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved: you and your house.' For this above all wins men: that one's household also should be saved ...The faith of the jailer was a voice in itself. What could be equal to this? He is put in bonds, and looses, being bound. He looses a twofold bond: him who bound him he looses by being unbound. These are indeed works of grace.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXXVI on Acts XVI. B#55, pp. 223-225

The Gospel According To St. John 9: 1-38

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; But by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

ONE THING I KNOW, THAT THOUGH I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE

Last Sunday, the Sunday of the Samaritan woman, the Holy Church told us how Christ raises a person from an earthly, carnal state of mind to the state in which a human being thirsts to worship God and pray to Him. You see, the Samaritan woman came to the well for physical water which satisfies only earthly thirst. But when Christ revealed her sins to her, and she ran to Him in repentance, then in her awakened spiritual thirst, the thirst for Living Water springing up into everlasting life, the thirst for communion with God, her first question was about prayer: where one should worship God, how to pray. Now today's Gospel gives us a model for prayer.

"As Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth" (Jn. 9:1). Being blind from birth he had never seen anyone. He could not imagine to himself the form of a man. He had never even seen Christ. He only knew that Christ was passing close by, that He was a miracle-worker and could give him sight. And he began to cry out, to call to Christ: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk. 10:47; Lk. 18:38). The people tried to quiet him; he was interfering with their listening to Christ's preaching, he was disturbing the peace. Christ was walking, surrounded by His disciples, and they asked: "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And said unto him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (Jn. 9:2-3, 6-8).

Let us imagine to ourselves the mental state of this man blind from birth. He cried out, called. They pushed him, maybe even forced him to be silent, but he still cried out, begged. Speaking in our terms, he was praying. Finally, that Miracle-Worker Who was invisible to him approached. But He did not perform an immediate miracle. On the contrary. He did something which according to human understanding might appear humiliating, unpleasant. He spat and made clay from the saliva and earth, and smeared the eyes of the blind man. But this wasn't enough; He sent him with this clay on his eyes to go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means "sent"). But the blind man didn't object, he went feeling his way, stumbling, exposed to the mockery of the passers-by. Finally he reached the pool and washed. And here, fulfilling all this, enduring all this, he finally recovered his sight and returned seeing.

This is a model of prayer for you and me. After all, we too are spiritually blind and cannot see the Lord. But we know that He exists. Let us call to Him, cry out to Him, begging for help. And let us not despond if this help is not immediately given to us. Maybe we still have to go a long way, not an easy way, like the way for the blind man to the pool of Siloam. On this path we might meet unpleasant things, humiliations, like the clay for the blind man. Let us endure everything. Let us be obedient. Let us do what He orders us to do; let us go the way He showed us, like the blind man's way to the pool of Siloam. And here, when we have fulfilled all this, then the Lord will answer our prayer, and if it pleases Him, will fulfill it. And the same will happen to us that happened to the blind man. When, through the circumstances of our life, the Lord asks us, "Dost Thou believe on the Son of God?" (Jn. 9:35), we will answer: We believe Lord! and we will worship Him.

Only let us avoid all images during the time of prayer. We must not imagine anything to ourselves; but like the blind man, let us just know that the Lord is near and that He can do anything. And if things seem to turn out opposite to our prayers, let us not be despondent. But let us hope, hope against hope. And He will do what is beneficial for us. Let us keep the state of mind of the blind man—this is the best form of prayer.

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

Saints of the Week

30 April / 13 May — The Holy Apostle James - the son of Zebedee and brother of St. John the Theologian, he was one of the Twelve. At the call of the Lord Jesus, he left his fishing nets and his father and, together with John, immediately followed Christ. He was one of the three apostles to whom the Lord revealed the greatest mysteries: before whom He was transfigured on Tabor and before whom He was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion. After receiving the Holy Spirit, he preached the Gospel in various places, going as far as Spain. On his return from Spain, a violent quarrel broke out between the Jews and himself on the Holy Scriptures, and, being unable to withstand him, they hired a magician, Hermogenes. But Hermogenes and Philip his pupil were overcome by the power and truth that James preached, and were baptised. Then the Jews denounced him to Herod, and persuaded one Josias to slander the Apostle. This Josias, seeing James's manly bearing and hearing his clear preaching of the truth, repented and came to faith in Christ. When James was condemned to death, this Josias was also condemned. Mounting the scaffold, Josias begged James's forgiveness for the sin of slander, and James embraced him, kissing him and saying: 'Peace be to thee, and forgiveness.' And they both laid their heads under the sword and were beheaded for the sake of the Lord whom they had loved and served. St James suffered in Jerusalem in the year 45. His body was taken to Spain, where to this day miracles of healing are performed at his tomb;

St Donatus - bishop of Evira in Albania. He was endowed by God with the great blessing of miracle-working, by which he performed many miracles for the benefit of the people. Donatus changed bitter water into sweet water; brought down rain during a drought; healed the king's daughter of insanity; and resurrected a man from the dead. This deceased man had repaid his debt to a certain creditor. This unscrupulous creditor wanted the debt to be repaid a second time and, wanting to benefit from the death of his debtor, he came to his widow and demanded that the debt be repaid immediately. The widow wept and complained to the bishop. St. Donatus warned the creditor to wait, at least, until the man was buried and then the debt would be discussed. The creditor angrily insisted his own. Then Donatus approached the dead man, touched him and cried out: "Arise brother and see what you have with your creditor!." The dead man rose and with a frightening glance looked at his lender and related to him the time, when and where he had repaid the debt. He also sought from the lender his written receipt. The frightened lender then placed a document into his hands and the enlivened deceased tore it up and again lay down and died. St. Donatus died peacefully in very old age and took up habitation with the Lord in the year 387 A.D. His relics repose in Evira, Albania and, even today, benefit the faithful; The Holy Martyr Argyra.;

St. Erconwald, bishop of London (c.693) - Born in East Anglia; died at Barking, April 30, c. 686-693; second feast day on May 13. Erconwald is reputed to have been of royal blood, son of Annas or Offa. In 675, Saint Theodore of Canterbury appointed Erconwald bishop of the East Saxons with his see in London and extending over Essex and Middlesex. His episcopate was the most important in that diocese between that of Saint Mellitus and Saint Dunstan. His shrine in Saint Paul's Cathedral was a much visited pilgrimage site during the Middle Ages, where miracles were reported until the 16th century, but little is known of his life except that he founded a monastery at Chertsey in Surrey, which he governed, and a convent at Barking in Essex to which he appointed as abbess his sister, Ethelburga. Erconwald took some part in the reconciliation of Saint Theodore with Saint Wilfrid. In Saint Bede's time, miracles were recorded as a result of touching the couch used by Erconwald in his later years. At his death, Erconwald's relics were claimed by Barking, Chertsey, and London; he was finally buried in Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, which he had enlarged. The relics escaped the fire of 1087 and were placed in the crypt. November 14, 1148, they were translated to a new shrine behind the high altar, from where they were again moved on February 1, 1326 He is portrayed in art as a bishop in a small 'chariot' (the Saxon equivalent of a bath chair) in which he travelled because of his gout. Sometimes there is a woman touching it or he may be shown with Saint Ethelburga of Barking (Roeder). Erconwald is invoked against gout.

1 / 14 May — The Holy Prophet Jeremiah - born 650 years before Christ in the village of Anathoth, not far from Jerusalem, he began to prophesy at an early age, during the reign of King Josiah (Jer. 1:1-19). He preached repentance to the King and nobles and the false prophets and priests, and, in the time of that King Josiah, barely escaped death at the hands of the enraged nobles. He prophesied to King Jehoiakim that his burial would be like that of an ass; that is, he would be cast dead out of Jerusalem and his body would be for a long time dragged around the ground without burial (22:18). For this, Jeremiah was thrown into prison. Being unable to write there, he sent for Baruch, who stood outside the window of the prison while Jeremiah dictated to him. When the King read this prophecy, he took the paper in fury and threw it into the fire. By the providence of God, Jeremiah was saved from prison, and the words of the prophecy were fulfilled upon Jehoiakim. He prophesied to King Jeconiah that he would be carried off to Babylon with his whole family and that he would die there, all of

which quickly came to pass (24:1; 27:20). Under King Zedekiah, he put a yoke on his neck and walked through Jerusalem prophesying the fall of the city and slavery under the yoke of Babylon (27:2). He wrote to the slaves in Babylon, telling them that they would not return to Jerusalem but would remain for seventy years in Babylon, which came to pass (25:11). In the valley of Topnet, near Jerusalem, where the Jews had brought children to the idols for sacrifice, Jeremiah took a whole pot in his hands and smashed it in front of the people, prophesying the imminent crushing of the Jewish Kingdom (19:10-11). The Babylonians soon over-ran Jerusalem, killed King Zedekiah, burned the city down and utterly destroyed it. They slaughtered an enormous number of Jews in the valley of Topnet, in the place where children had died as sacrifices to idols and where the prophet had broken the pot. Jeremiah, with the Levites, took the Ark out of the Temple and bore it off to the mountain of Nebo, where Moses had died, and hid it in a cave. He hid the fire from the altar in a deep well. He was forced by some Jews to go with them to Egypt, where he lived for four years and was then stoned to death by his countrymen. He prophesied to the Egyptians the destruction of their idols and the coming there of a Virgin with a Child. There is a tradition that Alexander the Great himself visited the grave of the Prophet Jeremiah,* and ordered that his body be moved and buried in Alexandria. *The Egyptians almost deified St Jeremiah, and they therefore buried him as a king. He was regarded as a wonder-worker after his death. The dust from his tomb was taken as a medicine against snake-bite, and today many Christians invoke his help against it; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Acacius the Slipper Maker; Our Holy Father Paphnutius of Borovsk;

St. Asaph, bishop of Llanelwy, Wales c.550 - Related to Saint Deiniol and Saint Tysilo. Hermit near Tenegal, Wales. Servant to Saint Kentigern. Second bishop of the Welsh see now known as Saint Asaph. At Tengenel, near Holywell, Wales, there are an ash-tree, well, and valley that tradition says belonged to Asaph.

2 / 15 May — The Holy Martyrs Hesperus, Zoe, Cyriac and Theodulus - in the time of the Emperor Hadrian (117-138), a pagan called Catallus bought Hesperus, his wife Zoe and their sons Cyriac and Theodulus as slaves. Being convinced Christians, they refused to eat anything that had been sacrificed to idols, but threw all that had been thus offered to the dogs, and themselves went hungry. Catallus, discovering this, became very angry and began to torture his slaves cruelly. He first tortured the children, but they remained unfaltering in the Faith and sought yet harsher tortures. At last all four of them were cast into a burning furnace where, after prayers of thanksgiving, they gave their spirits into the Lord's hands. Their bodies remained whole and untouched by the fire; St Athanasius the Great, Archbishop of Alexandria - on this day are commemorated the translation of his relics and their miracles;

The Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb - they were sons of the great Prince Vladimir, Baptiser of the Russian people. Until his baptism, Vladimir had many wives, and children by them. Boris and Gleb were brothers of one mother. Before his death in 1015, Vladimir divided the Kingdom among all his sons. But Svyatopolk, his eldest son and Prince of Kiev, desired to take the parts that were set aside for Boris and Gleb, so he sent men to kill Boris in one place and Gleb in another. Both brothers were deeply devout and pleasing to God in all things, and they met death with prayer and the lifting up of their hearts to Him. Their bodies remained uncorrupt and fragrant, and were buried in the town of Vishgorod, where to this day blessed strength flows forth from them to heal men of divers ills and sufferings;

St Michael (Boris), King of Bulgaria - born and educated as a pagan and was baptized under the influence of his uncle Bojan and his sister. At baptism, he was given the name Michael. Patriarch Photius sent him priests who gradually baptized all the Bulgarian people. Many Bulgarian noblemen opposed this new Faith but the new Faith conquered and the Cross glistened on many churches built by the devout Tsar Michael. The Faith among the Bulgarians, as among the Serbs, was especially established by the Five Followers, the disciples of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who preached to the people the knowledge of Christ in the vernacular: the Slavonic language. In his old age Michael retreated to a monastery and was tonsured a monk. When his son Vladimir began to destroy his father's work and to exterminate Christianity, Michael again donned his military uniform, girded himself with a sword, ousted Vladimir from the throne and installed Simeon, his younger son, as Tsar. After that, he again clothed himself in the monastic habit and retreated in silence where, in mortification and prayer, he completed his earthly life "in the good faith; in the correct confession of our Lord Jesus Christ; great, honourable and devout," and took up habitation in the heavenly life on May 2, 906 A.D.

3 / 16 May — Fast Day - Leavetaking of Pascha - The Holy Martyrs Timothy the Reader and his wife Maura of Antioch in Egypt - Strange was the destiny of these wonderful martyrs, husband and newly-wedded wife. Twenty days after their wedding, they were taken for trial for their Christian faith before Arrianus, governor of the Thebaid, in the time of the Emperor Diocletian. Timothy was a reader in the church where he lived. 'Who are you?', the governor asked him. Timothy replied: 'I am a Christian and a reader in the Church of God.' The governor said to him further: 'You see, don't you, the instruments prepared for torture?' Timothy replied: 'But you don't see the angels of God, which are strengthening me.' Then the governor commanded that he be pierced through the ears with iron rods, so that the pupils of his eyes leapt out with the pain. They then suddenly hanged him by the feet and stuffed his mouth with wood. Maura was at first afraid of torture but, when her husband gave her courage, she also confessed her steadfast faith before the governor. He commanded that, first, her hair be torn out, then all her fingers cut off. After many other tortures, to which they would quickly have succumbed had they not been strengthened by the grace of God, they were both crucified, one in sight of the other. And thus, hanging on their crosses, they remained alive for nine full days, counselling each other and encouraging each other in endurance. On the tenth day they gave their spirits into God's hands, the God for whom they had suffered crucifixion, and thus became worthy of His Kingdom. They suffered with honour for Christ in 286. 'Maura' means 'black', from which it comes that in Macedonia the day of these saints is known as 'Black Day'. On the island of Zakynthos there is a church of Saints Timothy and Maura, in which many miraculous healings have taken place; Our Holy Father Theodosius of the Kiev Caves.

Troparion, Ascension of the Lord, Tone IV — Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, having gladdened Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. And this blessing convinced them that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

Kontakion, Ascension of the Lord, Tone VI — Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere separated from those who love Thee, but remaining everpresent with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you.

“He Ascended into Heaven.”

Four of the greatest miracles of Christianity are: the Son of God becoming the Son of man, the Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, and His coming again to judge the world. It was a great day for our planet when the Son of God appeared upon it in the likeness of our flesh. It was a momentous day when He rose from the grave. It was a majestic day for the Church when a cloud received Him out of sight. It will be an even greater day for the world when the ascended Christ shall return in glory.



Let us concentrate on the miracle of the Ascension: what it is and what it means.

Just as the Lord Jesus came to earth in a supernatural way so He left in a supernatural way. One of the best descriptions of the Ascension is found in Acts 1:9-11, “And when he (Jesus) had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

“Lifted Up.”

The words “and when he was lifted up” do not mean that Jesus was elevated so many feet above sea level. They mean that through His ascension Jesus entered a higher existence. When a school boy says that he has been promoted to a higher class, we do not take him to mean that he was transferred from a classroom on the ground floor to one upstairs. Likewise, the words “and he was lifted up” mean that Jesus was promoted to glory, to a different realm of life, to heaven.

It is interesting to note that when one does go “up” into outer space, one enters a new and different realm than what we know here on earth. For example, scientists tell us that by the end of this century we will be able to break the light barrier just as we did the sound barrier. In other words, men will be able to travel at the speed of light, i.e., 186,000 miles per second. To reach the nearest star at that speed would require ten years: five years to go and five to return. We here on earth will be ten years older when the astronauts return but they will be only ten days older. Why? Because when they break the light barrier, they reach the point where time almost ceases to exist. Time in space is not as it is here on earth. It is a completely different realm. So it is that when the New Testament says that Jesus “was lifted up,” it means to say that He entered a new realm of life completely different from what we know here on earth.

“A cloud took Him out of their sight.”

In the Bible, a cloud is a sign of the presence of God. It was a cloud which enveloped Mt. Sinai as God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was transfigured we read that “a bright cloud overshadowed them” (Matthew 17:5). It was probably from a cloud that God’s voice came when Jesus was baptized saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased.” So when we read in Acts, “A cloud took him out of their sight,” it means that Jesus entered into the very presence of God.

Why did He go Away?

Why did Jesus go away when there was so much He could have done here on earth? The answer was given by Jesus Himself: “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). Jesus tells us here that His human form will be replaced by the presence of the Counselor, the Helper, the Holy Spirit. He will bring us into much closer contact with Jesus than His human form could bring about.

Seen in this light, the Ascension and Pentecost are not two separate holy days. The Ascension is a prelude to Pentecost. Jesus goes away that He may send the Holy Spirit. He goes away in order to change the form by which He will work among us. Now He will work through us, the Spirit-filled, Christ-filled members of His body, the Church.

Humanity Ascends with Christ.

Jesus came down from heaven as the Eternal Son of the Father, but when He went back to the seat of honor and glory at God’s right hand, He took with Him our human nature. He returned to His Father as God-man. It was our nature, in everything except its sin, that sat down at the right hand of God. The Son of God descended to become one of us and ascended to enable us to ascend with Him. Through the ascension and enthronement of Christ, all human nature has been enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Since the manhood of Jesus was taken up to the heavenly places, our manhood will also be taken up. The Ascension is proof that man was made for heaven not for the grave, for glory not for corruption. St. Paul does not hesitate to describe Christians as “enthroned above the heavens, in Christ Jesus.”

He Ascends to Reign.

The Ascension was the enthronement of Jesus. It was His coronation as King of the Universe. Jesus ascends into heaven to resume His universal rule and dominion. This is brought out beautifully in one of the icons of the Ascension where the iconographer depicts the ascending Christ as growing larger and larger until the earth itself becomes no bigger than a ball which He holds in His hand. In other words, through His ascension Christ is no longer a prisoner of space and time. He is no longer confined to Palestine in the first century A.D. He now transcends space and time as Ruler of the Universe.

A Friend Awaits us in Heaven.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He passed into another world, spiritual, invisible, yet just as real as the world in which we live today. This tells us that we mortals may be at home somewhere else in this vast universe than on earth. "I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also," said Jesus. The Ascension gives us the certainty that we have a Friend not only on earth, but also in heaven. He is our forerunner who has gone on before us to prepare for our arrival. To die is not to go out into the dark; it is to go to Him.

He Will come Again.

The message of the ascension concludes with the announcement of the return of Christ: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The Ascended Jesus is Lord of the future. He will return one day in the same manner as He ascended. He left in person, He will come back in person. He left in His glorified body, He will come back in His glorified body. He left in sight of men, He will return in sight of men. Only then, as we read in Revelation, not a mere handful of select disciples, but "every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7). Before His judgement seat will appear every person who ever lived. No Christian can take lightly his ultimate appearance before God — when all his thoughts, words and deeds will be laid bare. The great mystery of God's grace is that He who will judge the world is the same One who gave His life to save the world!

He Prays for Us.

Jesus ascended into heaven not to end His work for us but to continue it — this time as our great intercessor before the throne of God. Even before His Ascension Jesus prayed to God for us. He prayed for His disciples, especially for Peter that his faith might not fail him. In His sublime prayer at the last supper He prayed for all Christian believers, past, present and future. Now that He is in heaven He continues this intercession. "... who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us" (Romans 8:34).

If it helps to know at times that some wife or little child, or blessed mother or father, or true friend is praying for us, if the thought of those prayers helps and strengthens and purifies, so that our hearts are brave again and strong, how much more will it help us to remember that the Ascended Christ is now our great intercessor in heaven ever praying for each one of us?

"While He Blessed them..."

St. Luke records that as Jesus was ascending into heaven, He raised His hands in blessing: "Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them" (Luke 24:50-51). His whole life among us was a blessing. He died as a blessing. He rose as a blessing. He left His followers with a blessing. In almost every icon He is pictured with His hand lifted up in blessing. It is His blessing that the priest bestows upon the congregation when he says, "Peace be with you." And now through His Church He seeks to enrich all of us with the greatest blessing there is: the promise of pardon and peace and life with God.

A Continuing Ascension.

Our Lord promised the disciples that they would see "heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." What do these words mean, "the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"? They refer to the continued presence of Christ in the world even after His ascension. Christ's coming into the world marks the opening of heaven. He came down the ladder from heaven and ever since then heaven has remained open. We may say that Christ Himself is the ladder — the only way to the Father and to heaven. There is a constant stream of traffic on that ladder. Those angels ever going up and coming down are our prayers. Up to gain help and inspiration — down to bring a little bit of heaven, a breath of Godly air into this world of struggling humanity. "Prayer," writes St. John of the Ladder, "is a continuous ascension to heaven." We may add, so is the liturgy and the reading of God's word — a continuous ascension to where God is.

For Us.

In conclusion we remember that everything Jesus did, He did for us. For us He ascended into heaven. For us He sits at the right hand of the Father. For us He pleads and prays. For us He has gone to prepare a place in the presence of God. For us He has opened heaven that our prayers may ever ascend to Him. For us He shall come again to take us unto Himself that we may ever be with the Lord.

Anthony M. Coniaris - Gems from the Sunday and Feasts Gospels

The Holy Martyr Pelagia of Tarsus - born in the town of Tarsus of pagan but noble and wealthy parents, she heard about Christ and the salvation of the soul from Christians, became inflamed with love for the Saviour and was a Christian in her soul. There was at that time a terrible persecution of Christians. It happened that the Emperor Diocletian himself stopped in Tarsus and that, during the time of his stay in the town, his son, the heir, fell deeply in love with Pelagia and wanted to make her his

wife. Pelagia replied through her mother—a wicked woman—that she was already promised to her betrothed husband, Christ the Lord. Fleeing from the foul heir and her wicked mother, Pelagia sought and found Bishop Linus, a man renowned for his holiness. He instructed her in the Faith and baptised her. Then Pelagia gave away her luxurious clothing and great wealth, returned home and confessed to her mother that she was already baptised. Hearing of this, the Emperor's son, losing all hope of getting this holy maiden as his wife, ran himself through with a sword and died. Then the wicked mother denounced her daughter to the Emperor and she was taken for trial. The Emperor marvelled at the girl's beauty and, forgetting his son, burned with an impure passion for her. But when Pelagia remained unfaltering in her faith, the Emperor condemned her to be burned in a metal ox heated by fire. When they stripped the martyr, she signed herself with the sign of the Cross and, with prayers of thanksgiving to God on her lips, went into the ox, where, in the twinkling of an eye, she melted like wax. She suffered with honour in 287. Bishop Linus hunted for the remains of her bones and buried them on a hill under a stone. In the time of the Emperor Constantine Copronymos (741-775), a beautiful church was built on that site in honour of this holy virgin and martyr Pelagia, who was sacrificed for Christ to reign eternally with Him; The Hieromartyr Silvanus, Bishop of Gaza; Our Holy Father Nicephorus the Hesychast;

St. Ethelred, king of Mercia and monk in England (716) - abdicated to become a monk at Bardney, where he was later elected abbot (Benedictines). Saint Ethelred is depicted as a Benedictine abbot with royal regalia at his feet. He is venerated at Leominster.

5 / 18 May — The Holy and Great Martyr Irene - She lived in the Balkans in apostolic times, in the town of Magedon where her father Licinius was governor of a small region. Some think that she was a Slav. She was born a pagan of pagan parents. Penelope—for that was her pagan name—learned the Christian faith from her teacher, Appelianus. St Timothy, the disciple of the Apostle Paul, baptised her and her lady-in-waiting, and brought her a letter from the Apostle Paul to read. She infuriated her father by her refusal to marry, and he intended to torture her, but she brought him to Christianity in a miraculous way. She was tortured in different ways by four kings, other than her father, but God saved her through His angels. King Sedechias buried her up to the neck in a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but an angel of God neutralised the poison of the reptiles and preserved the holy maiden untouched. Then the same king attempted to saw her in two, but the sword broke against her body as against stone. This same king once again bound her to the wheel of a water-mill, then let the water in to drown her, but the water would not flow, but stood still, and the maiden remained whole and alive. King Sapor, Sedechias's son, shod her with nails, loaded a sack of sand onto her, put a bridle on her and commanded that she be led like an animal far outside the city. "Truly I am as a beast before Thee, O Lord!", said the holy martyr as she ran bridled behind her torturers. But an angel of God caused an earthquake, and the earth opened and swallowed up her tormentors. Surviving all these tortures, by which an enormous number of pagans were brought to Christianity, Irene went to the city of Kallinikos, where she preached the Christian faith. The local king, Numerian, tried to kill her, throwing her into three burning metal oxen one after the other. But the maiden was preserved and remained alive, and many saw and believed. The Eparch, Vaudon, took her to the city of Constantina, where he thought to kill her by putting her onto a burning grid. But this did not harm St Irene, and many were brought to the true Faith. Finally, Irene came to the city of Mesemhria, where the king killed her but God restored her to life. And the king, seeing this, together with many of the people, believed in Christ and was baptised. And thus St Irene, by her sufferings and miracles, brought over 100,000 pagans to faith in Christ. At last she laid herself in a grave and commanded Appelianus to close it. After four days, when the grave was opened, her body was not in it. Thus God glorified forever the maiden and martyr Irene, who had sacrificed all and endured all, that God should be the more greatly glorified among men; Ss Martin and Heraclius.

6 / 19 May — Holy, Righteous and Longsuffering Job - a descendant of Esau, the grandson of Abraham, and lived in Arabia about 2,000 years before Christ. His father's name was Zareth and his mother's Bosora; his full name was Jobab. He was an honourable and God-fearing man, and was very rich. But when he reached the age of seventy-nine, God permitted heavy temptation from Satan to fall on him, as is written in detail in the Book of Job. In one day, Job lost all his great possessions and his sons and daughters. Then a great sickness fell on him, from which his whole body was covered with sores from top to toe, and Job lay on a rubbish heap outside the town and scoured his boils with sherds of broken pottery. But Job did not complain of God, but patiently endured all his sufferings to the end. Therefore the Lord restored his health and gave him riches greater than he had had before, and there were born to him seven sons and three daughters; as many as he had had before. And Job lived for 248 years, glorifying and praising God. Job is regarded as the model of patient endurance of every suffering that God sends us, and is a type of the suffering Christ;

The Holy Martyr Barbarus - a soldier during the reign of Julian the Apostate. When the emperor's commander Bacchus led the Roman army against the Franks, Barbarus, who was secretly a Christian, was serving in the army. In battle there appeared a certain hero on the side of the Franks, similar to Goliath of old and he challenged the Romans to send one of their men to come out to do battle. Commander Bacchus advised Barbarus to go. Barbarus prayed in his heart to the Living Lord, went out and defeated that giant. As a result, the Frankish army became confused and fled. Then the commander prepared a great celebration and ordered that sacrifices be offered to the idols. During the sacrificial offerings, the commander learned that Barbarus kept himself apart. When he was asked about that, Barbarus declared that he is a Christian. The commander informed the emperor and the emperor ordered that Barbarus be subjected to the most severe tortures. But Barbarus endured all with rare courage and composure. During his tortures, many miracles were manifested and many soldiers, witnessing this, accepted the Faith of Christ. Among them was the Commander Bacchus along with Callimachus and Dionysius. All three were beheaded for the Name of Christ and, after them, Barbarus was also beheaded in the year 362 A.D. Their souls took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the Immortal King; St Barbarus the Robber; Martyrdom of Father John (Karastamatis) of Santa Cruz (1985); St. Edbert, bishop of Lindisfarne (698).

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