

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



May 21, 2017 – Sunday of the Blind Man (6th Sunday of Pascha)

We have reached today the last Sunday of Paschaltide. Wednesday is the leavetaking of Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, and on the following day we will celebrate the Holy Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel reading, we see a living icon of all that the Lord has accomplished for each human soul. All of us are indeed born blind, disfigured by sin, incapable of perceiving the spiritual world around us, or the glory of God which suffuses all creation. In His Incarnation, in the union of the earth of our humanity with the cleansing water of His Divinity, the Savior heals our blindness and refashions us in our former beauty and dignity. And though we ourselves, and our parents before us, have certainly sinned and brought our suffering upon ourselves, yet we see over and over—in our lives and in the lives of those around

us—that the providence of God utterly transcends this, that there is a deeper reason behind all the sinfulness and brokenness of the world: “that the works of God should be manifest” in us.

Indeed, we often see that the works of God are manifested so strikingly and powerfully in our lives that, just as in the case of the blind man, those who knew us before grace transfigured our hearts are scarcely able to tell if we are the same people that they knew before. And just as in the Gospel reading, there is a division among those people: some glorify the saving power of God, while others are not able to tolerate the light of Christ that now shines in us, and they cast us out.

In fact, it is this with which today’s Gospel reading is primarily concerned: the going forth of the one who has been healed into the world. In the long Gospel reading, only the beginning verses concern the actual healing of the blind man by Christ; afterwards, Christ disappears and there is only the man born blind, and the men and women of this world.

It is no accident that we hear this Gospel reading at this particular time, at the close of Paschaltide. We see this same pattern over and over again during these holy days: the risen Christ appears, only to vanish again a moment later. Whether it be the holy myrrhbearers, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, or the countless others to whom the Lord appeared after His Resurrection, it is clear that these appearances are but brief consolations, meant to strengthen them for the trials ahead. Likewise, in our own lives let us remember that if we receive a visitation of the grace of Christ, we must treasure it and guard it lovingly for as long as we can, for in this world such experiences of grace are never lasting.

How often do we fail in this, my brothers and sisters! How often, when we experience the grace of God with particular sweetness and closeness, do we squander this grace and lose it soon after, whether it be to the deceitful sweetness of the passions or simply to the bustle, distraction and cares of this life? As Abba Dorotheos writes, we are fools who do not know how to be happy. And it is as St. Augustine says beautifully in his *Confessions*: “Where do you go along these rugged paths? Where are you going? The good that you love is from Him... Why then will you wander farther and farther in these difficult and toilsome ways? There is no rest where you seek it. Seek what you seek; but remember that it is not where you seek it. You seek for a blessed life in the land of death. It is not there. For how can there be a blessed life where Life itself is not?”

Nevertheless, whether it happens through our own careless or by the providence of God, these tangible experiences of grace will sooner or later withdraw. And so today we hear these words of the Savior: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in

the world, I am the light of the world.” We hear these words now, knowing that in a few short days the Lord will ascend from us into heaven and will be with us no longer in the same immediate and tangible way that He has been during these holy days.

What, then? Does the Lord leave the world in darkness? Looking around us today, it certainly appears to be so. Even the ancient pagan world was in many ways more noble and beautiful than our own – the ancients were expecting Christ, albeit in shadows and broken figures, while our own world has decisively rejected Him, plunging voluntarily into a night from which there will come no dawn. In fact, this is indeed the sad truth. The next verse following today’s Gospel passage reads: “And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that those who see not might see; and that those who see might be made blind.” A world that has rejected God has chosen the very blindness from which Christ came to heal us. And there is nothing that He can do to heal those who choose not to be healed. This is why so many of Christ’s miracles were preceded by the question: “What do you want me to do for you?... Do you believe that I am able to do this?” If a person rejects faith, if a person does not freely choose to place himself into the hands of God, then the Lord can “do no miracle there.”

And so it is indeed the truth that the Lord, the light of the world, has ascended up into heaven, leaving behind Him a darkened world that increasingly demands a self-inflicted blindness. This is the sad truth. But it is not the whole truth. St. Augustine, in the same passage from the *Confessions*, writes: “He departed from our sight that we might return to our hearts and find Him there. For He left us, and behold, He is here. He could not be with us long, yet He did not leave us. He went back to the place that He had never left... He is within the inmost heart, yet the heart has wandered away from Him. Return to your heart, O you transgressors, and hold fast to Him who made you. Stand with Him and you shall stand fast. Rest in Him and you shall be at rest.”

The rest of the truth (perhaps an even harder truth) is that we ourselves, the feeble Christians of the last days, are now called to shine forth the light of Christ for anyone who still wishes to see. We have been healed in Holy Baptism of our spiritual blindness, but it is still left to us to choose, with God’s help, to open those eyes, to use the sight that has been restored to us to look into our hearts, where alone the risen Christ can be seen in this world. If we Christians do not find Him there, then how will anyone else find Him?

Years ago there was a study done to try to find out why people went to church. The study was not interested in nominal believers, but only in those who demonstrated their commitment through regular and faithful attendance at worship

services. There was only one factor that nearly all these people shared in common, and to which they attributed their piety: they had all, at some point in their lives, met a real Christian... and knew that they wanted what that person had. *In almost every case, it is only in a Christian that anyone has ever met Christ.* In this world we are like the blind man. We have met Christ. We have felt His touch, and we have experienced the healing power of His grace. Our hearts have been filled with the light of Pascha. And now He is in some sense leaving us, and we must bear witness before an unbelieving world of Him Whom we have known, and of what we have been given; we can only do this through entering as deeply as we can into our own hearts and reverently preserving, through humble prayer and repentance, the Light that abides there. And if we are faithful in this, if we fight the good fight and keep the faith, then we too like the blind man, after we have been cast out by this world, will be found by Christ, and He will reveal to us in the full power and majesty of His glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And then, throughout all time and all eternity, we will fall down and worship Him. + *Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen. (adapted from holycross-hermitage.com)*

Today’s Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 16:16-34

In those days, as we went to prayer, 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 baptized. 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.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint John 9:1-38

At that time, 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 neighbors 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 marvelous 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.

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 130: Success



“Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success!” (Psalm 118[117]:25 RSV)

Most people would agree that success is a good thing. We work hard at it. We strive for it. We dream of it. Even David the Psalmist praises success, and prays to God for it. But what is success? Success may depend on the person praying, dreaming and striving for it. Looking at success with the *“mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16 RSV), as we Orthodox Christians are required to do, we see some problems. It is apparent that the more successes we have, the more responsibility is placed upon us. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once said, “Each success only buys an admission ticket to a more difficult problem.” When we read the biographies of some who have been labelled as successful (for example, Elvis Presley, Howard Hughes, Prince), they seem less like biographies than they are tragedies.

David’s Psalm-prayer for success is of a different kind than that which a modern 21st-century American dreams. His prayer is not for cars, houses, prestige, a large

bank account or any other hundreds of other “things” that are seen as signs of success. Rather, the Holy Psalmist is seeking success in the life of God’s people as faithfulness. In the modern American view of success, success may move us away from God rather than nearer to Him. Personal success and achievement in our world today often lead to a sense that we ourselves are God. We begin to think that our security and value rest in our own wisdom, strength and performance. To be the very best at what we do, to be at the top of the heap, means no one is like us. We make ourselves supreme.

In our Old Testament, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job were rich and yet were also approved by God. God gives us the power to make wealth, which includes material prosperity: “...*the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground.... The Lord will open to you his good treasury the heavens, ...the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward...*” (Deuteronomy 28:11-13 RSV).

Getting success? We work at the pleasure of the Lord. Our work is to be driven by our love of the Master. When we meet God in heaven, he will not ask us if we were successful. Our only desire should be to hear Him say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master*” (Matthew 25:23 RSV). That’s success! (*from acrod.org*)

COMMEMORATED TODAY: STS. CONSTANTINE & HELEN

The Church calls Saint Constantine (306-337) “the Equal of the Apostles,” and historians call him “the Great.” He was the son of the Caesar Constantius Chlorus (305-306), who governed the lands of Gaul and Britain. His mother was Saint Helen, who was probably born at Drepanum (Helenopolis) in Asia Minor to parents of humble means. At this time the immense Roman Empire was divided into Western and Eastern halves, governed by two independent emperors and their corulers called “Caesars.” Constantius Chlorus was Caesar in the Western Roman Empire. Saint Constantine was born in 274, possibly at Nish in Serbia. In 294, Constantius divorced Helen in order to further his political ambition by marrying a woman of noble rank. After he became emperor, Constantine showed his mother great honor and respect, granting her the imperial title “Augusta.”

Constantine, the future ruler of all the whole Roman Empire, was raised to respect Christianity. His father did not persecute Christians in the lands he governed. This was at a time when Christians were persecuted throughout the Roman Empire by the emperors Diocletian (284-305) and his corulers Maximian Galerius (305-311) in the East, and the emperor Maximian Hercules (284-305) in the West. After the

death of Constantius Chlorus in 306, Constantine was acclaimed by the army at York as emperor of Gaul and Britain. The first act of the new emperor was to grant the freedom to practice Christianity in the lands subject to him. The pagan Maximian Galerius in the East and the fierce tyrant Maxentius in the West hated Constantine and they plotted to overthrow and kill him, but Constantine bested them in a series of battles, defeating his opponents with the help of God. He prayed to God to give him a sign which would inspire his army to fight valiantly, and the Lord showed him a radiant Sign of the Cross in the heavens with the inscription "In this Sign, conquer."

After Constantine became the sole ruler of the Western Roman Empire, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313 which guaranteed religious tolerance for Christians. Saint Helen, who was a Christian, may have influenced him in this decision. In 323, when he became the sole ruler of the entire Roman Empire, he extended the provisions of the Edict of Milan to the Eastern half of the Empire. After three hundred years of persecution, Christians could finally practice their faith without fear. Renouncing paganism, the Emperor did not let his capital remain in ancient Rome, the former center of the pagan realm. He transferred his capital to the East, to the city of Byzantium, which was renamed Constantinople, the city of Constantine (May 11). Constantine was deeply convinced that only Christianity could unify the immense Roman Empire with its diverse peoples. He supported the Church in every way. He recalled Christian confessors from banishment, he built churches, and he showed concern for the clergy.

The emperor deeply revered the victory-bearing Sign of the Cross of the Lord, and also wanted to find the actual Cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. For this purpose he sent his own mother, the holy Empress Helen, to Jerusalem, granting her both power and money. Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem and Saint Helen began the search, and through the will of God, the Life-Creating Cross was miraculously discovered in 326. The Orthodox Church commemorates the Uncovering of the Precious Cross and the Precious Nails by the Holy Empress Helen on March 6. While in Palestine, the holy empress did much of benefit for the Church. She ordered that all places connected with the earthly life of the Lord and His All-Pure Mother, should be freed of all traces of paganism, and she commanded that churches should be built at these places. The emperor Constantine ordered a magnificent church in honor of Christ's Resurrection to be built over His tomb. Saint Helen gave the Life-Creating Cross to the Patriarch for safe-keeping, and took part of the Cross with her for the emperor. After distributing generous alms at Jerusalem and feeding the needy (at times she even served them herself), the holy Empress Helen returned to Constantinople, where she died in the year 327. Because of her great services to the Church and her

efforts in finding the Life-Creating Cross, the empress Helen is called “the Equal of the Apostles.”

The peaceful state of the Christian Church was disturbed by quarrels, dissensions and heresies which had appeared within the Church. Already at the beginning of Saint Constantine’s reign the heresies of the Donatists and the Novatians had arisen in the West. They demanded a second baptism for those who lapsed during the persecutions against Christians. These heresies, repudiated by two local Church councils, were finally condemned at the Council of Milan in 316. Particularly ruinous for the Church was the rise of the Arian heresy in the East, which denied the Divine Nature of the Son of God, and taught that Jesus Christ was a mere creature. By order of the emperor, the First Ecumenical Council was convened in the city of Nicea in 325.

318 bishops attended this Council. Among its participants were confessor-bishops from the period of the persecutions and many other luminaries of the Church, among whom was Saint Nicholas of Myra in Lycia. The emperor was present at the sessions of the Council. The heresy of Arius was condemned and a Symbol of Faith (Creed) composed, in which was included the term “consubstantial with the Father,” confirming the truth of the divinity of Jesus Christ, Who assumed human nature for the redemption of all the human race. One might possibly be surprised by Saint Constantine’s grasp of theological issues during the discussions at the Council. The term “consubstantial” was included in the Symbol of Faith at his insistence.

After the Council of Nicea, Saint Constantine continued with his active role in the welfare of the Church. He accepted holy Baptism on his deathbed, having prepared for it all his whole life. Saint Constantine died on the day of Pentecost in the year 337 and was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles, in a crypt he had prepared for himself. (*from oca.org*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Conceit is a great evil. It makes man senseless, and it does not permit him to be set free from his passion or to learn better that which will be good for him. It misleads him to view as enemies those who undertake to draw him away from his error and to help him, and it renders more intimate those who inflame the disease by flatteries and make it incurable. Avoid conceit with all your might; it is a deep precipice which causes the ascent to salvation to be taken away.

– St. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Ep. 107* (to Akakios, monk and physician)

Thank You

Thank you to those who have donated items to benefit our parish through periodic yard sales. Dennis & Phyllis Thomidis, who have faithfully coordinated the yard sales the last few years, are no longer able to commit to running them. Please do not bring any more items for donation. Thank you, Dennis & Phyllis, for your service!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, Josh Moore, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly departed servants of God Protopresbyter Ronald Hazuda and Father William George, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)