

~ Happy Mother's Day to the Mothers of St. Thomas! ~

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

**ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

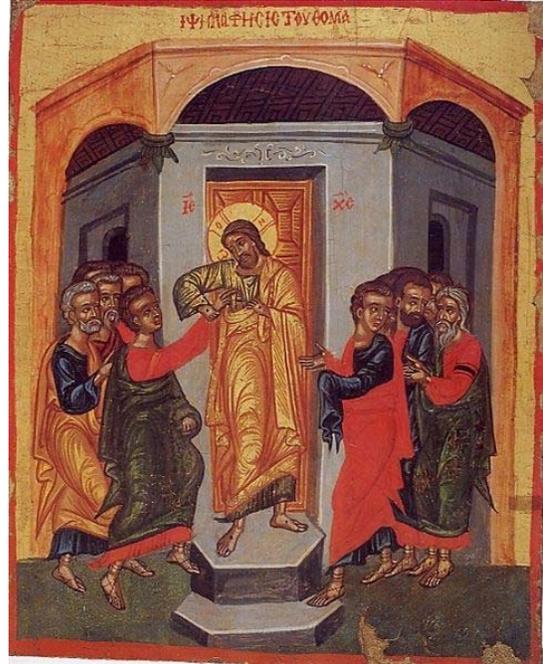
SERVICES

Saturdays: Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sundays: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



May 8, 2016 – Sunday of St. Thomas (Antipascha)

Understand how much better Sunday is than other feast days: Every other festival comes round once a year, the Lord's Day comes round four times every month, and this frequent recurrence makes the whole year a year of true remission for us, a year acceptable to the Lord (cf. Isa 61:2). It was in order to teach us to celebrate it in practice at the end of each week that the Lord first appeared to the disciples inside the house while Thomas was absent (John 20: 19-24). He proved He was alive and give them peace. By His breathing upon them He renewed the divine breath given in the beginning (Gen 2:7), and endowed them with the grace of the Holy Spirit, imbuing them with divine power to bind and loose sins. He made the sharers in the exercise of His heavenly lordship, saying to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23). The Lord granted them this power and grace when He appeared to them on the very day of His Resurrection, obviously a Sunday. Then, letting the intervening days of the week elapse, He appeared in the same manner and in the same house, on the eighth day, the Sunday we celebrate today, to inaugurate His festival and to bring the hesitant Thomas to faith. According to the Savior's beloved Evangelist and disciple, "And after eight days

His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" (John 20:26).

You will see that it was Sunday when the disciples assembled and the Lord came to them. On Sunday He approached them for the first time as they were gathered together and eight days later, when Sunday came round again, He appeared to their assembly. Christ's Church continually reflects these gatherings by holding its meetings mostly on Sundays, and we come among you and preach what pertains to salvation and lead you towards piety and a godly way of life.

But are some of you puzzled that Christ could enter when the doors were shut, since He had a body? Apparently you are unaware that spiritual things must be compared with spiritual and understood on their own terms, as the holy Apostle says (cf. 1 Cor 2:13). Christ did not spoil the womb of the Virgin who bore Him in the flesh. He did not undo the sign of virginity when He was born, but kept them intact, even though at that time His Body was subject to suffering and death. So it is not at all surprising if now that He had immortalized the humanity He had assumed and His Body was no longer subject to death, He could enter through closed doors. However, as He undoubtedly had a body free from suffering and death, how was it that on His Side and His Hands He had marks of wounds and holes from the nails? For the Evangelist tells us that the Lord said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." (John 20:27) Why did He have scars? It would be impossible for a mortal, suffering body to display marks of wounds and nails and to remain healthy and sound. On the other hand, an immortal body without suffering can show the scars and wounds it suffered to anyone at will, and nevertheless continue free from suffering and death.

This enables me to understand something else: that those who have suffered for Christ are adorned forever with their wounds. Windows in a house do not make it less safe and are not something ugly but a necessary decoration for a building, to let in light and allow those within to look out. In the same way, the body's sufferings for Christ's sake and the resultant wounds become for those who bear them windows to let in the light without evening. And when that light shines forth they will be recognizable by the divine beauty and radiance of their wounds and not by their ugliness. Their scars will not be obliterated when suffering comes to an end, in so far as they procure immortality.

Christ's Body held within it the Fount of divine light, which shone forth spiritually to enlighten the mind of him who hesitated, so that Thomas cried out at once, with perfect theology, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The Lord said to him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not

seen and *yet* have believed” (John 20; 29), showing that those who saw the Lord with their own eyes are not in greater glory than those who have been brought through them to faith in Him. He did not say “yet believe” but “yet have believed”, because with the divine power of foreknowledge whereby He saw everything before it happened, future events were like present facts. . . .

Thomas lost his faith when he was absent, but when he was together with the believers his faith did not in any way fall short. So I have the idea that if only a sinner will flee the company of immoral men and associate with the just, he will never be found lacking in righteousness or the resultant salvation of his soul. It seems to me that the Psalmist and Prophet was hinting at this when he called blessed the man who avoided sitting with the scornful and being their companion (cf. Ps 1:1). Another prophet writes, “You shall not follow the multitude to do evil (Exod 23:2), and the author of Proverbs says, “Where sinners gather, the fire breaks out” (Ecclus 16:6), “but he that walks with wise men shall be wise” (Prov 13:20).

So let us, brethren, meet together and often come to God’s Church, where all who are truly godly are present and never stay away. When each of you enters the church, look for the more godly of those within, whom you can recognize just by seeing how they stand in attentive silence. Watch for those who are more pious and God-fearing than the rest, and go and attach yourself to them, and attend upon God with them. When you come out after the dismissal on the Lord’s Day and are at leisure from earthly work for the sake of Him Whose day it is, carefully search to see if there is an imitator of the Apostles who mostly stays indoors, longing for God with silent prayer, psalmody and other suitable practices. Approach such a person and enter his small room with faith as though you were entering a heavenly place containing the Spirit’s sanctifying power. Sit down beside him and stay with him as long as possible. Talk to him about God and divine matters, asking questions, humbly learning and appealing for help through prayer. If you do this, I know for sure that Christ will invisibly come to you, give peace within the thinking part of your soul, increase your faith, strengthen your steadfastness, and in due time set you among His chosen in the heavenly kingdom.

May we all attain to this in Him Who has now died and risen for us and afterwards will come in glory, Christ the King of the Ages, to Whom belongs glory forever and ever. Amen.

- St. Gregory Palamas



Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 5:12-20

In those days, many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 20:19-31

On the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace be unto you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.



On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 67: God’s Gift – Our Gift

“...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8 RSV)

Orthodox Christians firmly believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and at the same time fully human. When Jesus appeared on earth as a human being, He came with just one objective in mind: the salvation of all human beings through Him. To accomplish this objective, Jesus Christ, the Human Being, had to die, just like all other human beings.

And this giving up of human life by Jesus was God’s gift to all of humanity. The plan from before time began was for God to humble himself and become as one of us. Jesus Christ, in obedience to the will of His Father, gave His all, His human life for our salvation. Thus we who have become one with Him ought likewise to be willing to give all we have for Him. We who have through Baptism put on Christ (*“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* Galatians 3:27 RSV), have become one with Him, that we, too have died with Him (*“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death”* Romans 6:4 RSV). The Resurrection of the same Christ whom we have “put on” thus assures us of our Resurrection as well. What a gift to us! What a humiliation on the part of God *for us!* He gave His all for us – what is our gift in return?

Our lives are already His. We have given them over to God. We are living examples of Resurrection, we who have put on the resurrected Christ. A life of pain, work and sacrifice thus means nothing. Those who resist or forget that they are of the same nature in their humanity as Christ Himself are the ones who are weak in purpose and changeable in desire. Such persons are full of the need for instant gratification, and have little of the spirit of thanksgiving in them. Such persons are fearful of the future and need to hold on to the present (and the past) because they do not trust God.

According to the parable of Jesus known as the “Sower and the Seed,” attempting to serve both self and God is like the seed that falls on rocky soil. *“Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away”* (Matthew 13:5-6 RSV). And when the worst of life comes upon such a person, he or she will not endure. God gave His all – what will you give in return? (*from acrod.org*)

Archpastoral Letter For Pascha 2016

To the Very Reverend Protopresbyters, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
and the Faithful of our God-Protected Diocese: **CHRIST IS RISEN!
INDEED, HE IS RISEN!**

On this great and glorious Feast of Pascha – the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our hearts are filled with tremendous joy, our souls are transformed and we bask in the Light of the Truth. This year I want to share with you some Paschal thoughts from St. Gregory the Theologian.

It is the Day of the Resurrection! Let us then keep the Festival with splendor, and let us embrace one another. Let us say Brethren, even to those who hate us, Let us forgive all offenses for the Resurrection's sake; let us give one another pardon. Yesterday, I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him. Yesterday, I died with Him; today I am made alive in Him. Yesterday, I was buried with Him, today I am raised with Him.

Let us offer ourselves to Him who suffered and rose again for us. Let us become divine for His sake, since for us He became human.

He assumed the worst that He might give us the better. He became poor that by His poverty we might become rich. He accepted the form of a servant that we might win back our freedom. He came down that we might be lifted up. He was tempted that through Him we might conquer. He was dishonored that He might glorify us. He died that He might save us. He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were thrown down through the fall of sin.

Let us give all, offer all, to Him who gave Himself as a ransom and reconciliation for us. We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him that we might be cleansed.

We rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him. We were glorified with Him because we rose again with Him.

May we all be one in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.

Personal Greetings:

May all the Priests and Panis, Deacons, Parishioners, Friends and Supporters of our American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese experience the joy, excitement and wonder of the early followers of Christ when they first saw Him following His Resurrection. Christ is Risen!

Working in the Risen Lord's Vineyard with much love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "+ Bishop Gregory".

+His Grace Bishop Gregory of Nyssa

Holy Week at St. Thomas

On Great Friday, we processed with the kouvouklion for the very first time, carried by Ramius Connour, John Edgington, Brad Karbowski, and Bernie Vallandingham. Many thanks to Phyllis Thomidis and Pani Stacey for decorating it! Although it threatened to rain all weekend, it was dry enough that we could process outside both Friday and Saturday evenings.



“Let all mortal flesh keep silence...” Fr. Joseph tosses flower petals on Saturday during the liturgy celebrating the harrowing of hell. *(Next week, pictures from Pascha and Bright Week)*



A Word From the Holy Fathers

It is a good thing, brothers, to sing something from the holy God-bearing Fathers, because in every way they were most solicitous always to teach everything that works together for the illumination of our souls. In these hymns, in the words they pronounced, we see always before us something to be learned of the significance of the feast we are celebrating, whether it is a feast of our Master or of the holy Martyrs, of the Fathers or any other notable holy day. We ought, therefore, while singing with childlike simplicity, to fix our minds on the meaning of the holy words, so that not only our mouths sing but, as the Book of the Ancients says, our hearts sing in unison with our mouths.

– Dorotheos of Gaza

Also Commemorated Today: St. John the Evangelist

The Church commemorates St John on this day because of the annual pilgrimage to his grave. When St John was more than one hundred years old, he took seven of his disciples and went to a spot outside the city of Ephesus. There he told them to dig a grave in the form of a cross. Then he climbed into the grave and told his disciples to cover him with earth. Later, the grave was opened and the saint's body was not there. Each year on May 8 a red dust would arise from the grave which the faithful collected in order to be healed of their illnesses. St John's main Feast is on September 26.

Young Women's Encounter

Registration is now open for the Third Annual Diocesan Young Women's Encounter which will take place from Sunday, June 26th to Wednesday, June 29, 2016 at Sts Peter and Paul Church in Windber, PA which is open to young women in our Diocese ages 12-18. This engaging experience will highlight how young women can live our Orthodox Faith and serve the Church with their own unique gifts. This year we are really looking forward to having Katrina Bitar with us. She is the YES North America Program Director (Youth Equipped to Serve) for FOCUS North America (Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve.)

Space is limited to the first thirty respondents, so participants are urged to register as soon as possible. **Registration Deadline is June 1, 2016.** For more information, please visit <http://www.acrod.org/news/7283/ywe2016>

Diocesan Altar Boy Retreat

The annual Diocesan Altar Boy Retreat will happen at the same time as the Young Women's Encounter. More information will be forthcoming as the date approaches.

Parish News

Yard sales will be held at St. Thomas on the following Saturdays this year: May 21, June 18, July 9, Sept. 3, Sept. 24, and Oct. 15. Please sign up on the sheet in the fellowship hall if you are able to help. Contact Dennis or Phyllis at thomidg@comcast.net or 410-535-3005 if you have items that you would like to donate to arrange for item pickup.

Papers for the 2016 Summer camping session at Camp Nazareth are now available at http://www.campnetwork.com/Register/Register.php?camp_id=396857. Start your planning now; your kids won't want to miss this. Get 'em while they're hot!

Fr. Joseph Goes to Camp - Bishop Gregory will meet with his priests at Camp Nazareth during the coming week. So, contacting Fr. Joseph will require a little patience because cell phone connection at the camp is sketchy; it depends on where you stand. However, there will be opportunities for Fr. Joseph to call Pani and check for messages left at his home as well as use his cell phone when he leaves the camp and heads for the bright lights of Mercer. If there's an emergency, calling Camp Nazareth and leaving a message might get the quickest response. Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Follow Our Diocese On-Line

Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

Camp Nazareth: <http://www.campnazareth.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

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, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, 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, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Daria Virvan, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, for the newly departed servant of God Timothy Loya, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)