

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 (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



May 7, 2017 – Sunday of the Paralytic (4th Sunday of Pascha)

By Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotis (John 5:1-15)

"And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years."

The question is asked, beloved, what is life? Is it enjoyment? Is it amusement? Is it dancing and fun? Is it "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die"? Many people think this way, especially the young of our times, who are carried away by materialistic and atheistic ideas and think that the few years they are going to live on this planet must be lived as happily and as hedonistically as possible. They have as a kind of motto the Italian phrase *dolce vita*, which means "sweet life". For them, sweet life means living day and night at various amusement centers, dancing wildly, singing obscene songs, engaging in loud behavior, and taking drugs to achieve a chemical paradise of pleasure for a few hours. Once those hours pass, these unfortunates fall into a terrible state of depression and gloom.

For those who examine things deeper and think philosophically, life has a greater meaning. The life of virtue and duty is not like a smooth paved road, landscaped with shrubs and flowers for passing motorists to admire; it is like a narrow, hilly road, on which motorists shall meet many obstacles, afflictions, and trials. As Job observes, man's life is a trial. And what is a trial? It is a life full of temptations, sorrows, and tribulations. Just as gold comes out of the depths of the earth unclean and is thrown into a fiery furnace where all the worthless elements are burned

away and the gold runs pure, in the same way man has to pass through the fiery furnace of affliction and temptation to be cleansed of his faults, vices, and passions.

There was a time, however, when man did not have to be cleaned. He was pure and clean. When? When he lived close to God in paradise. But when man sinned, sin contaminated the world of his soul and he became full of evils and faults, like impure gold in need of cleansing and purification. From then on, after the fall of the first man, the sufferings, the sorrows, and the temptations started. The earth, which was pure and fragrant with the aroma of beautiful flowers, became wild and started to send out thorns; to root out the thorns and make the earth productive, man had to bloody his hands. Tame animals became wild and turned into beasts whose roars frightened man. The rivers filled up and overflowed, causing floods and cataclysms. The earth started to shake with fearful quakes. Man, too, who once was healthy and immortal, was infected by illness, pain, and death because of sin.

Afflictions, then, came to man from the upheavals of the elements of nature, from earthquakes and floods. Afflictions came from sicknesses and death. They also came from his fellow man; these were the greatest. The afflictions hardest to bear are those that come from friends and relatives, who because of the evil within them, pour affliction out like a poison. Out of this evil from his fellow man, man has suffered many and great afflictions. Injustice, theft, insult to family honor, fornication and adultery, lies, calumny and slander, injuries, killings, crimes, horrifying wars that make the earth an endless trial - all of these constitute a great well of affliction for man.

Wherever man goes he shall face afflictions, sometimes from the elements of nature, sometimes from the evil and malice of his fellow man, and sometimes from himself. Some afflictions come from the devil, who tries to destroy man. Finally, some afflictions come from the omnipotent, all-benevolent and all-wise God for the purpose of bringing about the purification of a sinful humanity.

Man travels within an ocean of sorrows. Christ confirmed it when he said, "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" [John 16:33]. There was not, there is not, and there shall never be a person who does not have to confront affliction. When there is an island that is not surrounded by the sea, then there shall be a man who is not afflicted by sorrows.

The problem is, how does man confront affliction? Many people glorify God when they are healthy, their wallets are full, their children are thriving, and their lives are on course. But when affliction interrupts the tranquility, they lose their

composure and curse the day they were born. Some become so desperate that they end their lives through suicide.

Oh man who is afflicted in this world! You have to arm yourself with patience to conquer sorrow. To receive patience, you must open up Holy Scripture and read what it says about affliction and the purpose it serves; read about those superb examples of patience. In Holy Writ, there are many examples of patience. One such example is the paralytic in this Sunday's Gospel reading. He is a hero greater than those who are victorious on the fields of battle and get medals for courage.

Let's look at the life of this hero. He lived inside an ocean of afflictions. Not days, not weeks, not just a few years but for thirty-eight years he was sick, completely paralyzed. And yet he didn't howl, he didn't blaspheme, he didn't curse the day he was born. With a patience that reminds one of the patience of Job, he passed the days of his affliction believing that God had not abandoned him, but would someday show His mercy to him. And God did show His mercy. He came Himself, Jesus Christ, the true God, and cured the paralytic. All who saw were amazed by this miracle. On that day, the paralytic, that hero of patience, received from Christ, the Ruler of All, the reward for patience.

May it be, my beloved, that we all - men and women, any of us who suffer afflictions - be rewarded for patience. In order to endure, let's think of those heroes of patience like the paralytic and especially the king of pain and sorrow, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said: "In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

(From *Drops From the Living Water: Orthodox Homilies On the Sunday Gospel Readings* by Augoustinos N. Kantiotis; pp. 60-64.)

Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 9:32-42

In those days, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had

come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint John 5:1-15

At that time, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep *Gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed.” He answered them, “He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’” Then they asked him, “Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being *in that* place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

You need not be despondent. Let those be despondent who do not believe in God. For them sorrow is burdensome, of course, because besides earthly enjoyment they have nothing. But believers must not be despondent, for through sorrows they receive the right of sonship, without which is impossible to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

– Barsanuphius of Optina

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 128:

Family Holidays



“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6 RSV)

Parenting is one of the truly more difficult tasks asked of families. That task ought to include not only guidance in teaching children how to pray, how to read the Holy Scriptures, how to participate in the Divine Liturgy, how to receive Holy Communion – but parenting also includes training in the commandments of God, and in proper behavior both in church and outside of it. Perhaps unknowingly, parents have often taught their children a rather selfish lesson that has extended to much of the lives of those who have grown up with this teaching. Parents have taught their children that birthdays and holidays are occasions for them to expect to receive gifts. This follows the very customs and bad habits that the world has fallen into.

Birthdays and holidays should be occasions to increase the knowledge of God’s ways, awakening thankfulness for God’s mercy and love for the gift of another year. Yet such occasions are turned into times of self-pleasing and self-gratification. The children have been kept by the hand of God every moment of their lives. How many parents and relatives think of a birthday as a day to say “Thank you” to God for His great mercy and loving-kindness? In fact, is God ever remembered on a child’s birthday? But it is not only birthdays that are served in the world’s way of self-gratification. The Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) is surely a day that is not about the gifts we receive from each other, but about the great Gift that God has given us.

Some ideas: make a birthday a happy day for a child, but consider making it also a pleasant day for someone in need. Perhaps the day can become a day of service at a local food bank or soup kitchen. Perhaps the gift the child would receive might go to a child in the hospital. Let the day not pass without a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Find a way to make a gift to God that remembers one’s birthday, rather than all gifts to be received by the one whose anniversary of birth it is. The most memorable Christmas Day I have ever had? Following Divine Liturgy for the Feast, we traveled close to 50 miles to the downtown Orthodox parish where a feast day dinner was being provided for the city poor and hungry. Like the magi of old, we carried with us gloves, hats, coats and sox as gifts for those in need of them. We offered gifts to the people of God in thanksgiving for the gift of His only-begotten Son. (*from acrod.org*)

UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS

The Young Women's Encounter and the Altar Boy Retreat (ABR) are scheduled for 25-28 June. The ABR is open to our Altar Boys ages 8-18. More information will be coming out on this event in the near future.

YWE registration information is now available on the diocesan website. The 40th Anniversary Alumni Day will be held at Camp Nazareth on Saturday, May 20, 2017. Family Day will be held at Camp Nazareth on Sunday, June 11, 2017. Keep an eye out for further details in future bulletins, or navigate your way to www.campnazareth.org.

CAMP NAZARETH

Camp Nazareth is eagerly awaiting and preparing for the arrival of the Summer Camping Season, and registration is now open. Apostle Thomas campers will be attending Week 2, July 23-29, 2017. May 15th is the deadline for clergy and volunteer applications, and is the last day for registrants to receive the \$20 early bird discount. For more information, please visit the Camp website.

REGISTRATION FOR CAMP WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BE DONE ONLINE THROUGH THE CAMP'S WEBSITE – CAMPNAZARETH.ORG.

COMMEMORATED TODAY: APPARITION OF THE SIGN OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS OVER JERUSALEM, IN 351 AD

The Precious Cross appeared in the sky over Jerusalem on the morning of May 7, 351 during the reign of the emperor Constantius, the son of Saint Constantine (May 21). At that time the heresy of Arianism, which taught that Christ was merely a creature and not God, was causing great turmoil and division throughout the Empire. Even after the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325, many people were drawn to this false teaching, and the Orthodox found themselves in the minority in many places. Constantius, the ruler of the eastern part of the Empire, was a fervent supporter of Arianism. His brothers Constantine II and Constans, who were pious Orthodox Christians, ruled in the west. They were both killed in separate battles around 350, leaving Constantius as sole ruler. Also in 350, Saint Cyril (March 18) became Patriarch of Jerusalem and began his zealous struggle against Arianism.

In May of 351 a luminous Cross appeared over Jerusalem, stretching from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives, a distance of about five and a half miles. The Cross was wide as it was long, and shone more brightly than the sun. Many people left their homes and workplaces to gather in the church and glorify Christ. The historian Sozomen says that this wondrous sign led to the conversion of multitudes of pagans and Jews to Christianity. A letter from Saint Cyril to the emperor

describing this phenomenon, and admonishing him to become Orthodox, has been preserved. The apparition of the Cross remained over the city for a whole week.

The vision of the Cross over Jerusalem strengthened the Orthodox faithful and contributed to the return of many Arians to the Church. It is also a reminder of the awesome Second Coming of Christ, when “the sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven (Matthew 24:30). *(from oca.org)*

ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: REPOSE OF ST ALEXIS TOTH - CONFESSOR OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH IN AMERICA

“Submitting my soul to the mercy of God, and asking everybody's forgiveness and forgiving everybody, and remaining faithful to the Orthodox Catholic doctrines up to my last minute, believing and professing myself, and submitting myself to the prayers of all...” With these words, our Holy Father Alexis Toth composed his last will and testament shortly before his death in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1909. St. Alexis was born in a Carpatho-Rusyn family of priests, both his father and brother were priests and his uncle was a bishop. Like most Carpatho-Rusyns of the time, the Toths were Eastern Rite - Uniate Catholics. After completing his seminary education, he married Rosalie Mihalich, the daughter of a priest in 1878, was ordained to the priesthood and assigned as the second priest in a Greek Catholic parish. While serving there, his wife and their only child died. Father Alexis was later appointed secretary to the Bishop of Presov and Chancellor of the Diocese and taught Church History and Canon Law in the Presov Seminary.

The pivotal time of Father Toth's life began with his arrival in America in November, 1889 to become the first pastor of the new Greek Catholic church in Minneapolis. Five weeks after his arrival, Father Toth, following Canon Law, presented his credentials to the local Roman Catholic bishop, Archbishop John Ireland. Learning that Father Toth had been married, the Archbishop refused to recognize him as a legitimate Catholic priest and forbade him to function as a priest anywhere in the Diocese. Archbishop Ireland was a leader among a movement in the Catholic Church aimed at Americanizing the Catholic Church. Their views had no place for the use of the Eastern rite in Liturgy by foreign speaking immigrants with married priests.

Having served as a professor of Canon Law, Father Toth knew his rights and continued serving the needs of his flock. He set about raising funds for needed church items, purchased a house for use as a rectory and even opened a small grocery store for which he served as a baker. With his small income, he provided not only for himself but gave assistance for his poor parishioners and paid for a caretaker and cantor for the church. In 1890, all of the Uniate priests then serving in America gathered for a meeting in Wilkes-Barre to discuss the open hostility

they were all receiving from the local Roman Catholic hierarchy. In response and as a punishment for this meeting, all the priests in attendance were recalled to Europe by their bishops. Recognizing that the Greek Catholic clergy and faithful would always be treated as inferiors in the larger Roman Catholic Church and that the Union with Rome had been forced upon the peasant Carpatho-Rusyns, Father Alexis relates: *I made up my mind to do something which I carried in my heart for a long time, for which my soul longed: that is, to become Orthodox. But how was it to be done. I had to be very cautious. The unfortunate Union, the source of our decline and all our ills, had been part of our people too long. We had already borne that yoke on our shoulders for 250 years. I fervently prayed God to grant me the power to make all this clear to my unenlightened parishioners.*

After contacting the Orthodox Bishop Vladimir who was residing in San Francisco, Father Toth traveled there and was received into the Orthodox Faith by the bishop. An eyewitness of this event, the parish choir director Paul Zaichenko wrote: *In the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of San Francisco, Bishop Vladimir is serving the Divine Liturgy. The choir, under my direction, is singing splendidly. In the center of the church stands a stranger. He is clean shaven, with a short military haircut. He wears a cassock, fastened with a row of buttons, and around his waist is tied a wide purple sash... All eyes are on him, but no one knows who the stranger is. Bishop Vladimir, in all his vestments, comes forward from the altar, holding the Bible and the cross. According to the Church ritual, the stranger is accepted into the Orthodox faith. In a loud voice, he renounces papism and enters the fold of the Holy Orthodox Church. At that moment his face lights up with an internal light. This new convert was Father Alexis Toth, young, handsome, and energetic...*

Bishop Vladimir traveled to Minneapolis in March, 1891 and received 361 parishioners into the Orthodox Church. Uniate priests and people throughout America took note of Father Alexis' courageous action and he found ready listeners as he enlightened his Carpatho-Rusyn brethren of the false teachings and deceptions which had misled them for generations. Through his efforts, over 17 parishes returned to the Orthodox Faith and an estimated 25,000 people.

Father Toth's life was not without struggle and hardship. From the time he was received into the Orthodox Faith in 1891, it took over a year for the Holy Synod of Russia to officially accept Father Toth and his flock into the American Missionary Diocese. During this time Father Toth was without any salary, his only income was the paltry trebe or gifts he received from baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Despite his poverty, Father Toth was accused of selling out the Christian Faith to the Muscovites for a huge sum of money, he was accused of stealing orphan's money in Hungary before fleeing to America, and in Old Forge, Pennsylvania, he

narrowly escaped serious injury or death when a rock was thrown at his head through the rectory window. Returning from his missionary journey to Northeastern Pennsylvania, he found that his own flock had turned against him which caused him to move to the newly-converted Orthodox parish in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Recalling this tragic event, Father Alexis later wrote to his Bishop Nicholas: *...these same people, for whom I sacrificed everything and who, during the attacks of the Papists, stood as strong as a wall, and whom I had been protecting and saving, became so ungrateful... It was told to my face that "we do not want the 'Hungarian' as a priest anymore - we need a Russian priest!" ... So I left Minneapolis and moved to Wilkes-Barre.*

Father Alexis endured all of his sufferings with the help of his faith in the Lord. He wrote: *I lived through very difficult days. But regardless of the difficult situation and privations, I did not rescind from my temporary thorny road. The Lord gave me strength to overcome the difficulties of being scorned and disdained as a slave of my past connections. All this trouble with its many uncalled for offenses against me, I was able with the help of God to overcome. Glory to God for His great mercy.* Father Toth's health began to decline in 1908 and he fell asleep in the Lord in Wilkes-Barre on May 7, 1909 and was buried in a magnificent mausoleum behind the altar of St. Tikhon's Monastery Church in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. His body was exhumed from his tomb in 1994 and placed in the special shrine in preparation for his official glorification as a saint with the title: Confessor of the Faith in America. The example of St. Alexis, along with his tireless preaching and teaching of the Orthodox Faith in the mill and mining towns throughout the eastern United States was undoubtedly influential on Father Orestes Chornock and other Uniate clergy as they faced a new era of misunderstanding, mistreatment, and changes to their faith by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. After their repeated appeals to Rome fell on deaf ears, the founders of our Diocese followed the path first trod by St. Alexis in returning to the Orthodox Faith of their ancestors. However they observed what had happened in the 17 parishes received into Orthodoxy through the efforts of Father Toth. In time the unique Carpatho-Rusyn identity of these people was suppressed in favor of an invented Russian identity which continues in many places to this day. Their ancient congregational style of singing known as prostopinije was suppressed as some sort of Uniate invention in favor of Russian music sung by a choir with the congregation as passive listeners. These observations led the founders of this Diocese to coin the motto Ani do Rim, ani do Moskvi! (neither to Rome nor to Moscow!) as they sought refuge and protection under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

The life of St. Alexis also challenges us in his relentless and courageous pursuit of the truth of the Gospel. One of the pamphlets he wrote and distributed in his missionary work was titled *Where to Seek the Truth*. The challenge for Orthodox Christians living in America today is the dangerous yet common belief that there is no one truth but that each person follows whatever is true for them. Truth is not objective but subjective: I decide what is right and wrong, what is true and false, truth is not revealed from God on high and disseminated to mankind. While our respect for people of other beliefs has led to relative peace among the many religions of America, the price has been the embrace of a non-Biblical, non-Christian teaching that there are many paths to God, I have my path and you have yours and they are all equally valid. This new view now demands that we question and change the meaning of such previously basic institutions as family and marriage. In today's society, to declare that there is objective right and wrong, sin and virtue, truth and falsehood is to be labeled bigoted, old-fashioned, narrow and exclusive. St. Alexis, by his struggle to return to the truth of the Gospel, inspires us to continue to seek the truth revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ to an unchanging Church that continues in the Faith of the Apostles. (from *acrod.org*)

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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, Kristen McNeil, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, 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, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)