

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

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



June 9, 2019 – Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (7th Sunday of Pascha) | Afterfeast of the Ascension

By Met. Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh

During the Last Supper our Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples that separation was near, that He was to ascend to His God and to His Father as He would repeat again to the women who came to the grave. And when their hearts were filled with sorrow at the thought that they will not see Him again, He said, “Your hearts are full with sorrow and yet, you should rejoice for Me that I am returning to My Father. But I will not,” he added, “leave you orphan, I will send you the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, whom I will send to you and who will teach you all things.” And so do we here now while we are still in the light of the Ascension.

St. Paul grieved about the necessity of living in the world and in the flesh. He said, “To me life is Christ and death would be a gain, a blessing, because as long as we are in the flesh, we are separated from Christ.” And yet, this separation is not total, we are not separated irremediably, we are not separated desperately from Christ if we only long for Him, if we only love Him, if as St. Paul longed to die to be inseparably forever with Him because according to the promise the Holy Spirit has come on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit whom we call the Comforter by

word, which in ancient languages has a much wider meaning. It means the one who consoles, the one who gives strength, the one who brings joy. His presence indeed can console us from our separation from Christ because the Holy Spirit if we only live according to the Gospel, if we become not only in word or in imagination but in all truth, in action and in thought, in our heart and in our being disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in us. We become His temples and He speaks to us either in unutterable groaning or with that wonderful clarity that allows us to call 'Father' the God of Heaven because in Christ and by the power of the Spirit we have become the children of the Living God.

So the separation from Christ is a separation in space, it is the loss of that moving, wonderful contact of humanity as we know it on earth but it is the beginning of a new discovery of Christ, the Christ not only risen but ascended, the Christ who according to today's Gospel is resplendent with the glory, the shining that belonged to Him before all ages, the shining, the resplendence, the splendor of Divinity. And it is this Christ whom we meet in prayer, whom we discover through and in the Holy Sacraments, to whom we can get united only by a faithfulness in life, it is this Christ of whom Paul speaks when he says, "We no longer know Christ according to the flesh", we do not touch Him as Thomas did, we do not hear and see Him as Apostles and the women, and all crowds of people did, but we know the Christ of the Spirit, the risen and ascended Christ, who is everywhere where two or three are gathered together, who is everywhere when a lonely soul cries for Him, when a life is being dedicated to Him.

And so we are confronted with this mystery of a separation, which is a victory, a separation, which leads us to a new knowledge, to a new discovery of Christ. His Divinity is no longer veiled for us by His human presence, He is revealed to us as God resplendent not only in His Godhead but also in His humanity. And so it happens also all the time when people meet on a human level and then discover one another in the Holy Spirit, a discovery that makes humanity resplendent with eternity.

Let us rejoice in the Ascension but also let us remember that in a week's time we will stand here remembering the day of Pentecost, not only remember it as an event of the past but bringing it back by presenting ourselves to the descent of the Holy Spirit as the Apostles offered themselves to Him in the Upper Room nearly 2,000 years ago. But to do this we must be disciples of Christ, we must be His own, we must be faithful to the word of His preaching, we must follow the example which He gave us, we must truly be in the world in which we live an incarnate presence of Christ and the temple of Spirit, a vanguard of the Kingdom.

Let us devote the coming week to preparing ourselves by searching our lives, by rejecting at least in intention and determination all that is unworthy of our calling. Let us prepare ourselves to come open, empty to be filled with the Spirit, so that we truly may be also in an ever-increasing way become the temples of His presence.

We have heard in the Acts of the Apostles how, as the Feast of Pentecost was approaching, Paul the Apostle had started on his journey to Jerusalem to be there together with all those who on that very day received the Holy Spirit. Of all of them he was the only one who had not been present in the High Room where the event took place. And yet, God had given him a true, a perfect conversion of heart, and of mind and of life, and had given him freely the gift of the Holy Spirit in response to his total, ultimate gift of self to Him, the God Whom he did not know but Whom he worshipped.

We also are on our way to the day of Pentecost, next week we will keep this event. When Paul was

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(continued from page 4) on his way, he thought of what had happened to himself in the solitude of his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus and in the gift of the Spirit mediated to him by Ananias. And we also, each of us singly and all of us together should reflect on all that God has given us. He has given us existence and breathed life into us, - not only the life of the body, but a life that makes us akin to Him, His life. He has given us to know Him, the Living God, and He has given us to meet, in the Gospel and in life, His Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Baptism, in the Anointment with Holy Chrism, in Communion to the Body and Blood of Christ, in the mysterious, silent communion of prayer, in the moments when God Himself came near, although we were not thinking of Him, He has given us so much.

Let us reflect on all that is given us, asking ourselves whether we are truly disciples of Christ. We know from Saint Paul what it means to be a disciple: he said that for him, to live is Christ, to die will be a gain, because as long as he is in the flesh he is separated from Christ, Christ Whom he loves, Christ Who has become everything to his life, not only in time but for all eternity. And yet, says he, he is prepared to live, not to die, because his presence on earth is necessary to others. This is the measure of communion he had with Christ. And this is shown so movingly in a parallel between a small phrase in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Gospel: both the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciple say that they are now going back to the Father, that the time of their departure has come. His life in Christ had culminated in such identification with what Christ stood for, and beyond that with

what Christ was, that whatever was applicable to Christ became applicable to him. Indeed, for him to live was Christ, and he longed for his death, but he had learned from God something more than this longing for freedom, for communion with the God Whom he adored and served so faithfully, - he had learned that to give is a greater joy than to receive.

The saints had heard Christ say, 'No one has greater love than he who gives his life for his friends'. Paul, the other apostles, and innumerable saints after them gave their lives, shed their lives day after day forgetting themselves, rejecting every thought, every concern about themselves, having thought only for those who needed God, who needed the word of truth, who needed love divine. They lived for others, they gave as generously as they had received.

We also are called to learn the joy, the exhilarating, the wonderful joy of giving, of turning away from ourselves to be free to give, and of giving on all levels, the smallest things and the greatest things. And this can be taught us only by the power of the Holy Spirit that unites us to Christ, makes us into one body with Him, a body of people, bound with each other in their total togetherness, one with the God who is our unity.

Let us think of all we have received from God and ask ourselves: what can we give first to Him so that He can rejoice in us, so that He can know that He has not lived and died in vain. And what can we give to all those who surround us, beginning with the smallest, the humblest gifts to those closest to us and ending with giving all we can to those who need more. And then truly Pentecost will come as a gift of life, a gift that unites us, welds us into one body capable of being to others a vision on earth of the Kingdom, but also a source of life and of joy, so that truly our joy, and the joy of all those whom we meet should be fulfilled. Amen.

Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 20:16-18, 28-36

In those days, Paul decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord and God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I

have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 17:1-13

At that time, Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He shall give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them through Your name which You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Everyone baptized in an Orthodox manner in the name of our King of all and Lord God Christ has promised to travel the straight and narrow road, since the Lord many times also decrees this, that the one who does not walk the narrow road is alien to salvation, as the Holy Scripture enjoins; for, He says, the road that leads to life is straight and narrow and those who find it are few, while the one which leads to perdition is broad and spacious and those who enter through it are many; He did not order this once but many times, as the meaning of the (following) passages

shows: "blessed are the poor and blessed are the hungry and blessed are those who cry" and "alas to those who laugh and alas to those who are full."

For this reason, my most beloved children, I entreat separately each one of you, whom I gave birth to in the name of Christ through the Gospel, that we do not deny with our deeds, while we confess that we know God in mere words, as do some people who judge in a corrupted way; since the Lord has secured us also in this: "not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven," but the one who believes in resurrection, judgment and retribution; about which also the great Paul said that "many men walk around " not in righteousness, "but now I also tell you weeping," he says, "that they are the enemies of the Cross of our Lord." But who are they? "Those whose belly is their God and whose Glory exists in their shame" and "the widow who lives in pleasure has already died, even if she is still alive," and "the one who does not hold his own cross and follow after Me," as the divine voice says, "is not worthy of me," and "the one who wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and carry his own cross and follow Me." Anyone who does not always grope after the power of these divine voices is totally irrational - for how will he realize whether he runs in the narrow but he is not deceived while running in the wide road?

For this reason I entreat my beloved children in the name of Christ, let us examine ourselves even in our garments and food and words, groping (to understand) whether we are the ones of the narrow road and whether we have kept or violated the promise which we made at our holy baptism, and even more everything related to our second profession to God during which there is not even a single excuse that perhaps we did not understand the commandments, as when we were infants, and we think being deceived by a few deranged men that the words about the wide road are more blessed and not the ones about the narrow road. For we do not know and have not heard from the beginning up to the present that anyone from those who walked the spacious road up to the end saw the face of God.

"Whosoever may be ashamed of Me and of My words," the Truth Himself says, "during this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him, when He will return in His glory together with the holy angels." For "the one who loves Me," He says, "will keep My commandments." But who is "the one who loves Me? He is the one who receives My commandments and keeps them." Let us the unfortunate pay reverence to the Lord who is beseeching and instructing us with words full of fear; let us always consciously grope (to understand) His holy words, (when He instructs us), "come to Me all that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" and "if someone does not forsake all that he has, he cannot be My disciple" and "why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say"; and "many men will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord,' have we not

prophesied in Your name" (and they will hear this, 'I know you not where you are') and "if your justice does not abound more than that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

For nobody from those of the wide road has ever enjoyed in this life a divine gift but (only) the workers of the straight road. For the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for all men but "for those who go around in sheepskins, in goatskins, who are oppressed and maltreated, of whom the world is not worthy, and they wander in deserts and mountains and caves and the holes in the earth." For the Holy Scripture teaches clearly which gifts they enjoyed by remaining firm under hope and faith in the narrow road to the point of shedding their blood, for whoever wishes to learn and imitate and follow their tracks up to the end and be illuminated by God toward a salvific manliness and imitation pleasing to God. These (gifts) are faith, love, hope, abasement, obedience, submission, fasting, poverty, temperance, prayer, confession, patience, humility, and in order not to make long speeches by enumerating each of them, these are honor and glory and willingness in all acts pleasing to God. After they have advanced in these, they have delivered to us not to eat like pigs every day, but to have one meal per day during evening time and not to satiety. And I ask you to remember day and night the struggles and pains by which those of the strait path have become familiar to God, and stay vigilant during the night in order to imitate the way of life by which they have been deemed worthy both of salvation and praise.

On the contrary do not (behave) in the way of the wearers of rags of the seventh century who were led astray, struggling to deceive those who were beholding them, not in order to serve the Lord, as the divine voice enjoins, "if someone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and carry his cross and follow Me," but in order to deceive others under the pretension of their habit, to pursue with all their might human praise and vain glory unto the perdition of their souls only by the tonsure of hair and the change of habit. For the order, "let him carry his own cross," as the divine voice says (O what has happened to us, who like me are the accursed slaves of the broad road!), does not only depend on the tonsure of hair and the change of name and the hanging of the life-giving Cross upon the chest only for, as I said, human praise, but on the willing transfer of the condition of death of the Lord Jesus into our body, as the great Paul had the good courage "to speak loudly in the name of Christ, the world has been crucified unto me and I have been crucified unto the world," he says.

I leave these to you, my beloved whom I gave birth to in the name of Christ through the Gospel, as I said to you when starting my document, and I advise you both being alive and after I depart, as my genuine sons, having my trust in the Lord Christ, I devise these to you as a testament: struggle both to act and to speak in

accordance with the example of the straight and narrow road until you shed your own blood, as our Holy Fathers have preserved, without slandering anybody, reproaching, hating, or begrudging (unless in some way the reason involves faith), and by paying serious attention to live as befits saints, finding fault only with ourselves for being sluggish and sinners.

Nonetheless, if perhaps some of you who happen to plough and work the other tasks of farming ask for a small relief from cold weather and toils, but they do not see clearly the glory that awaits them in the world to come in return for their continence, on the one hand during the sowing period there will suffice for them at the sixth hour a portion of bread with a drink of water, as much as the theophoros (Elijah) would consume, when the earthly angel was allowing him to sustain his flesh, until the usual time of their meal comes; on the other hand during the harvest period because of the summer heat and the length of each day there will suffice for them a double portion, in order to harvest much benefit from the toil, having also observed the narrow road without plunging headlong into the broad one because of their indolence, after trampling upon salvific scrupulousness, using it as a vain excuse, as if they have grasped it as a suitable opportunity.

For because of brief suffering, those of the narrow road and those of the Lord Christ, as the Scripture says, having crucified flesh together with their passions and desires until the end will be deemed worthy of a great and indescribable joy, which we may also be deemed worthy of by the gift of the consubstantial and life-giving and almighty Holy Trinity. Amen.

– Testament of St. Athanasios I, Patriarch of Constantinople

Also Commemorated Today: St. Cyril the Archbishop of Alexandria

St. Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, a distinguished champion of Orthodoxy and a great teacher of the Church, came from an illustrious and pious Christian family. He studied the secular sciences, including philosophy, but most of all he strove to acquire knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and the truths of the Christian Faith. In his youth Cyril entered the monastery of Macarius in the Nitreia hills, where he stayed for six years. Theophilus (385-412), the Patriarch of Alexandria, ordained him as a deacon, numbered him among the clergy and entrusted him to preach.

Upon the death of Patriarch Theophilus, Cyril was unanimously chosen to the patriarchal throne of the Alexandrian Church. He led the struggle against the spread of the Novatian heresy in Alexandria, which taught that any Christian who had fallen away from the Church during a time of persecution, could not be received back into it.

Cyril, seeing the futility of admonishing the heretics, sought their expulsion from Alexandria. The Jews appeared a greater danger for the Church, repeatedly causing riots, accompanied by the brutal killing of Christians. The saint long contended with them. In order to wipe out the remnants of paganism, the saint cast out devils from an ancient pagan temple and built a church on the spot, and the relics of the Holy Unmercenaries Cyrus and John were transferred into it. A more difficult struggle awaited the saint with the emergence of the Nestorian heresy.

Nestorius, a presbyter of the Antiochian Church, was chosen in 428 to the see of Constantinople and there he was able to spread his heretical teaching against the dogma about the uncommingled union of two natures in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nestorius called the Mother of God not the Theotokos, but rather Christotokos or “Birth-giver of Christ,” implying that she gave birth not to God, but only to the man Christ.

The holy Patriarch Cyril repeatedly wrote to Nestorius and pointed out his error, but Nestorius continued to persevere in it. Then the saint sent out epistles against Nestorianism to the clergy of Constantinople and to the holy emperor Theodosius the Younger (408-450), denouncing the heresy. Cyril wrote also to other Churches, to Pope Celestine and to the other Patriarchs, and even to monks of several monasteries, warning of the emergence of a dangerous heresy. Nestorius started an open persecution against the Orthodox. In his presence one of his partisans, Bishop Dorotheus, pronounced an anathema against anyone who would call the Most Holy Virgin Mary the Theotokos.

Nestorius hated Cyril and brought out against him every kind of slander and fabrication, calling him a heretic. The saint continued to defend Orthodoxy with all his powers. The situation became so aggravated, that it became necessary to call an Ecumenical Council, which convened in the city of Ephesus in the year 431. At the Council 200 bishops arrived from all the Christian Churches. Nestorius, awaiting the arrival of Bishop John of Antioch and other Syrian bishops, did not agree to the opening of the Council. But the Fathers of the Council began the sessions with Cyril presiding. Having examined the teaching of Nestorius, the Council condemned him as a heretic.

Nestorius did not submit to the Council, and Bishop John opened a “robber council”, which decreed Cyril a heretic. The unrest increased. By order of the emperor, Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria and Archbishop Memnon of Ephesus were locked in prison, and Nestorius was deposed.

Soon Saints Cyril and Memnon were freed, and the sessions of the Council continued. Nestorius, not submitting himself to the determinations of the Council, was deprived of priestly rank. By order of the emperor he was sent to the faraway

place Sasim in the Libyan wilderness, where he died in grievous torments. His tongue, having blasphemed the Mother of God, was overtaken by punishment -- in it there developed worms. Even Bishop John of Antioch and the remaining Syrian bishops signed the decrees of the Council of Ephesus.

Cyril guided the Alexandrian Church for 32 years, and towards the end of his life the flock was cleansed of heretics. Gently and cautiously Cyril approached anyone, who by their own simpleness and lack of knowledge, fell into false wisdom. There was a certain Elder, an ascetic of profound life, who incorrectly considered the Old Testament Priest Melchizedek to be the Son of God. Cyril prayed for the Lord to reveal to the Elder the correct way to view the righteous one. After three days the Elder came to Cyril and said that the Lord had revealed to him that Melchizedek was a mere man.

Cyril learned to overcome his prejudice against the memory of the great John Chrysostom (November 13). Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and uncle of Cyril, was an antagonist of John, and presided in a council in judgment of him. Cyril thus found himself in a circle antagonistic to John Chrysostom, and involuntarily acquired a prejudice against him. Isidore of Pelusium (February 4) repeatedly wrote to Cyril and urged him to include the name of the great Father of the Church into the diptychs of the saints, but Cyril would not agree.

Once in a dream he saw a wondrous temple, in which the Mother of God was surrounded by a host of angels and saints, in whose number was John Chrysostom. When Cyril wanted to approach the All-Holy Lady and venerate her, John Chrysostom would not let him. The Theotokos asked John to forgive Cyril for having sinned against him through ignorance. Seeing that John hesitated, the Mother of God said, "Forgive him for my sake, since he has labored much for my honor, and has glorified me among the people calling me Theotokos." John answered, "By your intercession, Lady, I do forgive him," and then he embraced Cyril with love. Cyril repented that he had maintained anger against the great saint of God. Having convened all the Egyptian bishops, he celebrated a solemn feast in honor of John Chrysostom.

Cyril died in the year 444, leaving behind many works. In particular, the following ought to be mentioned: commentaries On the Gospel of Luke, On the Gospel of John, On the Epistles of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians and to the Hebrews; also an Apologia in Defense of Christianity against the Emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363). Of vast significance are his Five Books against Nestorius; a work on the Most Holy Trinity under the title Thesaurus, written against Arius and Eunomios. Also two dogmatic compositions on the Most Holy Trinity, distinguished by a precise exposition of the Orthodox teaching on the Procession

of the Holy Spirit. Cyril wrote Against Anthropomorphism for several Egyptians, who through ignorance depicted God in human form. Among Cyril's works are also the Discussions, among which is the moving and edifying Discourse on the Exodus of the Soul, inserted in the Slavonic "Following Psalter".

Today we commemorate the repose of this great Father of the Church. He is also remembered on January 18, the date of his flight from Alexandria. (*from oca.org*)

Social Team for June 16

Team 7 is up next week – Single, Wright H, Thomidis, Sticht. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan 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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, 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, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, 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.)