

~Happy Mother's Day!~

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Public services are in abeyance pending resolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the information on our parish and diocesan websites on how you can worship at home.



May 10, 2020 | Sunday of the Paralytic (3rd Sunday of Pascha)

Today, we hear about a poor, paralyzed man who has been waiting 38 whole years for someone to carry his wretched and disabled body to the sheep pool, that he might be healed; for, an angel would descend into the water at a certain season, and heal only one person: the first person. 38 whole years: that's about as long of a time as half of us here have been alive!

But everyone else by the pool was also waiting; as many living corpses, a large multitude of the weak, blind, and paralyzed were gathered there, each one eager to receive healing for himself only. Every sinful habit, every passion which terrorizes us, is also a weakness, a sickness, a paralysis of the soul and a blinding of the mind and heart; this is the more terrible sickness and infirmity which afflicts all of us, even those who are healthy in body.

So, here we all are. We are gathered together into this Church, but maybe only physically; we see each other with our physical eyes, but do the eyes of our hearts see the God-like soul of each and every one? Do we understand that we are one body and spirit?

We sense the presence of each other here; but do we sense each other's gifts and virtues, pains and struggles, and silent prayers? Are we bound together by sympathy of mind and heart, bearing each other in our hearts with mutual joy, love, pity and prayer?

The man who truly prays will go out from himself and lay hold of every other person; he will cherish them, love them as his own self, feel pain over them, pray for them and weep for them with all of his heart. As if seeking to apply some precious and healing ointment upon them, he burns with all of his heart for them—if only he could move, by his bold prayer, the Transcendent God to pour out His grace upon them. The man who truly prays will seek to soar to heaven, and he desires to bring everyone there with himself, laying them before the most high throne of the Most High God.

Moved by such prayer, which was offered by His Most Holy Virgin-Mother, this Most High God came down to us, He became a Man. He, Who before all time, before all creation, both knew and loved each and every man; Who, after He created man, was deeply afflicted when His creation went astray and fell into God-hating sin;

This One has become like unto us in everything, except for sin, silencing all who ask with Righteous Job: *"Hast Thou eyes of flesh? Or seest Thou as man seeth? Is Thy life human life?"* The Lord answers: "Yes, I do now have human eyes, and a human heart. I have borne, and bear forever, your very flesh; in it, I was beaten, spit upon, insulted, blasphemed, cursed, flogged, pierced, tortured and crucified, that I might glorify your whole person with Myself."

"I know what it is to suffer in body; and I know much more than any man what it is to suffer in soul. I alone know the wickedness, the darkness and the pain of sin! I alone know the unnatural rending of soul from body at the time of death, I Who am Self-Existing Life! I alone know the agony and gloom of hades' prison!"

When we are broken down by weakness of body, mind and soul, then we come to know that man often can only destroy himself, others and the whole created order of the universe; but God alone can create, redeem, save, restore, transfigure and deify!

We have to be laid low in order to understand our weakness. Abba Isaac says that if we would pay attention to ourselves, and contemplate with unbroken awareness our weakness, then we would not grow negligent; and then God would not have to bring us low in order for us to understand our complete dependence on Him.

He also says: *"If we stop humbling ourselves, God will never stop humbling us!"* Therefore, in order to acquire humility, we need *humiliation!* Of course, we would

like to ascend without struggle into a God-like life of perfect peace, which comes from Christ-like humbleness of mind. We desire to become sons of God and gods, but we do not want to become like the Only True God, Who voluntarily endured suffering, crucifixion and death in perfect peace, forgiveness and prayer.

But often, even when we bear our own cross, we do so in such a way that all of our awareness is completely consumed by our own struggle; and we are blind to the struggles of others. All of us want our own good health and joy; and to rush into the healing waters of compunction, true repentance and heartfelt, burning tears. All of us want to rush into the embrace of God's loving-mercy, that He might wash away our many evil habits and sins, and grant us comfort.

We all desire transformation! We all beg the Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on us! But often we step over the wounded bodies and souls of each other; for what purpose? To where are we running? To God, we say, to receive His mercy. But, do we show mercy? For, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they alone shall receive mercy!"*

Let us imagine a room where many are gathered together: all of a sudden, someone is overtaken by a violent seizure, and falls down to the floor unconscious, writhing uncontrollably with all of his members flailing about and causing wounds to his poor body. If someone started to laugh at him, would we not all feel and say that he is completely hard-hearted, inhuman, wretched and stupid?

And what if that man started to even get upset, or worse, he starts cursing the unconscious victim, condemning him angrily, or even starts to hit and kick him, or wants to kill him out of rage. Many in the room would rush upon that man with inflamed anger and start to beat him, as if he were an incarnate demon!

Well, don't we also do this? Or rather, don't we do worse things? How, we might ask? The things of the soul are infinitely much greater than the things of the body, even as an angel is much greater than mud and rocks. Every passion, every sinful thought, word, action and mindset is a violent seizure which overtakes the soul of a man. It makes him fall, and blunts his understanding so that he becomes like one blind and drunk; he is gripped by evil and loses control of himself; he suffers, and even if he wants to free himself, he cannot.

This is a pitiable situation, much more pitiable than one who is gripped by a seizure of the body! And that being the case, how much more terrible is the man who neglects the victim of spiritual infirmity than the man who neglects the victim of physical infirmity.

How great is this wickedness: others are struggling with their pains and passions, while we stand afar off, unmoved, bereft of all sympathy, love, prayer and tears.

This is a great evil, a much greater evil than suffering from one's own passions: to disregard—not to mention to get angry with, blame and condemn—others who are overtaken and fall down on account of their spiritual infirmities.

What man is free from these things? What man doesn't fall? What man does not need repentance? What man is already spiritually whole and completely radiant in Christ-likeness? No one! Therefore, what man does not deserve from others, from his own flesh and soul, gentle sympathy and weeping-prayer on account of his sins? And what man is freed from this obligation towards his fellow man? Are we healthy like Christ? Then where is our Christ-like compassion for the sinner? For, Christ came to save sinners and to heal the sick, to raise the fallen and to give life to the dead.

Better it is to sin many times over and repent than to do much good with self-righteous vainglory, not to mention judgment and scorn! Even worse off is the man who is constantly sinning and yet thinks that he is well-off; and if this one starts condemning and railing on others, well, he needs to come to realize that he is afflicted more than all mankind with the worst demonic insanity.

Divine mercy alone can save us who are fettered with many sins. But, if we do not show human mercy, then how will divine mercy ever enter into us and heal us, transforming the human within us and mingling it with divinity? If we cannot even sigh over another with mercy, how far we are from that apostolic grace of healing which was manifested by the Apostle Peter in today's Epistle!

The criterion of the Last Judgment is mercy; not just good deeds with the body, but those also of the soul: forgiveness, patience, long-suffering, humble compassion, sympathy of mind; freedom from anger, judgment and condemnation; blaming oneself for other's sins; constant heartfelt prayer and weeping for others who are afflicted by sin—we will not speak about that perfect Christ-like love of the saints, which filled them with an unquenchable desire to suffer forever in hell if only one person might be saved from it.

The eternal, all-consuming and inextinguishable flame of our insensibility, inhumanness, and hatred is already kindled and blazing! This temporal world and age are speedily coming to a close, and our death is even closer. The Most-Merciful Judge is here, awaiting us on the other side of the door which leads to eternity: our death; and after this comes judgment! When will we wake up?

When we stand before Christ, what will be the divine verdict upon our whole life, which will seal our immortal body and soul with either eternal joy or torment? When Christ says, "*in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me*", then what will we see: our mercy or our mercilessness?

When we see others hungering for encouragement, do we give them the strong food of edifying words, or the stone of rude speech? When we see others burning with the thirst for human consolation, do we give them the refreshing drink of loving-attention and care, or the gall of indifference and the vinegar of a sharp turning away?

When we see others estranged by despair over their sins, do we take them in under our wing, granting them a consoling presence, or cast them away from us as something repulsive and unhuman? When we see others naked of virtue, do we clothe them with a divine and merciful over-looking of their sins, or with a robe of mockery, exposing their shame to others by judgment, gossip, laughter and slander, magnifying their sins?

How much energy and words do we waste on uselessly babbling about others' defects and mistakes, the affairs of politicians, and the evil deeds of those in spiritual darkness, who would rather benefit from our prayers than from our gossip! We would do better if we shut our mouths and directed our God-given gift of speech to heartfelt prayer for sinners—expending our energy, not on unjust indignation, but fervent sorrow and repentance on their behalf!

When we see others sick with sin, do we visit them with a broken heart of sympathy, or chase them away with anger? When we see others in the prison of their long-standing passionate habits, do we come to them through soul-uniting prayer, weeping to God for them as for our own soul? Or do we seat them in the electric-chair of our abusive criticism, and execute them by our disgust and hatred?

Will we hear from Christ, “Come, ye blessed, into My heavenly kingdom, and reign with Me forever as gods in ever-ascending bliss and glory”, or will we hear those terrible words: “Depart from Me, ye cursed, for I never knew you!” May God spare us from this!

What then is the beginning of our salvation if we now find ourselves under this scrutinizing judgment? If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged! If we blame ourselves instead of others, then we will not be blamed! If we condemn our own sins instead of others, we will not be condemned! If we forgive, we will be forgiven!

And if we break our hearts with painful contrition for our own sins and for our lack of compassion for others' sins, then we will receive divine tears of compunction, humility, and grace. And if we pray for one another, seeking the salvation and amendment of all, raising up the whole world in our prayers—ardently desiring for all mankind that endless divine light and life in God the Holy Trinity—

Then we will be granted wings from God and fly and be at rest forever in the heaven of Christ-like meekness, compassion, humility and love. But, even so, if we now find ourselves completely paralyzed in soul, and cannot even move our hearts with the slightest inclination towards the good, then, let us take up the humble stillness of patience with the paralytic. Hopelessness and impatience will prod us, as will vain distractions and illusory pleasures, but we will remain unmoved, keeping our eyes and our whole mind and heart fixed in a hopeful upward glance towards heaven, *“from where we look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

What became of those 38 long years in which the paralytic languished? What memory was left of that hopeless and painful time when to him, who cried out: *“I have no man”*, the God-Man finally came? Christ said: *“A woman, when she is in travail, has sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, on account of her joy that a man is borne into the world!”*

These words are the foundation of all our hope. He speaks these words above all to the soul which is in the upheaval of sin, the soul which is laboring bitterly in order to *“give birth”*, as the Prophet Isaiah says, *“to the spirit of salvation.”* The man who is in the midst of the struggle with his humiliating passions will hear these words of the Savior, and they will conceive hope within his soul, granting him to look beyond his current ordeal.

Then, the man who has been laid low by sin as a spiritual paralytic, will give birth to unexpected joy; for the Most-Merciful Lord Jesus Christ, who has been looking upon his weary servant, will suddenly rush out to meet him, embracing him with all His grace. Then, the man, who was before a terrible mess to look upon on account of his disfigurement from many sins, will be instantly transformed by the touch of the All-Healing and Most-Sweet Christ, who will raise him up, giving birth to him as a completely new man.

What joy could be greater than this? Truly, this joy is far greater than that of a woman who is delivered of child. For, the man that is delivered from sinful affliction has joy overabounding from within himself when he finally sees that he himself comes forth as a completely new man, swimming in the ocean of God's grace. This is a foretaste of the eternal joy of the heavenly kingdom; a joy unlike any other; a joy which has its cause not outside oneself, but in the depths of one's innermost being. And this is only a small glimmer of that eternal joy in Christ of the saints; through their prayers may we also forever live in this uncreated and everlasting joy which has been overflowing within the heart of the Most Holy Trinity, even before the creation of angels and this world. Amen. (*from holycross-hermitage.com*)

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

A mother experiences more than one death, even though she herself will only die once. She fears for her husband; she fears for her children; again she fears for the women and children who belong to her children. ... For each of these-whether for loss of possessions, bodily illness, or undesired misfortune-she mourns and grieves no less than those who suffer.

– St. John Chrysostom

The Power of a Mother's Prayer

As someone who studies motherhood and theology and who has five children myself, fellow Orthodox mothers often ask me if I can point them to prayers for mothers for their children, since few of our prayer books include prayers on this subject. While I do have a few prayers I pass on, I also recommend that they read Saint John Chrysostom's thoughts on prayer and motherhood.

Saint John of the fourth century is a frequent source for reflection on family life in the twenty-first. His reverence for family rings clear across the centuries, and this is true especially in his appreciation for motherhood. Saint John elevated motherhood to something beyond the mundane, daily care of children and into the realm of spiritual significance. Directing his remarks at mothers, he said, "I mean, the children being born, provided they receive proper care and are brought up to virtue by your attention, prove a basis and occasion of complete salvation for you; and in addition to your own virtuous acts you will receive a great reward for your care of them" (Homily on Hannah, Old Testament Homilies by Robert Hill). Thus Chrysostom saw motherhood as a salvific opportunity, as avocation that can lead to the heavenly reward.

Saint John was particularly moved by the vision of motherhood he saw in Hannah, the mother of Prophet Samuel in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 1-2). He admired the power of Hannah's spontaneous prayer when she visited the temple eager to have a child. He wrote of the intensity of the prayer she prayed in her quest for motherhood and her later dedication of her child to the Lord.

In praising Hannah's spontaneous prayer, Saint John contrasted it with more typical, less mindful prayer: "I mean, while we all pray, we do not all do it before

the Lord: when the body is lying on the ground and the mouth is babbling on, and the mind wandering through all parts of the house and the market place, how will such people be in a position to claim that they prayed before the Lord?" (Homily on Hannah, Old Testament Homilies by Robert Hill)

In short, Hannah provides the model for all types of prayer, not just a mother's prayer. Most prayer is half-hearted, barely present, whereas Hannah's prayer is fully present, felt in her body and her soul. Yet, Saint John also saw a special role for prayer by mothers. His specific instruction to mothers is that they should consecrate their children through prayer. As a mother and a theologian, I find this to be an important reminder of the importance of my prayers for my own children. Though the Orthodox Church lacks many composed prayers for mothers, and though the addition of such prayers would be welcome, Hannah's tale shows that mothers have taken prayers for their children into their own hands for millennia—and that the Church has celebrated this initiative. This is why I point mothers to Saint John: he reminds us that our spontaneous prayers as mothers are powerful on their own. Whatever words we choose, it is our sacred responsibility as mothers to bless and consecrate our children by praying for them. - Carrie Frost, Ph.D. (*from goarch.org*)

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 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, Dn. Steve Hall, 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 Domieniecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Howl Family, 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, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly reposed handmaiden of God Lydia Vita, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)