

SOBORNOST

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*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 24, 2020 | Sunday of the Blind Man

On Conceit and Humble Mindedness: A Sermon for the Sunday of the Blind Man (St. Ignatius Brianchaninov)

Beloved brethren! After our Lord Jesus Christ healed the man born blind, about which we have heard today in the Holy Gospel. He said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). The proud sages and righteous men of the world, such as the Jewish Pharisees, could not listen to these words of the Lord indifferently. Due to their self-love and high opinion of themselves they considered themselves to have been insulted. They replied to the Lord's words with a question expressing, simultaneously, their indignation, conceit, mockery, and hatred for the Lord, combined with contempt for Him. "Are we blind also?" they asked. In reply to the Pharisees' question the Lord showed them their state of soul, which was the initial reason for this question. "If you were blind," He told them, "you would have no sin: but now you say, 'We see;' therefore your sin remain."

What a terrible infirmity of soul conceit is! In human affairs it deprives the proud of the help and advice of their neighbors. And in the affairs of God, in the work of salvation, it has deprived and continues to deprive arrogant Pharisees of the most

precious treasure: the gift of God, brought down from heaven by the Son of God. It has deprived and continues to deprive them of Divine Revelation and, along with the reception of this Revelation, a most blessed relationship with God.

The Pharisees considered themselves able to see, that is, quite familiar with the true knowledge of God and in no need of further progress and instruction. On this basis they spurned the teaching about God that was taught directly by God.

The virtue opposed to pride and its particular expression in the human soul - conceit - is humility. As pride is primarily an infirmity of our spirit, a sin of the mind, likewise humility is a good and blessed condition of the spirit, and is primarily a virtue of the mind. For this reason it is very often called in the Holy Scripture and in the writings of the Holy Fathers "humble-mindedness." What is humble-mindedness? Humble-mindedness is man's correct understanding of humanity; consequently, it is man's correct understanding of himself. The direct effect of humility, or humble-mindedness, consists in the fact that a man's correct understanding of humanity and of himself reconciles a man with himself, with human society, with its passions, shortcomings and abuses, with personal and social circumstances; it reconciles him with earth and heaven. The virtue of humility received its name from the inner peace of heart born from it. When we are speaking only of the calming, joyous, blessed state produced in us by the virtue, we call it humility. But when we wish to indicate both this state and its source, we call it humble-mindedness.

Do not think, brethren, that our definition of humble-mindedness as man's correct way of thinking about humanity in general, and about himself in particular, is an arbitrary definition. The Lord Himself indicated such a definition of humility and humble-mindedness. He said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). But what is this spiritual freedom taught by the Truth, if not holy, grace-filled peace of soul; if not holy humility; if not evangelical humble-mindedness? The Divine Truth is our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:6). He proclaimed, "Learn of Me," of Divine Truth, "for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29). Humble-mindedness is man's way of thinking about himself and humanity, inspired and instilled by Divine Truth. ("The lips of a humble-minded man speak the truth," said St. Mark the Ascetic [see "Homily on the Law of the Spirit," chapter 9].) Conceit is pitiful and destructive self-delusion; it is a death-dealing deception by which blinded humanity deceives itself, and by which the demons beguile it.

False are the opinions and foundations of human pride, human conceit. A proud man looks upon himself as a self-existent being, and not as a creation of God. Earthly life seems to him endless, and death and eternity seem to him to be non-

existent. God's providence does not exist for him; he acknowledges human reason to be the ruler of the world. All of his thoughts creep along the earth. His life is offered up in sacrifice exclusively to the earth, upon which he would like to delight unceasingly in sin. And it was toward this insane, unfeasible goal that the blinded Pharisees and Sadducees strove with all their strength.

On the contrary, the remembrance of death accompanies a humble-minded man on the path of eternal life, instructs him to act on earth for the sake of eternity and, what is wondrous, inspires his deeds with a special beneficence. A humble-minded man labors for the sake of the virtues, not at the inducement of the passions or for the satisfaction of the passions. Consequently, his actions cannot help but be beneficial to human society. A humble-minded man sees himself as an insignificant speck of dust in the midst of the enormous universe, in the midst of time and the generations and events of mankind - both those of the past and those yet to come. The mind and heart of a humble-minded man are capable of receiving the Divine Christian teachings and of thriving unceasingly in the Christian virtues. The mind and heart of a humble-minded man see and feel the fall of human nature and are therefore able to recognize and receive the Redeemer.

Humble-mindedness does not see value in fallen human nature; it contemplates humanity as the supreme creation of God, but at the same time it contemplates sin, which has permeated the whole of man's being, poisoning it. Acknowledging the splendor of God's creation, humble-mindedness simultaneously acknowledges the ugliness of creation distorted by sin, continually mourning this calamity. It looks upon the earth as upon the land of its banishment, and strives by repentance to return to heaven, which it lost through conceit. But pride and conceit, having procured for mankind the Fall and destruction, neither see nor acknowledge the Fall in human nature. They see in it only merit, only perfection and refinement. They consider the infirmities of the soul and the passions themselves as virtues. Such a view of humanity renders the thought of a Redeemer utterly superfluous and foreign. The sight of the proud is a terrible blindness, while the lack of sight of the humble is the capacity for seeing the Truth. It is to this that the Lord's words refer: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39). The humble received the Lord and were enlightened by Divine light. The arrogant, satisfied with themselves, spurned Him and darkened themselves even further by this rejection and blaspheming of God.

Innumerable stars shine brightly in a clear sky at night, competing with one another in the magnitude of their light. But at the appearance of the sun the stars disappear - they disappear as though they had ceased to exist, although in reality they all remain in their places. So too, human virtues, when they are compared

with one another, have their own light. But at the appearance of Divine Goodness, they disappear before the Light of Divinity. The Apostle, speaking about the virtues of the Patriarch Abraham, said that "Abraham hath whereof to glory; but not before God" (Rom. 4:2). But concerning God he says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). In this way the Pharisees too ought to have acted, who boasted in their descent from Abraham according to the flesh, but who alienated themselves from him according to the spirit. In contrast to Abraham's course of action, they wanted to hold onto the imaginary worth of the old man, and through this they made themselves incapable of self-knowledge and the knowledge of God. They heard the Lord's terrible verdict: "If you were blind," that is, if you had acknowledged your blindness, "you would have no sin: but now, being blind, you say, 'We see;' therefore your sin remains" (John 9:41). You have inculcated it within yourselves, and impressed it upon yourselves by your conceit. The holy Apostle Paul was, in his youth, a pupil of the Pharisees, but he did not conform to the bitterness and conceit of the Pharisees. He was, as he relates to us for our edification, "an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;... touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:5-8).

Beloved brethren! Let us emulate the holy Apostle Paul and the rest of the God-pleasers. Let us draw near to God, having entirely rejected pernicious conceit through humility. By means of humility let us cling to God. Let us through humility attract the attention and mercy of our God, Who said, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). By seeing and acknowledging our sins, let us include ourselves in the number of the sinners who are beloved of God. By repudiating conceit, let us exclude ourselves from the number of the false righteous ones, or else God will reject us, saying, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).

May our hearts be renewed by humility to become spiritual altars of sacrifice to God, St. Poemen the Great said, "The Israelites were only permitted one place in which to offer up sacrifices and perform the common divine services. In the spiritual sense that place is the heart." And may the priest of the Most High God, our mind, offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him. May it offer up a sacrifice of contrition, of repentance, of confession, of prayer, and of mercy, filling every sacrifice with humble-mindedness, for "a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise" (Ps. 50:17). *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

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

In those days, as we went to prayer, a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

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

At that time, as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of

the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others *said*, "He is like him." He said, "I am *he*." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He *was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for* this *fellow*, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and

said to him, “You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?” And they cast him out.

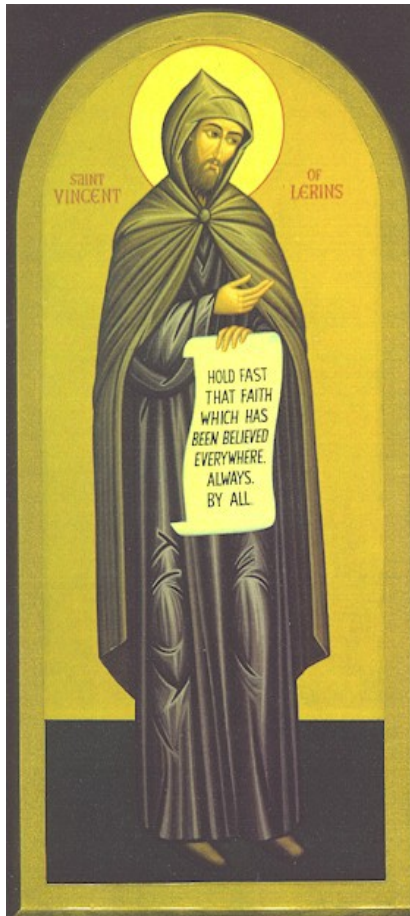
Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” He answered and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” And Jesus said to him, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.” Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” And he worshiped Him.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

All possible care must be taken, that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly and in the strictest sense Catholic, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors.

St. Vincent of Lérins

Commemorated Today: St. Vincent of Lérins



Born in the late fourth century in Toulouse in Gaul, Saint Vincent initially served in the military, but later left the world to become a monk at the renowned Lérins Monastery, where he was ordained to the priesthood. He is widely known for his work, *Commonitorium*, which he wrote around the year 434 AD, in which he differentiated between the Church's teachings and the heresies of his time. He is remembered for writing that Christians must follow the true faith that has been held “everywhere, always, and by all.” He also defended the term “Theotokos” with regard to the Mother of God in opposition to the teachings of Nestorius that were condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council. Saint Vincent died peacefully in 456 AD. His relics are preserved at Lérins. (from oca.org)

On the exhaustion of love

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all your things be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:13-14). In the Church of Corinth, founded by the apostolic labors of the holy Apostle Paul during his second journey (circa 53 A.D.), discord and division occurred. After Apostle Paul had departed from the city of Corinth, various false teachers appeared there, who began to belittle the dignity of the apostles, in order to elevate themselves in the eyes of the newly-converted Corinthian Christians. In this they were so successful that local Christians became divided into parties, each choosing a different teacher for itself.

When he learned of this, Apostle Paul became greatly saddened, knowing that, according to the Gospel, no house or church divided would be able to stand. Consequently, the same fate could befall the Corinthian Church. In order to summon all the faithful to unity, Apostle Paul wrote them an epistle explaining the principles of the Christian faith and a Christian outlook in general.

What once took place among the Christians of Corinth, is currently taking place among us. Due to extraordinary discoveries in the fields of technology and science, and the development of the arts and commerce, etc., the present age can easily be called an age of progress; however, in terms of spirituality, religiousness, church attendance and morality, – it leaves much to be desired! This is confirmed in modern society by a universal and passionate pursuit of material gain.

In modern man belief in the Lord God has become faint, if not completely dissipated. This is the cause of all our dissensions. Such weakening of faith permeates our consciousness. Our consciousness then becomes desensitized to our spiritual needs which leads to spiritual paralysis. This, in turn, leads to our lack of understanding – and lack of a desire to understand – the needs of others.

Christianity is founded upon these three: faith, hope and love. As long as time continues to exist for us, faith and hope must also exist, but when time ceases, i.e. after we pass from temporal life into eternal life, especially after the Last Judgment, faith and hope will cease to exist, and **only love will remain**.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that love is eternal, while faith and hope are temporal. Thus the apostolic advice: let all your things be done with love – remains forever appropriate.

Love unites everything, secures everything. Love is the sum total of all virtues. And it is love that is so sadly lacking in our times.

Love, like any other Christian virtue, does not vaunt itself, does not openly flaunt itself in the street, as does vice. Love conceals itself from the gaze of others and is recognized only by the fruit it bears.

There are occasions, naturally, when love proclaims itself firmly and courageously, whenever the need arises. Love is often revealed in patience towards others, in tolerance towards their frailties; love bears the burden of others. Sometimes misconceptions and prejudices serve to impede the revelation of love between people. Some people have a soft heart, but their mind is infected with all kinds of prejudices: the heart wants to do good, but the mind rejects it. For example: the heart wants to forgive an offense, while the mind whispers: will I not seem to be a weakling? Will it not go against my honor if I do not take revenge against my offender? Or another example: the heart wants to help someone in need, while the mind warns that one should not lose one's dignity in the eyes of society.

And, finally, the cause of such rare occurrence of love between people is egoism. Excessive love of oneself suppresses love of others. There are many examples of egoism destroying a person, a family, even entire nations. Look at what is left of the proud Romans. Great cities have vanished from the face of the earth, and even archaeologists cannot find them.

Love cannot be deceived. It has to issue from within and cannot be hypocritical. Love subsequently cemented the Corinthian Church, which flourished in the history of Christianity. Love will help us too – each one of us individually, and our parishes, and our Church.

Let us learn to act in all instances with love, and thus we will fulfill the law of Christ. (*from <http://tokandylaki.blogspot.com>*) (Father Igor Hrebinka)

Creating New Memories Together

Sure, camp, the altar boy retreat and young women's encounter are going to be virtual this year-- but so is everything else! Now, organizers of these events are working extra hard to create an extraordinary online experience, but they need our children to participate. So, please watch the short videos previewing these events and mark your calendars! On the front page of the Diocesan website, the videos are listed under Spotlight.

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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, 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 Dominiecki, 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.)