

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

November 27, 2022 – 24th Sunday After Pentecost

Great-martyr James (Jacob) of Persia

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

Saint James lived in the fourth century. He came from Persia and lived in the city of Bethlava. Being of noble lineage, he was friends with King Yazdegerd of Persia. Unfortunately, however, this friendship proved fatal for James, for it became the cause for which he changed his faith. Following pressure from his "friend" the King, he renounced his faith in Christ and worshiped idols. This brought great sadness to his mother and his wife, who truly loved him, which caused them to be hard on him, in order to lead him to repentance. They told him that after what he had done, they no longer wanted to see him. "We will receive you only if you sincerely repent," they told him in a letter. The attitude of his loved ones shocked him and led him to repentance. He sensed his great error and wept bitterly. Then, armed with spiritual courage, he went to the king and confessed boldly his faith in Christ. With this the king put him to be horribly tortured. He cut into little pieces the feet and hands of his "friend", and finally he beheaded him. Thus, James with the blood of his martyrdom sealed his confession, but also corrected the error of his renunciation.



His life and conduct gives us the opportunity to highlight the following: First, friendship is a sacred thing, but only if it is genuine and true. For friendship to be true, there must be mutual respect between friends. If there is no respect in the freedom of another, then the friendship is a counterfeit, and as we know, whatever is counterfeit has no value or duration. This is why one must be careful in choosing friends. Also, when you notice your friends enticing you through various means to distance yourself from God and the Church, you should cut off all communication with them, in order to protect your own spiritual well-being, since faith and spiritual health are inextricably linked. True faith in the Triune God, which is expressed through prayer, the sacramental life and asceticism, attracts the Grace of God, which strengthens the faithful in their struggles to overcome their passions. And when the passions are overcome, then the spiritual immune system of people is strengthened, which contributes most to the preservation of spiritual health.

Therefore, when someone realizes that their friend or friends do not respect their faith and freedom, they must react, stop associating with them, and find other more genuine and true friends. These are the ones who accept their friends as they are and not how they want you to be. In the case of someone being seduced or alienated from the Church, even their own family, since both are usually related, they must know and be reminded of the fact that there is repentance, which requires courage and spiritual bravery as a precondition. After all, eternal life belongs to those who do not justify themselves and hide their wrongs, but recognize them, confess them and correct them. And it is not just given to them, but it is earned with blood, in accordance with the well-known patristic saying: "Give blood and receive the Spirit."

Second, God loves everybody, but His love is not understood by all, instead it is only understood by those who have a spiritual antenna and are tuned to the same frequency as the Church. That is, they must attend church, pray, partake of the Immaculate Mysteries, especially of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, under appropriate conditions. It is truly tragic for God to visit us, to embrace us tenderly with His Grace, and for us not to understand nor perceive Him in the least. Although he loves us, we think He does not love us, and is harsh against us. Many times we have this same feeling about God's people, who truly love us and long for our repentance and correction. When the mother and wife wrote to Saint James, they may have appeared to have been harsh, but it proved to be therapeutic and saving, since it led him to repentance and salvation. Without this seemingly cruel behavior, he might not have been corrected. One wise Elder used to say that "those who punish us love us more than those who praise us" because they want our correction.

Therefore, genuine love is therapeutic, but many times, for the sake of human suffering, therapy does not take place without pain. After all, authentic love teaches, and leads to repentance, perfection, and God dwelling within us, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian says: Love is "the teacher of the prophets, the fellow traveler of the apostles, the strength of the martyrs, the inspiration of the fathers and teachers, and the perfection of all the saints." Unfortunately, however, many times, as stated above, we do not understand the expression of God's love and that of the people of God, and we turn against them. They love us, they stand by us, but we do not understand it. Nor do we feel grateful, but we constantly complain. In fact, we behave like young children, when parents send them off to school to get an education, but they think their parents don't love them and they are being cruel against them for not allowing them to stay home and play with their toys, but instead are forced to go to school where they get bored and feel tortured.

The heat of the sun melts a candle, but it hardens clay. Likewise the love of God softens the hearts of the humble, but hardens the hearts of the proud. It is clear, however, that neither the heat of the sun nor the love of God is responsible for the effect. When, with the Grace of God and our personal struggle, we cast away cold and perishable pride and put on soul-feeding humility, then our hearts will soften, feel the love of God, and it will turn from hell into paradise. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:14-22 EOB

Brethren, Jesus is our peace, he who made both [groups to be] one and tore down the wall of separation. He abolished in his flesh the enmity which is the law of commandments with its decrees, so that he might create in himself one new humanity instead of two, making peace. He reconciled both [groups] to God in one body, through the cross, by which he destroyed that enmity. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and also to those who were near. Through him, we both have access to the Father in one Spirit. And so, you are no longer strangers and foreigners! Instead, you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. In Christ, you too are built up into a dwelling-place of God in [the] Spirit.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 13:10-17 EOB

At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Behold, there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten herself up. When Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity!" He laid his hands on her and immediately, she stood up straight and glorified God.

However, the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. He said to the crowd, “There are six days in which people should work! Therefore, come on those days and be healed, not on the Sabbath day!” Then, the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead it out to water? Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who was bound by Satan for eighteen years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?” As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame and all the people rejoiced over all the glorious things that were done by him.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

When David considered and reckoned up the multitude and greatness of God’s gifts to us, and the fact that nobody has anything worthy to give Him in exchange, he said, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all that he has rendered to me?” [Ps. 116:11].... But what are those gifts which the prophet says God has rendered to us? When man realizes who it was that brought him into being and made everything for his sake, and gives glory to God and reaches up towards Him through faith and works, it is as though he were giving something back to God or offering something in exchange. And since God, as the ever-flowing and inexhaustible fount of grace-filled gifts, glorifies men many times over in return for glorifying Him, and increases His original bounties towards those who receive them with appropriate gratitude, this divine action is a recompense, which is accepted by its recipients with due thanksgiving in word and deed, and then given back again to the giver. This exchange between the two sides takes place many times and multiplies the benefits rendered by God to those well-pleasing to Him, and then rendered back to Him by them. For instance, when Abraham came to an understanding of the Creator by means of the creation, and gave God honor and glory, he was counted worthy to hear God's voice pronouncing the promise: “Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you; and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and I will bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you; and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3).

That voice and the promise it brought were granted by God to Abraham for the glory which Abraham had rendered to God. Abraham in turn repaid God by acting in obedience to Him, and as a result he heard Him saying again, “Find favor before me, and be perfect; and I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed, and I will make you exceedingly fruitful” (Gen. 18:1,6-7 LXX). What brief account can summarize their subsequent mutual exchanges – all Abraham's offerings to God through faith, words and deeds, and God's manifestations, promises and bounties to Abraham? These included the great and miraculous

favors as well as the law, the prophets, the royal line, and Christ Himself, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Anyone who looks carefully will discover that something very similar happened, not just to Abraham, but to each one of those who pleased God, through it might be accomplished differently, according to what was appropriate to the circumstances and way of life of those who found favor.

4. When David, having reflected on the matter, saw everything he had received, and everything given to those who went before him - for those gifts, too, were for his sake - he understood that the benefits bestowed by God are immeasurable and that, whereas these really are bounties from God for us, the things men offer to God are nothing in comparison. Then it was that he cried out, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all that he has rendered to me?" As he could find nothing to offer to God except his acknowledgment of the favors he had already received and his request for those still to come, he went on to say, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" [Ps. 116:12]. He is not rendering anything in return, rather he is taking, asking to receive, but giving nothing. Someone who has received a gift from a king and made obeisance, then requests a further gift, has not given anything in exchange for what he was given. The cup of salvation refers to the drink offerings made in gratitude to God for having been preserved. As a prophet, however, and speaking in the Spirit, he foresees what is to come. Making his own what belongs to grace, and regarding what is ours as his, since he is our forefather according to the faith, he says, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord", showing forth beforehand our sacred participation and communion in the sacramental Cup, our boldness towards God in this respect, and our salvation by this means.

If we have nothing to render to God for His benefits to us except to call upon Him once again, what reparation will we find to offer when we sin against Him and put ourselves in the wrong? None at all. Any good we may do, we were obliged to do before we sinned, and even then we were incapable of repaying our debt. So the only way we have to remedy our wrongdoings is to glorify God's incomparable forbearance towards us and to invoke his divine mercies.

But why am I telling you this now? Because, although we have nothing to offer God, either for all the good we have experienced from Him or in respect of our offenses against Him, we are also negligent about glorifying Him and making supplication. I observe that the church has a full congregation now, and I am filled with joy, but I recall the last few weeks. It was the season of the grape harvest - I am speaking to you about this now, not to reproach you but to help you to understand. It was the grape harvest, and the Church of God suffered a serious lack of worshipers and people to offer hymns and earnest entreaties to God. How many people have a full night's sleep during that period, even on Sunday, which is

called the Lord's Day because on it we abstain from self-indulgence and stop our daily work, being free from all the concerns of daily life in order to persevere in intercession and praise to God? And yet, where do your annual crops of fruit come from? Are they not from God?

When the season for enjoying and gathering in the fruit comes round, we ought to glorify God even more. We, however, acting wrongly and unjustly, cut down on His praises and neglect them at that time. But why mention this now? There are many who, both before and after the harvest, do not even wake up for the Sunday morning services of praise. Yet it is also the case that some among those gathered here pay more heed to their conversations between themselves than to the prayers and doxologies. The majority are more interested in the goods on sale than in the readings, and in buying and selling than in the teaching of the divinely inspired Scriptures. The noble building thus becomes a shop, and the house of prayer, that is to say, the house of God, is turned into a "house of merchandise" (John 2:16). People buzz around us, as you see, like drones, not listening themselves, and preventing those who want to listen from doing so.

What makes them like this? The fact that they consider they have nothing to gain from entreaties and praises to God, or from listening to the divine Scriptures and their counsel. Some feel that they are doing nothing – though it would not be fair to level this accusation at them all. Certain of them are of the opinion that they are standing idle and consider that any time spent persevering in glorifying God and making supplications is wasted. Proof that they think they are unoccupied at that time is the fact that they excuse themselves when any seemingly urgent work comes along: harvesting, perhaps, picking grapes, or anything else which appears to us to be necessary.

I cannot begin to say how much this attitude damages our faith, our Christian conduct, and also the material aspect of our lives. Anyone who thinks that the time set aside for prayer to God is unproductive, despises it and devotes himself entirely to physical activities, does not believe the one who says, "Without me you can do nothing" [John 15:5]; nor does he realize that the Lord has power over life and death, health and sickness, and that it was He who made us, so our being alive, our ability to act and our entire existence depend on Him. How can anyone who does not believe in the realities of the present believe in the things to come? And if someone does not have firm faith concerning what is to come, and what is promised and threatened after death, how can he strive to be virtuous? Tell me. For any virtue which is not accomplished for God's sake and on account of the promises and warnings about what happens after death, is not really a virtue. Do you see that it is impossible to have sure faith and genuine virtue without persisting wholeheartedly in hymns and supplications? And why mention only faith and

virtue? We cannot even perform our daily work well unless we share in God's assistance through earnest entreaty.

Yet some might say that many of us, without going to church frequently, or constantly attending the services and prayers there, not only earn a living but become rich, enjoy a high reputation and are in good physical health. But we must watch lest we suffer all sorts of calamities in our lives as a result, and our course through this world be uneven and full of difficulties. For if we do not call upon God every time we undertake something, and do not have Him working with us, we may offer the evil one a way in. And letting him enter like this not only makes us useless but brings us to a disastrous end. He stirs up people to such a frenzy of rage against one another about trivial matters and pretexts that some fall victim to their kinsmen's swords, while others go through life stained by their compatriots' blood, either in their thoughts and souls, or on their murderous hands. For a mind far from God becomes either like a beast or a demon, and once it has gone beyond the bounds of nature it desires what belongs to others and cannot satisfy its greed for gain. Such a man surrenders himself to the lusts of the flesh and recognizes no limit to self-indulgence. He dishonors himself through his deeds, but desires to be revered by all. It is his wish that everyone should flatter him, agree with him and assist in putting his ideas into practice, and if this does not happen - for how could it? - he is filled with uncontrollable rage. In his anger and aggressiveness towards his fellows he resembles a snake. The man becomes a murderer, and he who was made in God's image and likeness comes to resemble Satan, who was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

The one cause of all these evils is that our mind is far removed from the fear and remembrance of God, and opens the way for cooperation with the most evil enemy. If, however, every time we do anything we make our soul secure beforehand by means of hymns and prayers to God, our adversary will find no place in us. Then the whole tribe of evils surrounding him will be driven away as well, and harmony, chastity, righteousness, meekness and humility will adorn our souls. Bound to one another by love, we shall live peaceful lives without discord, having Christ, the King of Peace, in our minds through continuous converse with Him.

This is why every morning before any work begins God's Church draws us towards it. Daily converse with God through prayer and psalmody calms and transforms all attacks, repulses fleshly desires, blunts covetous thoughts, purges away conceit, destroys envy, educates anger, banishes remembrance of wrongs and, setting aside bitterness and contention, bestows every kind of peace, good order and comfort on towns, homes, souls and bodies, for married people as well as those who have embarked on the monastic life. Put simply, this is the foundation and assurance of everything good, driving away every evil and misfortune and redeeming us from it.

Prayer to God brings illnesses to an end, cleanses lepers, gives sight to the blind, rescues men from the mouths of fierce creatures on land and in the sea, preserves life in the midst of fire, restores to life from the gates of death, resurrects even those who have died and shows them as bearers of heavenly crowns, triumphant over visible and invisible enemies. It grants wonderful tokens of victory to those who pray with all their soul. Surely, therefore, it is obvious that dangers come upon us because of our neglect and indifference towards it. “Ask,” says the Lord, “and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened” (Mat. 7:7-8). And, it says, “If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?” (Mat. 7:11). But there is hardly anyone who understands; nobody seeks God. If we perceived who it was that created man, who honored him with His own image, who gave him a place of incorruptible joy to dwell in and, when he became old and unworthy because of sin and fell from the garden of delight, renewed him through Himself, remade him and called him once again to his former glory and eternal bliss, we would not occupy our minds entirely with material, fleeting concerns. Rather we would seek those things which neither fail nor pass away, and hasten towards them.

At present it is as though we were drawing water with a vessel full of holes, or gathering treasures into a torn sack. But you have no wealth? You have no treasure? But you have the desire for these things, and that is sufficient to involve you with all kinds of evil. “Those who will be rich fall into temptations and snares of the devil,” as the great Paul says (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9). So let us, brethren, long for and seek those things which are above, that in this present life we may obtain and enjoy the things here below without suffering harm, and not lose the future, heavenly rewards in the life to come, by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong all glory, honor and worship, together with His Father without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 51*

St. Bilhild, Abbess of Altmünster in Mainz

St. Bilhild was a Franconian noblewoman born to pagan parents near Mainz. Due to incursions of the Huns, she was sent as a child to Würzburg to be raised by her aunt, who educated her in the Christian faith. Against her wishes, her parents forced her to marry a pagan duke, Hetan. Although she loved him very much, she was unable to convince him to forsake the worship of his idols. When he was killed in battle, she left her castle in Hochheim am Main and traveled to Mainz,

where she was baptized by her uncle, Archbishop Sigebert. With his help, she founded the Altmünster monastery in Mainz in the early 8th century. She is recorded as saying, “I must now think only of God and the day of Judgment.” She reposed on November 27, 734 and was buried in the abbey church; her grave soon gave off a sweet aroma, and many miracles occurred there. Her veneration is attested in the 9th century. The main part of her relics is now in St. Emmeram in Mainz. She is depicted in abbess robes, sometimes with a princely ermine, with a church model, caring for the sick. (*adapted from heilige.de*)

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable Palladius of Thessalonica (6th-7th c.).
St. James, bishop and wonderworker of Rostov (1392).
Uncovering of the relics of St. Vsevolod (Gabriel), prince and w/w of Pskov (1138).
Blessed Andrew of Symbirsk (1841).
New Hieromartyrs Nicholas archbishop of Vladimir, Basil, Boris, Theodore, Nicholas, Alexis, John, Sergius, John, Sergius, Nicholas priests, New Hieromartyrs Ioasaf, Cronides, Nicholas, Xenophon, Alexis, Appolos, Seraphim, Nicholas and Martyr John (1937).
17 Monk-martyrs in India (4th c.).
Venerable Romanus the Wonderworker of Cilicia (5th c.).
Venerable Pinuphrius of Egypt (4th c.).
Venerable Nathaniel of Nitria (6th c.).
Kursk “Root” Icon of the Mother of God
Venerable Diodorus of George Hill (Solovki) (1633).
St. Maximus of Riez (460).
Venerable Theodosius of Trnovo (1363).
St. Virgil, bishop of Salzburg (748).
St. Congar, bishop of Somerset.
St. Fergus, bishop of Glamis. (after 721)
St. Seachnall of Dunshauglin, Bishop (447)
St. Edwold of Cerne, Hermit (871)
St. Gallgo of Wales, Abbot (6th c.)
St. Acharius, Bishop of Noyon-Tournai (640)
St. Apollinaris, Abbot of Montecassino (828)
Martyrs Facundus and Primitivus of Léon (c. 300)
St. John Angeloptes, Bishop of Ravenna (433)
St. Maximus, Bishop of Riez (460)
St. Severinus, hermit near Paris (c. 540)
St. Siffred, Bishop of Carpentras (c. 540)
St. Valerian, Bishop of Aquileia (389)

New Church App!

St. Thomas Parish now has a smartphone app! Our parish family is encouraged to download the “Church Center” app on either the Apple App Store or Google Play. Once you've downloaded the App, search for our parish. From the app you can see the Church calendar, donate, participate in church groups, and be notified about important information from St. Thomas Church.



Social Team for November 27

Team 5 is up next week - Cooper, M. Blaydoe, Roberta Corson, Mary V., Steven Watts. Thank you!

Study on the Divine Liturgy Wednesday Evening

As a reminder, we are holding the Study Series: *Exploration of the Divine Liturgy* on Wednesdays in the parish hall (house behind the church) at 7:00 pm following Lay Vespers (6:30 - 7:00). In the series, will work through the Liturgy to understand why each part is there, its significance in our Corporate Worship and our personal Christian development with a goal of bringing us closer to Christ. We will look at historical writings and explanations to gain a better understanding of our Liturgy.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)