

Sunday of the Blind Man

Sixth Sunday of Pascha

20 May / 2 June

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 5: Let us, the faithful; praise and worship the Word, / Co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit, / born for our salvation from the Virgin; / for He willed to be lifted up on the cross in the flesh, / to endure death, / and to raise the dead / by His glorious Resurrection!

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 5: Thou didst descend into hell, O my Saviour, / shattering its gates as Almighty, / resurrecting the dead as Creator, / and destroying the sting of death. / Thou hadst delivered Adam from the curse, O Lover of Man, / and we cry to Thee, O Lord, save us.

Kontakion of The Sunday Of The Blind Man, Tone 4: Blinded in the eyes of my soul, I draw nigh unto Thee, O Christ, like the man blind from his birth, and in repentance I cry to Thee: Thou art the exceeding radiant Light of those in darkness.

Kondak of Pascha, Tone 8: Though Thou didst descend into the grave, O Immortal One, yet didst Thou destroy the power of Hades. And didst arise as victor, O Christ God, calling to the myrrh-bearing women: Rejoice! and giving peace unto Thine apostles: Thou Who dost grant resurrection to the fallen.



Matins Gospel VIII

Epistle: St. Acts of the Apostles 16: 16-34

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that 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 baptised. 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.

THEY SEIZED PAUL AND SILAS AND THREW THEM INTO PRISON

What could equal these souls? These men had been scourged, had received many stripes; they had been misused, were in peril of their lives, were thrust into the inner prison, and set fast in the stocks: and for all this they did not suffer themselves to sleep, but kept vigil all night. Do you mark what a blessing tribulation is? ...That the earthquake should not seem to have come of itself, there was this concurrent circumstance bearing witness to it: the doors were opened, and all their bonds were loosed. And it appears this happened in the night time, for the Apostles did not work for display but for men's salvation ...Here, they no sooner showed the doors standing open, and it opened the doors of the jailer's heart. It loosed two sorts of chains. That prisoner kindled the true light: for the light in his heart was shining ...He says immediately, 'What must I do to be saved?' What then does Paul answer? 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved: you and your house.' For this above all wins men: that one's household also should be saved ...The faith of the jailer was a voice in itself. What could be equal to this? He is put in bonds, and looses, being bound. He looses a twofold bond: him who bound him he looses by being unbound. These are indeed works of grace.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily XXXVI on Acts XVI. B#55, pp. 223-225

The Gospel According To St. John 9: 1-38

Now 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 neighbours 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 marvellous 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.

ONE THING I KNOW, THAT THOUGH I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE

Last Sunday, the Sunday of the Samaritan woman, the Holy Church told us how Christ raises a person from an earthly, carnal state of mind to the state in which a human being thirsts to worship God and pray to Him. You see, the Samaritan woman came to the well for physical water which satisfies only earthly thirst. But when Christ revealed her sins to her, and she ran to Him in repentance, then in her awakened spiritual thirst, the thirst for Living Water springing up into everlasting life, the thirst for communion with God, her first question was about prayer: where one should worship God, how to pray. Now today's Gospel gives us a model for prayer.

"As Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth" (Jn. 9:1). Being blind from birth he had never seen anyone. He could not imagine to himself the form of a man. He had never even seen Christ. He only knew that Christ was passing close by, that He was a miracle-worker and could give him sight. And he began to cry out, to call to Christ: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk. 10:47; Lk. 18:38). The people tried to quiet him; he was interfering with their listening to Christ's preaching, he was disturbing the peace. Christ was walking, surrounded by His disciples, and they asked: "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And said unto him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (Jn. 9:2-3, 6-8).

Let us imagine to ourselves the mental state of this man blind from birth. He cried out, called. They pushed him, maybe even forced him to be silent, but he still cried out, begged. Speaking in our terms, he was praying. Finally, that Miracle-Worker Who was invisible to him approached. But He did not perform an immediate miracle. On the contrary. He did something which according to human understanding might appear humiliating, unpleasant. He spat and made clay from the saliva and earth, and smeared the eyes of the blind man. But this wasn't enough; He sent him with this clay on his eyes to go wash in the pool of Siloam (which means "sent"). But the blind man didn't object, he went feeling his way, stumbling, exposed to the mockery of the passers-by. Finally he reached the pool and washed. And here, fulfilling all this, enduring all this, he finally recovered his sight and returned seeing.

This is a model of prayer for you and me. After all, we too are spiritually blind and cannot see the Lord. But we know that He exists. Let us call to Him, cry out to Him, begging for help. And let us not despond if this help is not immediately given to us. Maybe we still have to go a long way, not an easy way, like the way for the blind man to the pool of Siloam. On this path we might meet unpleasant things, humiliations, like the clay for the blind man. Let us endure everything. Let us be obedient. Let us do what He orders us to do; let us go the way He showed us, like the blind man's way to the pool of Siloam. And here, when we have fulfilled all this, then the Lord will answer our prayer, and if it pleases Him, will fulfill it. And the same will happen to us that happened to the blind man. When, through the circumstances of our life, the Lord asks us, "Dost Thou believe on the Son of God?" (Jn. 9:35), we will answer: We believe Lord! and we will worship Him.

Only let us avoid all images during the time of prayer. We must not imagine anything to ourselves; but like the blind man, let us just know that the Lord is near and that He can do anything. And if things seem to turn out opposite to our prayers, let us not be despondent. But let us hope, hope against hope. And He will do what is beneficial for us. Let us keep the state of mind of the blind man—this is the best form of prayer.

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei

Saints of the Week

20 May / 2 June — The Holy Martyr Thaleleus - born in Lebanon, his father's name being Berucius and his mother's Romylia, he was an eighteen-year-old youth, handsome and well-grown and with ginger hair. A doctor by profession, he suffered for Christ in the reign of Numerian. When he courageously confessed his faith in Christ the Lord before the judge, the latter commanded the two executioners, Alexander and Asterius, to bore through his knees, pass a rope through the pierced bone and hang him from a tree. But the executioners, as though the unseen power of God had deprived them of sight, bored through a plank and hung it on the tree. When the judge discovered this, he thought that the executioners had done it deliberately, and ordered that they be flogged. Then Alexander and Asterius cried out under the flogging: 'The Lord is alive to us; from now on, we are become Christians. We believe in Christ, and suffer for Him.' Hearing this, the judge ordered that they be beheaded. Then the judge took the awl, to bore through Thaleleus's knees himself, but his hand was paralysed and he had to ask Thaleleus to heal him, which the kindly martyr, with Christ's aid, did by his prayers. Then he was thrown into water, but showed himself alive to the judge (for Thaleleus was praying within himself that God would not have him die at once, but would let his tortures continue). When he was thrown to the wild beasts, they licked his feet and rubbed tamely round him. He was finally beheaded and entered into eternal life in 284

The Holy Martyr Asclas - Asclas suffered in the town of Antioch in Egypt during the reign of Diocletian. He was flogged, scraped, burned with candles but he remained unwavering in the Faith to the end. When the tormentor Arrian was crossing the Nile by boat Asclas, through prayer, stopped the boat in the middle of the river and would not allow it to move until Arrian wrote that he believes in Christ as the One and Almighty God. But, ascribing this miracle to a magical skill of Asclas, the tormentor forgot what he wrote and continued to torment the man of God. Finally, they tied a stone around his neck and tossed him into the Nile river. On the third day Christians found the body of Asclas along the shore with the stone around his neck (as the martyr foretold them before his death) and honourably buried him in the year 287 A.D. Leonides, the holy martyr, also suffered with him. Arrian, their tormentor, later repented, believed in Christ with his whole heart and openly began to express his faith before the pagans. The pagans also killed him and so Arrian, a one-time tormentor of Christians, was made worthy of the martyr's wreath for Christ; Our Holy Father Stephen of Piperi; St. Ethelbert, king and martyr (c793)

21 May / 3 June — The Holy Emperor Constantine and the Empress Helena - Constantine's parents were the Emperor Constantius Chlorus and the Empress Helena. Chlorus had further children by another wife, but by Helena he had only the one, Constantine. Constantine fought two great battles when he came to the throne: one against Maxentius, a tyrant in Rome, and the other against Licinius not far from Byzantium. At the battle against Maxentius, when Constantine was in great anxiety and uncertainty about his chances of success, a shining cross, surrounded by stars, appeared to him in the sky in full daylight. On the cross were written the words: 'In this sign, conquer!' The wondering Emperor ordered that a great cross be put together, like the one that had appeared, and be carried before the army. By the power of the Cross, he gained a glorious victory over enemies greatly superior in number. Maxentius drowned himself in the Tiber. Immediately after this, Constantine issued the famous Edict of Milan, in 313, to put an end to the persecution of Christians. Conquering Byzantium, he built a beautiful capital city on the Bosphorus, which from that time was named Constantinople. At this time, Constantine fell ill with leprosy. The pagan priests and doctors advised him to bathe in the blood of slaughtered children, which he refused to do. Then the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared to him and told him to seek out a bishop, Sylvester, who would heal him of the disease. The bishop instructed him in the Christian faith and baptised him, and the leprosy vanished from the Emperor's body. When there was discord in the Church about the troublesome heretic Arius, the Emperor summoned the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, in 325, where the heresy was condemned and Orthodoxy confirmed. St Helena, the Emperor's devout mother, was very zealous for the Christian faith. She visited Jerusalem and found the Precious Cross of the Lord, and built the Church of the Resurrection over Golgotha and many other churches in the Holy Land. This holy woman went to the Lord in 327, at the age of eighty. The Emperor Constantine outlived his mother by ten years and entered into rest at the age of about sixty in 337, in the city of Nicomedia. His body was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople; Our Holy Father, the Martyr Pachomius.

22 May / 4 June — The Holy Martyr Basiliscus - a kinsman of St Theodore the Tyro, he was martyred together with Eutropius and Cleonimus (March 3rd). When these two were crucified and gave up the ghost, Basiliscus was taken back to prison. A change of governors occurring at this time, Basiliscus remained a long time confined in prison. He besought God with tears that He would not deprive him of a martyr's death for His sake. After he had prayed at length, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and promised to fulfil his desire, sending him to his village to say farewell to his mother and brothers. Thereupon the new

governor, Agrippa, arrived and sent to have Basiliscus brought from the village immediately. On the way to the city of Amasea, the Lord worked great wonders through His martyr, bringing many of the people to faith in Christ. Agrippa ordered the martyr to offer sacrifice to Apollyon. "Apollyon" means "Destroyer", said Basiliscus, and, with fervent prayer, he knocked the idol to dust and burned the temple with fire from heaven. The terrified Agrippa attributed this all to magic, and ordered that Basiliscus be beheaded with the sword. Agrippa immediately became insane and, in his madness, went to the place of execution, found a little of the martyr's blood in the dust and smeared it on himself under his belt, being restored to health by it. Having come to his senses, he was baptised. Later, a certain Marinus, a citizen of Comana (the place of Basiliscus's execution) built a church over the martyr's relics, and many of the sick found healing there.

The Holy Martyr John Vladimir, King of Serbia - John Vladimir was of princely lineage from Zahumlje. His grandfather was called Hvalimir and his father Petrislav. As a ruler, he was wise, merciful, meek, chaste and brave. He fervently prayed to God and voluntarily built churches and supported them. However, he had difficult struggles both internally and externally. Internally, from heretics and the Bogomils and externally from Tsar Samuel and Tsar Basil who wanted to conquer him. Samuel deceitfully captured him and cast him into prison. While he languished in prison an angel of God appeared to him and foretold that he would shortly be freed, but that he would die a martyr's death. Getting to know him better, Samuel grew to like him and gave his daughter Kosara to be his wife. When Samuel died, his son Radomir was crowned Tsar. But Vladislav, his twin brother, slew Radomir and deceitfully summoned Vladimir and beheaded him in the year 1015 A.D. The relics of this saintly king repose uncorrupt in his monastery near Elbasan and over his relics, throughout the ages and even today, numerous miracles occur. In 1925, a church was built to honor this crowned martyr adjacent to the monastery of St. Nahum since John Vladimir was the benefactor of this glorious monastery.

The Second Ecumenical Council - This Council was called during the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great in Constantinople in the year 381 A.D. Its goal was to confirm the Orthodox teaching concerning the Holy Spirit about Whom the Patriarch Macedonius of Constantinople erroneously taught. He erroneously taught that the Holy Spirit is God's creature and not a divine person [Hypostasis] equal to the Father and Son and One in essence with Them in the Holy Trinity. Macedonius was condemned by this Council and the teaching about the Holy Spirit was added to the Nicene Symbol of Faith [the Nicene Creed].

Holy and Righteous Melchisedek, King of Salem - Melchisedek was a contemporary of our forefather Abraham. According to the words of the Apostle Paul he was a king, priest and proto-type of the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7).

23 May / 5 June — Fast Day - St Michael, Bishop of Synnada - from his childhood, this wise and holy hierarch consecrated himself to the service of Christ. He laboured in asceticism together with Saint Theophylact of Nicomedia. Once, in a time of drought, these two holy men caused an abundance of rain to fall on the earth by their prayers. Because of the life of asceticism and chastity that Michael had led from his early youth, he was chosen and consecrated by Patriarch Tarasius as Bishop of Synnada. He took part in the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787. At the wish of the Emperor, he visited Caliph Harun al-Rashid to conduct peace negotiations. In the time of the wicked Emperor Leo the Armenian, he was deposed from his episcopal throne for his veneration of the holy icons and sent into exile, where he died in want and poverty, faithful to Orthodoxy to the end. He entered into the Kingdom of Christ the King in 818.

Our Holy Father, the Martyr Michael - After the death of his parents, Michael distributed all of his goods to the poor and went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Following that, he entered the monastery of St. Sabas the Sanctified where he was tonsured a monk. Michael was quite young and of a handsome countenance but, from much fasting, he appeared withered and pale. At that time, the Arabs ruled Jerusalem. One day Michael was sent by his spiritual father to the city to sell his handiworks. He was met on the streets by the eunuch of the Arabian queen who brought him to her to display his handiworks. When the queen saw this handsome monk she became inflamed with unclean passion and proposed carnal sin to the monk as once did the wife of Potiphar to the chaste Joseph. When Michael rejected the impure offer and began to flee, the angry queen ordered that he be beaten with canes and after that brought him to the king with the charge that he blasphemed the faith of Muhammad. The king proposed that Michael embrace the Islamic faith, but he refused. He was then given a potent poison to drink. Michael drank the poison but nothing happened to him. Then the king ordered Michael to be beheaded in the centre of Jerusalem. Monks discovered his body and removed it to the monastery of St. Sabas where they honourably buried him. St. Michael suffered for Christ and was glorified in the ninth century

Our Holy Mother Euphrosyne, Princess of Polotsk - the daughter of Prince Vseslav of Polotsk. When her parents wanted to betroth her, she fled to a convent and was tonsured a nun. An angel of the Lord appeared to her three times and revealed to her where she must establish a new convent for virgins. She even attracted her sister Eudocia to the monastic life and many other maidens from the ranks of the aristocracy. Her cousin, Zvenislava, by birth Princess Borisov, brought all of her riches, clothes and precious stones and said: "All the beauty of this world, I consider vanity and these adornments prepared for my marriage, I give to the Church of the Savior and I, myself, wish to be betrothed to Him in a spiritual marriage and place my head beneath His good and easy yoke." Euphrosyne also tonsured her a nun and gave her the name Eupraxia. In her old age, Euphrosyne desired to die in Jerusalem and for that she prayed to God. God heard her prayers and, indeed, when she visited Jerusalem she died there. Euphrosyne was buried in the monastery of St. Theodosius on May 23, 1173 A.D.

Troparion, Ascension of the Lord, Tone IV — Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, having gladdened Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. And this blessing convinced them that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

Kontakion, Ascension of the Lord, Tone VI — Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere separated from those who love Thee, but remaining everpresent with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you.

“He Ascended into Heaven.”

Four of the greatest miracles of Christianity are: the Son of God becoming the Son of man, the Resurrection, the Ascension into heaven, and His coming again to judge the world. It was a great day for our planet when the Son of God appeared upon it in the likeness of our flesh. It was a momentous day when He rose from the grave. It was a majestic day for the Church when a cloud received Him out of sight. It will be an even greater day for the world when the ascended Christ shall return in glory.



Let us concentrate on the miracle of the Ascension: what it is and what it means.

Just as the Lord Jesus came to earth in a supernatural way so He left in a supernatural way. One of the best descriptions of the Ascension is found in Acts 1:9-11, “And when he (Jesus) had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”

“Lifted Up.”

The words “and when he was lifted up” do not mean that Jesus was elevated so many feet above sea level. They mean that through His ascension Jesus entered a higher existence. When a school boy says that he has been promoted to a higher class, we do not take him to mean that he was transferred from a classroom on the ground floor to one upstairs. Likewise, the words “and he was lifted up” mean that Jesus was promoted to glory, to a different realm of life, to heaven.

It is interesting to note that when one does go “up” into outer space, one enters a new and different realm than what we know here on earth. For example, scientists tell us that by the end of this century we will be able to break the light barrier just as we did the sound barrier. In other words, men will be able to travel at the speed of light, i.e., 186,000 miles per second. To reach the nearest star at that speed would require ten years: five years to go and five to return. We here on earth will be ten years older when the astronauts return but they will be only ten days older. Why? Because when they break the light barrier, they reach the point where time almost ceases to exist. Time in space is not as it is here on earth. It is a completely different realm. So it is that when the New Testament says that Jesus “was lifted up,” it means to say that He entered a new realm of life completely different from what we know here on earth.

“A cloud took Him out of their sight.”

In the Bible, a cloud is a sign of the presence of God. It was a cloud which enveloped Mt. Sinai as God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was transfigured we read that “a bright cloud overshadowed them” (Matthew 17:5). It was probably from a cloud that God’s voice came when Jesus was baptized saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased.” So when we read in Acts, “A cloud took him out of their sight,” it means that Jesus entered into the very presence of God.

Why did He go Away?

Why did Jesus go away when there was so much He could have done here on earth? The answer was given by Jesus Himself: “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). Jesus tells us here that His human form will be replaced by the presence of the Counselor, the Helper, the Holy Spirit. He will bring us into much closer contact with Jesus than His human form could bring about.

Seen in this light, the Ascension and Pentecost are not two separate holy days. The Ascension is a prelude to Pentecost. Jesus goes away that He may send the Holy Spirit. He goes away in order to change the form by which He will work among us. Now He will work through us, the Spirit-filled, Christ-filled members of His body, the Church.

Humanity Ascends with Christ.

Jesus came down from heaven as the Eternal Son of the Father, but when He went back to the seat of honor and glory at God’s right hand, He took with Him our human nature. He returned to His Father as God-man. It was our nature, in everything except its sin, that sat down at the right hand of God. The Son of God descended to become one of us and ascended to enable us to ascend with Him. Through the ascension and enthronement of Christ, all human nature has been enthroned at the right hand of the Father. Since the manhood of Jesus was taken up to the heavenly places, our manhood will also be taken

up. The Ascension is proof that man was made for heaven not for the grave, for glory not for corruption. St. Paul does not hesitate to describe Christians as “enthroned above the heavens, in Christ Jesus.”

He Ascends to Reign.

The Ascension was the enthronement of Jesus. It was His coronation as King of the Universe. Jesus ascends into heaven to resume His universal rule and dominion. This is brought out beautifully in one of the icons of the Ascension where the iconographer depicts the ascending Christ as growing larger and larger until the earth itself becomes no bigger than a ball which He holds in His hand. In other words, through His ascension Christ is no longer a prisoner of space and time. He is no longer confined to Palestine in the first century A.D. He now transcends space and time as Ruler of the Universe.

A Friend Awaits us in Heaven.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He passed into another world, spiritual, invisible, yet just as real as the world in which we live today. This tells us that we mortals may be at home somewhere else in this vast universe than on earth. “I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also,” said Jesus. The Ascension gives us the certainty that we have a Friend not only on earth, but also in heaven. He is our forerunner who has gone on before us to prepare for our arrival. To die is not to go out into the dark; it is to go to Him.

He Will come Again.

The message of the ascension concludes with the announcement of the return of Christ: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The Ascended Jesus is Lord of the future. He will return one day in the same manner as He ascended. He left in person, He will come back in person. He left in His glorified body, He will come back in His glorified body. He left in sight of men, He will return in sight of men. Only then, as we read in Revelation, not a mere handful of select disciples, but “every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7). Before His judgement seat will appear every person who ever lived. No Christian can take lightly his ultimate appearance before God — when all his thoughts, words and deeds will be laid bare. The great mystery of God’s grace is that He who will judge the world is the same One who gave His life to save the world!

He Prays for Us.

Jesus ascended into heaven not to end His work for us but to continue it — this time as our great intercessor before the throne of God. Even before His Ascension Jesus prayed to God for us. He prayed for His disciples, especially for Peter that his faith might not fail him. In His sublime prayer at the last supper He prayed for all Christian believers, past, present and future. Now that He is in heaven He continues this intercession. “. . . who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34).

If it helps to know at times that some wife or little child, or blessed mother or father, or true friend is praying for us, if the thought of those prayers helps and strengthens and purifies, so that our hearts are brave again and strong, how much more will it help us to remember that the Ascended Christ is now our great intercessor in heaven ever praying for each one of us?

“While He Blessed them...”

St. Luke records that as Jesus was ascending into heaven, He raised His hands in blessing: “Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them” (Luke 24:50-51). His whole life among us was a blessing. He died as a blessing. He rose as a blessing. He left His followers with a blessing. In almost every icon He is pictured with His hand lifted up in blessing. It is His blessing that the priest bestows upon the congregation when he says, “Peace be with you.” And now through His Church He seeks to enrich all of us with the greatest blessing there is: the promise of pardon and peace and life with God.

A Continuing Ascension.

Our Lord promised the disciples that they would see “heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” What do these words mean, “the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”? They refer to the continued presence of Christ in the world even after His ascension. Christ’s coming into the world marks the opening of heaven. He came down the ladder from heaven and ever since then heaven has remained open. We may say that Christ Himself is the ladder — the only way to the Father and to heaven. There is a constant stream of traffic on that ladder. Those angels ever going up and coming down are our prayers. Up to gain help and inspiration — down to bring a little bit of heaven, a breath of Godly air into this world of struggling humanity. “Prayer,” writes St. John of the Ladder, “is a continuous ascension to heaven.” We may add, so is the liturgy and the reading of God’s word — a continuous ascension to where God is.

For Us.

In conclusion we remember that everything Jesus did, He did for us. For us He ascended into heaven. For us He sits at the right hand of the Father. For us He pleads and prays. For us He has gone to prepare a place in the presence of God. For us He has opened heaven that our prayers may ever ascend to Him. For us He shall come again to take us unto Himself that we may ever be with the Lord.

Anthony M. Coniaris - Gems from the Sunday and Feasts Gospels

Our Holy Father Simeon Stylites of the Wonderful Mountain - This wonderful and holy man was born in Antioch in 522, in the reign of the Emperor Justin I the Elder. His father perished in an earthquake and he was left alone with his mother, Martha. When he was six years old, he went away into the desert to John, a spiritual teacher there and, under his guidance, gave himself to a strict asceticism of fasting and prayer, to the wonderment of all who saw him. Whilst enduring fearful demonic trials, he received great comfort and grace from the Lord and His angels. Christ the Lord appeared to him in the form of a handsome youth, and, after this vision, Simeon's heart was inflamed with great love for Christ. He spent many years on a pillar, praying and singing psalms. Led by God, he took himself off to the mountain called 'Wonderful' by the Lord Himself, and is known as 'of the Wonderful Mountain' because of this. The measure of his love for God was such that rare grace was given him, by the help of which he was able to heal every sort of illness, tame wild beasts and perceive the most distant regions of the earth and the hearts of men. He was taken out of the body and saw the heavens, conversed with angels, harried the demons, prophesied, spent thirty days at a time without sleep and even longer without food, receiving nourishment at the hands of angels. The words of the Saviour: 'He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do' (Jn 14:12), were completely fulfilled in him. In the year 596, at the age of seventy-five, Simeon went to the Lord, to the eternal enjoyment of the vision of the face of God in the company of the angels.

The Holy Martyr Meletius Stratelates along with 1218 Soldiers and their wives and children - Meletius was accused of demolishing a pagan temple during the reign of Emperor Antoninus. Nailed to a tree, Meletius gave up his holy soul. Many soldiers under his the command, who refused to deny Christ their Lord, suffered with him. They all honourably suffered in the eleventh century and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the God;

Our Holy Father Nikita Stylites - As a youth, Nicetas lived an unrestrained and sinful life. Entering into church by chance, he heard the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "*Wash yourselves (from sin) and you will be clean*" ([Isaiah 1:16](#)). These words entered deeply into his heart and caused a complete turnabout in his life. Nicetas left his home, wife, property and entered a monastery near Pereyaslav, where he lived an ascetical life of difficult mortifications until his death. He wrapped chains around himself and enclosed himself in a pillar for which reason he was called a Stylite. God endowed him with abundant grace so that he healed men of various tribulations. He cured Prince Michael Chernigov of palsy. Certain evil doers spotted the chains on him and, because of their brightness, thought they were made of silver. They killed him one night, removed the chains and carried them away. This occurred on May 16, 1186 A.D. After his death, he appeared to the Elder Simeon and ordered that his discovered chains be placed next to his body in the tombs;

St. Vincent of Lerins - + c 445. Perhaps of a noble family in Gaul, in early life he followed a military career but abandoned it to become a monk at Lérins in southern France. He is best known as the writer of the *Commonitorium*, where he formulates the Orthodox principle that the only true teachings are those which have been held 'everywhere, always and by all the faithful' (*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*). It is the Church which interprets the Scriptures and is the source of the Faith.

25 May / 7 June — Fast Day - The Third Finding of the Head of St John the Baptist - in the eighth century, during a period of fierce iconoclasm, the head of St John the Baptist was taken to Comana, the place of St John Chrysostom's exile. When the iconoclast persecution ended in 850, in the time of the Emperor Michael and Patriarch Ignatius, the honoured head of St John was taken to Constantinople and placed in the church at the imperial court.

The Hieromartyr Therapon, Bishop of Cyprus - Therapontus was a monk and an ascetic on the island of Cyprus. He was found worthy of the episcopal rank, but during the time of the persecution of Christians, he was found worthy of an even greater wreath, the crown of martyrdom. His body reposed in a church on Cyprus. When, during the reign of Emperor Nicephorus in the year 806 A.D., the island of Cyprus was attacked by the Hagarenes, the saint appeared to the sexton of that church and told him that the infidels will attack Cyprus and ordered him to remove his relics to Constantinople. The sexton did this immediately. While the boat was travelling on the sea with the reliquary, a great storm arose but the sea was calm around the boat and a sweet-smelling fragrance emitted around the entire boat in all directions. The sexton opened the reliquary and everyone witnessed that it was filled with myrrh [oil] which flowed from the saint's relics. By rubbing themselves with this oil, many of the sick were healed. A church was built in Constantinople over the relics of this miracle-worker, who continued to grant healing to all those who with faith touched them. By the Grace of God, the gravest illness of possession, of cancer, of haemorrhaging, of insanity, of blindness, of barrenness and of various other maladies were cured by the relics of St. Therapontus

The Holy Martyrs Pasicrates, Valentian, Julius and others - They were all Roman soldiers. They all suffered for Christ in Macedonian Dorostol about the year 302 A.D. When Pasicrates' brother Papias, who apostatized from Christ because of fear, began to persuade him to deny Christ and remain alive, St. Pasicrates answered him: "Depart from me, you are not my brother!" Pasicrates and Valentian were beheaded together. At the trial, St. Julius said: "I am a veteran; for twenty-six years I have faithfully served the emperor and since I was faithful to a lesser one, how can I not be faithful to a greater one?" i.e., to the Heavenly King. After that, Nicander was brought before Maximus the Perfect. Nicander's wife encouraged her husband to die for Christ. "Foolish old woman" Maximus said to her angrily, "You just want a better husband." The woman answered him: "If you think that of me, give the order and let them kill me now before my husband!" Marcian was also slain with Nicander. Marcian's wife approached the scaffold carrying her son in her arms. Marcian kissed his son and prayed to God: "O All-powerful Lord, You take care of him!" Following that, they were beheaded and were translated into the kingdom of Christ

St. Aldhelm, bishop of Sherbourne. - 639-709. Born in Wessex in England, he became a monk at Malmesbury and taught there. In 675 he became abbot and in 705 first Bishop of Sherbourne. Aldhelm was the first Englishman to attain distinction as a scholar

May 26 / June 8 — Holy Apostle Carpus - One of the Seventy, he was a follower and companion of the Apostle Paul, who installed him as Bishop of Varna in Thrace. But he also preached the Gospel in Crete, where he was host to St Dionysius the Areopagite. St Dionysius testifies that he was a man with an exceptionally pure mind, of great humility and guilelessness. He further relates how the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to Carpus in a vision with His angels, and how he never began the Liturgy without first receiving a heavenly vision. He endured many assaults for the name of Christ, and finally suffered at the hands of the faithless Jews and was murdered. His soul entered into the Kingdom of God, to delight forever in the vision of the Lord in glory; The Holy Apostle Alphaeus - the father of two of the Twelve Apostles: James the son of Alphaeus and Matthew the Evangelist. He entered peacefully into rest; Our Holy Father John of Psychaita ; The Holy New Martyr Alexander of Salonica; **St. Augustine of Canterbury, evangeliser of England (c.605)** — a native of Italy and a disciple of Felix, Bishop of Messana. He became prior of the Monastery of St Andrew on the Celian Hill in Rome, and was chosen by Saint Gregory the Great to lead a mission of forty monks to evangelise the Anglo-Saxon peoples of Britain. He arrived in 597 A.D., landing at Ebbsfleet in Kent. He was given a guarded welcome by King Ethelbert, being allowed to centre his mission on the ancient church of St Martin in Canterbury. Subsequently he brought the pagan king to the Christian Faith, baptising him and many thousands of his people. He was consecrated Bishop by St Virgilius of Arles, built the first cathedral in Canterbury and founded the Monastery of Sts Peter and Paul there, which, now in ruins, is more commonly called St Augustine's. He was instrumental in founding the English dioceses at Rochester and London, consecrating Sts Justus and Mellitus as their bishops. He also helped the king draft the earliest Anglo-Saxon written laws and founded a school in Canterbury. He was known as a miracleworker in his lifetime, and he reposed in the Lord in the year 604 on 26th May. He was laid to rest near the as yet unfinished monastery Church of Sts Peter and Paul, and in 613 A.D., when it was dedicated, his sacred relics were placed within the church. Along with his Elder, the Pope St Gregory, he is rightly called the Apostle of the English. He was the founder of the English Church and hierarchy which remained Orthodox in faith and an integral part of the One Church founded by our Saviour for four and a half centuries. The many saints of that period are his spiritual children. Through his prayers may the Lord grant that those people of England who are now returning to the Apostolic and Orthodox faith receiving the one Baptism of the Church, might in this life and in the next be counted among that company of saints, the flock of St Augustine; Queen Bertha, apostle to the Anglo-Saxons at Kent.