

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
TWELFTH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW



Icon of Saints Balibas, Moses and Hermione -- September 4

September 4, 2011
12TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Tone 3

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 5 - SEPTEMBER 11

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 – NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS
 9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy Special Intention

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11 – 13TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
 9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy For All Parishioners

Please Note: On Sunday, September 25, Fr. James will be in Chicago for the Jubilee celebrations. On that Sunday, Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at **12:00 noon**. Fr. Robert Pipta has agreed to serve our community that day.

Collection for St. Andrew Orthodox Church. Over the last two weeks we collected \$624.00 to assist our Orthodox brothers and sisters at St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Los Angeles following the vandalism and desecration of their church. Thank you for your generosity!

Parish Meeting

The next parish meeting, originally scheduled for October 16, has been moved to October 23 due to a scheduling conflict. Please make every effort to attend. Further information regarding our financial situation will be given and elections for the Pastoral Council will take place.

Generations of Faith:
Mark your Calendars

September 18

The unique contribution of the Eastern Church to the transformation of the World.

November 20:

The Divine Liturgy - Preparation and Proskomedia.

January 19:

The Divine Liturgy - From “Blessed is the Kingdom” to the Gospel.

March 18:

The Divine Liturgy - From the Gospel to the Great Entrance

May 20:

The Divine Liturgy – The *Anaphora* and Holy Communion.

August 2011 Finances				
Collections	Rent	Other donations	Expenses	Difference
\$3030	\$2500	\$280	\$10000	-\$4190

What is tithing?

In Sacred Scripture, tithing is the setting aside of 10% of the “first fruits” of one’s labors. Many Protestant congregations strongly encourage and sometimes even require their faithful to tithe. While we don’t require it, I certainly encourage you to consider tithing. If not 10%, perhaps 5%.

If your monthly income is:

**A 10% tithe would be
per month**

**A 5% tithe would be
per month**

\$1,000
 \$2,000
 \$4,000
 \$6,000
 etc...

\$100
 \$200
 \$400
 \$600

\$50
 \$100
 \$200
 \$300



COMMUNION AS SALVATION

by Fr. Stephen Freeman

Few things are as fundamental to the New Testament as the reality of communion (*koinonia*). It means a commonality, a sharing and participation in the same thing. It is this commonality or sharing that lies at the very heart of our salvation. This communion is described in Christ's "high priestly prayer."

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:20-23).

The unity for which Christ prays is no mere "quality" of our life in Christ – but is our life in Christ. That this unity (communion) is the very life of salvation is made clear in St. John's first epistle:

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have communion [*koinonia*] with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have communion [*koinonia*] with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7).

Here our communion with God is described as a communion of light - though the nature of that light is made clear: God is light. St. John uses light to say that our communion is a true participation in God, in His very life.

This same saving participation in the life of God is presented in Christ's discourse on the Eucharist:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (John 6:53-57).

Some time ago I wrote about the problem of many modern English translations in which *koinonia* is rendered "fellowship," a very weak translation indeed. Our very life in Christ is trivialized by unwitting (I hope) translators into a noun used to describe church socials. It is a witness to how far removed many modern treatments of our saving relationship with Christ have become from the classic treatments of Orthodox tradition.

The compartmentalization of theology (ethics, soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology – and the list goes on) frequently results in a fragmented, disjointed account of the Christian life. When you view the massive tomes that comprise the average systematic theology it is a marvel that the New Testament manages to be so short.

A telling weakness of many "theologies" is their failure to give account for the most common aspects of our Christian life. Prayer is a very straightforward example. Many systematic presentations of theology have no treatment of prayer whatsoever, despite the fact that we are bidden to "pray without ceasing." How is it that something so pervasive finds no place in a theological description?

It is just this kind of spiritual myopia that marks theology that has departed from the Tradition of the faith and set off on its own trail of creativity. Thus, much has been written on "predestination" (a word which occurs but a few times in all the New Testament) while prayer is relegated to lesser treatments in what

amounts to a category of recreational reading.

The Tradition does not treat prayer in this manner. Prayer is so much at the heart of the teaching of the faith that it is stated: *Lex orandi, lex credendi* - "the law of praying is the law of believing." This is far more than saying that liturgy preserves the most primitive and pure proclamations of the gospel (though this is true). It is also saying that prayer itself is a pure expression of the gospel.

This becomes particularly clear when prayer is understood to be communion [*koinonia*] with God. And it is not prayer alone of which this can be said: the whole of the Christian life – every sacrament of the Church – has as its foundation our saving participation in the life of God.

I offer here some thoughts from a post in 2007 on communion with God:

One of the best places to begin thinking about communion with God is to ask the question: "What is wrong with the human race?" What is it about us such that we need saving?

The answer to that question is perhaps the linchpin of Christian theology (at least what has been revealed to us). Among the most central of Orthodox Christian doctrines is that human beings have fallen out of communion with God – we have severed the bond of communion with which we were created and thus we are no longer in communion with the Lord and Giver of Life, we no longer have a share in His Divine Life, but instead have become partakers of death.

St. Athanasius describes this in his work: *On the Incarnation of the Word*:

"For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was

making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore, when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good. By nature, of course, man is mortal, since he was made from nothing; but he bears also the Likeness of Him Who is, and if he preserves that Likeness through constant contemplation, then his nature is deprived of its power and he remains incorrupt. So is it affirmed in Wisdom : 'The keeping of His laws is the assurance of incorruption.'" (Wisdom 6. 18)

This lack of communion with God, this process of death at work in us, manifests itself in a myriad of ways, extending from moral failure, to death and disease itself. It corrupts everything around us – our relationships with other people and our families, our institutions and our best intentions.

Without intervention, the process of death results in the most final form of death – complete alienation and enmity with God (from our point of view). We come to hate all things righteous and good. We despise the Light and prefer darkness. Since this is the state of human beings who have cut themselves off from communion with God, we substitute many things and create a "false" life, mistaking wealth, fame, youth, sex, emotions, etc., for true life.

Orthodox Christian faith does not generally view humanity as having a "legal" problem. It is not that we did something wrong and now owe a debt we cannot pay, or are being punished with death – though such a metaphor can be used and has its usefulness. But we need more than a change in our legal status – we need a change in our ontological status – that is we must be filled with nothing less than the Life of God in order to be healed, forgiven and made new. Jesus did not come to make bad men good; He came to make

dead men live.

Thus God came into our world, becoming one of us, so that by His sharing in our life, we might have a share in His life. In Holy Baptism we are united to Him, and everything else He gives us in the Life of His Church is for the purpose of strengthening, nurturing, and renewing this Life within us. All of the sacraments have this as their focus. It is the primary purpose of prayer.

Thus, stated simply, to have communion with God means to have a share in His Divine Life. He lives in me and I in Him. I come to know God even as I know myself. I come to love even as God loves because it is His love that dwells in me. I come to forgive as God forgives because it His mercy that dwells within me.

Without such an understanding of communion, many vitally important parts of the Christian life are reduced to mere moralisms. We are told to love our enemies as though it were a simple moral obligation. Instead, we love our enemies because God loves our enemies, and we want to live in the Life of God. We're not trying to be good, or to prove anything to God by

loving our enemies. It is simply the case that if the Love of God dwells in us, then we will love as God loves.

Of course all of this is the free gift of God, though living daily in communion with God is difficult. The disease of broken communion that was so long at work in us is difficult to cure. It takes time and we must be patient with ourselves and our broken humanity – though never using this as an excuse not to seek the healing that God gives.

We were created for communion with God – it is our very life. Thinking about communion with God is not a substitute for communion with God. Theology as abstraction has no life within it. Theology is a life lived in Christ. Thus there is the common saying within Orthodoxy: “a theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian.”

“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

This is our salvation.

Did You Know?

- Most people come to church because of a personal invitation.
- Only 2% of church-going people invite someone to church in a given year.
- That means 98% of churchgoers never extend an invitation in a given year!
- 7 out of 10 unchurched people have never been invited to church in their whole lives.
- 82% of the unchurched are at least somewhat likely to attend church if invited.
- The top “rational” reason adults seldom or never attend church is they don’t agree with organized religion or what they preach (24 percent).
- The top “practical” reasons for hardly attending or missing church altogether, 21 percent said they don’t have time or they don’t get around to it.
- Children and youth who attend religious services weekly, exhibit fewest behavior problems, are more likely to have high-quality relationships with their parents, and are more likely to exhibit positive social behavior, including showing respect for teachers and neighbors, getting along with other children, understanding other people’s feelings, and trying to resolve conflicts with classmates, family or friends.
- September 18, 2011 is National Back To Church Sunday! Who will you invite?



**Українська Греко-Католицька Церква
Святого Йоана Хрестителя
St. John the Baptizer
Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church**

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La Mesa, CA 91941
Parish Office: (619) 697-5085

Website: stjohnthebaptizer.org

Pastor: Fr. James Bankston

Парох: о. Яків Бенкстон

frjames@mac.com

Fr. James' cell phone: (619) 905-5278

Christ and the Law

When Christ says to him, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments," the man expects Him to add immediately, "my commandments." "Which ones?" he asks. He was quite deceived in his expectation. For Christ did not answer him as he expected but simply pointed him to the law.

This is not because the law is perfection, for "no one is justified by the law," as it is written, but because the life lived according to law is a kind of introduction to the eternal life, briefly acquainting trainees to the things above. "For the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ."

The law is the starting point for social justice. Christ is the perfection. For the beginning of good is to act justly, He says. Just action then is shown by the law, but goodness is shown by Christ. The law taught us to repay those who wish to harm us, as in "eye for eye, tooth for tooth."

But Christ taught us to let go such balanced vengeance with a view to the greater good, teaching that "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well."

St. Cyril of Alexandria