

# Sunday of the Blind Man

## Sixth Sunday of Pascha

### & Sts. Cyril and Methodius

11 May / 24 May



**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!

**Troparion of Ss Cyril and Methodios tone 4:** O Cyril and Methodios, Equals-to-the-Apostles and teachers of the Slavonic lands, / pray to Christ our God to strengthen all nations in Orthodoxy in one spirit, / to convert and reconcile the world to God, and to save our souls.

**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.

**Kontakion of Ss Cyril and Methodios tone 3:** Let us honour our two holy enlighteners, / who by translating the divine writings / have poured forth a well-spring of knowledge from which we still draw today. / We call you blessed, O Cyril and Methodios / as you stand before God intercede fervently for our souls.

**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*

for the Saints: Heb . 7:26-8:2

### 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*

for the Saints: Matt . 5:14-19

### Saints of the Week

**11 / 24 May — Ss Cyril and Methodius, Equal to the Apostles** - brothers from Salonica, of eminent and wealthy parents, Leo and Maria. The elder brother, Methodius, spent ten years as an officer among the Slavs in Macedonia, and thus learned the Slavic language. After that, Methodius went off to Olympus and gave himself to monastic asceticism, and Cyril (Constantine) later joined him there. When the Khazarite king, Kagan, sought preachers of the Christian faith from the Emperor Michael, the Emperor commanded that these two brothers be found and sent to the Khazars. They converted Kagan to the Christian faith and baptised him, together with a great number of his nobles and an even greater number of the people. After some time, they returned to Constantinople, where they compiled a Slavic alphabet of 38 letters and began to translate the service books from Greek into Slavonic. At the invitation of Prince Rastislav, they went to Moravia, where, with great devotion, they spread and confirmed the Faith, made more copies of the books, brought them priests and taught the young. They went to Rome at the invitation of the Pope, and Cyril fell ill and died there, on February 14th, 869. Then Methodius returned to Moravia and laboured at the confirming of the Faith among the Slavs until his death. After his death—he entered into rest in the Lord on April 6th, 885 —his disciples, the Five Followers, with St Clement as bishop at the beginning, crossed the Danube and moved towards the south, to Macedonia, where, from Ochrid, they continued the work among the Slavs that Cyril and Methodius had begun in the north; The Hieromartyr Mocius;

**St Nicodemus, Archbishop of Pec** - This great hierarch was a Serb by birth. He lived a life of asceticism on Holy Mt. Athos and was abbot of Hilendar Monastery. Following the death of Sava III, he was elected as the Archbishop of "All the Serbs and the Coastal Lands" in the year 1317 A.D. Nicodemus crowned King Milutin in the year 1321 A.D. He translated the Jerusalem Typikon into Serbian. [The Typikon is a book containing the rubrics (directions) for the celebration of the Divine Mysteries and other offices of the Orthodox Church.] In the introduction of this book, Nicodemus says: "Almighty God, Who knows our weaknesses, will give us spiritual strength, but only if we first display effort." He sincerely loved the ascetical life and laboured to strengthen it throughout the Serbian land. He laboured relentlessly to uproot the Bogomil heresy and to strengthen the Orthodox Faith. He died in the Lord in the year 1325 A.D. His miracle-working relics repose in the monastery in Pec.; St. Comgall, founder and abbot of Bangor (c.601); St. Mayeul, abbot of Cluny (994).

**12 / 25 May — St Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus** - born a Jew, but, seeing the power of the Christian faith, was baptised together with his sister, Callithrope. He became a monk at the age of twenty-six, in the monastery of St Hilarion. He later founded a monastery of his own, and became famed throughout Palestine and Egypt for his asceticism, his spiritual wisdom and the wonders he worked. Fleeing the praise of men, he went off to Egypt. On the way, he met Paphnutius the Great, who prophesied that he would be a hierarch on the island of Cyprus. And indeed, many years later, by God's providence, Epiphanius came to Cyprus, where he was unexpectedly chosen as bishop. He became bishop of the town of Salamis at the age of fifty, and governed the Church of God for thirty-six years. In all, he lived nearly ninety years on this earth, and entered into

rest from this life to live eternally in the Kingdom of Christ. Before his death, he was invited to Constantinople by the Emperor Arcadius and his wife, Eudoxia, for the Council of Bishops which was forced, at the desire of the Emperor and Empress, to condemn St John Chrysostom. Arriving in Constantinople, he came to the Emperor's court, where the Emperor and Empress talked with him at great length, endeavouring to make him declare against Chrysostom. The citizens and Chrysostom heard that Epiphanius had agreed with the Emperor against him. Chrysostom therefore wrote him a letter: 'My brother Epiphanius, I hear that you have advised the Emperor that I should be banished: know that you will never again see your episcopal throne.' To this, Epiphanius wrote in return: 'John, my suffering brother, withstand insults, but know that you will not reach the place to which you are exiled.' And these two prophecies of the two saints soon came about. Refusing to agree with the Emperor on the exile of Chrysostom, Epiphanius took ship and set off for Cyprus, but died on the voyage. The Emperor sent Chrysostom into exile in Armenia, but the saint died on the road. Saint Epiphanius entered into rest in the year 403. Of his many writings the best-known is his 'Medicine Chest', in Greek, in which he explains and refutes eight heresies;

**St Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople** - Germanus was the son of the head imperial senator who was killed by Emperor Constantine Pogonatus. This same evil emperor castrated the senator's son, Germanus, and forcibly banished him to a monastery. As a monk, Germanus shone like a star by his life and good works. Because of that, he was chosen as the first bishop of Cyzicus and, when Anastasius II was crowned emperor, Germanus was elected as patriarch of Constantinople. As patriarch he baptized the ill-reputed Copronymos who, during the time of his baptism, soiled the water with his uncleanness. Then the patriarch prophesied that this child, when he becomes emperor, will introduce into the Holy Church some impure heresy. And this happened. When Copronymos became emperor, he restored the heresy of the iconoclasts. Leo Isaurian, the father of Copronymos, initiated the persecution of icons and when Patriarch Germanus protested, the arrogant Leo cried out: "I am emperor and priest!" He removed Germanus from the patriarchal throne and banished him to a monastery where this saint lived for ten more years until the Lord called him to Himself and to the heavenly kingdom in the year 740 A.D.; The Holy Martyr Pancras.

**13 / 26 May — The Holy Martyr Glykeria** - daughter of a governor of Rome, she became poor after her father's death and went to live in Trajanopolis in Thrace. In the time of the wicked Emperor Antoninus, Glykeria was brought to offer sacrifice to the idol of Zeus. She traced the Cross on her forehead and, when the governor asked her where was her lamp (for they all carried lamps in their hands), Glykeria indicated the Cross on her forehead and said: 'This is my lamp!' At her prayers, the idol was struck by lightning and broken into pieces. The governor was furious with her and commanded that she be thrown into prison. He sealed the door of the prison, intending to starve the maiden to death, but an angel of God appeared to Glykeria and gave her heavenly food. After a certain time, when the governor reckoned that the maiden must have died of hunger, he opened the prison and was astounded to see her in good health, bright and merry. The warder, Laodicius, seeing this marvel, himself confessed Christ the Lord and was at once beheaded. After that Glykeria was thrown into a burning furnace, but she remained untouched by the flames. Standing in the midst of the fire, she praised the Lord, commemorating the wonder with the Three Children in the burning fiery furnace in Babylon. Finally, she was thrown to the lions and, praying to God, this holy maiden gave her soul into the hands of the Lord for whom she had heroically suffered much torture. She suffered with honour in the year 141. A healing myrrh flowed from her relics, which healed the sick of the gravest illnesses;

**The Holy Martyr Alexander** - a Slav. As an eighteen year old soldier in the army of Emperor Maximilian, he refused the order of the emperor to give honor to the Roman idols and for that which he was handed over to Captain Tiberian, to either counsel Alexander to deny Christ or else torture and kill him. Since all the counselling was in vain, Tiberian took Alexander with him across Macedonia to Constantinople where he traveled for duty. In every town along the way, the young Alexander was cruelly tortured but, in every town, Christians came out before him and begged him for a blessing and they encouraged him in his mortification. Pimenia, his mother, followed after him. During the course of this travel, an angel of God appeared many times to Alexander soothing his pains and encouraging him. In one place, Carasura, the martyr performed a miracle through prayer: when thirst overcame him and the soldiers who escorted him, he brought forth a well of cold water from an arid place. On the shore of the Ergina river, Tiberian ordered the executioner to behead Alexander and to toss his body into the water. When the executioner swung at the martyr's head, he saw radiant angels of God around Alexander and became frightened and his hand dropped. Alexander asked him why his hand dropped and the executioner replied that he sees some radiant young men around him. Yearning death and union with the Lord, Alexander prayed to God to withdraw the angels from him so that the executioner would not be frightened. And thus, the executioner carried out his work in the year 298 A.D. Pimenia removed the body of her son and honourably buried him. Many healings occurred at the grave of the martyr. After death, the martyr appeared to his mother and informed her of her imminent translation to the other world.; Our Holy Fathers John, Euthymius, George and Gabriel of Iviron.

**14 / 27 May — Fast Day - The Holy Martyr Isidore** - in the reign of the Emperor Decius, this Isidore was taken by force by soldiers from the island of Chios. He had held the Christian faith from his youth, and had spent his life in fasting, prayer and good works. So when, in the army, he declared himself to be a Christian, the commander took him to task for it, and urged him to deny Christ and offer sacrifice to idols. The saint replied: 'Even if you kill my body, you have no power over my soul. I have the true and living God, Jesus Christ, who lives in me and will be with me at my death; and I am in Him and shall remain in Him, and will not cease to confess His holy name while the spirit is in my body.' The commander ordered that they first beat him with iron flails and then cut out his tongue. But, even without his tongue, Isidore was able to speak, and confessed the name of Christ by the Spirit of God. Meanwhile the punishment of God struck the commander, and he suddenly became mute. The mute commander finally gave the signal to behead Isidore. Isidore rejoiced at this sentence and, praising God, went out to the scaffold, where his head was cut off in the year 251. His friend, Ammon, buried his body and, after that, himself suffered and received the wreath of martyrdom; Our Holy Father Serapion the Sindonite; Blessed Isidore the Fool for Christ.



**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 Pachomius the Great** - an Egyptian by birth and was a pagan in his youth. As a soldier, he took part in the Emperor Constantine's war against Maxentius. After that, learning from Christians about the one God and seeing their devout life, Pachomius was baptised and went to the Tabennisiot desert, to the famous ascetic Palamon, with whom he lived in asceticism for ten years. Then an angel appeared to him in the robes of a monk of the Great Habit at the place called Tabennisi and gave him a tablet on which was written the rule of a cenobitic monastery, commanding him to found such a monastery in that place and prophesying to him that many monks would come to it seeking the salvation of their souls. Obeying the angel of God, Pachomius began building many cells, although there was no-one in that place but himself and his brother John. When his brother grumbled at him for doing this unnecessary building, Pachomius simply told him that he was following God's command, without explaining who would live there, or when. But many men soon assembled in that place, moved by the Spirit of God, and began to live in asceticism under the rule that Pachomius had received from the angel. When the number of monks had increased greatly, Pachomius, step by step, founded six further monasteries. The number of his disciples grew to seven thousand. St Antony is regarded as the founder of the eremitic life, and St Pachomius of the monastic, communal life. The humility, love of toil and abstinence of this holy father were and remain a rare example for the imitation of monks. St Pachomius performed innumerable miracles, and also endured innumerable temptations from demons and men. And he served men as both father and brother. He roused many to set out on the way of salvation, and brought many into the way of truth. He was and remains a great light in the Church and a great witness to the truth and righteousness of Christ. He entered peacefully into rest in 346, at the age of sixty. The Church has raised many of his followers to the ranks of the saints: Theodore, Job, Paphnutius, Pecosius, Athenodorus, Eponichus, Soutus, Psois, Dionysius, Petronius and others; St Achillius, Bishop of Larissa; Our Holy Father Silvanus.

**16 / 29 May — Fast Day - Our Holy Father Theodore the Sanctified** - he was a disciple of St Pachomius, being born and growing up an unbeliever. Coming to the true Faith as a young man, he was baptised and, having heard of St Pachomius, fled to him in his monastery unknown to his parents. St Pachomius made him a monk and came to love him for his rare zeal and his obedience. When his mother came to fetch him back home, he would not let her see him, but prayed to God to enlighten her with the truth. And indeed, his mother not only did not take her son back home but herself did not return. Seeing a women's monastery, ruled by Pachomius's sister, close by, she entered it and was tonsured. After a certain time, Paphnutius, Theodore's brother, also came to the monastery and was tonsured. It once happened that the Bishop of Panopolis invited Pachomius to build a monastery for the many people who were desirous of the monastic life. Pachomius took Theodore with him, and entrusted to him the duty of building the monastery. Upon Pachomius's death, Theodore became abbot of all Pachomius's monasteries and lived until great old age, guiding a multitude of monks on the way of salvation. He entered peacefully into rest and went to the Kingdom of eternal light in the year 368.

**St. Brendan the Voyager, abbot of Clonfert (578)** - St. Brendan sailed in skin-covered coracles, from Ireland to Scotland, then to England and Wales. His most famous voyage in search of the promised land, was described in a famous saga known as the 'Navagatio,' which indicates that he reached Greenland or even North America. It is still possible to construct a coracle according to the instructions of the Navagatio, and to sail it from Ireland to Newfoundland. St. Brendan was born near Tralee on the west coast of Ireland, and he was brought up by a saint called Ita, who taught him three things that God truly loves: 'the true faith of a pure heart; the simple religious life, and bountifulness inspired by Christian charity.' (She added three things that God hates: 'a scowling face; obstinate wrong-doing; and too much confidence in money'.) He founded several monasteries the most renowned being at Clonfert, a centre famous for missionary work, where he is said to have directed three thousand monks.; The Blessed Maiden Musa; St Nicolas Mysticus, Patriarch of Constantinople; The Holy New Martyr Nicolas; Our Holy Fathers martyred at St Sava's.

**17 / 30 May — The Holy Apostle Andronicus** - One of the Seventy, he was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul, as Paul wrote (Rom. 16:17), remembering also St Junia, Andronicus's helper. Andronicus was made Bishop of Pannonia, and did not stay in one place, but preached the Gospel throughout the whole of Pannonia. With St Junia, he was successful in bringing many to Christ and in demolishing many temples of idolatry. Both of them had the grace of wonder-working, by which they drove out demons and healed every sort of sickness and disease. They both suffered for Christ, and thus received a twofold crown: of apostleship and of martyrdom. Their holy relics were found in the excavations in Eugenius; The Holy Martyr Solochon; St Stephen, Patriarch of Constantinople;

**St. Melangell, virgin hermitress of Wales** - Imagine a party of huntsmen in the thick, green undergrowth of a small, wooded valley. The dogs are barking as they begin to follow the scent of a hare. One of the huntsmen sounds the horn. Riding at the front is the local prince. The time is 607 A.D. The place is the Pennant Valley in the kingdom of Powys, in central Wales. The hare disappears into a huge thicket of undergrowth, and the hunters prepare to follow. Then suddenly strange things begin to happen. The dogs turn back in fear. The huntsman with the horn finds he cannot sound a blast, yet he cannot take the horn from his lips. The prince, brave and proud, leaps from his horse. He will not show fear in the face of magic. He draws his sword and begins to cut his way through the brambles and shrubs. In a circular clearing in the centre of the thicket stands a young woman. She is dressed very simply. She stands calmly, radiating a sense of peace. At her feet the hare has crouched down for safety. Prince Brochwel of Powys has just come face to face with Melangell, the daughter of an Irish warrior. Melangell refused a pre-arranged marriage to an old warrior chieftain. She fled to Wales and began a life of prayer, living in a cave on the side of the Pennant Valley. As she was drawn deeper into the spiritual life, animals began to come to her in complete trust. Around her the world was restored to Paradise. Prince Brochwel granted her the valley as a place of prayer and refuge for ever. Gradually a small convent grew up, and a church was built. When Melangell died, the nuns placed her body within the church. The holy woman came to be known as a saint. No one knows how long the convent lasted, but archaeologists have shown that nuns were still being buried outside the church in the 9th and 10th Century. Around 1160 A.D. a new stone church was built, with a shrine where people could come to venerate the bones of Saint Melangell. Pilgrims began to arrive, and miracles of healing took place. The valley was noted as a place of peace, a sanctuary for hares, a comfort to the sick, a glimpse

of heaven. Then came the upheavals and pain of the Reformation. The shrine was desecrated, and chunks of masonry from the shrine were hurled out of the church. Often the relics of saints were destroyed at this time by the reformers, but Saint Melangell was reburied in the floor of the church. Pilgrims were no longer encouraged to make the long journey into the Welsh mountains to visit this holy place. Centuries passed, and times changed. Hardly anyone lived near the tiny church in the hidden valley. The few local sheep farmers could not afford to repair the building. By the 1980's the church was almost derelict. Then in 1988 work began to restore the church and shrine of Saint Melangell. Many parts of the ancient shrine were found built into walls, or on neighbouring farms. New masonry was carved to match the old stonework. Today, the church and shrine are beautiful once more. Hundreds of pilgrims flock to pray there and to ask for the prayers of the early Celtic holy woman. A centre for healing and rest has been established a few yards from the church, so that Saint Melangell's work may continue.

## HYMN OF PRAISE

### SAINT CYRIL

The Muslim leaders asked Cyril, What kind of three persons in God, were? If God is one, from where three persons? Our God is one, yours is three! Cyril replies: It is not that way, it is not, But, as the shining sun which warms at noon, And light, warmth, its cycle has,. But a pale picture of the Divine Triade, that is, One in essence and three divine persons Through Christ, this truth is revealed. Never, will a mortal man comprehend this God Himself revealed this; this the Church teaches.

## REFLECTION

In the encampment of the Saracens they asked St. Cyril: "How could Christians wage war and at the same time keep the commandment of Christ about praying to God for their enemies?" To that, St. Cyril replied: "If two commandments were written in one law and given to men for fulfilling, which man will be a better follower of the law: the one who fulfills one commandment or the one who fulfills both?" To that, the Saracens replied: "Undoubtedly, he who fulfills both commandments." St. Cyril continued: "Christ our God commands us to pray to God for those who persecute us and even to do good to them; but, He also said to us: greater love cannot be shown in this world than if one lay down his life for his friends." "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (St. John 15:13). That is why we bear the insults which our enemies do to us individually and we pray to God for them; and, as a society, we defend one another and give up our lives, that you would not somehow enslave our brethren, would not enslave their souls with their bodies and would not kill them in body and soul.

## HOMILY

### **About the irresistible will of God**

"I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jeremiah 20:9).

If anyone still doubts that God spoke through the prophets, let him read this confession of the great prophet Jeremiah and let him doubt no more. The prophet confesses that he had decided not to speak anymore in the Name of the Lord. Why? Because so few paid attention to his word. If anyone heeded his word the prophet endured "reproach and derision daily" (Jeremiah 20:8). But, when he decided to remain silent, did he, in fact, remain silent? No, he could not: "I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it!" He was so pressed by the irresistible power of the Spirit of God upon him to speak and he had to speak. It is, therefore, not the affair of the prophet whether he is going to speak or not: that is the affair of the All-powerful Spirit of God. The prophet is merely the chosen vessel of the All-powerful Spirit of God. All of Holy Scripture is written thusly - not according to the will of man but according to the will of God, and not according to the mind of man but according to the mind of God.

How does the word of God feel when it enters the prophet from the Spirit of God; this the great Jeremiah explains from his personal experience: "It becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones." That means, inspiration from the All-powerful Spirit of God. Under such irresistible internal pressure - as under the pressure of fire imprisoned in my bones - wrote the holy man of God. And many of them cried out: "I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it anymore." Who will go against the Spirit of God without punishment and destruction? Who will withstand Him when He wants to say something or to do something?

Only my brethren, the action of God the Holy Spirit is irresistible!

O All-powerful Spirit of God, direct us irresistibly on the path of salvation.

**To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.**