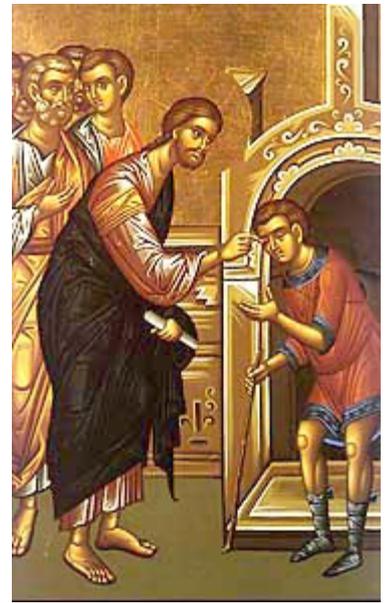


The Healing of the Blind Man

Sixth Sunday of Pascha & St John the Theologian

8 / 21 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 — Tone 2: O beloved Apostle of Christ our God, / come quickly to deliver your helpless people. / He on whose breast you leaned, will accept you as intercessor. / Entreat Him, O Theologian, to disperse the clouds of darkness, / granting us peace and great mercy!



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 — Tone 2: Who shall declare your greatness, / O virgin disciple, / for you pour forth wonders and are a source of healings, / and pray for our souls as theologian and friend of Christ.

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.

Vespers: I John 3:21-4:6; I John 4:11-16; I John 4:20-5:5

Matins Gospel VIII

Epistle: for Sunday: Acts 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 Apostle: I John 1:1-7

Gospel: for Sunday: 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 Apostle: John 19:25-27, 21:24-25

Saints of the Week

8 / 21 May — The Holy Apostle and Evangelist John - The main commemoration of this great Apostle and Evangelist is on September 26th, but on May 8th is commemorated a wonderful revelation about his grave. When St John was more than a hundred years old, he took seven of his disciples, went outside the city of Ephesus and told the disciples to dig a grave in the form of a cross. Then the old man went down alive into the grave and was buried. When the faithful later opened John's grave, they did not find the body in it. And on May 8th each year a dust arose from the grave, from which those suffering from many diseases were healed;

Our Holy Father Arsenius the Great - This glorious saint was born of a patrician family in Rome and was well educated in the secular sciences and philosophy as well as in spiritual wisdom. Abandoning all the vanity of the world, he dedicated himself to the service of the Church and was a deacon of the great church in Rome. Unmarried, withdrawn, quiet and devout, Arsenius thought to live that way his entire life. But the Providence of God directed his path in life otherwise. Emperor Theodosius took him as a tutor and teacher of his sons Arcadius and Honorius, and installed him as a senator surrounding him with great wealth, honours and luxury. But all of this burdened Arsenius' heart rather than pleasing him. It happened that Arcadius committed a wrong and for that Arsenius punished him. The offended Arcadius conceived a terrible revenge against his teacher and when Arsenius found out he changed into the clothes of a beggar, left for the seashore, boarded a boat and sailed to Egypt. When he arrived at the renowned Scete, he became a disciple of the glorious John Colobus [The Short] and dedicated himself to a life of asceticism. He considered himself dead and when someone informed him that a wealthy relative died and willed his entire estate to him, Arsenius replied: "But I died before him, how is it therefore that I could be his heir?" Withdrawn in a hermit's cell as in a tomb, throughout the entire day, he wove baskets of palm leaves, and at night, he prayed to God. He avoided men and all conversations with them. Only on feast days did he leave his cell and attend church to receive Holy Communion. In order not to become lazy, he often asked himself the question: "Arsenius, why did you come to the wilderness?" He remained in the wilderness for fifty-five years as a "desert dweller" and for that entire time was a model to the monks and a glory to monastics in general. In all, Arsenius lived one hundred years and died peacefully in the year 448 A.D. after prolonged labour and voluntarily imposing hardships upon himself and took up habitation in the kingdom of Christ the Lord, Whom he loved with all his heart, all his mind and all his soul;

St Emilia - the mother of Saint Basil the Great. In her youth she desired to remain a virgin for life but was forced into marriage. Emilia gave birth to nine children and so inspired them with the Spirit of Christ that five of them became Christian saints: Basil the Great, Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, Peter, Bishop of Sebaste, Macrina and Theosevia. In her old age Emilia established a convent where she lived with Macrina her daughter and where she died in the Lord on May 8, 375 A.D.; Our Holy Father Arsenius the Lover of Labour; St. Wiros, monk-missionary of the Netherlands (c.753).

9 / 22 May — St Nicolas the Wonderworker of Myra in Lycia - on this day is commemorated the translation of his relics. In the time of the Emperor Alexius I Comnenus and Patriarch Nicolas Grammaticus, in 1087, the body of this saint was taken from Myra in Lycia to the town of Bari in Italy. This came to pass because of a Moslem attack on Lycia. The saint appeared to a priest in Bari and commanded that his relics be taken there. At that time, the town of Bari was Orthodox and under the administration of an Orthodox patriarch. At the translation of the saint's relics, many miracles were wrought on those who touched them, and a healing myrrh flowed in abundance from them. Also on this day is commemorated the miracle worked by St Nicolas on Stefan of Decani, King of Serbia. This was when the saint restored the sight of the blind King Stefan.

The Holy Prophet Isaiah - This great prophet was of royal birth. He was born in Jerusalem of Amoz the brother of Amaziah, King of the Jews. By the great grace of God that was within him, Isaiah was made worthy to see the Lord of Sabaoth on His heavenly throne, surrounded by six-winged seraphim which cried unceasingly: 'Holy, holy, holy Lord of Sabaoth' (Is. 6). Isaiah prophesied many things, both to individuals and to nations. Once he walked for three days naked through the streets of Jerusalem, prophesying the imminent fall of the city to the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, and warning the King and the leaders of the people not to seek help from Egypt and Ethiopia, because they too would shortly be over-run by the same Sennacherib, but to seek the aid of the all-seeing God. And this prophecy, like all the rest, was literally fulfilled (37:31-35). But his most important prophecies were on the incarnation of God, on the conception of the most pure Mother of God, on John the Baptist and on many events in the life of Christ. This seer, because of his pure heart and zeal for God, also received the gift of working miracles. Thus, when the besieged city of Jerusalem was suffering from thirst, he prayed to God and water flowed out from beneath the hill of Sion. This water was named Siloam (Sent), and it was to that water that, later, the Lord sent the man born blind, to wash himself and receive his sight (Is. 8:6; Jn 9:7). In the time of King Manasseh, when Isaiah thundered against the pagan practices of the king and the leaders of the people, comparing that generation with Sodom and Gomorrah, the anger of the leaders and the people was lifted up against this great prophet, and he was seized, taken out of Jerusalem and sawn in half. He lived and prophesied seven hundred years before Christ;

The Holy Martyr Christopher - Third century martyr in the persecutions of Decius. His fame derives from the pious legend of him being a "Christ-bearer" (= Christopher). He was a powerfully built man who wandered the world in search of novelty and adventure. He came upon a hermit who lived beside a dangerous stream and served others by guiding them to safe places to cross. He gave Offero instruction in the truth of God. Offero took the hermit's place, but instead of guiding travellers, he carried them safely across the stream. One day he carried a small child across the stream; the child's weight nearly crushed him. When they arrived on the other side, the child revealed himself as Christ, and he was so heavy because he bore the weight of the world on himself. He then baptised Offero with water from the stream. Christopher's service at the stream led to his patronage of things related to travel and travellers, people who carry things.

10 / 23 May — The Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot - One of the twelve Great Apostles, he was born in Cana of Galilee. The Lord Jesus came to his wedding with His Mother and His disciples, and, when the wine ran out, the Lord changed water into wine. Seeing this wonder, the newly-married Simon left his home and parents and bride, to go after Christ. Simon was called the Zealot because of his great and burning zeal for the Saviour and His Gospel. After receiving the Holy Spirit, he went off to preach the Gospel in Mauretania in Africa. As a result of his success in bringing many to the Faith of Christ, he was tortured and finally crucified like his Lord, who had prepared a crown of glory for him in His immortal Kingdom. The Holy Martyrs Alphaeus, Philadelphus and Cyprinus;

Our Holy Mother Isidora the Fool for Christ - Isidora lived in the fourth century and was a nun in a convent in Tabennisi. She pretended insanity in order to conceal her virtues and her mortification. Isidora performed the most menial tasks, fed on the leftovers on the dishes, served all and everyone and was despised by all and everyone. At that time, an angel of God revealed to the great ascetic Pitirim about Isidora's secret. Pitirim came to the convent and when he saw Isidora he bowed down to the ground before her. And so, she to him. Then the sisters informed Pitirim that she was insane. "All of you are insane" replied Pitirim, "and this one is greater before the Lord than I and all of you; I only pray that God will render to me that which is intended for her at the Dreadful Judgment!" Then the sisters became ashamed and begged both Pitirim and Isidora for forgiveness. From then on, everyone began to show respect for Isidora. And she, to escape the honours of men, fled the convent to a place unknown and died about the year 365 A.D.; Blessed Thais;

St. Conleth, hermit and bishop of Kildare (c.520) - Skilled worker in gold and silver, and manuscript illuminator. Hermit in a cell in Old Connell, Ireland near the Liffey river. His reputation for holiness attracted would-be disciples. Friend and co-worker with Saint Brigid; they ran first double monastery together. First bishop of Kildare, Ireland c.490. Baptised Saint Tigernach of Clogher Died while on pilgrimage to Rome.

Born c.450 in Ireland Died attacked by wolves on 3 May 519 in the forests of Leinster, Ireland; buried nearby; relics translated to the Kildare cathedral in 799; relics taken to Connell in 835 to protect them from Danish invaders.

11 / 24 May — Leave-taking of Pascha - 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 — **THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD** -

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.

Vespers: Isa . 2:2-3; Isa . 62:10-12, 63:1-3, 63:7-9; Zech . 14:4, 14:8-11

Matins: Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: Acts 1:1-12

Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

“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

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 Anastatius 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, Laodicus, 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. Pimonia, 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. Pimonia 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 — 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.

REFLECTION

A monk complained to St. Arsenius that while reading Holy Scripture he does not feel, neither the power of the words read nor gentleness in his heart. To that the great saint will reply to him: "My child, just read! I heard that the sorcerers of serpents, when they cast a spell upon the serpents, the sorcerers are uttering the words, which they themselves do not understand, but the serpents hearing the spoken words sense their power and become tamed. An so, with us, when we continually hold in our mouths the words of Holy Scripture, but even though we do not feel the power of the words, evil spirits tremble and flee for they are unable to endure the words of the Holy Spirit." My child, just read! The Holy Spirit Who, through inspired men, wrote these divine words, will hear, will understand and will hasten to your assistance; and the demons will understand will sense and will flee from you. That is: He Whom you invoke for assistance will understand, and those whom you wish to drive away from yourself will understand. And both goals will be achieved.

HOMILY

About evil as the fruit of the thoughts of men

"Hear O earth: behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened to my words, nor to my law, but rejected it" (Jeremiah 6:19).

Brethren, do you see where evil grows and where it ripens? Not in the bosom of God, but in the thoughts of men. Evil is sown in the thoughts of men by demonic powers or from the passions of the flesh. Evil grows in the thoughts of men and spreads and multiplies itself, blossoms and bears leaves and finally shows fruit. In due time, God warns men to break from their evil thoughts so that evil would not ripen in the souls of men and bring forth its bitter and deadly fruit. In due time, God warned Cain but he did not want to heed the warning and permitted evil thoughts against his brother to bring forth evil fruit; fratricide.

What are the thoughts of evil? All those thoughts that are contrary to the law of God; the word of God. Evil thoughts are the self-willed law of man which man prescribes for himself against God and contrary to the law of God. Therefore, if a man has resolutely decided to adhere to the law of God, evil thoughts are then as weak as shadows which quickly appear but, in the same way, quickly disappear. Then, a man is lord over his thoughts for he feels God as the Lord over himself. Then the law is the law of God and the evil thoughts of men, are nothing.

"Behold, I will bring evil upon this people," said the Lord. What kind of evil? "The fruit of their thoughts." That is: I will permit them only to reap that which they sowed and nurtured, for evil is neither My seed nor My harvest. The evil which I will permit upon lawless men is the fruit of their own thoughts. According to their thoughts, they should have estimated what kind of evil will befall them as a sower estimates, according to his seeds, what he will harvest.

O Lord meek and guileless, save us from our own evil which we alone, have nurtured in ourselves. We pray to You, remove the evil fruit of evil crops, and help us to pluck out the evil seed from our souls.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.