

# The Healing of the Blind Man

## Sixth Sunday of Pascha

### 27 May / 9 June

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

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

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



#### Vespers

Lord I have Cried - Tone 5, on 10: Resurrection 7; Blind Man 3 (He that was born blind); G: Blind Man (Passing by on the way); N: Sunday Dogmatic (Once, the image of the Bride who knoweth not wedlock).

Aposticha: The sticheron of the Resurrection 1 (With sounds of hymnody do we magnify Thee); The Paschal Stichera, with its verses; G: Pentecostarion (O Christ God, Thou spiritual Sun of Righteousness); N: Pascha (It is the day of resurrection) and Christ is risen x1.

Troparia: O Theotokos and Virgin x3.

#### Matins Gospel VIII

#### Epistle: The 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.

### **Epistle for the saint: Ephesians 6: 10-17**

#### **THEY SEIZED PAUL AND SILAS AND THREW THEM INTO PRISON**

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

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

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

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbours and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; But by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei*

### **Gospel for the saint: Luke 12: 2-12**

#### **Saints of the Week**

**May 27 / June 9 — The Hieromartyr Therapon, Bishop of Sardis** - he brought many Greeks to the Christian faith and was cruelly persecuted by the pagans, being starved, imprisoned and flogged. They stripped him and threw him to the ground, bound him to four posts and beat him mercilessly, until they had stripped the flesh from his bones. However, the martyr still remained alive and the four dry posts became green and grew into tall trees from which many of the sick received healing. Finally St Therapon was slain like a lamb and entered into the Kingdom, to behold the glory of God in eternity. He suffered with honour in the time of Valerian, about 259 AD.

**St. Bede the Venerable** - 673-735. Born in Wearmouth in the north of England, as a child he entered the monastery of Sts Peter and Paul at Wearmouth-Jarrow, and spent his whole life there, 'always

praying, always writing, always reading, always teaching'. He wrote many commentaries on the Scriptures. His work *The History of the English Church and People* earned him the title of the Father of English History. He reposed on Ascension Eve and his dying words were Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Translation of the relics of Venerable Nilus of Stolben Island. Venerable Therapontes, abbot of Byelozersk. Translation of the relics of Sts. Cyprian, Photius, and Jonah, metropolitans of Kiev. Venerable Therapontes, abbot of Monza. St. John the Russian, whose relics are on the island of Euboea. Virgin-martyr Theodora and Martyr Didymus the Soldier of Alexandria. Martyr Julius the Veteran at Dorostolum, Moesia. Venerable Michael of Parekhi. St. Basil of Khakhuli, son of King Bagrat III. Martyr Eusebiotus. Martyr Alypius.

**May 28 / June 10 — St Nicetas the Confessor, Bishop of Chalcedon** - he renounced the world in his youth and withdrew to follow the path of monastic asceticism. He shone like the sun with virtue and came to the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities, being raised to the episcopal throne of Chalcedon. He was, as a hierarch, particularly compassionate to the poor and cared for many orphans, widows and beggars. When the wicked Emperor Leo the Armenian made his stand against the icons, St Nicetas came courageously to their defence, denouncing the Emperor and expounding their meaning. He was finally driven into exile for his confession of the Faith, and, after much hardship and suffering, went to the Lord to receive a wreath of glory in the Kingdom of God.

**The Holy Martyr Heliconis** - born in Thessalonica and was educated in Christian piety. During the reign of Gordian and Philip, she moved to Corinth where she openly denounced all those who offered sacrifices to the idols. When Perinus the mayor counselled her to offer a sacrifice to the idol Aesculapius, this martyr of Christ said to him: "Hear me, I am a handmaiden of Christ and who Aesculapius is, I do not know. Do with me what you will." For this, she was brought to trial and endured terrible tortures. She was cast into fire and much blood poured from her body which extinguished the fire and she remained alive. She was cast before lions but the lions did not touch her but fawned around her. Admitted into the temple, allegedly to offer sacrifices to the idols, she destroyed the idols, and by this, embittered the torturer even more. Lying wounded in prison, the Lord Himself appeared to her with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. He healed her wounds, comforted and strengthened her. After that she was led to the scaffold to be beheaded. Before her beheading, Heliconis raised her arms high and prayed that God receive her and unite her with His lambs in the heavenly enclosure. When she completed her prayer, a voice was heard from heaven: "Come daughter, a wreath and a throne is prepared for you!" Finally, she was beheaded and received the wreath of glory from God to Whom, out of love, she sacrificed herself as an innocent and pure lamb.

**St Ignatius, Bishop of Rostov** - As a hierarch, he governed the flock of Christ for twenty-six years with great love and compassion. When he died and as his body was being placed in church, some of those who were present witnessed as his body rose from the coffin into the air above the church and from the heights, he blessed the people and the to the Lord on May 28, 1288 A.D.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Venerable Helen of Diveyevo. New Hieromartyr Macarius, Dyonisius, Hieromartyr Nicholas deacon, Martyrs Ignatius and Peter. New Hieromartyr Heraclius confessor. Virgin-Martyr Hermogenas. St. Gerontius, metropolitan of Moscow. St. Eutychius, bishop of Melitene. St. Germanus, bishop of Paris. Hieromartyr Helladius, bishop in the East. "Nikeysky" (304), "Chukhlomsky" (Galich) (1350), "Orlovsky", "Antiochsky" and "Tenderness" Icons of the Mother of God. New Martyr Mitros (Demetrius) of Tripolitsa. New Hieromartyr Zachariah of Prusa. Venerable Sophronius, monk, of Bulgaria. Martyrs Crescens, Paul, and Dioscorides of Rome. St. William of Languedoc. St. Andrew the fool-for-Christ of Constantinople.

**May 29 / June 11 — Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council** - the Commemoration and eulogy of the holy fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, which was held in Nicaea in 325 in the reign of Constantine the Great—held during the week before Pentecost, or the seventh week after Easter. It was summoned to remove the confusion which Arius, an Alexandrian priest, had created by his false teaching. He had been spreading the teaching that Christ was created from God in time, and that He is not the pre-eternal Son of God, equal in being with God the Father. Three hundred and eighteen holy fathers took part in this Council. It condemned the Arian teaching, and anathematised Arius when he would not repent. This Council also definitively confirmed the Symbol of Faith (the Creed) which was later amplified at the Second Ecumenical Council. Many bishops were present at the First Ecumenical Council, among whom the following stood out: St Nicolas of Myra in Lycia, St Spiridon, St Athanasius, St Acillius, St Paphnutius, St James of Nisibis, Macarius of Jerusalem, Alexander of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Eusebius of Caesarea, Mitrophanes of Constantinople, John of Persia, Aristarchus of Armenia and many others from the East. And from the West: Hosius of Cordova, Theophilus the Goth, Cecilianus of Carthage, and others. The most important work of this Council was the confirmation of the Symbol of Faith. The Council also confirmed the time of the celebration of Easter, and prescribed twenty Canons.

**The Holy Martyr Theodosia of Tyre** - One day during the reign of the Emperor Maximian, many Christians were standing bound before the Praetor in Palestinian Caesarea. The pious virgin Theodosia came to comfort them and encourage them in their death by martyrdom. The soldiers heard her words and brought her also before the judge. The enraged judge ordered that a stone be tied round her neck and that she be cast into the deep. But angels carried her up onto the shore alive. When she appeared before the judge again, he gave orders to have her beheaded. The following night, Theodosia appeared to her parents in the brightest heavenly light, surrounded by many other virgins, and said: 'Do you see how great is the glory and grace of my Christ, of which you wished to deprive me?' She spoke thus to her parents because they had turned back from confessing Christ and from martyrdom. She suffered with honour and was glorified in the year 308.

**Our Holy Mother, the Martyr Theodosia** - born as the result of the prayers of her mother to the holy martyr Anastasia who appeared to her and said that she will give birth. Her parents dedicated her to God and at an early age presented her to a convent. After the death of her parents, Theodosia inherited a vast estate, and from that estate, she ordered three icons from a goldsmith: The Savior, The Mother of God [The Theotokos] and St. Anastasia. The rest she distributed to the poor. She suffered in the year 730 A.D. during the reign of the evil Emperor Leo the Isaurian, the iconoclast, and received a two-fold wreath: virginity and martyrdom.

**Also commemorated this day:** Repose of Blessed John of Ustiug, fool-for-Christ. Uncovering of the relics of Venerable Job, Schemamonk of Anzersk. New Hieromartyr John deacon and martyr Andrew. St. Luke, hierarch-surgeon of Simferopol. Pskov-Pechersk Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos "Surety of Sinners". Synaxis of All Saints of Krasnoyarsk Metropolia. The Icon of the Mother of God "Non-Slumbering Eye" ("Nedremliuschee Oko"). The Icon of the Mother of God "Imperial" ("Tsesarkaya") Borovsk. St. Alexander, patriarch of Alexandria. New Martyr Andrew of Chios. New Martyr John (or Nannus) at Smyrna. Blessed Constantine XII, last of the Byzantine emperors, martyred by the Turks. Hieromartyr Olbian, bishop of Aneus, and his disciples. Martyrs Cyril, child Carellus, Primolus, Phinodus, Venustus, Gissinus, Alexander, Tredentius, and Jocunda at Caesarea in Cappadocia. Righteouses John and Mary of Ustiug.

**May 30 / June 12 — Fast Day - Our Holy Father Isaac the Confessor** - in the time of the Emperor Valens, the Arians persecuted Orthodoxy fiercely with the Emperor's encouragement. Isaac, a hermit somewhere in the East, heard of the persecution, left his desert and went to Constantinople to encourage the faithful and denounce the heretics. Valens arrived in the north at that very time with his army, to meet the Goths who had come down from the Danube into Thrace. Isaac went out and stood before him, saying: 'Open the churches to those of the true Faith, O Emperor, and God will bless thy path', but the Emperor turned a deaf ear to the elder and went on his way. Isaac spoke out before the Emperor on the next day also, repeating his warning, and the Emperor almost hearkened to him, but one of his advisors, a follower of the Arian heresy, thwarted him. Isaac spoke before the Emperor again on the third day, seizing the Emperor's horse by the reins and pleading with him to grant freedom to the Church of God and to escape divine punishment by acceding to his request. The enraged Emperor ordered that the elder be thrown into a waste place full of thorns and mud, but three angels appeared and pulled him out of the swamp. St Isaac appeared before the Emperor on the fourth day, and foretold a terrible death if he did not give the Orthodox freedom: 'I tell thee, my Emperor, that thou shalt lead thy troops out upon the barbarians, but thou shalt not be able to withstand them. Thou shalt flee before them, but shalt thyself be taken captive and burned alive.' And so it all came to pass. The barbarians mowed the Greek force down like grass, and the Emperor fled with his Arian counsellor, and hid in a hamper. The barbarians arrived at the spot and realised where the Emperor was hiding. They surrounded the hamper and set fire to it, burning both the Emperor and his counsellor. The Emperor Theodosius the Great then came to the throne. He heard of Isaac and of the prophecy that had been fulfilled, and, sending for him, prostrated himself before him. And so peace came to reign in the Church and the Arians were banished. Isaac desired to return to his desert, but he was persuaded to remain in Constantinople. A certain influential citizen, Saturninus, built him a monastery where the elder laboured in asceticism until his death, performing many wonders. The community overflowed with monks and became a great monastery. Before his death, Isaac appointed a pupil of his, Dalmatus (after whom the monastery was later named), as abbot. The elder Isaac, who had found such favour with God, entered into eternity in the year 383, to rejoice forever in the vision of the face of God.

**St Macrina** - the grandmother of St. Basil the Great. She was wonderful in mind and in her piety. She was a disciple of St. Gregory Neo-Caesarea the miracle worker. During the reign of Diocletian, Macrina abandoned her home and, with her husband Basil, hid themselves in the forests and wilderness. Their property was confiscated but they did not grieve over it. Deprived of everything except their love for God, they settled in a primeval forest where they spent seven years. By God's providence, goats descended from the mountains and offered themselves to them and so they were nourished. They both died peacefully in the fourth century following great suffering for the Faith of Christ.

**Also commemorated on this day:** New Hieromartyr Basil priest. Martyr Natalius. Martyrs Romanus, Meletius and Euplius. Venerable James, monk of Galich Monastery. Venerables Isaiah and Nikanor of Arkhangel'sk. Martyr Barlaam of Caesarea in Cappadocia. St. Venantius of Gaul. St. Hubert of Maastricht.

## May 31 / June 13 — 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*

**The Holy Apostle Hermes** - one of the Seventy, he is mentioned in the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans (16:14). A Greek by birth, he spent a long time in Rome. He was bishop in Philippoupolis, and finished his life a martyr. He compiled the very instructive book 'The Shepherd' through revelations from the angels of God. Hermes was a rich man, but fell into extreme poverty through his own sins and those of his sons. A man appeared to him, clad in white and with a staff in his hand, and told him that he was the angel of repentance, sent to him before the end of his life. The angel gave him twelve commandments: 1. To believe in God. 2. To live in simplicity and innocence. 3. To love truth and flee from falsehood. 4. To guard his thoughts in chastity. 5. To learn patience and magnanimity of soul. 6. To know that a good and an evil spirit attend every man. 7. To fear God, but not the devil. 8. To perform every good deed and to restrain himself from every evil one. 9. To pray to God in faith from the depths of his heart, so that his prayer might be heard. 10. To preserve himself from melancholy, the daughter of doubt, and from anger. 11. To try true and false prophecies. 12. To preserve himself from every evil desire.

**The Holy Martyr Hermeas** - Hermeas grew old as an imperial soldier and in his old age suffered for Christ the King. Since the evil judge tried in vain to dissuade him from the Faith of Christ and counseling him to offer sacrifices to the idols, the judge then gave orders that his teeth be knocked out with a stone and the skin peeled from his face with a knife. After that they threw him into a fiery furnace but, by the Grace of God, he was saved and stood up. Following that, by order of the judge he drank a bitter poison which was given to him by a magician, but the poison did him no harm. Witnessing this, the magician was so amazed that he openly confessed Christ for which he was immediately beheaded. Afterwards, they gouged out both of Hermeas' eyes but he did not grieve and cried out to the judge: "Take for yourself these bodily eyes that gaze upon the vanity of the world. I have eyes of the heart by which I clearly see the light of the truth." He was hung then by the feet upside down and those who did this to him were blinded and staggered around him. St. Hermeas beckoned them to come to him, laid his hands on them and, by prayer to the Lord, restored their sight. Witnessing all of this, the judge became as enraged as a lion, drew a knife and severed the head of this godly-man. Christians secretly removed the body of Hermeas and honorably buried it. His relics gave healing to all the sick and to the afflicted. St. Hermeas suffered in the year 166 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Antoninus.

**The Holy Martyr Philosophus** - This martyr of Christ was born in the vicinity of Alexandria. During the time of the persecution of Christians, St. Philosophus did not want to deny Christ the Lord before the pagan princes and judges. For that, the pagans subjected him to violent tortures. Since he was tortured in various ways, they finally placed him on a soft bed, tied his legs and hands and permitted an immoral woman to come to him and to lure him into sin. When St. Philosophus sensed that the sin of passion was being aroused in him from the touch of the woman's hand, he placed his tongue between his teeth, bit it off and spit it in the face of the depraved one. Because of that, the passion subsided in him and the immoral woman was so horrified that she immediately fled from him. He was beheaded after that about the year 252 A.D. in his youth and took up habitation in the kingdom of eternal youth.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Holy Georgian Martyrs of Persia (movable holiday on the day of the Holy Ascension). New Hieromartyr Archpriest Philosoph Ornatsky with his sons Boris and Nicholas, in St. Petersburg. New Hieromartyrs Hierotheus, bishop of Nikolsk, and his friend Hieroschemamonk Seraphim (Nikolsky). Martyr Marus the Magician who was converted on witnessing the martyrdom of Hermias. Five Martyrs of Ascalon. Martyrs Eusebius and Charalampus. St. Eustathius, patriarch of Constantinople. Finding of the relics of New Martyr Nicholas the Deacon of Lesbos. Translation of the relics of St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow, to Solovki. St. Philotheus, metropolitan of Tobolsk.



**1 / 14 June — The Holy Martyr Justin the Philosopher** - He was born of Greek parents in the Samaritan town of Shechem (formerly called Nablus), about a hundred and five years after Christ. He sought wisdom and philosophy with his whole heart, first with the Stoics, then with the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans and finally with the Platonists. Although Platonic philosophy did not content him, it held him the longest, until he found something higher to attract him. By God's providence, he encountered a remarkable old man who began to undermine his Platonic philosophy, reminding him that a man cannot fully know the truth about God till God reveals it to him, and telling him that God had revealed the truth about Himself in the books of Holy Scripture. Justin began to read the Scriptures, and became an utterly convinced Christian, but he would not be baptised or call himself a Christian until he had convinced himself of the falseness of the accusations that pagans found to bring against Christians. Going to Rome for a philosophical gathering, he quickly gained much respect there, and many followers. He witnessed the martyrdom of St Ptolemy and St Lucian, and, seeing the tortures of these innocent Christians, wrote an Apologia for Christians and Christian teaching and gave it to the Emperor Antoninus and the Senate. The Emperor read it carefully and ordered that the persecution of Christians cease. Justin took a copy of the Emperor's decree and went off to Asia, where he saved many persecuted Christians by its aid. After that, he returned again to Rome. When a persecution arose under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he wrote a second Apologia and addressed it to the Emperor. Some disreputable philosopher, Crescens, a Cynic, denounced him as a Christian because Justin was getting the better of him in every dispute, and Justin was thrown into prison. Desiring his death, and fearing that judgement would not be given against him, Crescens took the opportunity to administer poison to him in the prison. Thus this great defender of the Christian faith finished his earthly course and went to the blessedness of eternity, in the year 166.

**Our Holy Father Agapitus of the Kiev Caves** - a doctor who practiced medicine by using natural remedies. He was a disciple of St. Anthony of the Caves. He cured people through prayer and by giving them vegetables from which he prepared bread for himself. In this manner he cured Prince Vladimir Monomachus for which Agapitus became known throughout. Being envious of this the prince's physician, an Armenian, began to slander Agapitus. When Agapitus became ill, the Armenian came to him and looking at him said that he [Agapitus] would die within three days and that if he [Agapitus] did not die, he [the Armenian physician] would become a monk. Agapitus said that it had been revealed to him by the Lord that he would not die within three days but within three months. And so it happened. After the death of Agapitus, the Armenian came to the Abbot of the Caves and begged him to tonsure him a monk for, he said, Agapitus appeared to him from the other world and reminded him of his promise. Thus, the once envious one became a humble monk by the Providence of God Who wishes that all men be saved. St. Agapitus died about the year 1095 A.D.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Venerable Dionysius, abbot of Glushitsa. New Hieromartyr Basil priest, Virgin-martyr Vera. Glorification of Righteous John of Kronstadt. Venerable Justin (Popovich) of Chelije in Serbia. St. Mertius the Farmer of Myra in Lycia. Martyr Neon. Hieromartyr Pyrrhus the Virgin. Martyr Firmus of Magus. Martyr Thespesius of Cappadocia. Holy Martyrs Shio the New, David, Gabriel and Paul of Gareji.

**2 / 15 June — St Nicephorus the Confessor** - a nobleman of Constantinople. His father Theodore, a wealthy and devout man, was a high-ranking official at the Emperor's court. Nicephorus served several years at court in the same capacity as his father but then, seeing all the vanity of the world, he withdrew to the shore of the Bosphorus and built a monastery there. This monastery rapidly became filled with monks and he administered it; not, however, himself becoming a monk from a conviction of his unworthiness. He was, in this, an example to all. He had earlier, as a layman, taken part in the Seventh Ecumenical Council, at the request of the Emperor and the Patriarch, and was of great assistance there with his intimate knowledge of Holy Scripture. When Patriarch Tarasius died, Nicephorus, much against his will, was chosen to succeed him. He was immediately professed a monk and received the priestly orders in succession, being enthroned as Patriarch in St Sophia's in 806. This was in the time of the Emperor Nicephorus, who went off to war against the Bulgars very shortly after this and was killed in battle there. His son Stauracius reigned for only two months before he died. After this, the good Emperor Michael, called Rangabe, came to the throne, but he reigned only two years before Leo the Armenian attacked him and drove him into exile. When this Emperor began his reign, the Patriarch sent him a book on the Confession of the Orthodox faith for him to sign (this being according to the custom obtaining for all Byzantine Emperors, who were regarded as sworn to uphold and defend the true Faith). The Emperor did not sign it, but set it aside until his coronation. When the Patriarch crowned him, he still refused to sign the book, and revealed himself to be an iconoclast heretic. The Patriarch attempted to remonstrate with him and bring him back to the true Faith, but in vain. The Emperor exiled him by force to the island of Proconnesus, where he spent several years in want and privation before going to eternity in the year 829. He governed the Church as Patriarch for nine years.

**The Holy Martyr John the New of Sochava** - A nobleman of Trebizond, he was denounced by some envious Latin and suffered for Christ in the town of Akerman. After being tortured for not accepting the

Persian religion (for the governor of the town was of that faith), St John was tied to a horse's legs and dragged round the town. Some wicked Jews, seeing him thus, ran up and butchered him. That night, a burning column was seen by many people above his body, and three men bathed in light standing around it. Later the Moldavian commander, Joalexander, took his honoured body and buried it in the metropolitical church, where it remains to this day and miraculously saves men from various pains and sicknesses. He suffered with honour and was glorified on June 2nd, 1492; The Hieromartyr Erazmo of Ochrid.

**Also commemorated on this day:** Finding of the relics of St. Juliana, princess of Vyasma. Hieromartyr Pothinus, bishop of Lyons. St. Blandina and St. Ponticus of Lyons. "Kiev-Bratsk" Icon of the Mother of God. New Martyr Demetrius of Philadelphia. St. Odo, archbishop of Canterbury. New Martyr Constantine of the Hagarenes. Hieromartyr Erasmus of Ochrid, who reposed in peace, and 20,000 Martyrs with him. New Martyr John of Trebizond. New Martyr Asprocastron.

### ‡ Daily Scripture Readings ‡

**Monday** - Acts 17: 1-15; John 11: 47-57

**Tuesday** - Acts 17: 19-28; John 12: 19-36

**Wednesday** - Acts 18: 22-28; John 12: 36-47

**Thursday** - Mark 16:9-20; Acts 1:1-12; Luke 24:36-53

**Friday** - Acts 19: 1-8; John 14: 1-11

**Saturday** - Acts 20: 7-12; John 14: 10-21

