

**CHRIST IS RISEN!
HE IS RISEN INDEED!**



HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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May 7, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Pascha

St. Alexis Toth

Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy in America (1907)

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

† Tuesday, May 9, 6:30pm - Vespers of the MidFeast, with the Blessing of Water

➤ Note: Inquirer's Class resumes Tuesday, May 16, 6:30pm

MID-PENTECOST ~ from the Synaxarion

On Wednesday of the fourth week of Pascha, the week of the Paralytic, we celebrate the Feast of Mid-Pentecost.

We celebrate this present Feast in honor of the two great Feasts of Pascha and Pentecost, for this is the day which, in a sense, ties the two Feasts together. The celebration of this present Feast came about in the following manner: after Christ had performed the miracle of healing the paralytic, which surpasses all nature, the Jews sought to put Him to death, using the excuse that it was a scandal to do such a deed on the Sabbath, since this miracle had been performed on a Saturday. Knowing this, Jesus left Galilee and went about in the mountain region where He performed the miracle of the multiplication of five loaves and two fishes, feeding five thousand men, aside from the number of women and children. Shortly after that was celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (which for the Jews was a great feast), and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, although He took care not to be seen by men. However, in the middle of this feast, He went into the Temple where He taught all who were gathered there, and everyone was amazed at His teaching; then being filled with envy, they said, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" (John 7:15). But Jesus, as the new Adam, had all the knowledge that the first Adam had possessed; in addition to this, as God, He was full of perfect Wisdom. But those gathered complained and arose against Him, seeking to put Him to death, Jesus reproved them showing that they only put on the appearance of preserving the Sabbath, saying to them, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill me?" (John 7:19). Then, reminding of what had been said already, He said to them: "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:23-24). Therefore, when He had spoken many such things to them, showing that He is Himself the giver of the Law and is together with the Father, on the final day of the Feast, the Jews sought to stone Him, but the stones did not touch Him. Departing from there, He then came upon the man who had been blind from birth, and He granted him sight.

(over)

Mid-Pentecost (continued)

It is good to know that the Jews had three major feasts. The first was the Passover, which they celebrated during the first Jewish month (approximately our March) in remembrance of their escape from Egypt and passing through the Red Sea. This feast also commemorates the eating of the lamb in the evening and the anointing of their door posts and lintels with the lamb's blood. It is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread since they were commanded to eat the unleavened bread for seven days before they departed from Egypt. The second feast was Pentecost, which occurred fifty days after Passover, and commemorated crossing the wilderness after passing through the Red Sea and entering the Promised Land, for fifty days had passed from the time they had crossed the sea to the time when Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai and forty years had passed since leaving Egypt and entering the land of Canaan. On this day, they thankfully offered to God bread prepared with new wheat (since this was the beginning of the wheat harvest) and decorated their homes and synagogues with greenery and flowers. This particular day was greatly respected by them, since it is also a multiple of seven (7x7+ 1). Their third feast was the Feast of the Tabernacles held in the seventh Jewish month (approximately our September) in remembrance of the tent which Moses beheld in the cloud on the mountain and that he then had constructed with the help of the craftsman Bezaleel and which was completed in seven days. During this festival, the Jews lived in booths constructed of vines and branches in remembrance of their living in tents in the wilderness. This feast also commemorates the first harvest of the field, which took place after the wandering in the desert. So, during this middle period between the two great Feasts, Jesus stood out and said loudly, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

Through this teaching, Christ proved Himself to be the Messiah, becoming our Mediator and Reconciler with His eternal Father; and it is for this reason that we celebrate this present Feast, calling it Mid-Pentecost, praising Christ the Messiah, and clearly showing the reverence for the two great Feasts. This explains why the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman is celebrated after this present Feast, for that day speaks a great deal of Christ as the Messiah, as well as about water and thirst, even though St. John the Theologian places the meeting with the Samaritan woman before the healing of the blind man.

Through Thine immeasurable loving-kindness, O Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us!
Amen.

*"[St. Paisios responds to the comment: '**Geronda, no matter what good I do, I end up losing it because I immediately become prideful.**'] Do you know what you are doing? You make honey and then you allow the devil to steal it, so that the only thing you are left with is your effort. Just as a beekeeper dazes the bees with smoke and collects the honey, so does the devil daze you with the smoke of pride. He steals your spiritual honey, rubbing his hands with glee. In other words, he steals the precious gifts of God from you; and then, he rejoices. You are smart. How can you not see this? Why don't you catch the thief, the evil one, who is robbing you?"*

✠ **Remember that not a single word is lost during prayer**, if you say it from your heart; God hears each word, and weighs it in a balance. Sometimes it seems to us that our words only strike the air in vain, and sound as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. No, no; it is not so!. The Lord responds to every desire of the heart, expressed in words or unexpressed.

~ St. John of Kronstadt

Christ is Risen!

"...if they (the Apostles) had not seen Him risen and had proof of His power, they would not have risked so much."

— a sermon on I Corinthians by St. John Chrysostom

It was clear through unlearned men that the Cross was persuasive. In fact, it persuaded the whole world. Their discourse was not of unimportant matters but of God and Orthodox religion, of the Gospel way of life and future judgment, yet it turned plain, uneducated men into philosophers. How the foolishness of God is wiser than men and His weakness is stronger than men!

In what way is it stronger? It made its way through the world and overcame all men; countless men have sought to eradicate the very name of the Crucified, but that name flourished and grew ever mightier. Its enemies lost out and perished; the living who waged war on a "dead man" proved helpless. Therefore when a philosopher tells me I am dead, he shows only that he is foolish indeed, for I, whom he thinks a fool, turn out to be wiser than those reputed wise. So to, in calling me weak, he but shows that he is weaker still, For the good deeds which tax collectors and fishermen were able to accomplish by God's grace, the philosophers, the rulers, the countless multitudes cannot even imagine.

Paul had this in mind when he said: "The weakness of God is stronger than men." That the preaching of these men was indeed divine is brought home to us in the same way. For how otherwise could twelve uneducated men, who lived on lakes and rivers and wastelands, get the idea for such an immense enterprise? How could men who perhaps had never been in a city or a public square think of setting out to do battle with the whole world? That they were fearful, timid men, the Evangelist makes clear; he did not reject the fact or try to hide their weaknesses. Indeed he turned these into a proof of the truth. What did he say of them? That when Christ was arrested, the others fled, despite all the miracles they had seen, while he who was leader of the others denied Him!

How then account for the fact that these men, who in Christ's lifetime did not stand up to the attacks by the Jews, set forth to do battle with the whole world once Christ was dead – if, as you claim, Christ did not rise to speak to them and rouse their courage? Did they perhaps say to themselves: "What is this? He could not save Himself but He will protect us? He did not help Himself when He was alive, but now that He is dead He will extend a helping hand to us? In His lifetime He brought no nation under His banner, but by uttering His Name we will win over the whole world?" Would it not be wholly irrational even to think such thoughts, much less to act upon them?

It is evident, then, that if they had *not* seen Him risen and had *proof* of His power, they would not have risked so much.

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Christos a Inviat! A Deverat a Inviat!

AL Maseeh Qam! Haqqan Qam!

Cristo e' Risorto! E' Veramente Risorto!

Christos Voskrese! Voistinu Voskrese!

Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

Christ est Ressuscite! En verite il est Ressuscite!

Cristo ha Resucitado! En Verdad ha Resucitado!

Ta Criost ar eirigh! Go jehveen, taw e ar eirigh (pronounced *air-ree*)!

Christus ist Auferstanden! Wahrhaft Auferstanden Kriste Aghsdga! Cheshmaritad Aghsdga!

Pascha, the Pascha of the Lord!

This and That

The goal of the Jesus Prayer is union with God. Not to produce a certain type of experience. Union with God requires that all in us which doesn't resonate with Him be removed, so that we can have that union. The Jesus Prayer removes these hindrances, and the removal is never pleasant. This is why the Prayer is ALWAYS a struggle.

...I fail constantly in prayer....However, a couple of things I have learned. When we think of mercy we are usually thinking of clemency. However, the word mercy in the Jesus prayer means rather that God show us his lovingkindness, his steadfast love. Perhaps, God, shower me with your goodness, with your presence. St. Paul says that we should pray without ceasing, to be mindful of God at all times. Psalm 16 in the RSV says, "I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." We are "to live, move, and have our being in God." I knew these verses as a Protestant, but I had no tool to aid me in doing what the Scriptures asked. The Jesus prayer is just such a "tool" and the prayer comes right from the Bible....think of the words of the publican. It's Trinitarian when prayed in its long form, for no one can say Jesus is Lord, except the Spirit move him. Can it be a meaningless repetition? Of course, anything can be misused. However, when Jesus' name is on your lips, it's pretty difficult to sin. And of course, we want the prayer to finally descend into the heart and stay there. These are a few thoughts from a complete novice. But I've been around enough monastics the last 13 years to see the fruit of the prayer.

The word for Mercy, Loving Kindness, Long Suffering etc in Hebrew is Hesed which means all of those. The Greek, Eleos, which we faithfully translate as Mercy has all of that meaning as well. The richness of the Hebrew word Hesed encompasses far more than we can translate as a single word in English for it can be translated into Greek as Agape as well. When we pray "Have Mercy on me," we are really asking for it all, the love, the mercy, the peace, the loving kindness and the long suffering of our Lord as blessing to us.

Dn. Nicholas Griswold

The work of the private shy: What evolutionary sense could it possibly make for humans to be bashful? Robert Fulford, March 27, 2017

Charles Darwin was confounded by an "odd state of mind" that he recognized in himself and many others. Shyness. Why did it exist? He could work out how lust, greed, love, etc. evolved as traits over many millennia. Each of them had a clear purpose in the creation and survival of humanity. But shyness? It was, so far as he could see, of no benefit to our species. And shyness could lead sometimes to blushing, another non-starter among human qualities. Darwin noted that it makes the blusher suffer and the beholder uncomfortable, "without being of the least service to either of them." Why?

The Fool-for-Christ

One form of the ascetic Christian life is called foolishness for the sake of Christ. The fool-for-Christ set for himself the task of battling within himself the root of all sin, pride. In order to accomplish this he took on an unusual style of life, appearing as someone bereft of his mental faculties, thus bringing upon himself the ridicule of others. In addition he exposed the evil in the world through metaphorical and symbolic words and actions. He took this ascetic endeavor upon himself in order to humble himself and to also more effectively influence others, since most people respond to the usual ordinary sermon with indifference. The spiritual feat of foolishness for Christ was especially widespread in Russia.

(Excerpted from *The Law of God*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY: 1993)

The concept is ultimately about humility, and reminding us that God sometimes reveals himself through those the world considers foolish. For Christians, it is critically important that God chose not to enter into time as a king, a high priest, or a theology professor, but as a poor man from Nazareth.

Three Things and the One Thing

Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things*

In a comment, I recently described three dominant concepts in our modern culture. They are so dominant that questioning them can actually be disconcerting. I have questioned them before and been hammered more than once as a result. But I am sure of my ground and offer these thoughts for however they may be of use.

The ideas:

We define ourselves and our world by the choices we make.

We have the power to correct things that are wrong or broken.

Progress is the purpose of our existence.

These ideas are not self-evident – nor are they old. They are hallmarks of what makes the modern world modern. And though these ideas may seem fitting to many situations and people, they are by no means universal. They are largely an artifact of American middle-class prosperity and are at the very root of the American life-style. As the middle-class shrinks, an increasing number of people find themselves shut out of the modern world – their choices are limited, their power ineffective and they are likely to finish life less prosperous than the previous generation. The social and economic conditions that have contributed to this are of no interest in this article. **What is of interest are the false assumptions of the world-view represented in the three ideas.**

At their foundation is a myth about human power and control. There is a classical myth from the Greeks. It is the story of Prometheus who was said to have stolen fire from Mt. Olympus for the benefit of humanity (and paid a terrible and eternal price). The story has, in recent times, been something of a primary model for the modern human being. The gods (representing everything that is seemingly unchangeable and arrayed against us) are resisted in the name of humanity. No matter the price, man asserts himself against the gods and his fate.

Prometheus is a model of the modern hero. The gods, fate, the givenness of our existence, everything that seems to conspire against the human will is opposed. There are any number of Promethean heroes/heroines in the pantheon of our modern myth. Even Milton's Lucifer who would "rather reign in hell than serve in heaven," can sound brave and idealistic to the modern ear [it would all depend on who played him in the movie]. Of course, most of us will not have to fetch fire from Mt. Olympus, or steal happiness from the gods. But we imagine ourselves in such stories, and imagine such stories to be the stuff of the good life.

And so we make our choices. "You can be anything you want to be," parents whisper to their children. "You can make the world a better place." We teach progress as the measure of what is good. Our schools frequently labor under the need for progress with constant testing and increasing goals (with the fundamental causes of poor education being largely ignored). The future is the repository of all of our dreams as well as the postponed payments for our present luxuries.

These same central ideas (and they are not the only ones) are carried over into almost every area of our lives. The self-help section of a bookstore is a library built on these assumptions. Contemporary Christianity shares these same assumptions and has raised them to the place of theological prominence. A recent trip to a "Christian" bookstore revealed a self-help section that overwhelmed both history and theology. It is a testament to the better Christian for a better world.

But these assumptions are not true. They can be made to seem true, if the data are carefully sifted and arranged to create a pattern. Our lives, however, are just lives. They begin and end and have

time in between. Our lives have value because they are the gift of God, not because they have cultural, economic or social benefit. We do not have to justify our existence to anyone. Existence is a gift.

Before we ever make even one choice in our lives, we already have infinite worth. As life goes along, we will make "good" choices and "bad" choices. No one but God is omniscient. We never have enough information to make a perfect choice. Those who pride themselves on their success ignore one of Aristotle's most important categories: luck. It is not a Christian term (God is in charge of the outcome of all things). But even Aristotle was wise enough to recognize that true success in life (what he termed becoming a "great soul") was not something we could simply choose and achieve. It remains true.

One of the first and major flaws of relying on the power of choice is our inability to know how and what to choose. We may obviously make plans, but things almost never turn out exactly as we plan. It is a rare life that has a straight trajectory. This does not mean that we make no plans, only that they will serve miserably as a purpose for our lives.

The same is true of our ability to fix what is broken or wrong. Life is not a machine. The more people are involved in any given phenomenon, the less is it susceptible to "fixing." Imagine a machine where all the parts have free will.

The myths of modernity and the grammar of American culture make us very susceptible to every appeal to fix or remake. America can rightly be described as the culture of "can-do." Almost every scenario of suffering draws the response, "Somebody needs to do something!" And while it is true that "doing something" is often quite appropriate (cf. Matt. 25), what we can do will not fix ourselves or the world around us.

This is where I believe it is important to consider "where we live." We do not live in the fix, or the plan, or in the choice. We live in the present moment. It is a commandment of the Lord: "Take no thought for the morrow." The immediate objections that arise in our minds when we hear this commandment are simply testimony to how deeply the grammar of progress and planning is engrained in our consciousness. There is an abyss of anxiety that confronts us at the thought of not planning.

At its very root, our drive towards progress is idolatry. St. James addresses this with wisdom: Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (Jam 4:13-16)

Now the one who says, "If the Lord wills," may still go to the city, buy and sell, but the center of his life has changed and shifted. What we find difficult is to live our lives, recognizing that they are only a "vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." But this is, in fact, what it means to live with Christ Himself as the purpose of our existence.

The "evil" of which St. James warns is manifested in the inherently violent nature of an existence grounded in progress. **The desire to plan, to fix and progress, always requires control and management, both of which entail temptations to violence.** It is little wonder that modernity has also been the locus of almost continual warfare, on a level never imagined in antiquity. And it has fixed nothing. Prometheus keeps fetching fire, but the fire keeps going out.

HOMILY

About the resurrection of the dead

"But someone may say, 'How are the dead raised?' With what kind of body will they come back?" (1 Corinthians 15:35).

The Apostle Paul knows in advance the objections which the unbelievers will make concerning the resurrection from the dead and, in advance, he rejects them. Even today, the non-believers who have not seen with the physical eyes the miracle of the resurrection in nature, much less the spiritual Resurrection, ask: "How will the dead be raised?" "You fool!" continues the apostle, "What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies" (1 Corinthians 15:36). Until the seed dies in the ground, the plant will not grow, in other words, something totally different than the seed will sprout up. The non-believers see through their eyes and do not see, but further ask: "How will a dead man resurrect?" How? In the same way that Christ resurrected. He lowered Himself lifeless in the tomb and rose alive. Even nature manifests the resurrection from the dead; but stronger than nature, it is manifested by the Resurrected Lord. In order to make it easier for us to believe and to hope - to believe in the resurrection in general and to have hope in our own resurrection, He Himself, resurrected from the grave, and prior to that resurrecting Lazarus who lay in the grave for four days, the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jarius.

The non-believers ask: "With what kind of body will the dead rise?" In that kind of body which God wills. With God there are many kinds of bodies. The Apostle Paul divides all bodies into two groups: into earthly bodies and into heavenly bodies. Therefore, they who have died in earthly bodies will be clothed with heavenly bodies: the incorruptible will replace the corruptible, the immortal will replace the mortal, the beautiful will replace the ugly. In this heavenly body man will also recognize himself and others around him as man recognizes himself or even when he is clothed in beggar's rags or even when he is clothed in royal purple. O Lord, All-Plenteous, do not hand us over to eternal corruption but, as royal sons, clothe us in the garment of immortality! To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

HOMILY

About the need for death in order to bring forth much fruit

"Amen, Amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (St. John 12:24).

Why does the sower throw wheat into the ground? Does he do this so that the wheat will die and rot? No, he does this so that it would live and bear fruit. In sowing the seed, the sower does not think about the death and decay of the seed, but rather about its life and its yield. Indeed, with joy does the sower sow his seed, not thinking about the death of the seed, but rather about life and fruit-bearing yield.

The Sower is Christ the Lord and men are His wheat. He was pleased to call us wheat. There are many other types of seed on earth but nothing is more priceless than wheat. Why did the Lord sow us throughout the world? So that we should die and decay? No, rather that we should live and bring forth fruit. He alludes to our death along the way. He alludes to death only as a condition for life and multiple yield. The goal of sowing is not death but life. The seed must first die and decay. He only mentions this because He knows that we are fully aware of this. He reminds us of this along the way, whereas His Gospel is primarily a narrative of life, about life and about bringing forth good fruit. He speaks to us a great deal about the latter because He knows that we are not aware of this and that we are suffocating from ignorance and doubt. Not only does He speak to us abundantly about life but He also shows us life. By His Resurrection, He demonstrates to us life and the multitude of fruit which is brighter than the sun. The entire history of His Church is a clear map of life.

O Lord of Life, Invincible, save us from a sinful death. Redeem us from a spiritual death. To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

Paschal Greetings from Around the World

Language	Greeting	Response
Aleut:	Khristus anahgrezum!	Alhecum anahgrezum!
Albanian:	Krishti U Ngjall!	Vertet U Ngjall!
Anglo-Saxon:	Crist aras!	Crist sodhlice aras!
Arabic:	El Messieh kahm!	Hakken kahm!
Armenian:	Kristos haryav ee merelotz!	Orhnial eh harootyunuh kristosee!
Bulgarian:	Hristos voskrese!	Vo istina voskrese!
Byelorussian:	Khrystos uvaskros!	Saprawdy uvaskros!
Chinese:	Helisituosi fuhuole!	Qeshi fuhuole!
Coptic:	Pchristos aftooun!	Alethos aftooun!
Czech:	Kristus vstal a mrtvych!	Opravdi vstoupil!
Danish:	Kristus er opstanden!	Ja, sandelig opstanden!
Dutch:	Christus is opgestaan!	Ja, hij is waarlijk opgestaan!
English:	Christ is risen!	Indeed He is risen!
Eritrean-Tigre:	Christos tensiou!	Bahake tensiou!
Estonian:	Kristus on oolestoosunt!	Toayestee on oolestoosunt!
Ethiopian:	Christos t'ensah em' muhtan!	Exai' ab-her eokala!
Finnish:	Kristus nousi kuolleista!	Totistesti nousi!
French:	Le Christ est ressuscite!	En verite il est ressuscite!
Gaelic:	Taw creest ereen!	Taw shay ereen guhdyne!
Georgian:	Kriste ahzdkhah!	Chezdmарidet!
German:	Christus ist erstanden!	Wahrlich ist er erstanden!
Greek:	Christos anesti!	Alithos anesti!
Hebrew:	Ha Masheeha houh quam!	Be emet quam!
Hungarian:	Krisztus feltamadt!	Valoban feltamadt!
Ibo (Nigeria):	Jesu Kristi ebiliwo!	Ezia o' biliwo!
Indian (Malayalam):	Christu uyirthezhunnettu!	Theerchayayum uyirthezhunnettu!
Indonesian:	Kristus telah bangkit!	Benar dia telah bangkit!
Italian:	Cristo e' risorto!	Veramente e' risorto!
Japanese:	Christos fukkatsu!	Jitsu ni fukkatsu!
Korean:	Kristo gesso!	Buhar ha sho nay!
Latin:	Christus resurrexit!	Vere resurrexit!
Latvian:	Kristus ir augsham sales!	Teyasham ir augsham sales vinsch!
Norwegian:	Christus er oppstanden!	Sandelig han er oppstanden!
Polish:	Khristus zmartyckwstal!	Zaprawde zmartyckwstal!
Portugese:	Cristo ressuscitou!	Em verdade ressuscitou!
Romanian:	Hristos a inviat!	Adeverat a inviat!
Russian:	Khristos voskrese!	Voistinu voskrese!
Serbian:	Cristos vaskres!	Vaistinu vaskres!
Slovak:	Kristus vstal zmr'tvych!	Skutoc ne vstal!
Spanish:	Cristo ha resucitado!	En verdad ha resucitado!
Swahili:	Kristo amefufukka!	Kweli amefufukka!
Swedish:	Christus ar upstaden!	Han ar verkligen upstaden!
Syriac:	M'shee ho dkom!	Ha koo qam!
Tlingit:	Xristos Kuxwoo-digoot!	Xegaa-kux Kuxwoo-digoot!
Turkish:	Hristos diril - di!	Hakikaten diril - di!
Ugandan:	Kristo ajukkide!	Kweli ajukkide!
Ukrainian:	Khristos voskres!	Voistinu voskres!
Welsh:	Atgyfododd Crist!	Atgyfododd yn wir!
Yupik:	Xris-tusaq Ung-uixtuq!	Iluumun Ung-uixtuq!