

A SEASON OF STRUGGLE

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ΛΑΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL



Η ΑΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗ

Η περίοδος της Μ. Τεσσαρακοστής (Μ.Τ.) έχει μεγάλη σημασία για τον πνευματικό άνθρωπο. Ανοίγεται μπροστά του ένα στάδιο αθλήσεως. Περισσότερες ακολουθίες στην εκκλησία, ευκαιρίες για εντονότερη προσευχή, νηστείες, γονυκλισίες, ψυχικές ανατάσεις, κλήση για πνευματική εγρήγορση. Όλα αυτά προσφέρονται πλουσιοπάροχα στους πιστούς και τους καλούν σε πνευματικό εξαγνισμό, σε αγώνα που τους τιμά και τους αγιάζει.

Η περίοδος του Τριωδίου που προηγείται τις Μ.Τ. προετοιμάζει τους πιστούς με κατάλληλα αναγνώσματα και υμνολογίες να εισέλθουν στο «στάδιο των αρετών» (έτσι ονομάζουν οι Ορθόδοξοι τη Μ.Τ.).

Η πρώτη Κυριακή του Τριωδίου (Τελώνου και Φαρισαίου) μας παρουσιάζει την υψοποιού ταπείνωση. Η δεύτερη Κυριακή (του Ασώτου) προβάλλει το ύψος της μετάνοιας και το βάθος της Αγάπης του Θεού Πατρός που εναγώνια αναμένει την επιστροφή του Ασώτου (δηλ. όλων μας). Η τρίτη Κυριακή (της Κρίσεως ή της Απόκρεω) μας θυμίζει πως ο καθένας μας “κρίνεται”, ή μάλλον, “κρίνει” τον εαυτό του ανάλογα με την αγάπη που έδειξε στον συνάνθρωπό του. Την τέταρτη Κυριακή (της Τυροφάγου) κλείνει το Τριώδιο. Αυτή η Κυριακή μας θυμίζει τον Παράδεισο που χάσαμε και που τώρα, μπαίνοντας στη Μ.Τ., μας δίδεται η ευκαιρία να τον ξανακερδίσουμε, εφόσον βέβαια αναλάβουμε φιλότιμα τον καλό αγώνα της νηστείας μαζί με την ταπείνωση, τη προσευχή, την ελεημοσύνη, την πίστη κ.λ.π. Πάνω απ’όλα η Εκκλησία μας παροτρύνει να ζητούμε θερμά το Έλεος του Θεού («Ελεήμον ελέησόν με τον παραπεσόντα» – Οίκος της Κυριακής).

Το ίδιο βράδυ η Εκκλησία μας αποβάλλει τα στολίδια της. Ντύνεται πένθιμα. Συντονίζεται το κατα Θεόν πένθος. Μπαίνουμε στην Μ.Τ. Όλο το πνευματικό και λειτουργικό μεγαλείο της Ορθοδοξίας μας αποκαλύπτεται. Τα Μεγάλα Απόδειπνα, οι προηγιασμένες Θ. Λειτουργίες, οι Χαιρετισμοί της Θεοτόκου, οι Κυριακάτικες μεγαλοπρεπείς Θ. Λειτουργίες του Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, οι μελωδικότατοι και θεόπνευστοι κανόνες, καλούν τις ψυχές των Ορθοδόξων σε πνευματική πανδαισία που συγκινούν τις ψυχές, συναρπάζουν το νού και μας κινούν σε Μετάνοια.

Η Πρώτη Κυριακή των Νηστειών (της Ορθοδοξίας) μας θυμίζει τους θησαυρούς της Ορθόδοξης πνευματικότητας και μας κινεί στο σεβασμό των Αγίων Πατέρων και των Ιερών Παραδόσεων της Εκκλησίας μας. Επίσης, προβάλλοντας την Αναστήλωση των Ιερών Εικόνων στις Εκκλησίες, μας θυμίζει την ανάγκη της Αναστήλωσης της προσωπικής μας εικόνας σύμφωνα με το ύψος της εικόνας του Δημιουργού μας.

Επειδή στο σύνολό της η περίοδος της Μ.Τ. είναι ένας θεοτερπής ύμνος στο ασκητικό πνεύμα της Εκκλησίας και ένας θρίαμβος του Μοναχισμού, προβάλλει τη Δεύτερη και την Τέταρτη Κυριακή των Νηστειών δυο μεγάλες μορφές του Μοναχισμού και της Ορθοδοξίας.

Πρώτον, τον Άγιο Γρηγόριο τον Παλαμά – το φωστήρα και διδάσκαλο της Εκκλησίας (απολ.) και δεύτερον, τον Άγιο Ιωάννη της Κλίμακος που πότισε με τα δάκρυά του την άγονη έρημο και έβγαλε χυμώδεις καρπούς (απολ.)

Την Τρίτη Κυριακή των Νηστειών (της Σταυροπροσκυνήσεως) η Εκκλησία μας θυμίζει το πολίτευμα του Σταυρού και πώς ο Σταυρός του Κυρίου νοηματοδοτεί τη ζωή μας, εφόσον υπομένουμε στους παντοίους πειρασμούς και πρόθυμα κακοπαθούμε για την αγάπη και την Χάρη Του Θεού.

Την Πέμπτη Κυριακή των Νηστειών προβάλλεται το παράδειγμα της Οσίας Μητρός υμων Μαρίας της Αιγυπτίας για να ξαναθυμηθούμε όλοι τη δύναμη της Μετάνοιας και τη Φιλανθρωπία του Θεού που μπορεί να ανασύρει μια ψυχή από το βόρβορο των παθών στα ύψη της αγιότητας.

Τέλος, ακολουθούν, το Σάββατο, η Ανάσταση του Λαζάρου και η Κυριακή των Βαΐων. Μας θυμίζει έτσι η Εκκλησία μας «την κοινήν ανάστασιν» όλων μας, που για να συντελεσθεί, πρέπει να προηγηθεί η Μεγάλη Εβδομάδα Των Παθών του Κυρίου μας.

Περι αυτής θα γράψουμε στο επόμενο τεύκος μας.

**Καλή Μεγάλη
Τεσσαρακοστή!**



A SEASON OF STRUGGLE



Our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ intensely and with great devotion. Such a unique and triumphal event can only be understood and celebrated by the faithful with meaningful spiritual preparation. This involves the cleansing of the heart, repentance, contrition, fasting, intense prayer, and participation in the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion. The preparatory period before the great feast of the Resurrection is known as Great Lent.

Great Lent is a pensive period, which reminds and prepares us for the suffering and death on the Cross of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. It brings to mind our own passions and innumerable sins, which are the reason for His crucifixion and His unbelievably cruel death. Our Mother Church provides several holy services in this period, which explain the significance of the various aspects of the passion of Jesus Christ. These aim to bring us to contrition and deep sorrow about our past errors, encouraging us to change our ways and return to God in deep repentance.

From the Services of Great Lent

1. The Compline [Απόδειπνον] – These are evening services held in churches throughout Great Lent. The Great Compline is held from Monday to Thursday, while the Small Compline is read on Friday evenings. This latter service is also read by Orthodox Christians for evening prayer throughout the year.

2. The Hours [Οἱ Ὁρᾱς] – These are brief, simple services, comprising three psalms, hymns, and a prayer. They are commonly joined to the end of Matins (Ὁρθρος), the morning service.

3. The Odes [Οἱ Ὁδές] – There are nine biblical odes, each of which is dedicated to one specific religious personality. Eight of them are taken from the Old Testament, while the last ode, dedicated to our Lady Panagia, is taken from the Gospel of Luke. Whilst the odes are normally sung each Matins service in various combinations, during Great Lent only three are sung daily on weekdays. From this is derived the liturgical name of this season, Triodion, meaning three odes.

4. The Akathist Hymn [Ὁ Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος] – Composed by Saint Romanos the Melodist, this service is sung each Friday of Great Lent during the Small Compline.

It is a triumphant hymn of gratitude from the citizens of Byzantium to our Lady Panagia, who miraculously saved the city of Constantinople from a siege by its enemies. The people's gratitude was expressed by an all-night vigil, singing praises to Panagia while upstanding. From this is derived the name of the service which translates to 'not seated'.

5. The Great Canon [Ὁ Μέγας Κανὼν] – This is a long and powerful canon of hymns by Saint Andrew of Crete, which have a penitential character, calling us to change our way of life and make every effort to raise ourselves from earthly concerns to those of heaven. It is sung in portions over the course of the first week of Lent in the Great Compline, and in full on the Wednesday of the fifth week of the Great Lent.

6. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts [Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τῶν Προηγιασμένων Δώρων] – This is a form of the Divine Liturgy, served on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout Great Lent, in which the priest uses pieces of the consecrated Lamb [the pre-sanctified bread] from the Sunday Liturgy to prepare Holy Communion for the faithful. Since the Holy Gifts used are from the Sunday Liturgy, they are called presanctified.

The Holy Mother Church has established the period of Great Lent in connection with the Passion of Jesus Christ, as an opportunity to progress spiritually and to be in greater contact with our inner self, through concentration, self-examination and self-knowledge. To receive these spiritual benefits, we must demonstrate greater control of our heart, thoughts, eyes, ears, and tongue – critiquing ourselves more sternly.

To experience Great Lent profitably, we need to pray more frequently and fervently, that God grants us His grace to help us reach greater spiritual heights and prepare ourselves to participate meaningfully in the joy of his Resurrection.

In this period, the Church sends this message to all of us:

The stadium for the acquisition of virtues is now open, Those who wish to compete, enter! Only the victors will be rewarded!

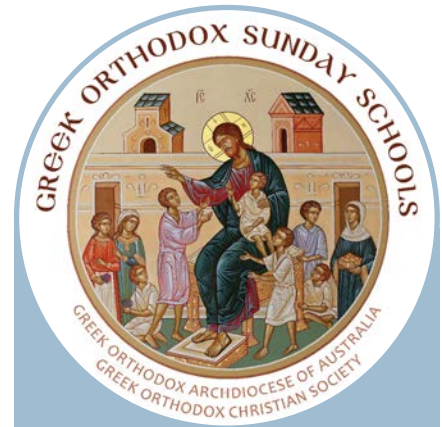
Blessing & Commencement of the 2024 Sunday School Year



On Sunday 18th February 2024 at the Greek Orthodox Parish of St Gerasimos, Leichhardt, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia blessed the commencement of Sunday Schools for the upcoming year. After concelebrating the Divine Liturgy with His Eminence Archbishop Damaskinos of Joppa from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and His Grace Bishop Elpidios of Kyanea, Archbishop Makarios led a blessing service for the Sunday School teachers. Addressing the teachers, His Eminence emphasised the importance of the work undertaken by Sunday Schools and the significance of spreading the word of God to the children of our Church.

The day prior, His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis, on behalf of

His Eminence, attended the official launch of the Sunday School year at the Orthodox Mission Centre, Kingsgrove. His Grace stressed that every Christian must have two priorities in life: cultivating a personal relationship with God and actively living a life of love towards those around us. It is these two elements that are fundamental for every good work in the Church and must be at the heart of every Sunday School teacher. We pray that God continues to bless the teachers, children and all involved in this holy and sacred work.



Register for Sunday School 2024!

Sunday School provides a friendly and nurturing environment in which children can begin to appreciate the beauty of their Orthodox Christian Faith and a life in Christ. We play games, learn Christian songs and hymns, and engage in lessons on various aspects of our Orthodox Faith.

Sunday School operates at 23 Parishes in NSW, with 100 teachers across 70 classes, usually broken up into Infants, Primary and High School groups.



Scan here to register



Holy and Glorious Hieromartyr Haralambos

Saint Haralambos was a priest who lived in the city of Magnesia in Asia Minor in the 2nd century. He martyred for Christ at the age of 113, and both throughout his life, and in his death, he served as a powerful guide of the people to repentance and salvation.

When a terrifying persecution of Christians began under the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211), news of the Saint's preaching reached the local governor. The Saint was arrested at the age of 107 and, upon refusing to sacrifice to the idols and deny Christ, was punished with severe tortures. His clothes were stripped and his body ripped with iron hooks and skin scraped from his body.

He withstood the torture with courage and exclaimed to his tormentors: "I thank you, brethren, in flaying my old body, you are renewing my soul and preparing it for everlasting life". Rather than repenting upon the sight of St Haralambos, the governor flew into a rage and tried to attack the Saint with his bare hands. Immediately, the governor's hands were severed from his body and lifelessly attached to the body of the Saint. St Haralambos then prayed for the governor and he was healed, which led to his repentance and conversion.

Hearing about the unbearable tortures that the Saint endured, as well as the miracle with the governor, many people from Magnesia and other parts of Asia Minor came to the Saint and confessed their sins. The Saint also performed many miracles by curing illnesses.

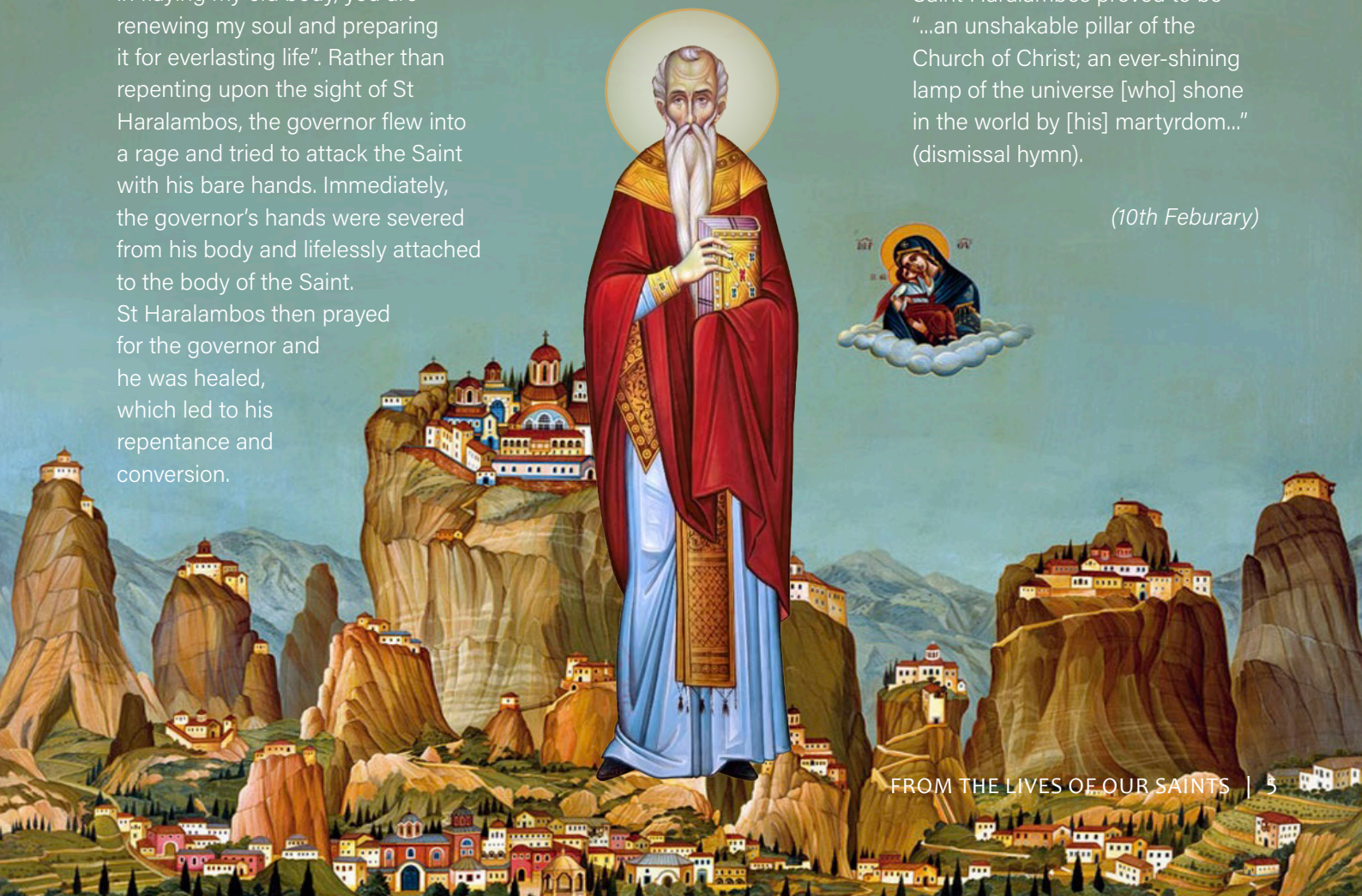
News then spread to the emperor about the inhabitants of Magnesia abandoning idolatry and being baptised. The emperor ordered Saint Haralambos to be brought to him in Antioch. Soldiers twisted the Saint's beard into a rope, wrapped it around his neck and used it to drag him across the ground. They also drove an iron nail into his body. The emperor then ordered more intense tortures and began to burn him, however, under God's protection, the Saint remained unharmed.

The Saint's travails became widespread so that many people began to believe in Christ, including Galina, the emperor's daughter. Indeed, she twice smashed the idols in a pagan temple. The tortures continued as the emperor ordered his men to break the Saint's jaw with stones and set his beard on fire, but the flames burned the torturers and an earthquake shook the ground on which they stood.

Finally, the emperor sentenced Saint Haralambos to be beheaded. Before the sword fell, he lifted up his hands and eyes to heaven and heard a voice welcoming him to share in the splendour of the martyrs. The Saint was beheaded and his body was buried by Galina. The holy relic of the skull of Saint Haralambos is kept at the Monastery of St. Stephen at Meteora, Greece.

Saint Haralambos proved to be "...an unshakable pillar of the Church of Christ; an ever-shining lamp of the universe [who] shone in the world by [his] martyrdom..." (dismissal hymn).

(10th February)





A motto for 2024

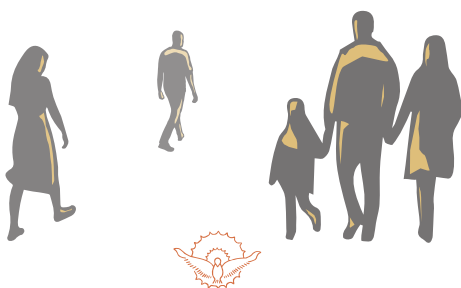
Our Synthema or motto for 2024 focuses on a few powerful words taken from the First Epistle of Saint John: **"walk in the light"**.

*"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."
(1 John 1:7)*

This passage begs the question: *"how can I walk in the light?"* This can be achieved when we open our hearts to the Lord in prayer, when we study our Lord's words and when we actively go about putting those words into action. Then, we slowly begin to leave behind our old selves, our old habits, our old ways of thinking, our sins and passions, and we begin to think, behave and feel as God our heavenly Father wills. As St Paul says, *"Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light"* (Ephesians 5:14).

*we walk
in the
light*

1 JOHN 1:7



ΣΥΝΘΗΜΑ 2024

As Christians and active members of the Church, we have a responsibility to ensure the light of Christ shines through us and radiates to all people.

We cannot take any preliminary steps, however, if we do not recognise our sins or acknowledge that we are in darkness. As we read in the next verse of the epistle, *"[i]f we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). It is only when we acknowledge our sins and repent, when we are aware of the darkness in which we walk, and that we need to be pulled from that darkness into the Light of Christ, that we can begin to be transformed.

St Maximus speaks of how the soul moves from the darkness of sin to the light of communion with God. It is this constant movement which should mark our lifelong struggle as Christians - to do what the Apostle Paul

says: "[f]or you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

(1 John 1:7)

As Christians and active members of the Church, we have a responsibility to ensure the light of Christ shines through us and radiates to all people. This, in turn, will influence others and bring them to the light of Christ. We must remember that salvation is not a matter of individual concern, nor is it limited to a privileged few. Rather, it is offered to "every person who has come into the world" as we hear in a prayer asking for Christ's light.

The true Light, Jesus Christ, enlightens every person. Our participation in the mysteries of the Holy Church, especially in the mystery of Holy Communion offers us the opportunity to walk in that light.

The beautiful hymns of Pascha tell us to let everything begin anew in the Light of the Resurrected Christ. So, in the same way, as we begin 2024, let us all pray and yearn daily to receive the Light of Christ and make a new start in our spiritual journey so that our union with Him may bring about our own salvation and the salvation of all who we encounter.



*Christ the true light,
which enlightens and
sanctifies everyone
who comes into the
world, may the light
of your countenance be
signed upon us, so that
in it we may see the
unapproachable light,
and may you direct our
steps towards performing
your commandments;
through the intercessions
of your all-pure Mother
and all your Saints.
Amen.*

Prayer of the First Hour



Το Σύνθημά μας για το 2024

«Εάν δὲ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν, ὡς αὐτός ἐστιν ἐν τῷ φωτὶ, κοινωνίαν ἔχομεν μετ' ἀλλήλων». Ἀν δηλαδή ζούμε μέσα στο φως κι έχουμε φωτεινὴ καὶ ἐνάρετη ζωή, ὅπως ὁ Θεός, ὁ Ὁποῖος εἶναι μέσα στο φως, τότε θα ἔχουμε στενὴ σχέση καὶ κοινωνία μεταξύ μας, καὶ ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ θα μας καθαρίζει ἀπὸ κάθε αμαρτία.

Θα περιμέναμε ἴσως νὰ μας πει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης ὅτι, ὅταν ζούμε καθαρὴ καὶ ἁγία ζωή θα ἔχουμε κοινωνία με τὸν Θεό. Ἀντί γι' αὐτὸ ὅμως, λέει ὅτι τότε ἔχουμε κοινωνία με τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας. Τὸ ἀναφέρει αὐτὸ, διότι ἡ ἐνότητα καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους γίνεται αἷτια νὰ ἐνωθούμε τελικὰ καὶ με τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀντίστροφο συμβαίνει: ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καλλιεργεῖ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας. Αὐτὴ τὴ διπλὴ ἀγάπη βίωσε καὶ δίδαξε ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ μας καλεῖ σήμερα νὰ τὴ βιώνουμε κι ἐμεῖς.

Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή, ἡ Ἱερά Παράδοση, ἡ Ὑμνολογία καὶ ἡ καθημερινὴ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας βεβαιώνουν ὅτι ὁ Θεός εἶναι τὸ ἀληθινὸ φῶς, ἡ πηγὴ κάθε ἀληθείας καὶ γνώσεως πὺ ἀκτινοβολεῖ ἀγιότητα, σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ. Δὲν ὑπάρχει μέσα Τοῦ τίποτε τὸ σκοτεινὸ.

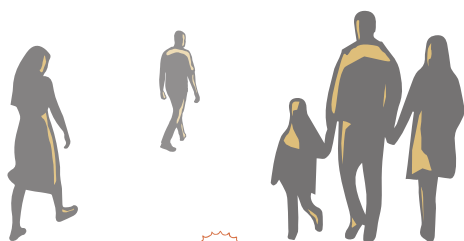
Μας ἔδωσε βεβαίως ὁ Θεός τὸ υλικὸ φῶς ἀλλὰ μας ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸ φῶς τὸ ὁποῖο εἶναι θεϊκὸ καὶ ἀσυγκρίτως χρησιμότερο καὶ μυστηριωδέστερο ἀπὸ τὸ φυσικὸ φῶς. Σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ πνευματικὸ φῶς μας συνιστᾷ ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης νὰ περιπατοῦμε καὶ ἔτσι θα συναντήσουμε καὶ τὸν πλησίον μας καὶ τὸν Χριστό.

Τί στρατηγικὴ χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ περπατοῦμε στο Φῶς?

1. Καθημερινὴ προσευχή- Νὰ ζητάμε ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ τὴν θεῖα φώτισή Του γιὰ τὰ ζητήματα τῆς ζωῆς μας, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ τὰ λύσουμε με τὰ δικά μας φῶτα.
2. Νὰ μελετάμε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή- νὰ μάθουμε γιὰ τὸν Θεό, τὸν προορισμὸ μας στὴν γῆ καὶ ἔτσι νὰ θερμαίνουμε τὴν πίστη μας.
3. Νὰ ἐλέγχουμε τὴν συνείδησή μας. Νὰ μετανοοῦμε, νὰ καθαρίζουμε τὴν ψυχὴ μας με τὴν Ἐξομολόγηση.

ἐν τῷ
φωτὶ
περιπατῶμεν

Α' ΙΩΑΝ. 1:7



ΣΥΝΘΗΜΑ 2024

4. Να συμμετέχουμε στην Θεία Λειτουργία και στο μυστήριο της Θείας Κοινωνίας.

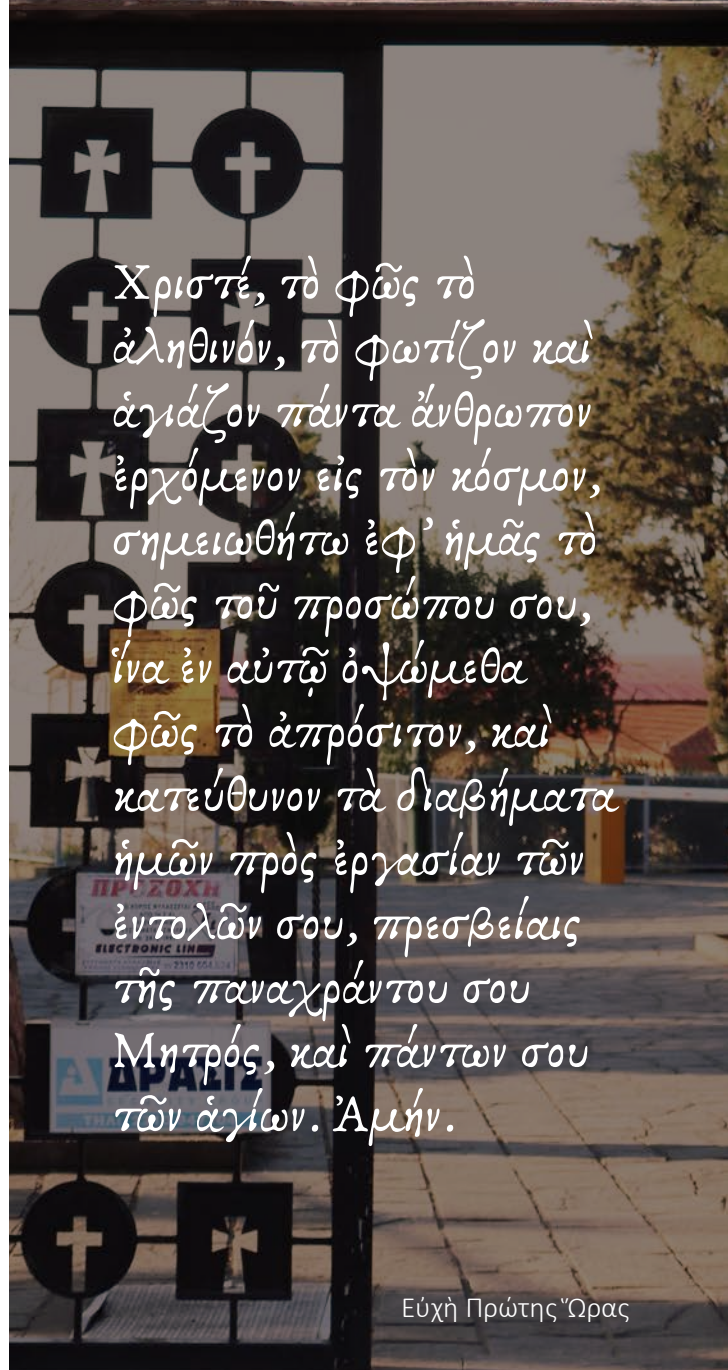
5. Να αποφεύγουμε την αμαρτία που μας βυθίζει μέσα στο σκοτάδι, τα σκοτεινά έργα, λόγια, πράξεις, σκέψεις, δηλαδή τα πάθη μας. Να καλλιεργούμε την ψυχή μας. Και εάν κάποια στιγμή πέσουμε, να ξανασηκωθούμε αμέσως με το Ιερό μυστήριο της ειλικρινής Μετανοίας και Εξομολόγησης.

Όταν ο αγώνας μας είναι προς το Φως, ο Χριστός ευλογεί τις προσπάθειές μας. Ας σκεφτούμε τους Αγίους, που παρόλες τις αμαρτίες τους, πολλοί είδαν το άκτιστο Φως γιατί ήταν αφοσιωμένοι στον Χριστό – με τον νου, την καρδιά και την ψυχή των. Και έτσι έγιναν Άγιοι με την Χάρη του Θεού.

Ας αφιερώσουμε αυτή
την χρονιά, το 2024,
στην προσευχή που
παρακαλεί τον Κύριο
Ιησού Χριστό, που είναι
η πηγή τού αληθινού
Φωτός, να πλημμυρίζει
τη ζωή μας με το δικό
Του φως.

Το Φως του Χριστού δίδεται σε όλους όσους έχουν καθαρή καρδιά, πραγματική πίστη στον Θεό και φανερώνεται με την ειρήνη, την καλωσύνη, την δικαιοσύνη, την φιλαλήθεια - αρετές που ο άνθρωπος καλείται να αξιοποιήσει για το δικό του το καλό και για τον πλησίον του.

Ας αφιερώσουμε αυτή την χρονιά, το 2024, στην προσευχή που παρακαλεί τον Κύριο Ιησού Χριστό, που είναι η πηγή τού αληθινού Φωτός, να πλημμυρίζει τη ζωή μας με το δικό Του φως, και ας αγωνιζόμαστε να ζούμε ενωμένοι μαζί Του, να περπατούμε στο δρόμο Του ώστε να γίνουμε, και εμείς, «τέκνα φωτός»!



Εύχή Πρώτης Ώρας



Χαίρε Κεχαριτωμένη Rejoice, O Full of Grace!



"And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:28).

These extraordinary and blessed words - spoken by the Archangel Gabriel to our Panagia - are celebrated triumphantly at the feast of the Annunciation commemorated on the 25th of March. On that day, Panagia, a human like all of us, accepted the invitation to be the Mother of Christ our Saviour. She is "the heavenly ladder, by which God came down... [the] bridge that leads us from earth to Heaven" (Akathist Hymn). From the day of the Annunciation, God's pre-eternal plan for the salvation of humanity is revealed.

This is why the dismissal hymn of the day reminds us that the feast "marks the crowning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery before all ages". One of the kathisma hymns of the day calls the feast an "incomprehensible and inexplicable wonder", with Panagia being "the restoration of humanity". In this way, Panagia is not only humanity's gift to God, but also God's gift to humanity.

Let us briefly reflect on Panagia's worthiness to receive such a message from the Archangel. She was born as a result of the humble, faithful and persistent prayers of her parents, Joachim and Anna, the most blessed and virtuous couple in history. She then entered the temple from a young age and devoted herself entirely to the service of God, being fed by angels. St Nicholas Cabasilas says that she lived a "life that was all-immaculate, all-pure, refused all wickedness, exercised all virtues, had a soul purer than light, a body altogether spiritual ... a nous with wings that flew to the heights ... a soul that longed for divine eros".

It was this all-consuming love for God that allowed her to be the only human in history considered pure and worthy enough to be the Mother of God. A Theotokion hymn of the feast tells us that even the Archangel Gabriel, when about to deliver the message, was "astounded by the beauty of [her] virginity and the exceeding radiance of [her] purity". He was lost for words and wondered "[w]hat worthy hymn of praise can I offer you? And what shall I name you?". Eventually, "as commanded, I cry out to you: "Rejoice, O Full of Grace".

If the Archangel Gabriel, who sits in the presence of God, has such wonder and amazement at the holiness of Panagia, how much more reverence and love should we have for her? But, more practically, how should we respond on this great feast of the Annunciation?

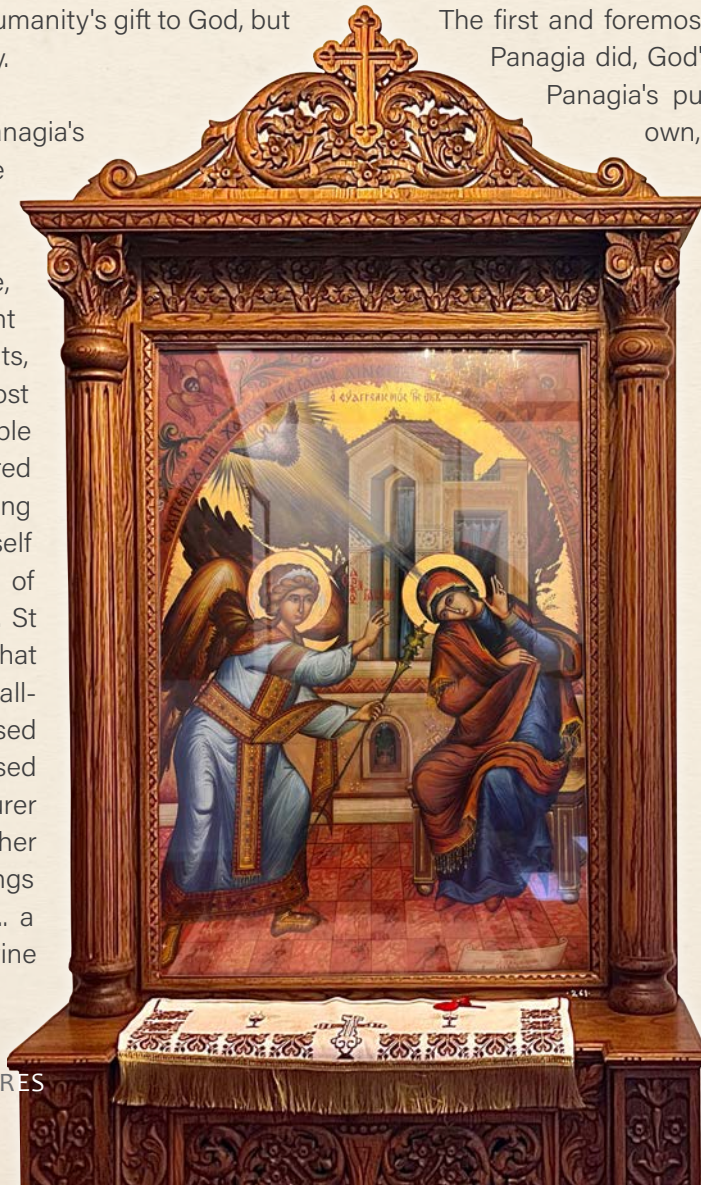
The first and foremost response is to accept, like Panagia did, God's invitation to live within us.

Panagia's purity, which far exceeds our own, allowed her to be chosen by

God to give birth to Christ.

But even for us, Christ promises that if we live with a pure heart, we "shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). These are not vain words or idle hopes, but concrete promises from God Himself.

And the second response is to follow the proclamation at the end of the dismissal hymn: "let us join [the Archangel], and cry aloud to the Theotokos: "Rejoice, Maiden full of grace! The Lord is with you"". And if we do that, if we pray and chant to Panagia with all our heart and pray for her continual intercession, our hope in her will not be disappointed.



Book Review

GOD *and* MAN

Metropolitan
Anthony Bloom

A modern classic of Orthodox Christian literature, *God and Man*, consists of an interview with, and four homilies by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom in 1969-70. In a short text of

one hundred and twenty odd pages, the late Metropolitan of ever-blessed memory provides refreshing insights into what it means to live and to believe in Christ. The book reads as a series of specific reflections circling around fundamental yet often problematic concepts for our contemporary world, including faith, doubt, reality, truth, love and holiness. The talks are deep and comprehensive while simultaneously personal and well-articulated, making for an easy, captivating read filled with challenges to inspire its readers.

The book opens with a transcript of the famous BBC television interview between atheist Marghanita Laski and Metropolitan Anthony. The discussion is especially beneficial to the Christian for the way in which the Metropolitan describes the ways in which someone who discovers and knows God exists can navigate the points of view of others who have not made the discovery. Metropolitan Anthony closes his statement about God and religion, saying,

"God is not someone I need to fill gaps. It's someone I have got to accept because from the experience of life I have He does exist; I can't avoid the fact... all the morals that develop from His existence are part not of a duty to Him or a duty to people – I don't like the

word duty – but an act of happiness and gratitude for God and for people, and that links with worship – a worshipful attitude to God, a worshipful attitude to people, a worshipful attitude to life; I think the sense of worship and joy and of a challenge which will make me grow into a full stature is really what matters in practical life." (*God and Man*, p.18)

In the subsequent four homilies – Doubt and the Christian Life, Man and God, Holiness and Prayer and John the Baptist – Metropolitan Anthony penetrates some of the core aspects of man's relationship with God, revealing the mystery of God's plan for us. God stands in the middle of history – in the eye of the storm – and He calls us to stand where He stands, to be involved and committed writes the Metropolitan, so that we may properly intercede by bringing ourselves into the centre of the conflict as Christ did in His life.

The text is filled with analyses of passages and parables from the holy scriptures as well as anecdotes useful to explaining spiritual realities to a contemporary audience. The lived experience of the author (himself a convert) comes alive in his powerful words, imparting to the reader an authenticity and enthusiasm for the Christian life.

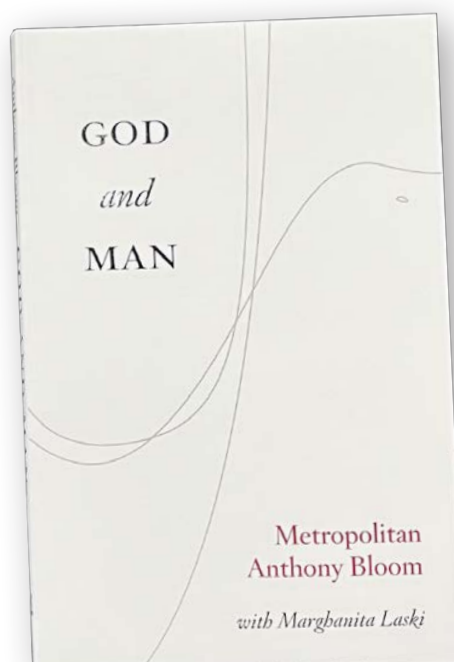
God and Man is a necessary refresher for the cradle Christian and a compass of encouragement for the catechumen and all searching souls.

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The background of the title section is a photograph of an ornate church interior, likely an iconostasis, featuring numerous religious icons in arched frames and a central cross.

The Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the additional services which the Church offers during the six-week journey of Great Lent and Holy Week, being held on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent, on the Thursday of the fourth week of Lent and the first three days of Holy Week.

Apparent by its name, this Liturgy differs to the other liturgies of the year in that the holy gifts are already sanctified, having been set aside during one of the liturgies held on a prior Saturday or Sunday. The Church stipulates that due to the sombre character of Lent, regular Divine Liturgies are not served during the week except on Saturdays and Sundays and on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos celebrated on 25 March.

The service is not strictly a Divine Liturgy as the gifts have already been changed. Instead, it is a service involving the distribution of the Precious Gifts. Its structure commences much like a vespers service typical of those held during Great Lent. The chanting of the ancient hymn "[n]ow the powers", serves as the junction between the two services where Vespers concludes and the Presanctified Liturgy begins.

In the middle of the hymn, at the words, "for, behold, the King of Glory enters" the Entrance of the Holy Gifts occurs in utter silence, after which the hymn is completed, "[b]ehold, the mystical sacrifice, fully accomplished, is ushered in. In fervent faith let us draw near, that we may become sharers in everlasting life. Alleluia"

The Entrance is followed by a litany, the prayer "by placing the holy gifts on the holy altar",

the Lord's Prayer, the two prayers of bowing the head and the exclamation "[l]et us attend. The Presanctified holy things to those who are holy".

Following this, the structure of the Presanctified is identical to that of the Divine Eucharist, with only a few differences in hymns and prayers.

Historically, the origins of this service are found in the practice of self-communion of the Gifts, specifically the Body of Christ, brought home from the Holy Liturgy. St Basil the Great places this custom in the era of the Christian persecutions, writing, "[i]t is needless to point out that for anyone in times of persecution to be compelled to take the communion in his own hand without the presence of the priest or minister is not a serious offence, as long custom sanctions this practice from the facts themselves."

This custom continued after the end of the persecutions. For example, we see in the life of St Basil the Great written by St Amphilochios of Iconium, after celebrating the first eucharist with prayers composed by himself, St Basil communed of one portion of the Body, put a second portion in a tabernacle which was hanging in the form of a dove above the altar table and took a third portion home, so as to commune from it on his deathbed.

We also have evidence that the readings from the Book of Genesis during the Vespers portion of the service are linked to the custom wherein Bishops would expound on the Book of Genesis to those catechumens preparing to receive Baptism during the service of the Sunday of Pascha.

As the Holy Eucharist is so essential to the life of the Church and the spiritual needs of the faithful, this liturgy exists to allow regular communion of the Holy Gifts during the Lenten season when the Divine Liturgy is not celebrated as frequently.





OUR CREED

I expect the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)

Long before Christ proclaimed these magnificent words, God was continuously revealing the reality of life after death to humanity, through the mouths of His elect: "Will man live again after he completes his course of life and dies? I will wait until I arise" (Job 14:14, ~1600 B.C.)

"Son of man, can these bones live? ... Behold I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live... I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves". (Ezekiel 37:1-14, 6th century B.C.)

"I expect" («προσδοκῶ» i.e. I will towards, I look forward to) – the third and final verb of our Creed, projects into the hearts of all the faithful, that wonderful combination of sure confidence, joyful anticipation, triumph and yearning. Towards what end? The resurrection from the dead (when the soul will reunite with the body), and the ensuing life of the age to come; a life with no end.

"... for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His [the Son of God] voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). For some, the experience of God's presence will be eternal bliss, while for others

it will be eternal torment, for they rejected Him from this life and want nothing to do with Him. What is certain, however, is that every soul will rise from the dead to one or the other.

In the Orthodox Memorial Service, we chant on behalf of the departed, "[g]rant me the homeland for which I long, and once again make me a citizen of Paradise" Since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, we are all living in exile for "our citizenship is in heaven" as Apostle Paul says (Philippians 3:20). The Saints - those champions of our faith, the souls that gave their all to the struggle to be cleansed, enlightened, sanctified and united with God, truly lived "as sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11). They maintained a constant remembrance of death whilst deepening their faith in "... an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven..." (1 Peter 1:4). They counted the present sufferings as nothing to be compared with the glory of the age to come.

Time is a gift. Our present life is a gift. The time of our life is God's. The Lord calls us to "do business till I come" (Luke 19:13), in other words, to sanctify the days He grants us by applying His teachings. We are to use our talents and present circumstances, whatever they may be, as opportunities for spiritual cultivation, knowing that our every thought, word, and action in this present life has eschatological value.

Those baptised in the Orthodox Church are offered a foretaste of the eternal Kingdom through the liturgical life of our Church, especially through participation in the Holy Eucharist, the eschatological experience par excellence. We have heard and know that "[w]hoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54).

These closing Articles (11 & 12) of our Creed, effectively serve as a starting point for the eternal blessedness we have set our gaze upon from this life. It is very fitting that our declaration of the Symbol of Faith on a personal and collective level, takes place in the harmonious and panegyric atmosphere of every Divine Liturgy just before our participation in the Holy Eucharist.

Our Creed is our identity as Orthodox Christians. If someone was to ask us "who are you?", we could very well respond by reciting the Creed... "I believe in..." To those who formulated each phrase with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and gave their blood, sweat and tears to keep it whole and untouched through the centuries, we owe immense gratitude, but above all, we ask for their intercessions to give us the strength to continue our sacred task of ensuring it is guarded by God's grace. May our "Amen" at the end of the Creed, serve as our ever-renewed personal affirmation to know our faith and to live by it. Amen.



Στο σημερινό μας άρθρο θα επικεντρωθούμε στη δυναμική σχέση του Δημιουργού με το πλάσμα Του, τον άνθρωπο, και πώς ο Θεός «αναθεωρεί» μερικές αποφάσεις Του όταν ο άνθρωπος διαπραγματεύεται, προσεύχεται, μετανοεί και γενικά επικοινωνεί μαζί Του. Τα παραδείγματα που θα αναφέρουμε είναι από την Αγία μας Γραφή.

(Α) Στο 8ο κεφάλαιο της Γενέσεως έχουμε τη γνωστή μας περικοπή με τη φιλοξενία του Αβραάμ. Τρεις «άνδρες» εμφανίστηκαν απέναντι από τη σκηνή του Πατριάρχου. Αμέσως τους φιλοξένησε με νερό για να πλύνουν τα πόδια τους, ψωμί και ένα τρυφερό μοσχαράκι για να φάνε. Όταν ο κύριος φιλοξενοούμενος του είπε πως τον επόμενο χρόνο,

την ίδια εποχή, η γυναίκα του η Σάρρα θα γεννούσε υιό, κατάλαβε ο Αβραάμ πως μπροστά του είχε τον Κύριο με δύο αγγέλους (οι Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας μας αποδίδουν τις εμφανίσεις του Θεού στην Παλαιά Διαθήκη στον Μονογενή Υιό και Λόγο του Θεού). Ο σκοπός αυτής της Θείας επισκέψεως ήταν να προαναγγείλουν στο ηλικιωμένο ζευγάρι τη σύλληψη και γέννηση του υιού τους Ισαάκ αλλά και την αναγγελία της καταστροφής των Σοδόμων. Και όταν αναχώρησαν οι άγιοι αγγελοι για να εκτελέσουν την απόφαση του Θεού στην αμαρτωλή πόλη, έμεινε μαζί με τον Αβραάμ ο Κύριος για να τον ενημερώσει για την επικείμενη καταστροφή. Ο Αβραάμ τότε, σε έναν πολύ χαριτωμένο διάλογο (στίχοι 23-33), διαπραγματεύεται με τον Κύριο. «Εάν υπάρχουν στα Σόδομα πενήντα δίκαιοι, θα τους καταστρέψεις μαζί με τους ασεβείς;» Ο Κύριος τότε δέχτηκε να μην καταστρέψει την πόλη για χάρη των πενήντα εκείνων δικαίων. Ο Αβραάμ συνέχισε τότε το διαδοχικό «παζάρεμα» για το αν θα κατέστρεφε ο Κύριος τα Σόδομα εάν υπήρχαν σαράντα πέντε, σαράντα, τριάντα, είκοσι ή έστω και δέκα δίκαιοι και ο Θεός απαντούσε πως η πόλη δεν θα καταστρεφόταν εάν υπήρχαν τόσα άτομα στην πόλη. Και όντως στα Σόδομα υπήρχαν μόνο τέσσερα άτομα άξια για να σωθούν από την καταστροφή – ο Λωτ, η σύζυγός του και οι δύο θυγατέρες

του τους οποίους επροστάτευσαν από τους αμαρτωλούς κατοίκους των Σοδόμων και από την καταστροφή της τελευταίας οι δύο άγγελοι. Βέβαια η γυναίκα του Λωτ σώθηκε μεν αρχικά αλλά με το να παρακούσει την εντολή των αγγέλων που τους ζήτησαν να φύγουν γρήγορα κυττάζοντας μόνο μπροστά, ρίχνοντας προς τα πίσω μια στιγμιαία ματιά μεταμορφώθηκε σε στήλη άλατος. Εδώ πρέπει να θαυμάσουμε την παρρησία (ευσεβές θάρρος) του Αβραάμ αλλά και την συγκατάβαση του Θεού να διαπραγματευθεί μαζί του το μέλλον μιας ολόκληρης πόλης.

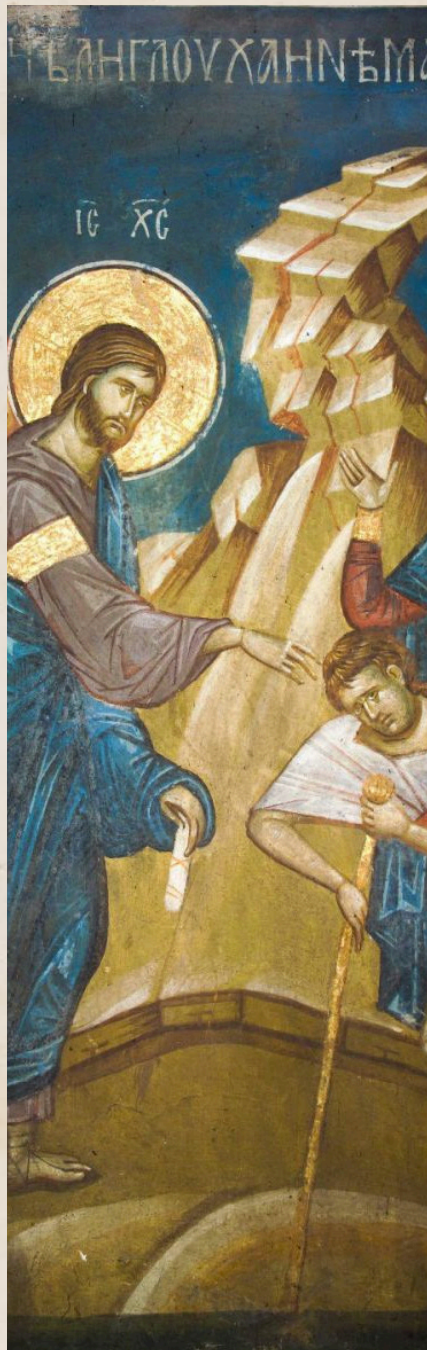
(Β) Ερχόμαστε τώρα στο 20ο κεφάλαιο της Βασιλειών Δ', στίχους 1-11. Ένας από τους πιο ευσεβείς βασιλείς του Ιούδα, ο Εζεκίας, αρρωσταίνει βαριά και κοντεύει να πεθάνει. Ήλθε λοιπόν κοντά του ο προφήτης Ησαΐας και του είπε: «Αυτά λέει ο Κύριος: Τακτοποίησε τις υποθέσεις του βασιλικού σου οίκου, διότι δεν θα ζήσεις πολύ ακόμη, θα πεθάνεις». Τότε ο Εζεκίας, καθώς βρισκόταν ξαπλωμένος στο κρεβάτι, γύρισε το πρόσωπό του προς τον τοίχο του δωματίου και προσευχήθηκε στον Κύριο λέγοντας: «Κύριε, θυμήσου, σε παρακαλώ, ότι έζησα ενώπιόν σου με πιστότητα και σε υπηρετήσα με ειλικρίνεια και αφοσίωση κι έκανα ό, τι σου είναι αρεστό». Και άρχισε να κλαίει γοερά κι έχυσε δάκρυα πολλά. Την ώρα εκείνη, πριν ακόμη φύγει ο Ησαΐας



από το ανάκτορο κι ενώ βρισκόταν στη μέση της εσωτερικής του αυλής, κατέφθασε σ' αυτόν λόγος Κυρίου που του έλεγε: «Γύρισε πάλι πίσω να πεις στον Εζεκία, τον αρχηγό του λαού μου: αυτά λέει ο Κύριος, ο Θεός του Δαβίδ του προπάτορά σου: Άκουσα την προσευχή σου και είδα τα πολλά σου δάκρυα. Εγώ, ο Κύριος, θα σε θεραπεύσω και την τρίτη μέρα θα ανεβείς στον Ναό του Κυρίου. Και θα προσθέσω στις μέρες της ζωής σου δεκαπέντε ακόμη χρόνια ...». Τελικά ο Εζεκίας, αφού ζήτησε και έλαβε από τον προφήτη ένα σημάδι για να πεισθεί πως όντως θα γίνει αυτό που του ανήγγειλε τη δεύτερη φορά, θεραπεύθηκε. Τί βλέπουμε εδώ; Τη δύναμη της σωστής και εγκάρδιας προσευχής που κατάφερε να αγγίξει τον Θεό και να αντικατασταθεί μια προφητεία με μια άλλη, πιο ευνοϊκή. Βέβαια, ο Παντογνώστης Κύριος εγνώριζε εκ των προτέρων την όλη έκβαση της υπόθεσης, αλλά επέτρεψε στον άνθρωπο- δούλο του να του μιλήσει, να τον παρακαλέσει ταπεινά και επίμονα και να καταφέρει να γίνει δεκτό το αίτημά του και να ανακαλέσει την πρώτη του απόφαση.

(Γ) Ο προφήτης Ιωνάς, στο Β' κεφάλαιο του ομώνυμου βιβλίου, προσεύχεται θερμά στον Θεό και τελικά ο Κύριος πρόσταξε το θαλάσσιο κήτος που τον είχε καταπιεί, κι εκείνο αμέσως τον έβγαλε έξω από τα σπλάχνα του στη στεριά. Και στο Γ' κεφάλαιο, αφού τελικά ο Ιωνάς συμμορφώθηκε με την εντολή του Κυρίου, πήγε στη Νινευή, την πρωτεύουσα των Ασσυρίων, και κήρυττε λέγοντας: «Ακόμη τρεις ημέρες και η Νινευή θα καταστραφεί». Η προφητεία αυτή ήταν τελεσίδικη, δεν πρόσφερε ευκαιρία για μετάνοια και ανάκληση της τιμωρίας. Κι όμως! Οι άνδρες της Νινευή κήρυξαν γενική νηστεία και φόρεσαν όλοι πένθιμους σάκκους από τον μεγαλύτερο μέχρι τον μικρότερο. Και όταν το μήνυμα του

Ιωνά έφθασε στον βασιλιά της πόλης, αυτός αμέσως σηκώθηκε από τον θρόνο του κι έβγαλε από πάνω του τη βασιλική στολή, φόρεσε πένθιμο σάκκο και κάθισε στο έδαφος πάνω στη στάχτη. Κι έστειλε τους



κήρυκες να διακηρύξουν σε όλη τη Νινευή: «Οι άνθρωποι κι όλα τα μεταφορικά ζώα και τα βόδια και τα πρόβατα να μη γευθούν τροφή, ούτε να βοσκήσουν, ούτε να πιούν νερό». Και οι άνθρωποι φόρεσαν

πένθιμους τρίχινους σάκκους κι έβαλαν πάνω στα ζώα τους τρίχινο σαμάρι. Κι άρχισαν να κραυγάζουν προς τον Θεό ακατάπαυστα με όλη τους τη δύναμη. Κι ο καθένας από αυτούς μετανόησε και απαρνήθηκε τον κακό και αμαρτωλό δρόμο που είχε πάρει, και κάθε αδικία που είχε διαπράξει. Κι έλεγαν όλοι τους: «Ποιός ξέρει μήπως μετανόησει ο Θεός και διώξει μακριά του τον θυμό και τη μεγάλη του οργή και δεν χαθούμε;» Και είδε ο Θεός την έμπρακτη μετάνοιά τους, ότι δηλαδή απομακρύνθηκαν από τους πονηρούς τους δρόμους και τους αμαρτωλούς τρόπους ζωής τους. Και άλλαξε απόφαση για την καταστρεπτική τιμωρία που θα τους έστελνε, όπως τους είχε προειδοποιήσει δια μέσου του προφήτη Ιωνά, και δεν την πραγματοποίησε.

Άλλη μια απραγματοποίητη προφητεία, αποτέλεσμα της παρέμβασης των δημιουργημάτων προς τον Πλάστη τους δια μέσου μιας ειλικρινής μετάνοιας και δυνατής προσευχής.

(Δ) Στα Ιερά Ευαγγέλια της Καινής Διαθήκης, με την οποία είμαστε οι περισσότεροι πιο εξοικωμένοι, έχουμε πολλά παραδείγματα όπου ο Κύριός μας ζητά την σύμπραξη των ασθενών στην ολοκλήρωση των θαυμάτων θεραπείας. Και η σύμπραξη αυτή ήταν να έχουν την πίστη πως είχε την ικανότητα (ο Κύριος) να επιτελέσει το συγκεκριμένο θαύμα.

Ο Θεός μας είναι Θεός αγάπης και μας ακούει. Ζητά τη συνεργασία μας στο έργο της Θείας Πρόνοιας. Η σχέση μας μαζί του δεν είναι στάσιμη αλλά δυναμική. Αυτό βέβαια δεν σημαίνει πως θα πραγματοποιήσει το κάθε αίτημά μας, εαν αυτό αντιτίθεται στον σκοπό της υπάρξεώς μας, δηλαδή τη σωτηρία της ψυχής μας.

News & Events



Annual Omatha Camps

On Thursday the 11th of January 2024, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia visited the Boys Omatha Youth Retreat, organised by the Greek Orthodox Christian Society and with the blessing of His Eminence. In a spirit of joy, enthusiasm, while chanting hymns, the 95 young men together with their leaders welcomed their Shepherd and Spiritual Father to their Retreat on Mangrove Mountain of NSW. His Eminence was welcomed by Fr Eusebios, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of 'Pantanassa' and Dr John Psarommatis, who both offered warm greetings to His Eminence and expressed their gratitude to His Eminence for blessing the Retreat with his presence. The young men then presented the song dedicated to the theme of their retreat and chanted the dismissal hymns of St Paisios the Athonite and St Makarios the Great.

With much love and warmth, His Eminence addressed the boys commenting on the theme of the camp «έν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν» (Α' Ιωαν. α' 7) "We walk in the light" (1 John 1:7) and how this "light" is found only in Christ and within the embrace of the Church. His Eminence also commented on the lives of the six hierarchs which represented the six groups of the Retreat; St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, St John Chrysostom, St John the Merciful, St Nicholas and St Spyridon the Wonderworkers. He highlighted how these Hierarchy Saints of our Church remained as shining beacons of the light of Christ to preserve the truth and our Orthodox Faith despite being surrounded by the darkness of heresy or spiritual indifference. This greatly edified and inspired the boys.

The annual summer retreat for the Girls' Omathes took place from 15-19th of January, at Mangrove Mountain in NSW. There were a total of 70 girls and retreat leaders in attendance. The girls spent the week discussing the same theme from 1 John through the feasts of our Lord: the Nativity, the Epiphany, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and Pentecost.

The girls took part in a wide range of activities including Bible studies and spiritual talks, craft, prosforo making, singing, chanting, indoor and outdoor games, common meals, daily prayers and spiritual reading. As has become tradition, Greek Day featured again at the retreat. This year, the focus was on Constantinople to mark the occasion of His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew's upcoming visit to Australia. In addition, the high school graduates of Omatha presented on migrant stories to commemorate 100 Years of our Holy Archdiocese.

The highlight of the retreat was the celebration of the Divine Liturgy with the Very Rev. Fr Eusebios, Abbot of Pantanassa Monastery. The retreat was also blessed with a visit from the Very Rev. Fr Stephanos, former abbot of Pantanassa Monastery, who spoke to the girls and encouraged them to continue to engage and have a relationship with Christ and His church.



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(02) 9787 9779



editor@lychnos.org



lychnos.org



@orthodoxjourneyaustralia



@orthodoxjourney_australia