



## *Sunday Bulletin July 5, 2020* *Greek Orthodox Church of the* *Annunciation*

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**Rev. Dr. Michael Bahlatzis, Presiding Priest-  
Proistamenos**

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### **Epistle Reading**

**Prokeimenon. Grave Mode. Psalm 149.5,1.**

**The saints shall rejoice in glory.**

**Verse: Sing to the Lord a new song.**

**The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2**

Brethren, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

### **Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 8:5-13**

At that time, as Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Dear Beloved Faithful:

I pray that you are enjoying a wonderful July 4th weekend filled with God's love and blessings. We pray that you are also enjoying the spirit of patriotism set forth by the founding fathers of our nation and the wonderful Independence Day celebrations. May peace be upon us all with unity and love. God bless.

+Fr. Michael

## **The Wounds of Love - Matthew 8:5-13**

by Rev. John Chakos

One of the most meaningful prayers prior to receiving Holy Communion reads as follows: "You have smitten me with yearning, O Christ, and by your divine love you have changed me." To be smitten by Christ is the most profound of all mystical experiences. Jesus Himself, as it were, wounds our hearts with His love. From that moment we can never again be the same. One desire is only to be with Him, to serve Him and to make Him known to others.

Matthew's story of a Roman centurion (Math. 8:5-13) presents us with a moving testimony of the heroic lengths to which love will go. He was a man who willingly crossed the lines of a rigid caste system to seek healing for his paralyzed slave. As if that were not enough, he crossed the imposing religious divide that separates Jew from Gentile. Finally, he crossed the greatest barrier of all and manifested a faith that knew no spatial limitation when it came to healing. He knew that Jesus only had to say the word and his servant would be healed. And by this he proved that his was a caliber of faith that had never been seen in all of Israel. This is what can happen to us when we are smitten by Christ. We will cross every barrier and confront every obstacle for the sake of His love.

One such barrier that the Centurion nimbly vaulted over was his ego. In the Gospel passage we read that he was a man used to issuing commands. But because of his humility he dared not ask the Lord to come under the roof of his house.

He also knew that it was not lawful for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile, since the dwelling places of Gentiles are viewed as unclean in Jewish law. The fact that he humbled himself before Jesus is in itself amazing, since most Gentiles harbored a deep hatred for Jesus, who were considered to be haters of all humanity. In Alexandria the story went that Jews had taken a deliberate oath never to show kindness to any Gentile, and it was said that the Jewish ceremonies involved the yearly sacrifice of a Gentile. This would make them nothing less than satanists by today's standards. But to the Centurion none of these deep prejudices mattered. Humility impelled him to breach the social etiquette of his station. The love he felt emanating from Christ made every obstacle appear petty.

This humility was also in evidence in the way the centurion treated his slave. His was not the double standard of many who say they love the Lord but despise a brother or sister. In the Centurion we find that perfect blend of love of God and neighbor. He loved his slave, thus proving himself to be an unusual man.

In antiquity a slave was an object. To quote Aristotle: "a master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." Varro, the Roman writer on agriculture, has a passage which divided the instruments of agriculture into three classes- the articulate comprising the slave, the inarticulate comprising the cattle, and the mute comprising vehicles. The only difference between a slave and a beast or a wagon was that the slave could talk. Any and all ill-treatment was completely justified by the law. In the words of Petrus Chrysologus, "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly is judgment, justice and law."

In an age such as ours when much attention is given to human rights, we can see that in the ancient world the slave was not only devoid of all rights, but his very humanity was denied.

Besides profound humility and love of neighbor, there was a third ingredient in the mix of the centurion's incredible personhood faith. What was so amazing about the centurion's faith that even Jesus marveled at it? He believed that all Jesus had to do was "say the word" and his servant would be healed, even without visiting him.

This kind of wonder-working faith is needed by all of us, not just faith in the existence of God. Many people believe in the existence of a deity, or even in the dogma of their faith, but how many believe in the possibility of miracles. "Only say the word, and my servant will be healed," the centurion declared. It's this kind of faith that inspired the following hymn of our Church: "Who is so great a god as our God. You are the God who performs wonders."

That the centurion was smitten by Christ and transformed by His love cannot be denied. It brings to mind the prophecy of Jesus about those who would one day sit at table with Him in the kingdom: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" (Math. 8:12).

Let me conclude with one such contemporary account from the mission field about Joseph, a Masai warrior, who was smitten by Christ like the centurion. His face bears the ritual scars every young man receives after killing his first lion with only a spear and a shield. One day, as he was walking along a hot, dusty African road, he met a missionary who shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with him. So taken was Joseph by this disclosure that the first thing that he wanted to do was to return to his own village and share that same Good News with the members of his local tribe. He began going door-to-door, telling everyone he met about the Cross of Jesus and the salvation it offered, expecting to see their faces light up the way his had. To his amazement the villagers not only didn't care, they became violent. The men of the village seized him and held him to the ground while the women beat him with strands of barbed wire. He

was dragged from the village and left to die alone in the bush.

Joseph somehow managed to crawl to a water hole, and there, after days of passing in and out of consciousness, found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception he had received from people he had known all his life. Impelled by the wound of love, he decided he must have omitted something or told the story of Jesus incorrectly. After rehearsing the message he had first heard, he decided to go back and share his faith once more.

Joseph limped into the circle of huts and began again to proclaim Jesus. "He died for you, so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God," he pleaded. Again he was grabbed by the men of the village and held while the women beat him, re-opening fresh wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more they dragged him unconscious from the village and left him to die.

To have lived through the first beating was truly remarkable. To survive a second was nothing short of miraculous. Again, days later, Joseph awoke in the wilderness, bruised, scarred- and determined to go back. He returned to the small village and this time, they attacked him before he had a chance to speak. As they whipped him for the third and probably last time, he again witnessed to them about Jesus Christ. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was that the women who were beating him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. The entire village had come to Christ.

Joseph is no longer known by the ritual scars carved in his face. He is recognized by the wounds he suffered for the sake of Christ. These wounds are not only on his skin, but also in his heart. They are the very wounds of love that Jesus Himself endured for our salvation. He will suffer in every one of us again and again until every precious soul is redeemed.

Today, Christ wants to wound each one of us so that we, too, will never cease loving and serving Him. Let us open ourselves up to this wondrous action of grace, this mystical stabbing of our hearts. Let us gladly endure the scars that the piercing love of Christ inflicts. Let us faithfully persist in our resolve to carry out every commandment of Jesus, even to the point of death. Then Jesus will say to us, as He did to the centurion, "...not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Math. 8:10).



## **Athanasius of Mount Athos**

Saint Athanasius had Trebizond for his homeland. He first entered the monastic life on the mountain called Kymaeos or Kyminas, which is in Mysia of Bithynia, then he went to Mount Athos and founded a large monastery, which is known as the Great Lavra. He became so renowned for his virtue that from Rome, Calabria, Georgia, and elsewhere, rulers, men of wealth and nobility, abbots, and even bishops came to him and were subject to him. When the time for his departure was at hand, God revealed to him how it would take place, so

that he was able to instruct his spiritual children not to be troubled when it should come to pass. A new church was being built for the sake of the many who came to him, and only the dome had not been finished. Together with six of the brethren, the Saint went to the top of the church to help the workmen. The dome collapsed, and they fell. Five were killed at once, and the Saint died three hours later. His holy body remained incorrupt and he worked many miracles after his death. He reposed about the end of the tenth century.

## **Uncovering of the Holy Relics of Our Righteous Father Sergius of Radonezh**

Our righteous Father Sergius was born in Rostov, north of Moscow, about the year 1314. Named Bartholomew in Baptism, he was brought up in Radonezh, and at the death of his parents he withdrew to the wilderness to become a monk. It is notable that without having been trained in a monastery, he was of such a spiritual stature as to be able to take up the perilous eremitical life from the beginning, without falling into delusion or despondency. When he had endured with courage the deprivations of the solitary life, other monks began to come to him, for whom he was made abbot against his will. On the counsel of Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, he organized his monks according to the cenobitic life, appointing duties to each. While Anthony and Theodosius of Kiev, and the other righteous Fathers before Sergius, had established their monasteries near to cities, Sergius was the leader and light of those who went far into the wilderness, and after his example the untrodden forests of northern Russia were settled with monks. When Grand Duke Demetrius Donskoy was about to go to battle against the invading Tartars, he first sought the blessing of Saint Sergius, through whose prayers he was triumphant. Saint Sergius was adorned with the highest virtues of Christ-like humility and burning love for God and neighbour, and received the gift of working wonders, of casting out demons, and of discretion for leading souls to salvation. When he served the Divine Liturgy, an Angel served with him visibly; he was also vouchsafed the visitation of the most holy Theotokos with the Apostles Peter and John. He was gathered to his Fathers on September 25, 1392. At the recovery of his holy relics on July 5, 1422, his body and garments were found fragrant and incorrupt. His life was written by the monks of Epiphanius, who knew him.

## **Holy New Martyrs Elizabeth the Grand Duchess and the Novice Barbara**



Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria of England and elder sister of Empress Alexandra of Russia (see July 4), was one of the most illustrious women of her day, known throughout Europe not only for her high birth and graceful beauty, but also for her modesty and goodness of heart. After marrying Grand Duke Sergius Alexandrovich, she converted to Orthodoxy, although this was not required of her by her position. After the assassination of her husband in 1905, Grand Duchess Elizabeth withdrew from public life, founding the convent of Saints Martha and Mary, of which she became the superior. There she dedicated herself to prayer, fasting, tending the sick, and caring for the poor. After the Bolsheviks seized power, she

was exiled to the Urals, where she and those with her were martyred in 1918 when they were cast alive into an abandoned mine. The Novice Barbara followed Saint Elizabeth into exile. When she was separated from the Grand Duchess, Barbara asked to be allowed to join her again; to terrify her, the Bolsheviks told her that she would be allowed to do this, but only if she were prepared for unheard-of torments and a violent death. To their amazement, she consented, and was deemed worthy of martyrdom with the Grand Duchess. Their holy relics were recovered and taken through Russia to China, and came to rest in the Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene in Jerusalem. When their reliquaries were opened in 1981, their bodies were found to be partially incorrupt, and sweet with the odour of sanctity. With them are also commemorated their fellow Martyrs: Grand Duke Sergius Mikhailovich; Princes John, Constantine, and Igor, the brethren; Prince Vladimir Paley; and Theodore Remez.

## Wisdom of the Fathers

Patience is a labor that does not crush the soul. It never wavers under interruptions, good or bad...Patience sets a boundary to the daily onslaught of suffering...Patience comes from hope and mourning, and indeed to lack those is to be a slave of despondency.

### **St. John Climacus**

Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 27: On Stillness; Paulist Press pg.271, 6th century

Virtues are formed by prayer. Prayer preserves temperance, suppresses anger, restrains pride and envy, draws down the Holy Spirit into the soul and raises man to heaven.

### **St. Ephraim the Syrian**

Unknown, 4th century

**FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...**that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: Ted Simon, John Gianakos, Maria Lambrinos, Steve Anastos, Angelo Romas, and Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord.

Results of Live-streaming services on YouTube for Annunciation Church in Vestal:

4th Sunday of Lent, March 29 - 147 views

5th Sunday of Lent - unable to broadcast due to Wi-Fi issues

Sat. of Lazarus, April 11 - 97 views

Palm Sunday, April 12 - 152 views

Palm Sunday evening, April 12 - 68 views

Holy Monday evening, April 13 - 63 views

Holy Tuesday evening, April 14 - 76 views

Holy Wednesday evening, April 15 - 85 views

Holy Thurs morning, April 16 - 41 views  
Holy Thurs evening, April 16 - 100 views  
Holy Friday morning, April 17 - 112 views  
Holy Friday afternoon, April 17 - 42 views  
Holy Friday evening, April 17 - 118 views  
Holy Sat morning, April 18 - 45 views  
Holy Sat afternoon/eve, April 18 - 126 views  
Easter Sunday/Pascha, April 19 - 41 views  
Sunday of Thomas, April 26 - 63 views  
Sunday of the Myrrhbearers, May 3 - 42 views  
Sunday of the Paralytic/Mother's Day, May 10 - 66 views  
Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, May 17 - 59 views

Total views to date: 1,543 as of May 23, 2020

I want to take this time to thank everyone for their 'virtual' attendance through viewing these services through YouTube. It is truly a blessing to see the diligence of the faithful in viewing these services and not allowing the discourse of the pandemic from inhibiting our thirst for hearing the word of God. May the Lord bless you for your continued love and faith!

In the risen Christ,  
+Fr. Michael

*Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. Although Holy Communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the "ANTIDORON" (blessed bread) which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the "agape feast" that followed worship in the early Church. After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments. We hope that you will return often to worship with us, to grow in Christ and in our Orthodox Faith. For any spiritual, religious, or sacramental matters, please contact Fr. Michael (607) 795-1474. For all other matters, please notify Fr. Michael or a member of the parish council. Deadline for suggestions for the bulletin is 12:00 noon on Thursday.*