

IC XC NIKA SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to Him Forever!

June 29, 2014	Holy Glorious Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
July 5	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
July 6	4 th Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

Saints of the Day: The Holy, Glorious and All-praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul (67). Saint Gregory, Metropolitan of Iraklia and Redestos. Venerable Peter, Prince of the Tatar Horde, Wonderworker of Rostov (1290). Uncovering of the relics of Venerable Nicander, Monk, of Pskov (1581). Saint Mary, mother of John-Mark, nephew of Apostle Barnabas, at Jersusalem (1 c.). Saint Cocha, Abbess of Ross-Benchuir, who nursed Saint Ciaran (6 c.). Saint Elwin Bishop of Lindsey (692). Saints Salome and Judith, Virgins (9 c.)

Please remember in your prayers: Suffering Christians of Egypt, Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. Bishop BOULOS Yazigi, Bishop YOHANNA Ibrahim, of Aleppo. Archimandrites Athanasy, Nectarios, Pachomy. Archpriests Alvian, Eugene, John, Jason, John, Vincent. Priests Sergius, Jacobus, Leonid, Vasil, Vasil. Deacons Mark, Demetrios, Philip. Mother Raphaela, Meriam, Dimitri, Nina, Daniel, Catherine, Helen, Anna, Peter, Helen, Michael, Kevin, Richard, Stephanie, Zara, Nolan, Emelie, Connie, Michael, Ed, Nettie, Maria, Michael, John, James, Nancy, Susan, Daniel, Aaron, Mark, Jennifer, Nina, Nadine, Michael, Anna, Gregory, Marianna, Mykola, Helen, Isaiah, Jamie, Albert, Kevin, Robert, Robert, Andrew, David, Warren, Vincent, Diane, Abigail.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of Deacon Mark Bohush, Archimandrite Pachomy [Belkoff.] Ted Botos and Elizabeth Gomes were offered today at Liturgy and Moleben at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the Streyjck Family – Harry, Mary, Anna, Katherine and Theodore – were offered June 22 at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of Stephanie Litwen.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of uncle John Kurap, aunt Katherine Udics Kurap and cousin Joe Kushner were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of John Tymoczko were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of the "Memory Eternal Requiem Service Fund."

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL (Matthew 16:13-19)

Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to criticize than to compliment? Why is it that too often we do not live the words of 1 Corinthians 13:7, that love "believes all things," but choose to believe the worst rather than the best about another person and their intentions? Well, in part it's because some of what we see as "wrong" isn't wrong at all, just different from what we're used to; and difference disturbs our comfort level. In larger part, it's easier to look for what's wrong than what's right because we're spiritually lazy and want only to skim the surface. What's wrong is usually blatantly obvious, while what's right takes some digging to discover. But godly love (and basic intellectual honesty) will do that digging, bearing carefully in mind the Lord's command in John 7:24, "*Judge not according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*"

And that applies to the Church too. We hear all the time from people who see the many imperfections, faults, and flat-out sins of some members of the Church, and write off the Church as "a bunch of hypocrites." Well, God knows there are things blatantly wrong with the Church in our day: corruption, scandals, ineffective and self-serving leadership, greed, and lukewarmness. And that can become discouraging. But none of that is new, of course. Even Jesus had His Judas...and Peter wimping out, and James and John throwing temper tantrums, and Thomas ignoring the silver lining because he's too focused on the cloud. And as we read Paul's letters to the spiritual juvenile delinquents of Corinth and Galatia, we wonder how the infant Church ever survived.

Yet survive it did and does, despite all that's wrong with its members. How? Because of all that's right about the Church, starting with the fact that the Church has the right Foundation. In today's Gospel, Jesus asks His disciples bluntly, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Simon Peter answered and said, '*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*'" And Jesus responds, "*Blesséd are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" So is Peter that rock-solid foundation of the Church? Hardly! He's the one who three times denied he even knew Jesus and who crumbled and backtracked when the Judaizers criticized him for eating with Gentile Christians.

No; the rock on which Jesus builds His Church is the faith Peter confessed: that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but also the Son of the living God; the rock is Jesus Himself. Look: everything, whether it be a

building or a marriage or a company, must have a proper and solid foundation if it's going to last. But what earthly person or thing, sin-infected and inherently-broken, could ever be good enough, holy enough, powerful enough, to provide an adequate foundation for what Hebrews 12:22-23 calls *"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven;"* a Church against which, says our Gospel, not even the gates of hell can prevail? Nothing and nobody from this earth could do that job. That's why 1 Corinthians 3:11 insists that *"no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* And again, Ephesians 2:20 reminds us that the Church has been built *"on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."* The Church has the right foundation because Jesus is that foundation.

Secondly, the Church has the right leadership. The leadership directs and sets the pace for the body. But who is the leadership of the church? Are the clergy are the leaders of the Church. After all, Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-12, that God. *"gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."* Ah, but notice that whatever ministry clergy have is not theirs, but is something entrusted to them by One of much higher authority. No, Ephesians 1:22-23 insists that the Father *"gave Him [the risen Jesus] to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body."* Colossians 1:18 proclaims the risen Jesus as *"the head of the body, the church,"* because He *"is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead."* And Ephesians 5:23 gives the basic reason why *"Christ is the head of the church:"* because *"He is the saviour of the body."* Jesus is the Head of the Church because only He is the Saviour. The bishops cannot be the head, because they are not the saviour. The presbyters cannot be the head, because they have no nail scars in their hands. The Central Church Administration and/or the parish council cannot be the head, because none of them is risen on the third day. The Church has the right leadership because the risen Jesus is that leadership.

Thirdly, the Church has the right doctrine. Now, "doctrine" simply means "teaching;" doctrine is what we accept and proclaim as true. Now, we have to be careful about what we accept as true; 2 John 9 warns that *"Whoever transgresses, and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abided in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son."* We do have to distinguish between what 1 John 4:6 calls *"the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."* And the test of that is, of course, what Saint Vincent of Lerins said it is: *"that which has always been believed everywhere by everyone."* And the bedrock of that doctrine is what it has always been: Jesus Christ. In John 8:58 Jesus announces Who He really is: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM;"* in John 10:10 Jesus teaches *"I and the Father are one;"* in John 14:6 Jesus insists *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me;"* and in John 3:16 the evangelist boils it down to basics: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* The Church has the right doctrine because Jesus is that doctrine.

Fourthly, the Church has the right purpose. Every organization has a purpose. The purpose of IBM is to make computers and to make money. The purpose of a school is to teach students. The purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous is to help people overcome addiction. And while the Church is not first an organization but an organism, it has a purpose too: fulfilling the deepest desire of God's heart, as expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, that God *"desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* And in Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus told us how to accomplish that purpose" *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."* The Church has the right purpose because sharing the Gospel of Jesus is that purpose.

Lastly, the Church has the right reward. Let's be blunt: nobody does "nothin' for nothin'." We work 40 hours a week because we expect a paycheck at the end of the week. We plant a garden because we expect to harvest fresh vegetables. We all expect a reward of some kind. But what reward does the Church offer? In Matthew 19:27 Simon Peter asked Jesus exactly that: *"See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"* Is our reward fame or wealth or power? Nope; God isn't so chintzy as to reward us with things we're ultimately going to lose to death. So what is our reward? In Genesis 15:1 God says, *"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."* Did you get that? God Himself is our reward! Our reward is not something but Someone! God's friendship, His love, His abiding presence, His own eternal life, is our reward. In John 14:23 Jesus puts it this way: *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."* Again, Revelation 22:4 tells us that we *"shall see His face, and His name shall be on [our] foreheads;"* that we'll be marked as His forever. The Church has the right reward because Jesus is that reward.

What's wrong with the Church? Too many things to count! But the Church has the right foundation, Jesus Christ; the right leadership, Jesus Christ; the right doctrine, Jesus Christ; the right purpose, sharing Jesus Christ; the right reward, Jesus Christ. And that's more than enough; it's everything worth having.

REFLECTION by Saint Nikolai of Zhicha By true repentance with tears, prayer and good works the most defiled soul can be completely cleansed and changed. Therefore be careful that you do not maliciously mention the sins of a repentant sinner but offer thanksgiving to God and be astonished how from darkness, light is made and from slime, pure water. The Egyptian Pharaoh Amases was of lowly birth and when he became king, men respected him very little, remembering his origin. In order to outwit the people and to gain their respect, he took a metal basin in which, according to custom, the feet of the visitors to the palace were washed. He ordered the basin to be melted down and from it to make a likeness of a certain idol. The pharaoh then placed this idol on the street. Seeing this idol, the people began to worship it and to render it divine honor. Then the pharaoh revealed what this idol was made of. The people then understood that, by this, the pharaoh wanted to show that they need not think anymore about what he once was but what he is now. Then the people began to render the pharaoh the respect due to royalty.