

+ SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
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GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!

June 28, 2015	4 th Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
June 29	Monday	Feast of the Leaders of the Apostles PETER AND PAUL	Liturgy 9:30 am
July 4	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
July 5	5 th Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

Saints of the Day: Translation of the relics (412) of the Holy and Wonderworking Unmercenaries Cyrus and John (311). Venerable Sergius and Herman (14th c.), Abbots of Valaam. New Hieromartyr Basil, Deacon (1918). Virgin-martyr Sebastiana (1938). New Hieromartyr Gregory, Deacon (1940). Venerable Xenophon, Abbot of Robeika (Novgorod) (1262). Venerable Paul the Physician of Corinth (7th c.). Venerable Sergius of Crete. Venerable Moses the Anchorite. Saint Sennuphius the Standard-bearer of Egypt (4th c.). Saint Austol of Cornwall (6th c.). Hieromartyr Donatus of Libya. Three Martyrs of Galatia. 70 Martyrs of Scythopolis. Martyr Pappias. Martyr Macedonius. Venerable Monk Magnus, who reposed while praying to the Lord, Saint Sergius the Magistrate of Paphlagonia, founder of the monastery of the Mother of God called Nikitiatus in Nicomedia (9th c.). Martyrs Serenus, Plutarchus, Heraclides, Heron, Raiso, and others in Alexandria (202). Saint Crummine, Bishop of Lackan, County Westmeath, Ireland (5th c.). Saint Egilo of Pruem, Abbot (871).

Please remember in your prayers: Suffering Christians of Egypt, Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. Bishop BOULOS and Bishop YOHANNA, of Aleppo. Archimandrites Athanasy, Nectarios, Pachomy. Archpriests Alvian, Eugene, Leonid, John, Jason, John, Vincent. Priests Jacobus, Leonid. Deacons Mark, Demetrios, Philip. Mothers Raphaela, Michaela, Catherine, Anna. Monk Victor, Mary, Valentina, Dimitri, Nina, Daniel, Helen, Catherine, Anna, Peter, Helen, Michael, Stephanie, Zara, Nolan, Emelie, Michael, Ed, Nettie, Anita, Maria, Michael, John, James, Nancy, Susan, Daniel, Aaron, Nicole, Ashley, Mark, Jennifer, Nina, Nadine, Michael, Anna, Gregory, Marianna, Isaiah, Jamie, Albert, Kevin, Robert, Robert, Andrew, David, Warren.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of Priest Thaddaeus Werner and Archimandrite Pachomy (Belkoff) were offered at Liturgy and Moleben at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the Stryjek Family: Harry, Mary, Anna, Katherine, Theodore and Theodore were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of Stephanie Litwen.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of uncle John Kurap and 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."

Weak, Sick, Poor and Tired: A Story for Losers by Father Stephen Freeman

The American Dream is embodied in strength. Gen. George Patton famously said, "America loves to win and cannot abide a loser." The spirituality of winning is probably the fastest growing and most attractive version of "Christianity" to be found on the American scene. Mega Churches, seating 10's of thousands have sprung up as temples of success.

Nobody wants to be sick. The dependence it fosters, the way it changes and shapes a life are a form of powerlessness that holds no attraction. Poverty (however it is measured) is a massive struggle against forces that steal human dignity. Most homes in poverty include children and are headed by women. Their daily efforts to pay the rent, work a job (or two or three), tend to childhood needs and face another day are quiet works of heroism that fall beneath the radar of most. They are not only poor, but tired (working jobs and raising children alone is a formula for perpetual exhaustion).

So, who wants to be weak, sick, poor and tired?

I could add more categories to these. Who wants to be handicapped, physically or mentally? Who wants to be constantly overwhelmed by the noise of the world, unable to read emotions, awkwardly moving through the world, somehow unable to see your own awkwardness? Who wants to be incompetent? Who wants to fail despite good intentions and best efforts? Who wants to be told that they are simply inadequate and should shape up or ship out?

It is little wonder that the American Dream is so powerful and popular. The alternative is nothing anyone would choose.

And yet, the American Dream may be the greatest obstacle to salvation the world has ever known.

The New Testament is quite clear: we are saved through our weakness. We are not saved in spite of our weakness. Nor is our weakness healed so that we can then be saved. Our weakness is precisely the point at which, by which and through which God saves us.

And our weakness can be found in places where our brokenness most resides: weak, sick, poor, tired, handicapped, dysfunctional, awkward, incompetent, inadequate – these all describe the place where Christ intends to meet us.

The good news is that despite the popularity of the American Dream, even those who find it most successfully remain weak. Their success can make them blind to their weakness, or can be so alluring that their weakness remains unacknowledged. But the very best of the successful remain broken enough to be capable of salvation.

Why are we saved through our weakness? There are many ways to answer this question, but I will choose but only one: Weakness is the path that is most like Christ Himself.

Christ specifically describes the path as “taking up the Cross.” In the Sermon on the Mount, those singled out as blessed are “poor in spirit”; “those who mourn”; “the meek”; “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”; “the merciful”; “the pure in heart”; “the peacemakers and the persecuted.” These characteristics do not belong particularly to the strong and the successful. They are hallmarks of weakness. Psychologically, our strengths protect us from the vulnerabilities of weakness. We need no help other than in managing and hiding our weaknesses. Not so strangely, almost no one ever went into treatment for an addiction because they felt so well that they only wanted to feel better. Interventions work through failures. The only question about hitting bottom will be between a high bottom and a low bottom. But bottoms are required.

The virtues required in the process of salvation include humility and self-offering. The noble virtues of compassion, kindness and generosity are certainly valuable, but even these virtues are most commonly found among the weak. The greatest givers, in terms of proportion of income, are found among the poor. If you need a few dollars and you’re on the street. You are most likely to get it from someone whose situation is little better than your own. The rich are the most able, but only in terms of resources. Their strengths shield them from the pain of compassion.

Many weaknesses are accompanied by shame – particularly in a culture that celebrates strength and success. Things such as incompetence and failure can be particularly shameful. Shame is a feeling about “who we are,” rather than what we might have done wrong (that is what we call “guilt”). The weaknesses that inherently produce failure are often experienced as shame. Psychologists say that the pain of shame is “unbearable.” We try to cover it. We lie, we cheat, or we find ways to tune it out. America has a name for such shameful sorts of characters: “Loser.” It is a epithet spoken and heard with sneering disdain.

It is both tragic and unsurprising that such shame looks for a winning identity. Sports teams provide a modern surrogate for success. I might personally be a loser, but my team is a national champion. I wear their logo and cheer them on. It is a mild and passing form of salvation.

Salvation comes to us at the point of weakness. To become whole we must become broken. Only in self-emptying can we be filled. The teaching of Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex states this most clearly:

...the way of shame is the way of the Lord, and when we put ourselves in the way of the Lord, we immediately beget Him as our companion. It was through the Cross of shame that He saved us; so, when we bear a little shame for His sake, in order to repent and come to confession, He considers it as a thanksgiving to Him, and in return He gives us the comfort of the “Comforter”.

The tender mission of the Church is to preach the gospel to all, but to know especially that it will find the greatest response among the weak, the sick, the poor, the tired, the incompetent and inadequate and all those who struggle with their shame. The pastoral task of the Church is to always be the kind of place where such people may find shelter and support. The Church must clearly be a place where the bearing of shame is possible. This is the very definition of “safe.”

It explains clearly why Christ was surrounded with harlots, tax-collectors, lepers and the like. He saw in those filled with shame, kindred souls. For he *voluntarily* walked a path that carried Him into the heart of human shame. It was in that very place that He entered death and hell and saved us. We cannot meet Him there by any other path. If we would live with Him, we must also die with Him.

And, of course, the good news is that everybody qualifies. Losers one and all.

CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE MAYAN INDIANS is undergoing a dramatic change in places like Guatemala and southern Mexico. This shifting of religious identity is part of a larger trend that is enveloping much of Latin America. According to the Pew Research Center report published in November of 2014, “Historical data suggests that for most of the 20th century, from 1900 through the 1960’s, at least 90% of Latin America’s population was Catholic.” Remarkably, however, in just one lifetime, the Pew survey indicates that only “69% of adults across the region identify as Catholic.” Up until recently, Orthodox Christianity did not play much of a role in this changing landscape. Most of the Orthodox parishes consisted of immigrant colonies, established mainly to perpetuate the customs, languages, and traditions of their respective ethnic cultures and mother churches in Europe. The title of a recent article in the Huffington Post by Carol Kuruvilla, however, announces a major shift in this approach to the church’s mission: “The Greek Orthodox Church in Latin America Is Not Very Greek.” Embracing this change and adapting to this new reality, His Eminence Archbishop Athenagoras, since his 1996 appointment by His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew to shepherd the Central American churches, has reached out to the indigenous people of this vast region, encompassing Mexico, Central America, Columbia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean islands. Of his 52 active clergy, only 3 are of Greek descent. The enthusiastic reception by His Eminence Athenagoras of many thousands of Mayan Christians into the Orthodox fold has transformed this Church into a unity of diverse people, sharing one faith, but speaking many native dialects, as on the day of Pentecost. On a recent visit to the village of Aguacate, His Eminence was able to begin Holy Week with the Mayan faithful, who now comprise the vast majority of his growing flock in Central America.

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