

St. George Greek Orthodox Church of the Desert

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THE LADDER, Sunday, July 6, 2008

Fr.Theodore Pantels, Proistamenos(Pastor); Deacon Euthym Kontaxis, M.D.
Fr. James Tavlarides, Emeritus; Fr.T.P.Theophilos, Emeritus

OUR BEST EFFORTS ARE MADE "THE BEST" BY GOD

The Oscar-winning producer Bill Wilder once said: "You are as good as the best things you've ever done." I take that to be a very positive statement, because we have all done good things in our lives. We've been there for our children and made sacrifices for our families; we've given to charity; we've given good advice to those who need to find their direction; we've prayed for people; we've shown that we care about those around us by offering to help in many ways. The problem is that we do not do our "best things" all the time. We often allow ourselves to get distracted. That's when we fall into the error of not being the best we can. But, how do we get distracted?

In today's Gospel reading, we heard the words of our Lord, reminding us that it is impossible for anyone to serve two masters. He implies that, in order to be loyal to our Lord, we need to understand that our Loving Lord knows that we have need of many things that are vital to our survival. The temptation to not be loyal to our Lord comes from our worry over "what we shall wear and what we shall eat" (Matthew 6:25). He asks us to have faith in Him and not to worry. Worry is caused by a lack of strong faith. Lacking in strong faith, we often are deceived into thinking that "our way" is better than God's Way and we waver in our loyalty to Christ -- not seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness, but seeking a kingdom of our own world, based on our own judgments. Our inability to "put our best foot forward" for God is related to the temptation that comes our way, which suggests that we should not serve the Lord our God as our Master -- that there is another power that can provide the solutions we need.

Unfortunately, many times, we worship the Lord in the church, but we forget the Lord outside the church. When we forget God, our efforts are tainted, being skewed basically toward our own interests and for the satisfaction of our own ego -i.e., toward the worship of *self*, even though we may tell ourselves that we love God. When we remember God, He gives us the strength to do our best for His glory. Our best efforts are made "the best" by God.

We cannot ignore the truth of the Gospels. We may read the Gospels, but we must also actually apply the teachings of our Lord to our thinking and in living our everyday way of live. We must be careful not to give "double messages". The consequences from doing this can be tragic, because this would influence others - especially our youth -- such that they form the opinion that Christians say one thing, but do another. As we make decisions in our lives, it is good to keep in mind the words of the Apostle Paul, which he addressed to the Corinthians: "What does righteousness have to do with lawlessness? What does light have in common with darkness?" (2 Cor. 1:14). If we seek to live both in the light and in the darkness at the same time, we reveal our "double-mindedness". In this, it may be possible to fool ourselves or others, but we can never fool God. For, before God everything receives its reward or its punishment.

For us to have our spiritual health and the blessings of God in our lives, we must dedicate ourselves only to the Lord -- to serve one God, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ.

+FR. THEODORE

PRAY FOR THE SICK - Adele Gallade, Dimitra Rosier, Vasiliki Kourletas, Nicholas Kontaxis
Anastasia Pantels, Aspasia Petsas

F.O.S. QUESTION FOR THIS SUNDAY

Question: *During the Orthodox Wedding ceremony, do the bride and groom ever say their own "vows"?*

Answer: The "vows" of the bride and groom are said through the symbols involved in the ceremony itself, such as the wedding rings that are exchanged between them. Their "vows" are confirmed by the placing of the wedding rings on their hands. Fr. Stanley Harakas, in his book, *The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers*, notes that the Betrothal Service, which takes place prior to the exchange of the crowns during the Orthodox Wedding Ceremony IS a "pledge of vows" service. "Originally, long before the wedding, a couple pledged their intent to marry eventually through the 'Service of the Promise' or the 'Service of the Pledge' ("arrabon", in Greek). The sign of the 'arrabon' was the exchange of rings. Since this was a solemn pledge, or promise, the use of the so-called 'strong hand' (the right hand) was made" (pg. 198). This is why the rings are originally placed on the ring fingers of the bride's and groom's right hands during the Wedding Ceremony itself. The prayer of the Betrothal Service reminds the bride and groom -- and everyone in attendance -- of the seriousness of this symbol of their pledge to one another; the ring is a symbol of God's pledge to us: "...You, O Lord declared that a pledge is to be given and held inviolate in all things. For, by a ring Joseph was given might in Egypt; by a ring Daniel was exalted in Babylon; by a ring our heavenly Father showed compassion on His Prodigal Son, for He said, 'Put a ring upon his right hand, kill the fatted calf and let us eat and rejoice'. Your own right hand armed Moses in the Red Sea..." Fr. Harakas points out that the "vows" of the couple are also implied in the symbolism of the exchange of the crowns: "...The exchange of the crowns by the sponsor (koumbaros), express beautifully the shared authority, privileges and responsibility which the newly married couple has..." In addition, "...When the couple drinks from the common cup of wine, this is a very significant symbol. Sipping three times each from the cup they are saying to each other that they pledge to share all of their future life together. The cup of wine is the cup of life and they vow through this beautiful symbolic act to share not only all of life's joys, pleasures and happinesses, but also all of life's sorrows, sufferings and difficulties" (pgs. 198 & 200).

+FR. THEODORE

FEAST: 3rd SUNDAY OF MATTHEW; Sts. Sisoës the Great, Archippos, Philemon and Onesimus

HYMNS (during and after the Entrance with the Gospel)

Ote katilthes pros ton thanaton... (When You the Immortal One, descended toward death, You caused Hades to become powerless through the dazzling brightness of the God-head; and when You raised up the dead from the lower world, all the powers of the Heavens cried aloud: Christ our God, Giver of Life, glory to You.) [Sunday Resurrection Hymn]

Os ton ehmaloton eleftherotis... (Since you are a deliverer of captives and a defender of the poor, a physician for the sick, a noble attendant to the kings, O Great among the Martyrs and Glorious George: intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.) [Hymn for St. George]

Prostasia ton Christianon... (A protection of Christians unshamable, Intercessor to our Holy Maker, unwavering, reject not the prayerful cries of those who are in sin. Instead, come to us, for You are good; Your loving help bring to us, who are crying in faith to You: Hasten to intercede, as a protection for all time, O Theotokos, for thos who honor You.) [Sunday Kontakion Hymn]

READINGS: EPISTLE - Romans 5:1-11; page 1646 in the GOOD NEWS BIBLE
GOSPEL - St. Matthew 6:22-33; page 1431 in the GOOD NEWS BIBLE

ST. SOPHIA SUMMER CAMP

Session I - July 27 - LAugust 2, 2008

Session II- August 2 - August 9, 2008

See details for camper and counselor applications, as well as the map to get to Camp Seeley, online at: <http://www.saintsophiacamp.org/home.shtml>.

APPLY NOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS MOST EXCELLENT ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE!

(Forms are available in our parish hall.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Following the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy today, everyone is invited to our parish hall for fellowship.

Monday, July 7th.....Greek Dance Exercise Group -- 10:30 a.m.

Fr. Ted will be away from Monday, July 14th until Friday evening, July 18th in order to attend the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Clergy-Laity Congress in Washington, D.C.

A THOUGHT FOR THIS INDEPENDENCE DAY

As we celebrate American Independence Day this year, we consider our role in the total world situation. What will next year's Independence Day be like? Will there be an end to the dilemma in Iraq? Will another nation threaten peace? Will our economy become stronger?

Our own Divine Liturgy gives us direction on these matters. As patriotic Americans and as Orthodox Christians, we are asked to pray with great faith:

1. "For peace in the whole world; the stability of the holy Churches of God and for the unity of all."
2. "For our country and all those in public service".
3. "For our deliverance from all affliction, anger, danger and distress."
4. We pray to Christ: "Lord, bless those who praise You and sanctify those who trust in You...do not forsake us who place our hope in You. Grant peace to Your world, to Your Churches, to the clergy, to those in public service, to the armed forces and to all Your people..."

Indeed, one could find other passages of prayers said during the Divine Liturgy which apply especially to our everyday concerns. In fact, during the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, we pray for our Armed Forces in this way: "Remember, Lord, our most faithful and pious public authorities which You have counted worthy to be appointed over this land: crown them with the armor of truth, with the armor of glory; cover their heads on the day of battle, strengthen their arm...subdue to them barbarous nations that delight in war; grant them deep peace that cannot be taken away; speak good things to their hearts for Your Church and all Your people, that within their peace, we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

At this moment in our nation's history, the Church asks us to do our best to be "peacemakers" by seeking "the peace from above" -- from God Himself.

As we consider the message of today's Gospel reading in which Jesus reminds us that we are to have faith only in Him and not try serving two masters, let us truly place our faith only in Him, Who provides all things for our salvation.

+FR. THEODORE