

# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

# CHURCH BULLETIN

Vol. 13 No. 28 \* Sunday July 5, 2020 \* Editor: V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

## The 4th Sunday after Pentecost

### Gospel Reading **Matthew 8: 5 - 13**

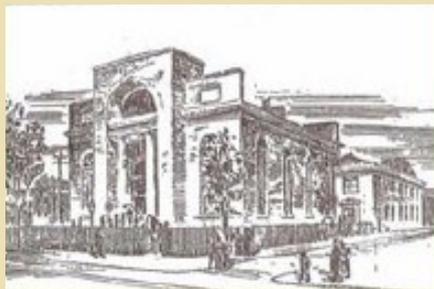
At that time, as Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; 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.

### Apostle Reading **Romans 6: 18 - 23**

*Brethren*, having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification. When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



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**Synaxarion.** Sunday July 5, 2020 (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost): Holy Venerable Athanasius of Mount Athos; Holy Venerable Lampadus

## Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

The LORD marvels and says: “I have not found such great faith even in Israel!” What is this faith that is greater than what the LORD has found even in Israel? Here is a summary of my effort to incline my ear to the music of the lyre, the liturgical worship of the Church, to solve this “riddle” (Psa 49:4).

These last two weeks or so, the Church has assigned for our daily contemplation readings from St Paul’s letter to the Romans, itself a “riddle” that has frustrated the efforts of many to solve and which many others have thought to solve by interpreting it in a theological confession that is alien to the mind of the Church (cf. Phil 2:5). Making no claim myself to have solved any of the biblical riddles, let me say only that it seems to me, as I incline my ear to these riddles from the “music” of the Church, that the burden of St Paul’s teaching in Romans is to expose the self-righteousness of our religiosity so that, seeing our spiritual pride, we would be smitten with shame and, in the humility of a broken and contrite heart, cry out: “create in me a clean heart, O God! Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, put a new and right spirit within me!”

The purpose of the Law, says St Paul, as I understand him, is to flush out my free will, my “self-power” (self-determination, *autexouios*, to use the word of the holy fathers) and bring it out into the open in order to choose my master. In the freedom that is the essential property of my having been made in the image of God, to whom will I offer my love: to God who created me and first loved me (I Jn 4:19), and so complete God’s work of creation (for, it was created in love, and so it can’t be finished until the creature returns the love of the Creator, freely in accord with the principle of love), or to the king of disobedience and death, Satan?

St Paul says – and let me translate his words sticking more closely to the Greek: “I would not have seen *desire* (epithumian – I believe he means, again I would draw out from the holy fathers, the erotic desire that is in me, that is perhaps the *primary* property of my nature) if the Law had not said: “Thou shalt not *desire*” (Rm 7:7). Now, most translations have this “desire” as “to covet”, which I think is okay as far as it goes. But St Paul here gives only the first word of the full commandment: “You shall not *desire* your neighbor’s house, you shall not desire your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass or anything that is your neighbor’s” (Ex 20:17 *sic passim*). Let’s summarize it as: you shall not desire what belongs to another.

This in effect is the commandment given to Adam when the LORD commands him, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good



and evil you shall not eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die!” (Gn 2:17) The issue wasn’t the tree of knowledge. The holy fathers tell us the tree was the beauty of creation, and, as such, it was very good. The issue was to give Adam opportunity to execute the work given him to “work the garden” so as to “complete the creation” (I read Gn 2:17 together with Gn 2:3 & 2:5 LXX). For this, it was necessary for him to offer his freedom

to God not under coercion but in love, expressed in freely chosen obedience.

Thus, note that the commandment was given but not forced on Adam, leaving him free to choose which master he would serve and which life he would live: the Life of God or the life of his bodily senses.

He chose to give his desire to what did not belong to him – not so much the tree, but what the serpent promised: that he would become *like* God. Notice that the promise wasn’t that he would become *one* with God, but *like* God; that is to say, he would become a little god alongside God, and so outside of God, not in God, with his “I” or his ego in his heart, not God in his heart. Such likeness to God, obviously, is a false likeness. It is a likeness outside of God, a self-righteousness, not the righteousness of God.

It has the appearance of holiness, but it is not holiness itself. In such a “likeness”, man is not in union with God. He is altogether outside of God. In his heart at the root, at that point where he opens onto the deep that is beyond all things, he is absolutely closed to God, because the face of his heart is turned away from God. The LORD’s word concerning the centurion is a stinging indictment against Israel. He is saying that the righteousness of Israel was a false righteousness because it was the righteousness of the ego presenting itself to God as a little god while its heart is closed off to God.

It was not the righteousness of a heart open to God in the humility and love of faith. Even keeping the Law perfectly would reveal the lie of such a righteousness. Here is the heart of the riddle, and it seems to me that the opening into its answer is very, very narrow and so it is very hard, if not impossible for one to enter it to see it, especially if one is trying to answer it in the self-righteous arrogance of one’s ego. For, in keeping the precepts of the law perfectly, one would stand before God – actually, it’s rather that one stands not before God but before the image of God in oneself, viz., one’s ego – and boast: “I have kept all the commandments from my youth up. What more do I lack?” as in, “I lack nothing, so give me entrance into your Kingdom!”

This self-righteousness, this false likeness to God, in fact, is the property of every one of us. Whatever judgment we find in the New Testament leveled against the Jews because of their hypocrisy and self-righteousness is actually another “riddle”, whose answer is given in coming to “see” that I am this “Jew”. St Paul says, the true Jew is the one who is a Jew inwardly, and the real circumcision is of the heart (Rm 2:29).

It is thus that this centurion, a Gentile not a Jew, uncircumcised not circumcised, and so ritually unclean outwardly, is an indictment against Christians probably even more than against Israel. For, if the Law flushed out our self-determination and brought it into the open, is it possible that Grace does so even more because it is the Light of God that illumines everything in the darkness, including the self-righteousness of our egotism? I have observed it in myself. I find when I observe the rites and rubrics of the Church’s liturgical worship perfectly, keep a rule of prayer faithfully, live a pure and moral life, there is in me a tendency to claim all this as my own righteousness, and my egotism blinds me to the spiritual pride behind it all. I cannot see how the god that is in my heart is not the LORD Jesus Christ but my own ego, making me not righteous, humble, lowly, meek, loving, but self-righteous, judgmental, arrogant, easily offended, defensive, huffy, and unforgiving. These are the qualities in which the “righteous” Jews crucified the LORD of glory in the flesh. Is it possible that we Christians crucify the LORD of glory “in the spirit”, or in our heart by our self-righteous pride?

If the LORD marveled at the centurion’s faith, meaning that he marveled at the centurion’s humility, then how much more should faith marvel at the Faithfulness of God? If the purpose of the Law was to expose my “desire” to claim as my own what doesn’t belong to me, let’s say the holiness that belongs to the LORD who alone is holy (Rev 3:5), then the purpose of Grace is to break it. This egotism may be the wall of enmity that separates me from God. Cast off the darkness, says St Paul. Let us cast off our egotism. Put on the armor of light. Let’s put on the armor of humility and brokenness of heart. Put on the LORD Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh. Put on the life of the Church, the Cross of Christ given us in the ascetic disciplines, not to boast before God but to put to death what’s earthly in us, our ego, for the sake of Christ who first loved us. Let us become slaves of God, not of ourselves as little gods, that dying with Christ in the likeness of His death, we may die to our self-righteousness and have as our fruit holiness and life eternal in the love of God the Father, the communion of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ in the joy and love of His Holy Mother and all the saints. Amen!

**Fr. Philip LeMasters**

## **HOLY TRINITY’S Liturgical Schedule from July 5 to July 20, 2020**

### **Sunday July 5 (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

### **Wednesday July 8:**

5:00 pm - Akathist

### **Friday July 10:**

5:00 pm - Akathist

### **Sunday July 12 (Fifth Sunday after Pentecost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

### **Wednesday July 15:**

5:00 pm - Akathist

### **Friday July 17:**

5:00 pm - Akathist

### **Sunday July 19 (Sixth Sunday after Pentecost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

### **Monday July 20 - Holy Prophet Elias:**

9:00 am - Matins

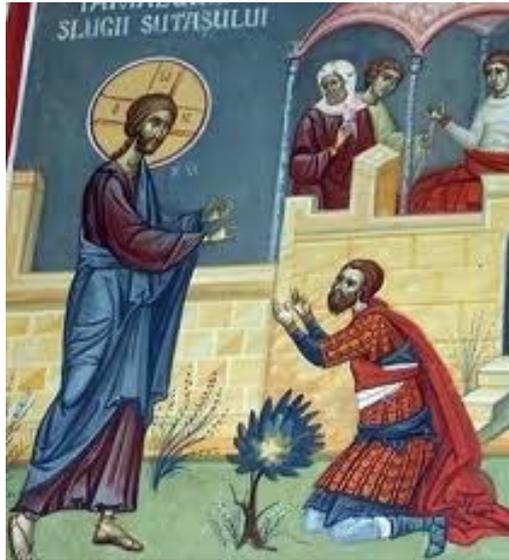
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

## The Centurion

To forestall health issues from my family history, I work out at a local health club. There, of course, all of us are basically walking around in our underwear, with tennis shoes; so, one sees more of human society there in the health club than one does on the streets. One sees also the lengths to which an increasing number of people are going to make a statement by means of their bodily appearance: the amount of skin covered with tattoos, for example, extra-terrestrial hair-cuts, shocking hair colors like fantastic fuchsia, lilting lavender and lyrical lemon-lime and electric orange, body parts pierced with rings, doo-hickies and other gadgets. There used to be no TV in the showers. There still isn't, but what's just as interesting as any TV show, especially the ones nowadays is the show on the fellows' backs and fronts as they lather and spin in the showers next to yours. No TV in the showers, but my health club *could* be called a *luxury* health spa and demand higher rates all the same because of the tattoo shows its patrons put on, accented by sparkling auras flashing from the rocks and stones stuffed in the most amazing spots in their bodies.

What I'm lampooning illustrates, in dramatic fashion, to be sure, what I think is true for all of us: we love external adornments because we want to be beautiful. I also strongly sense a hope that the adorning of one's body with trendy gadgets and fashions will chase away some inner pain; and the more outrageous the external adornments, the deeper the inner pain.

The biblical vision of man shows that the desire to be beautiful is in itself not sick at all but natural and good; for, we were created in the image and likeness of God. God is beautiful and the source of beauty. Created in His image and likeness, we were made beautiful from the beginning. To be in the image of God is to be beautiful. The desire to be beautiful is the desire to be like God. But, in the beginning, God did not cover us with tattoos or color our hair with electricity, nor did He poke holes in our ears, noses, eyebrows or anywhere else to insert rocks and stones hoping to make us beautiful, because He clothed us in a beautiful Garment of Immortality that radiated with the light of God's own uncreated life. He



crowned us, not with perishable silver and gold, but with His own imperishable glory and honor that is infinitely more precious than the most precious metals on earth.

Our preoccupation with bodily beauty is, I think, our soul giving voice to a long-forgotten yearning for the original beauty and divine character she once had. I think it is the anguished cry of the soul's inner shame over the ugliness that has deformed her original godlikeness and made her not in the likeness of God but more in the likeness of irrational beasts, because she has gotten separated from the

Heavenly Bridegroom who is full of grace and truth, and she has gotten lost in a herd of false gods that are beautiful only like a white-washed tomb filled with the stench of rotting flesh and death is beautiful.

Obviously, the soul's inner ugliness cannot be made beautiful by tattoos and pierced body parts or shocking hair colors. Provocative and revealing clothes cannot hide it. It cannot be cut or suctioned out by the reduction or augmentation of key body parts through plastic surgery. An ugly soul cannot be hidden even by a beautiful body because the soul's ugliness is visible for all to see in her pettiness, her meanness and smallness, her narcissism and selfishness, the scorn of her conceit, the contempt of her pride, her calloused insensitivity, her thoughtlessness, her prejudice and hatred.

External adornments will not make the hissy fits or temper tantrums go away; they will not make the soul patient when she doesn't get her way. The ugliness of the soul doesn't come from wrinkles and sagging skin. It comes from inner sores that ooze out of the pores of our skin and into our facial expressions, our words and gestures from a darkened soul buried underneath in the tomb of our heart. I think that the tattoos, the small rocks and stones stuffing our ears and noses, our lips, tongues and eyebrows, the effort to make ourselves young again through plastic surgery, covering our bodies with revealing and provocative clothes are the voiceless cry of a lonely soul mourning in anguish for a love, a joy, an intimacy that she's missing, and a beauty she's lost. And, I think a big part of her misery is the dark confusion

that has settled on her from her forgetfulness of the God who made her in the beauty of His own image and likeness.

Yet, this God has revealed Himself to the world. Born of the Virgin, He became flesh and dwelt among us; and the apostles have borne witness to Him who they saw with their own eyes, heard with their own ears, handled with their own hands. He is the Word of Life that was from the beginning, full of grace and truth, the only-begotten of the Father who has made the Father known.

So, what is it about Jesus that is so unattractive that we turn away from Him and continue hunting for tattoos, rocks and stones, spiffy hairstyles, and fancy clothes to make our bodies beautiful even as they grow older and uglier, as though they are mocking us as they wither away into smelly old stumps adorned with all the adornments we adorn them with? What is so ugly about Jesus that we dismiss Him so? Is it His humility? His graciousness? His tenderness and compassion? His moral goodness? The healing power of His compassion that healed everyone who came to Him of all their diseases? Is it His teaching to love God with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind and one's neighbor as oneself? Is it His love in which He voluntarily endured the agony of the Cross so that we could have not just life but His own divine life?

He, the only Lover of mankind, the all-compassionate One, by His death on the Cross liberated us from the power and the fear of death. United to us in death, He was buried and made the tomb of our heart to be a bridal chamber radiant with life, the opening onto the Garden of Eden, from which we are born again as children of God, clothed with the robe of light, crowned with glory and honor, restored to our original beauty as partakers of His divine nature in His own glory and virtue.

What about this Gospel proclamation is so unattractive that we ignore the Source of the healing of our soul's anguish who is "in our midst" and who could restore us to our original beauty, if we would but receive Him? What kind of madness has seized us? Not to seek Christ with our whole heart, soul, strength and mind is nothing short of suicide. Last Sunday's Gospel gave us the word of Jesus: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is single, your whole body will be light....You cannot serve two masters."

Brothers and sisters, the eye that is the lamp of the body is the heart that Christ made into a bridal chamber, radiant with life, in the baptismal font of His Holy Pascha, so that He could unite with us and we with Him and be born again, from above, as children of God. If Christ dwells in our hearts, then our heart becomes light,

for Christ is the Light of the world, and our whole body becomes light, because we have put on Christ as our Robe of Light. The ugly old Adam is buried with Christ in His death, and we are raised in His Resurrection in the New Adam. We are clothed once more in the Robe of Light that was ours in the beginning. We are clothed *within*, in our heart, in the beauty of God, and our whole body becomes beautiful not from tattoos and exotic clothes, but from the light of Christ that radiates from our heart and "tattoos" our body in the light of God's own glory and honor.

In this morning's Gospel, the centurion is an icon of the eye of the body that serves one ruler, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the ego that governs the soul and body, but denies itself and submits in obedience to the authority of Christ, and receives in return the healing of the soul and body, represented by the centurion's servant.

The world was brought out of the abyss into being when it obeyed the Lord's creative command, and it came to exist in the beauty of Paradise.

So also, we are raised from death to life when we deny ourselves and submit in obedience to Christ as our only Master. We come to exist in the glory and virtue of Christ's own divine nature, raised from the baptismal font as children of God clothed in a Robe of Light, which is Christ.

The Gospel proclaimed by the Church is the healing power of divine life that is breathed into us by Christ when we receive Him and follow Him according to His commandment. If we are sick, if we do not live in the joy and peace of Christ that heals the soul and makes her beautiful in the glory and honor of Christ, it is because we are serving the wrong master. Do you want to be beautiful? Do you want your whole body to be light? Like the centurion, deny yourself; give the eye of your body, your ego, your heart to Christ, the Light of the world and see if the Lord is not powerful to raise you up to life eternal, clothed in the beauty of your own Robe of Light in the goodness and beauty of Paradise. Amen.

**Fr. Paul Wesche**

