



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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The 27th Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel Reading Luke 13: 10 - 17

At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on

which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" As he said this, all his adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

Apostle Reading Ephesians 6: 10 - 17

Brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in

the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Synaxarion. Sunday December 6, 2020
(The 27th Sunday after Pentecost - fish allowed): Holy Great Hierarch Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra

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Set Free from Our Bondage

This week's Gospel lesson is the story of how Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). "She was bent over and quite unable to stand straight." (v. 11) Today we would say that she very likely had osteoporosis that led to curvature of the spine. Many of us know people who suffer in this way. Those of us who have had occasion to visit people in a nursing home have probably seen more than a few women like this. (It is something that afflicts women much more



than men.) There was a woman in my neighborhood who was so bent over that it was impossible when seeing her, not to suffer with her. Needless to say, it is a debilitating illness, and this poor woman had been suffering like this for eighteen years.

This particular story is unique to the Gospel of St. Luke, which is in keeping with his habit of highlighting for us Jesus' attention toward the poor and the weak. Here, we are told, that while he was preaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath Jesus saw her and called her over to him. She didn't ask anything of him, but rather He reached out to her. From among all the people in the assembly, he noticed her and her suffering. He said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." (v.12) Laying his hand on her she stood up straight and began praising God (v. 13).

He was immediately criticized by the leader of the synagogue for having broken the rules around work on the Sabbath. Jesus is outraged at the hypocrisy. He says, "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?" (v. 15) There were (and still are) intricate rules around what could or could not be done on the Sabbath. In one commentary on the Law, tying and untying knots was strictly forbidden, while in another commentary certain kinds of knots were exempt. Similarly, it was

forbidden to lead animals more than 2,000 yards to water.

Jesus is intimating that these rules were regularly broken out of necessity. No one would not tie or untie a rope or not water thirsty animals if their well-being were at stake.

This is the power behind his point, when he says: "Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (v. 16) The congregants immedi-

ately understand the hypocrisy and the lack of compassion that Jesus is decrying. I would also draw your attention to a subtle point in this account. Jesus says that Satan had bound this woman. Often we think that illness is a punishment from God, or just a natural part of life. The Lord calls this bondage, not punishment. He certainly doesn't see this as natural. He wanted her healthy and whole. Moreover, he wants us healthy and whole.

It is perhaps not too much to see in this crippled woman an image of humanity bound and held captive by the Evil One. It brings to mind the old Latin hymn that we sing at this time of year:

*"O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear."*

We should — all of us — prepare for His coming. We should set aside time for prayer and fasting, withdrawing from the frenzied pace of life. We should make room in our hearts to welcome that young child who comes to us, in order to free us, He who is the pre-eternal God

Fr. Nicholas Apostola



The Feast of Saint Nicholas

Some time ago I remember overhearing a child ask her mother: 'Mummy, why does Father Christmas have a beard? And why does he wear such funny clothes?' Her mother could give no adequate answer, quite simply because she was not an Orthodox Christian. All Orthodox should know the answer to the child's questions. Father Christmas, or Santa Claus, has a beard and wears such unusual clothes because he is the folklore version of an Orthodox bishop - St Nicholas. Who was St Nicholas?

Born at the end of the third century, in about 280, Nicholas was a very devout young man who, still quite young, became a Bishop and then the Archbishop of the then great city of Myra, which is in the province of Lycia in Asia Minor, which is now called Turkey. There he was renowned for his charitable deeds. There he set up orphanages, hospitals, hostels for the mentally ill, fed the starving in famine, and set up a drainage system so that his people would not die from the diseases incurred by poor hygiene. There he freed captives unjustly imprisoned, saved sailors in stormy seas, redeemed young girls who were bound for child prostitution. In everything he did, he wanted to show that our destiny is not to live as animals, but as the children of God. This is why, as one of the 318 Fathers present at the First Universal Church Council which took place in the year 325 in Nicea, he could not support the blasphemies of Arius.

This Arius was a philosopher, as we would say today, 'a clever dick' and stood up at that Council and said that Christ is not the Son of God. Like all who make the wrong choices, that is 'heretics' in the language of the Church, in talking about the Person of Christ, Arius talked of himself. For like every single heretic in Church History,



Arius replaced the understanding of God, theology, with the understanding of his own self, psychology. Not being able to accept God through Faith, they replace the transcendent Revelation of God, the Reality beyond their tiny minds, with the fruit of their own fertile imaginations and make God into sinful individuals like themselves. Arius indeed was not the Son of God. However, if we were to believe his words that Christ is not the Son of God, then of course Orthodox Christianity would no longer be the one, unique soul-saving Faith, but just another vain philosophy, a mere religion.

So it was that when this Arius blasphemed at the First Council, St Nicholas stood up and slapped him across the face. The other Fathers were horrified by St Nicholas' violent action, defrocked him and sent him away. St Nicholas did not justify himself by saying that he was trying to silence the demonic blasphemies of Arius, by saying that

he was trying to bring this arrogant man to his senses, by saying that if Arius were right, then mankind was condemned to live as animals. Instead he accepted this punishment with humility. However, many of the Fathers saw around St Nicholas a vision of Christ and his Most Holy Mother returning to the saint his episcopal vestments. This was a divine vindication of the action of the saint and indeed he was quickly reinstalled as Archbishop of Myra.

If we were to read the life of St Nicholas up until his repose, we would find that it runs to many, many pages. But if we were to read his life since his blessed repose, we would find that it runs to many, many books. His life since his death is much longer than his life before his death. For he is one of those many saints who has continued to work miracles among all peoples and among all generations up until the present age.

True, today the once great city of Myra is no more. In what is now a Muslim country there stand only the ruins of the great Cathedral of St Nicholas and the ruins of the buildings he had raised up. But St Nicholas is still venerated there, including by Muslims. Indeed he is venerated all over the world, by Orthodox and Non-Orthodox alike. Here in Felixstowe, the chapel at the ferry is dedicated to him and looking out across the haven to the port of Harwich there is the huge spire of St Nicholas' church, for he is ever the protector of seafarers.

Of St Nicholas' latest miracles we would quote only one, which came to our attention from a sure source only recently. It was a few years ago, in the 1980's, that a Russian nuclear submarine was in trouble in the Pacific Ocean. Its engine had stopped and refused to restart. Even in those Soviet times, however, one of the young sailors remembered that his grandmother had told him that St Nicholas always protects sailors. And, despite everything around him, he remembered to pray to St Nicholas at that moment. And through his prayers the engine started up again, over a hundred sailors were saved and the world preserved from untold pollution. St Nicholas is among us still today, here and now, preserving all who pray to him from danger and evil.

Finally, there is one question about St Nicholas which we must answer. Why does everybody love St Nicholas? Why is he so popular? Why do Muslims venerate him? Why do even Protestants dedicate chapels to him? Why do Catholics revere him and guard his relics in Bari in Italy? The answer is simple:

Everybody loves St Nicholas, because St Nicholas loves everybody.

Holy Father Nicholas, pray to God for us!

Fr Andrew Phillips



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from December 5 to December 13, 2020

Saturday December 5 (fish allowed):

11:00 am - Sacrament of the
HOLY UNCTION

Sunday December 6 (27th Sunday after Pentecost - fish allowed):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
11:00 am - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

Saturday December 12 (fish allowed)

Sunday December 13 (28th Sunday after Pentecost - fish allowed):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Divine Liturgy
11:00 am - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

