

# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



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# CHURCH BULLETIN

Vol. 14 No. 35 \* Sunday August 29, 2021 \* Editor: V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

## The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

### Gospel Reading Matthew 17: 14 - 23

At that time, when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples

came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

### Apostle Reading 1 Corinthians 4: 9 - 16

Brethren, God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when

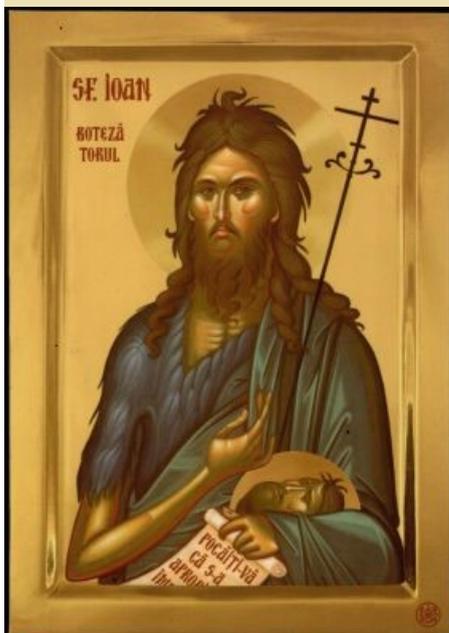
persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things. I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

**Synaxarion.** Sunday August 29, 2021 (The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost): Beheading of Holy Prophet John the Baptist

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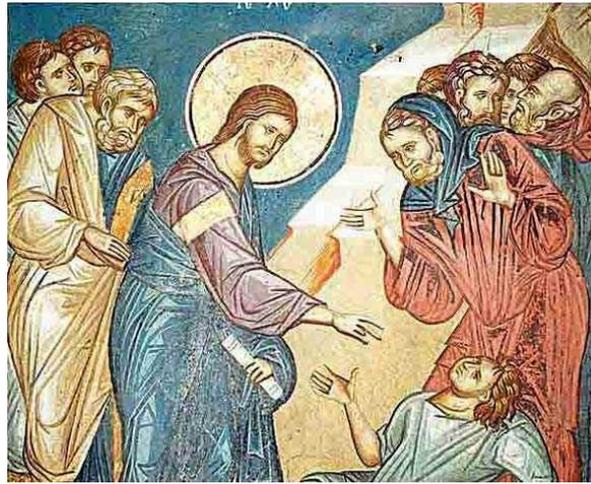


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## Transfigured in Humility

It is always easier to identify other people's weaknesses than to take a close look at our own. That is primarily because of our pride, our addiction to self-centeredness that makes us not want to give up whatever exalted illusions about ourselves have taken root in our souls. It is perhaps the most subtle of temptations, for we can become proud even of how well we think that we confess and repent of our sins.



St. Paul blasted the pride of the factions in Corinth by reminding them what a true apostle looked like. Instead of basking in religious glory, true servants of the Lord looked like fools, weak and dishonored by earthly standards. Just think for a moment about St. Paul's life, from his astounding conversion to Christianity to his constant suffering for the Church and ultimately his death as a martyr. He must have appeared insane to most people in his time and place. But it was because of the true humility of putting faithfulness to Jesus Christ first in his life that St. Paul could say with integrity to the Corinthians that they should imitate him.

In our gospel reading today, the Lord challenged the wounded pride of the disciples, who were disappointed that they had lacked the spiritual authority to cast out the demon and heal the boy. Imagine how humbling it must have been for them to hear the Messiah say, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" He set them straight by saying that they had no faith, not even as much as a tiny mustard seed. Instead of wondering why they could not work miracles, they needed to humble themselves through prayer and fasting if they were to be transfigured such that they would gain authority over the powers of evil.

As we conclude our celebration of the Transfiguration of the Lord today, our Scripture readings remind us of the dangers of presuming that we already shine brightly with the light of Christ. Too often we assume that success according to some worldly standard is the same thing as holiness. But when we take a close look at the lives of the saints, we do not see merely a good life according to passing cultural expectations of whatever

kind. Instead, we see people who embody humility in ways that should make us all earnestly confess and repent of our pride.

Since we are preparing through fasting to celebrate the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, it is especially fitting today to remember her extraordinary example of humility and obedience. The Theotokos agreed to become the Virgin Mother of the Son of

God, something that made absolutely no sense according to normal ways of thinking in our world. She became His Temple in a unique way when Christ was in her womb, and then she loved and served Him throughout His life and ministry, including through His death and resurrection. She is the first and model Christian. At the end of the Mother of God's earthly life, the Apostles were miraculously assembled in her presence. St. Thomas, however, arrived three days late. When her tomb was opened for him to pay his last respects, her body was not there. Even as she was the first to accept Christ into her life, she was the first to follow Him as a whole, complete person into the Kingdom of Heaven. She leads the way for us as Christians in this world and in the world to come.

We pray and fast in preparation for the Feast of the Dormition because we want to become more like her. There is surely no better way to become transfigured by the gracious divine energies of our Savior than to imitate His Mother. She grew up in purity in the Temple at Jerusalem, where she was fed by angels. She is the epitome of the prayer and fasting that the Lord said His disciples needed in order to open themselves to His divine power. That is how she developed the spiritual clarity and strength to say "yes" to the astounding message that she was to become the Virgin Mother of the Son of God. Of course, her story makes no sense according to the conventional standards of the world. Even more so than St. Paul, the Theotokos is a "fool for Christ's sake" because many people then, as now, scoff at her virgin conception of the Savior. The same is surely true about the miraculous characteristics of her **Dormition**.

The question that we all face is whether we will proudly

The question that we all face is whether we will proudly cling to our own illusions about ourselves and our place in the world as we stand before the holy mystery of Jesus Christ, the Son of God Who shines eternally with brilliant light that we do not yet have the eyes behold. His glory is not yet obvious to us. That is why it requires faith to fall before Him in humble repentance

as we open ourselves to His gracious healing power from the depths of our souls through prayer and fasting.

In order to turn away from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness, we must become fools who devote time and energy each day to commune with a Lord we do not see with our eyes in the world as we know it. So we must pray. We must go against society's expectations and our own desires by regularly refusing to indulge our taste buds and stomachs with the richest and most satisfying foods. In other words, we must fast. We must act in ways that will appear crazy in the eyes of many people today, such as reserving sexual intimacy only for marriage as blessed in the Church and refusing to consume pornography or any other media or entertainment that inflames our passions. We must give generously to the poor, forgive our enemies, welcome the stranger, and refuse to allow stupid distinctions between people—such as politics or race— to keep us from treating every human being—from the womb to the tomb— as one created in God's image and likeness. No matter what may be popular or appealing, we must sacrifice to live as those being transfigured in holiness by God's grace.

We must come to terms with the fact that doing so is never easy and will always be a struggle. There is much in all of us that prefers the darkness of sin to the light of holiness. We would often rather be miserable in prideful isolation than embrace the healing mercy of Christ in humility. We would often prefer forms of religion accommodated to worldly success and well-being than to the kind of sacrificial obedience that we

see in the Theotokos, St. Paul, and all the saints. But at the end of the day, we have to decide whether we would rather be part of a "faithless and perverse generation" that cowers in fearful weakness before the corruptions of evil in our lives or like the young Palestinian Jewish girl who changed the history of the universe by bravely saying "yes" to a calling that seemed, and still seems,

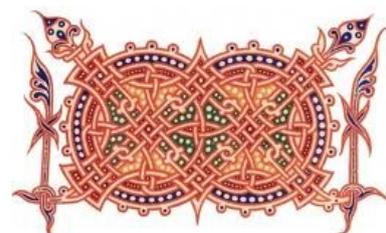
insane by the standards of the corrupt world.

Let us conclude our celebration of the Transfiguration by opening ourselves to the strength and holiness of our Savior, which shone so brightly throughout the life of the Theotokos. In order to do that, we must humbly focus on uniting ourselves

to Christ as we disregard temptations to self-centeredness in any form and to worrying about the conventional wisdom of our society. If we want, by God's grace, to shine with holy light, we must first become fools who, through prayer and fasting, simply want to love and serve our Lord with every ounce of our being. In other words, we need to become like His Mother, the first and model Christian who has shown us how to welcome the Savior into our lives and to follow Him into the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. Remember this: To follow her example is to be transfigured.

**Fr. Philip LeMasters**

(Source: <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/>)



## Sermon on the Feast of the Beheading of St John the Baptist

Two weeks ago, we celebrated the feast of the Dormition of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos proclaiming the holiness, of the greatest human being to ever walk amongst us. If the Theotokos is the greatest human being to walk the earth, then St John the Baptist, by Christ's own admission, is not far behind her.

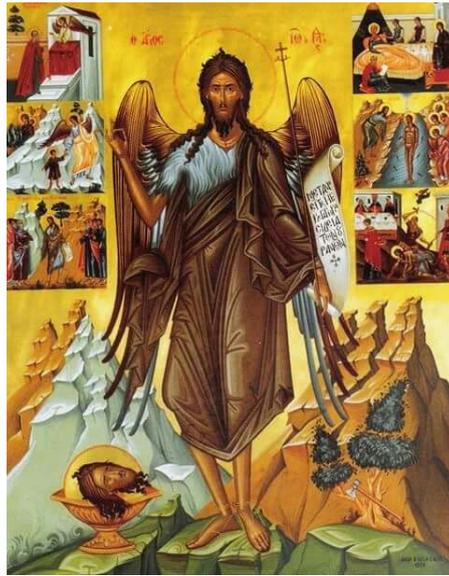
In the Gospel of Luke, we hear our Lord proclaim that among those born of women, there is no man greater than John the Baptist. St. Justin Popovich calls this feast a "little good Friday", because on Good Friday, men murdered the living God. Today, those same people murdered the greatest of all men.

St. Justin made this comparison in the feast days because so many of John's greatest accomplishments in this world went hand in hand with the ministry of Christ. From his first days on earth, St. John was entirely dedicated to the One who would come after him. We hear very early in the Gospels how he leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of the Theotokos proclaiming the incarnation. After that blessed encounter, Holy Scripture and Church Tradition teach us how he and his mother Elizabeth fled into the desert to escape the terrible decree by Herod, that all infants should be put to death. We know that forty days after that escape, his mother passed away, and his father Zachariah was put to death by Herod in the temple.

As an orphan and an infant, St. John was brought up in the desert, guided only by the hand of God. Take a moment to pause and think about that for a moment.

We can just imagine how difficult it would be for someone so young to be put out into the desert to fend for themselves. What kind of chance would they have? But John had the greatest of teachers, the greatest of guides. He was brought up by God the Father Himself who prepared John for his ministry that was to come.

When John the Baptist was about thirty years of age, the Word of God came to him, commanding him to preach repentance, and call on all men to



prepare the way of the Lord.

Shortly after the beginning of his ministry, having been preparing the Jews for the coming of the Messiah, the mysteries of the Holy Trinity were revealed to him when he baptized our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. St. John slowly fell into the shadows and became silent.

He had accomplished what he was ordained to do in life--to prepare the way of the Lord. St. John did this with great joy, as we hear him say in the Gospels: *"the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because*

*of the bridegroom's voice: therefore this my joy is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."* That last verse has some cosmic significance to it. We celebrate the Birth of John in June, right about the time when the days begin to get shorter, and the light of the sun decreases. We in turn celebrate the feast of the Nativity of our Lord in the winter, when the days slowly begin to get longer, and the light increases.

Shortly after the baptism of Christ, we know the story about how St. John was beheaded by Herod, and his earthly life ended. For many in the Christian world, this is where the story ends. The Orthodox Church however, celebrates this day as a new beginning, because we know that this was only the midpoint of the ministry of the beloved Forerunner of Christ.

Having departed the earthly life, St. John went down to hell itself, preparing the way yet again for Christ's descent into Hades. He continued the ministry that he had performed on earth, preaching about the coming of Christ.

As St. John of San Francisco explains: *"The souls of the righteous ones from the Old Testament, were languishing in hell, awaiting the fulfillment of the coming of the One Who would conquer the serpent, as had been told to Adam by God. These souls, deprived of the light of God's glory, tormented with waiting for the fulfillment of their hope, were greeted by John, who brought joyful tidings in saying that soon...the kingdom of hell would be destroyed."*



*...the kingdom of hell would be destroyed.”*

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we celebrate today the beginning of St. John’s ministry to those who were in anguish in Hell. He brought those souls the joyous news of the end of their torment and prepared the way for Christ who would later shatter the gates of hell. Just as the Nativity of St. John is the beginning of the Gospel for the living, so too is the Beheading of John the Baptist the beginning for the dead.

In keeping with our Cosmic Theme, I will conclude this morning with the words of St. John of San Francisco who said:

*“St. John the Baptist’s beheading was his final exploit on earth, and the last step for the receiving of the greatest reward, in the Kingdom of Heaven; For all those in hell, John’s death was the rising of the morning star, before the appearance of the Son of Righteousness.”*

**Fr. Gabriel Bilas**

(Source: <http://www.st-marymagdalene.org>)

# HOLY TRINITY’S Liturgical Schedule from August 29 to September 8, 2021

## **Sunday August 29 (Tenth Sunday after Pentecost) - Beheading of St John the Baptist:**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

## **Wednesday September 1 - Beginning of Church New Year**

## **Sunday September 5 (Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

## **Wednesday September 8— Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos:**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Holy Liturgy

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour