

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
(07.21.2024.)

Matthew 8:5-13

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. **(KJV)**

We gather in God's Holy Church today for the salvation of our souls. We seek peace and purity in our hearts, minds and souls. We desire for God's love to be manifested in our daily relationships.

The present Gospel is proclaimed every year in the Church. Jesus Christ recognized the strong faith in the centurion. The centurion showed compassion for his suffering servant. He desired Jesus to heal the servant.

The centurion was wise in turning to Jesus Christ to heal his servant. Believers suffering afflictions are wise to turn first to Jesus for healing. The centurion's decision to come to Jesus was beneficial. Jesus healed the servant.

Believers will have their faith tested from time to time. Events will occur in daily life that will require believers to proceed solely on faith in God. God does not disappoint believers coming to Him in faith.

Deep faith in the Lord God is fundamental for Christians. Deep faith needs to constantly be cultivated and nourished. The Holy Scriptures and lives of the saints offer lessons in faith.

Believers strengthen their personal faith by becoming familiar with the accounts of faith through the centuries. When Abraham took Isaac to the mountain to offer sacrifice, God responded to Abraham's faith. (Gen. 22:1-18)

The Lord God answered Elijah's deep faith when Elijah prayed to Lord in the contest with the 450 prophets of Baal, (I Kings 18:22-39) Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood for twelve year when she came to Jesus in faith, (Mark 5:25-34)

The Eleventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews yields lasting lessons of faith. Nourishing faith is a life-long process. Challenges to faith persist to the last moment of life.

Believers are required to cling to the Lord at every moment of life to address the challenges to faith. Evil temptations arise and attack the believer in moments of weakness and laxity.

God's Holy Church is where to nourish personal faith. Faithfully reading the Scriptures at home each day nourishes personal faith. Praying to the Lord often throughout the day keeps the believer connected with God.

When the connection with God is broken or severed, the soul is in peril. Danger to the soul increases when faith is weak. The soul is worth more than the whole world and merits constant care and protection. (Mt. 16:26)

The centurion in the current Gospel was a man of authority and power. He recognized that Jesus Christ was greater than himself. The centurion was humble before Jesus,

The centurion appreciated the power of Jesus' word. The centurion believed Jesus' word was sufficient to heal his servant. Faith in Jesus' words has power to heal the afflictions of believers' souls.

Faith in Jesus' words is sufficient for the cleansing of personal sins and beginning life anew in Christ. The Church proclaims Jesus' words at each Divine Liturgy. Attentive believers take Jesus' words to heart and put them into practice.

Each Divine Liturgy is intended to transform the believer. Believers are to increase their unity with and faithfulness with Christ at each Divine Liturgy. The Gospel entering the heart, mind and soul is intended to transform the believer.

Partaking of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ unites the believer with Christ completely. The more a believer partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ, the greater the unity with Christ.

Faith and faithfulness to Christ certainly go a long way in maintaining the unity. The Gospel message is to be put into practice each day. The Church provides teachings each day from the Holy Scriptures.

Believers unite and remain united with the Church by considering the Scripture readings each day. Believers enrich their lives by being attentive to the saints and martyrs commemorated by the Church each day.

Viewing life and the world through the perspective of the Church keeps the believer on the narrow path to God's Kingdom and eternal life. The hunger in the soul is nourished in the Church.

The Church is a fortress against the perils of the world. The Church offers protection against the world's evils. The Church nourishes and fills the heart, mind and soul with peace, love and joy.

The centurion in the present Gospel experienced peace and joy when his servant was healed. The centurion benefitted from Christ's love. The healed servant was renewed in life by the healing of Jesus Christ.

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost. Greatmartyr Procopius of Gaesarea. July 8/21, 2024.
Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

The Prologue from Ochrid

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic

1. THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR SAINT PROCOPIUS

Procopius was born in Jerusalem of a Christian father and a pagan mother. At first his name was Neanias. Following the death of his father, his mother raised her son completely in the spirit of Roman idolatry. When Neanias had grown up, Emperor Diocletian saw him, took a liking to him, and brought him to his palace for military service. When this nefarious emperor began to persecute Christians, he ordered Neanias to go to Alexandria with a garrison of soldiers in order to exterminate the Christians. But on the way, something happened to Neanias like that which once happened to Saul [Paul]. In the third hour of the night there was a strong earthquake and, at that moment, the Lord appeared, and a voice was heard: "Neanias, where are you going, and against whom are you rising up?" In great fear, Neanias asked: "Who are You, Lord? I am unable to recognize You." Then there appeared in the air an exceedingly luminous cross, as of crystal, and from the cross came a voice saying: "I am Jesus, the crucified Son of God." And the Lord further said to him: "By this sign that you have seen, conquer your enemies, and My peace will be with you." Commander Neanias's life was completely changed. He issued an order to make a cross such as he had seen, and instead of going against the Christians, he and his soldiers used their force against the Agarians, who were attacking Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem as a victor, and revealed his Christian faith to his mother. Brought before the court, Neanias removed his commander's belt and sword, and threw them before the judge, thereby showing that he was a soldier only of Christ the King. After being tortured extensively, he was cast into prison. There the Lord Christ appeared to him again, baptized him, and gave him the name Procopius. One day twelve women appeared before his prison window and said to him: "We too are servants of Christ." Accused for this, they were thrown into the same prison. St. Procopius taught them the Faith of Christ, and prepared them to receive their "martyr's crowns." (This is why St. Procopius, along with the God-crowned Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena, is mentioned in the order of crowning during the wedding ceremony.) Subsequently, the twelve women were brutally tortured. Witnessing their suffering and bravery, the mother of Procopius also came to believe in Christ, and all thirteen were slain. When St. Procopius was led to the scaffold, he raised his hands toward the east and prayed to God for all the poor, the needy, the orphans and the widows, and especially for the Holy Church, that it would grow and spread, and that Orthodoxy would shine to the end of time. And from heaven it was made known to him that his prayers were heard, after which he joyfully laid his head under the sword and went to his Lord in eternal joy. St. Procopius honorably suffered at Caesarea in Palestine, and was crowned with a wreath of immortal glory, on July 8, 303 A.D.

2. SAINT PROCOPIUS, FOOL FOR CHRIST

Procopius was a miracle-worker from Ustiug who died in the year 1303 A.D. He was of Varangian (Norse) descent and a merchant by profession. Coming to Novgorod on business, he was awed by the beauty of Orthodoxy and embraced the Orthodox Faith. Desiring to be a perfect Christian, he distributed his estate to the poor and began to practice all the other virtues. He pretended insanity, so that men would not praise him, and he was able to see into the hearts of men as well as their destinies, and to predict natural events, which afterward would indeed occur. By his tearful prayers before the icon of the Birth-giver of God, Procopius averted a terrible hailstorm from the town of Ustiug, and thus brought the sinful town to repentance. His body was found dead on the street, completely covered with snow. A church was built over his miracle-working relics.

3. THE VENERABLE THEOPHILUS THE MYRRH-GUSHER [MIROTOCIVI]

Theophilus was born in Macedonia in the village of Ziki. He was a very educated man and a great ascetic. By order of Patriarch Niphon of Constantinople, he traveled to Alexandria to make inquires as to whether it was true that Patriarch Joachim had moved a mountain by his prayers and had drunk poison without harmful effects, being forced to do this by the Jews and Muslims. Convinced of the truthfulness of these miracles, Theophilus returned to the Holy Mountain (Athos), where he lived in asceticism, first in Vatopedi, then in Iveron, and finally in the cell of St. Basil near Karyes. They offered the archbishopric of Thessalonica to this holy man, but he refused. Through profound silence, divine meditation and heartfelt prayer, he succeeded in purifying his mind of all passionate thoughts, and thus he became a pure vessel of the Holy Spirit in which Christ dwelt. In speaking of his imminent falling asleep in the Lord, he instructed his disciple Isaac not to bury him when he ws dead, but to tie a rope around his legs, drag him, and toss him into the river. With great fear the disciple carried this out. By by God's providence, the relics of St. Theophilus were revealed, and when they brought them to his cell, a miraculous myrrh began to flow from them. He entered into rest on July 8, 1548.

SAINTE PROCOPIUS

When it is the will of the Omniscient God,

Persecutors become His servants;

God-haters, wonderful apostles;

And pagans, zealots for the Faith.

By God's will, Saul became Paul,

And Neanias--Saint Procopius!

Procopius, against Christ, went to war,

Yet a Christian to his mother came!
Tortures he once prepared, yet now received them.
Like lightning, truth he recognized,
And before the Son of God bowed down,
And from the earthly king turning,
Of the King on High, a servant became.
The King of Heaven on him a gift bestowed--
The gift of strength, the afflicted to help.
And as it was then, so is it now:
Procopius is friend to the downcast.
For today as of old, he helps.

REFLECTION

St. Anthony teaches: "Be fearful that you do not become famous because of some work that you do. If they begin to praise you because of your work, do not rejoice or take delight in it, but keep your works secret as much as you can, and do not allow anyone to speak about them." How much more peace and joy would there be among men on earth, if a part of mankind would take these holy words to heart! Even though St. Theophilus lived as a simple monk secluded on Holy Mt. Athos, he was famous in all the patriarchates of the east, as much for his learning as for his virtuous, ascetical life. It once happened that Theoleptus, the Patriarch of Constantinople, visited Thessalonica. At that time the arch-episcopal throne of Thessalonica was vacant. The Christians of Thessalonica unanimously implored the patriarch to appoint Theophilus as their archbishop. The patriarch, a compatriot and friend of Theophilus, wrote a personal letter to him, in which he invited him to accept the arch-episcopal throne. Fearing the glory of men, yet not easily being able to refuse the patriarch, the humble Theophilus immediately received the "great angelic habit" [The Great Schema], and informed the patriarch of this, adding: "If God so wills, we will see each other in the Kingdom of Heaven." Such were the spiritual giants, whom the Church calls saints--shunning vanity and the glory of men.

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the miraculous changing of bitter water into sweet water (Exodus 15):

1. How the thirsty Israelites came upon bitter water in Marah and were unable to drink it, and the people began to murmur against Moses;
2. How God commanded Moses to cast a tree (wood) into the water, and the water became sweet;
3. How this tree foreshadowed the Cross of Christ, by which the bitterness of our life is transformed into sweetness;
4. How my entire being is bitter water, until I bring Christ Crucified into myself.

HOMILY

About the Living Stone

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2: 4-5).

Brethren, what does the stone signify, if not stability? Brethren, what does the stone teach us, if not stability? The living stone signifies immortality. The apostle calls Christ the Lord the Living Stone, because He is immortal and the Giver of immortality. The apostle calls Christians living stones, as partakers of the immortality of Christ.

Brethren, what do unbelievers think, concerning man's fate at the end of time? They think that the same thing happens to man as to a stone: a man dies, becomes senseless, and is transformed into dust. Yet a stone is already dead and senseless, and under certain conditions it is transformed into dust. So both the unbelievers and the believers compare man with a stone. The unbelievers, because of the deadness and the insensibility of the stone; and the believers, because of the durability and the stability of the stone. For the former [unbelievers], the stone is a symbol of death, but for the latter [believers], the stone is a symbol of immortality.

In truth, without Christ, mankind has always been and will always be like dead stones. But Christ is like a living stone. Only adhere to Him, and you will become as living stones. In building a house, the builder chooses only those stones that are chiseled into shape and prepared to fit easily with the other stones in the wall. The builder rejects the unchiseled, the unprepared, the unpolished and the fragile stones. Building the home, or a temple, of His Immortal Kingdom, Christ chooses men as the builder chooses stones, with one characteristic--life, spiritual life. The Lord rejects spiritually dead men as bad building blocks, and accepts only those who are alive, who resemble Him and who fit into place with the other living stones. These other living stones are the angels, prophets, apostles and saints. Brethren, let us endeavor to be a holy material for the holy house of the Kingdom of Christ--which He is building day and night, and which He will finish completely in the fullness of time.

O Lord Jesus, Builder of the Kingdom of Heaven, enliven us with Your Holy Spirit, and build us also, as living stones, into the house of Your eternal glory.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

PRAYER BEFORE TAKING HOLY BREAD AND HOLY WATER

Lord, my God, may Your holy gift—holy bread and holy water—be for the forgiveness of sins, the enlightenment of my mind, the strengthening of my soul and body, the health of my soul and body, the overcoming of my passions and ailments through Your boundless mercy, by the prayers of Your Most Pure Mother and all Your Saints. Amen!

Services this Week

- **Friday (07.26.2024.)**
 - **Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel; Venerable Stephen the Sabaite**
 - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **5th Sunday after Pentecost (07.28.2024.)**
 - **Holy Martyrs Gyricus and Julitta; St Vladimir of Russia;**
 - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*

Donations July 14, 2024

Offering - \$ 584.00 Candles - \$50.00

Large Candles

For Health of Olga Lucas from Sharon & Jim Urban
(2) IMO Devich & Lovrich Families from Tom & Carole McAllister
IMO Christine Bulich, Louis & Mary Daley from Olga Bulich
IMO Charles Bulich from Olga Bulich
IMO of Bartis & Pavich Families from Joe Bartis

UPCOMING EVENTS

JOIN US FOR



**SATURDAY, AUGUST 10TH 2024
NOON TO 6:00 PM
ORCHESTRA SRPSKI SINOVI**

EVERYONE'S HELP IS NEEDED!!!



Johnstown Slavic Festival – September 20-21st