

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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The Thirty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
(02.11.2024.)

Matthew 15:21-28

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. **(KJV)**

Believers face the actions of the devil in daily life. The devil may vex a family member, a friend or coworker. The devil can influence one or members of a parish. The devil's actions and influence are a constant concern.

Believers must be constantly vigilant when dealing with the devil's influence and actions. Being fully nourished by, focused on and centered in Jesus Christ is the only way to successfully deal with the devil.

The mother in the present Gospel focused her attention on Jesus Christ. She was resolute and committed in seeking Jesus' attention and healing. The mother wanted her daughter free of the devil's influence.

Persons vexed by the devil are disruptive to daily life. When the devil's actions manifest in the home, at work or in a parish, disorder and discomfort arise.

Through the present Gospel, the Church teaches the way to deal with the devil.

The devil is overcome and defeated by Jesus Christ. The present Gospel is a reminder for believers to be fully focused on and centered in Christ. The mother in the present Gospel demonstrates the value of seeking mercy from Christ.

The value of strong faith in Jesus Christ is verified in the present Gospel. The strong faith of the caring mother resulted in her daughter being healed and freed of the devil's influence.

For believers to experience daily life free from the trauma and influence of the devil, Jesus Christ must completely fill the heart, mind and soul. At any moment, believers can increase their personal commitment to Christ through prayer,

The believer's mind can firmly direct attention to Jesus Christ seeking Christ's intervention to overcome the devil. The mother in the Gospel proved by example the power of strong faith in Christ.

The present Gospel has inspired and educated believers down through the centuries. The present Gospel offers hope to parents, workers and parishioners dealing with the actions of the devil.

Jesus Christ is the answer for dealing with the devil. Personal self-assessment will reveal if the believer's commitment to Christ is firm, resolute and complete.

Honest self-assessment will reveal aspects of life that weaken personal faith.

Jesus Christ is a constant source of nourishment through prayer, reading the Scriptures or attending the Divine services. Jesus nourishes and strengthens believers when they partake of Holy Communion.

The wise use of daily time keeps believers strong in faith and centered in Christ. Prayers to Christ are possible throughout the day. Short prayers seeking Christ's mercy keep the believer strong and focused.

The road to God's Heavenly Kingdom can be long. The devil will always appear in certain forms on the journey through life. Seekers of God's Kingdom need to remain strong throughout the journey. Believers must take care of themselves.

The devil will take advantage of moments of weakness. The devil attacks when believers are tired. Being firmly rooted and nourished in Christ keeps the believer fit for the battles that arise during the journey.

The Church provides learning opportunities from infancy until departure from this life for believers to grow in Christ. The Holy Mysteries and Divine services of the Church keep the believer focused and strong.

Prayerful support for one another among believers helps when the battle against evil arises. Mothers and fathers dealing with a son or daughter vexed by the devil benefit from the support of other family members and friends.

Increased prayer among like-minded believers helps the person dealing with the devil in personal life. Leaders in the workplace or in a parish need prayerful support and encouragement to deal with issues created and fostered by the devil.

The Lord Jesus Christ is always present and within reach. Jesus Christ is always the answer to the questions of life. Jesus Christ is the answer to the problems of life. Jesus Christ is the constant joy of life.

Jesus Christ is ever-present in the Church. Growing in Christ is expected for the believer in the Church. Opportunities to grow are limited only by the faith of the believer.

When momentary battles are lost to the devil, wise believers immediately repent and begin anew. Jesus provides mercy, forgiveness and the direction for renewal. Jesus Christ provides the wisdom for action.

When Jesus hung upon the Cross, the darkness seemed to indicate death was final and Jesus was finished. Jesus rose from the tomb. Resolute believers fighting the devil rise with the Victorious and Resurrected Christ to continue the battle.

The Thirty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. Transfer of the Relics of Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer. January 19/February 11, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

WHY DO WE BLESS THINGS? ST. GYRIL OF JERUSALEM

Why do we need the sanctification of material things and how does it happen?

It seems to me that to some extent our missionary impulse, our desire to share faith with those who have not yet found it indicates our interest and involvement in our faith.

Take, for example, someone who is in love or just passionate about some hobby—he always talks about the object of his passion, and he is ready to discuss and talk for hours about what he is so strongly attached to. The trouble is that such an attitude to matters of faith is rare. One of such zealots was the [Holy Hierarch Cyril of Jerusalem](#), whose memory the Orthodox Church honors on March 31. In the first centuries of Christianity there were many missionaries, ascetics, and theological luminaries. The names of many Fathers are well known to us, but I would like to speak about why St. Cyril stood out.

Very few details on the saint's life are extant, so it will be easy to mention them here. The estimated date of St. Cyril's birth is 315. He most likely came either from Jerusalem or from its immediate environs. Who the saint's parents were and where he received his education is unknown. It can be said for certain that from a fairly early age St. Cyril began to lead an ascetic life. Thanks to his zeal at about the age of twenty Archbishop Macarius of Jerusalem ordained him deacon. In 345, Macarius' successor, Maximus, elevated the saint to priesthood.

Here we come to St. Cyril's distinctive feature. He was charged with the duty of instructing catechumens, and thus with responsibility for their due preparation for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. I will pass over in silence how today in most cases both godparents and natural parents relate to the sacrament of Baptism of their children. And here the example of the industriousness of St. Cyril towers over us in silent reproach. We often do not control our tongues, but the holy hierarch understood that spiritual life depended on his words, depended on what kind of Christian the person standing before him would become. His *Catechetical Lectures* are the saint's primary written legacy, which everyone can read.

Thanks to his manifest zeal, after Archbishop Maximus the clergy and the people elected St. Cyril as their primate. Presumably this took place in 350 or 351. The beginning of his archpastoral

ministry was marked by the appearance of the Cross in the sky, stretching from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives. It was not just a beautiful legend, but a real miracle, recorded by some historians and described by the saint himself. Like any genuine miracle, the appearance of the Cross had a purpose and a meaning—thanks to it the people realized that they had not made a mistake by choosing their primate, and a considerable number of pagans and Jews converted to Christianity.

St. Cyril’s zealous ministry manifested itself not only in his preaching, but also in concrete deeds. He was strongly disliked by Acacius, Metropolitan of Caesarea in Palestine, who adhered to Arian views. When famine broke out in Jerusalem, St. Cyril first distributed all the church money among the needy, and then, for the same purpose, sold all church vessels that it is not improper to sell. For this reason Acacius accused him of embezzlement of church property. In 357 the Metropolitan of Caesarea convened a council and deposed St. Cyril. For over three years the holy hierarch had to wander, finding refuge with Bishop Silouan of Tarsus, until he was returned to his see during the reign of Julian the Apostate. It is known that this emperor, wishing to mock the Christians, made an attempt to build another Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews were jubilant, but the holy hierarch made it clear that those plans were not destined to materialize. And so it happened: An earthquake destroyed not only the remaining foundations of the Temple, but also the buildings around it. The next exile of St. Cyril, a longer one (367–379), took place during the reign of the Arian Emperor Valens. Five years before his death, he took part in the meetings of the Second Ecumenical Council.

Amidst these dry facts I would like to draw your attention to an interesting episode. In 382, another Council of Constantinople was convened, and its members sent a letter to Rome in which St. Cyril was commended for his services to the Christian faith, and the Church of Jerusalem was called “the mother of all Churches”. On March 31, 386, this worthy archpastor reposed.

Now I would like to say a few words about some rather interesting arguments by St. Cyril. Most ordinary people believe that in Christianity, particularly in Orthodoxy, we should abhor not only the human body, but also matter, as such. In fact, we all perfectly understand that the material world was created by God, and therefore it, like the whole of creation, is “very good”. It should be said that even some Christians sometimes go to excesses in terms of a contemptuous attitude towards matter. In response I would like to cite St. Cyril’s thought that matter plays an important role in our salvation. He points out that, for example, the sacrament of Baptism, even with the reception of the Holy Spirit, will not be valid without water. Here the holy hierarch refers us to the six days of creation and points out that both Heaven, the abode of angels, and the earth, the abode of humanity, were created from water. Inasmuch as all matter was created by God, all of it needs to be sanctified. In the water St. Cyril saw the “beginning of the world”, through which the rest of the world receives sanctification, because *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:2).

As a result of the Fall, the sanctification of the world was lost—and it still needs special sanctification and blessing. According to the saint, Christ’s work of redemption included the abolition of the curse not only in man, but also in the world, giving the blessing to both mankind and the whole world: “Jesus assumes the thorns, that He may cancel the sentence; for this cause

also was He buried in the earth, that the earth which had been cursed might receive the blessing instead of a curse.”¹

Of course, man is guilty of the main tragedy of the universe. The curse of unreasonable nature, material things and even elements, occurred due to the motivated action of his will and mind. The teaching of the responsibility of people for the material world, which we often forget, was very close to the holy hierarch. Hence it follows that the sanctification of matter directly depends on the sanctification of man. If you like, this is an excellent explanation of cases when the elements or wild animals obeyed holy people. Here also lies the answer to the problem of the existence of evil and suffering in the world. God is not the author of evil because He created nature; and evil did not come from nature, but from will, and will is the lot of humanity. Only man was created in the image of God: according to St. Cyril, the image is expressed in the gift of free will, which is the basis, depending on its use, both for reward and for punishment.

Here it is important to note the idea that virtues that are not acquired by efforts have no value: *“The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness: since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature.”*²

Summarizing what has been stated, it should be said that our efforts in the spiritual life bear consequences not only for ourselves, but for the whole world.

Its final transformation will come only after the [Last Judgment](#), but even before that any of us can both desecrate and sanctify a particle of the world around him. Although most of the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem are addressed to those who are just preparing for Baptism, as we see, they contain many useful thoughts for us, “experienced” Christians. Apparently, with people like St. Cyril, catechumens are even better, more industrious and zealous than some baptized Christians... We must draw conclusions.

Archpriest Vladimir Dolgikh
Translation by Dmitry Lapa

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water in our homes takes place after the Feast of Theophany, the Baptism of Christ, bringing the holy water & prayer in which Christ was baptized to our homes, as a blessing upon our families.

Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 19).

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life.

"There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day."

Wearing Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings.

When the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle. They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home. This is a perfect time to introduce your small children to having their bedrooms blessed as a 'shield of armor' to protect them when they sleep and all the fears they may have as children do so often.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing.

***What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!
Schedule your Visit with Fr. Dragan Vukovic directly
by calling your parish priest 814-244-4063
God bless you all!***

Services this Week

- **Monday (02.12.2024.)**
Synaxis of the Three Holy Hierarchs -
Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM
- **Thursday (02.15.2024.)**
Meeting of our Lord in the Temple –
Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM
- **The 37th - Sunday after Pentecost**
(02.18.2024.)
Holy Martyr Agatha; Holy Polyeuctus of
Constantinople - *Divine Liturgy starts at*
10:00 AM

Donations February 4, 2024

Offering - \$ 1,855.00 Candles - \$75.00 Dues - \$150.00

DONATIONS

IMO of Mildred Tumbas from Dianna Dunnington - \$100
To the Sunday School from Tony & Linda Freidhoff - \$20

Large Candles

IMO Mary Ellen Locher-Byrd from Helene Gleason
IMO Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Knepp
IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Mastovich from Rick Kondas
IMO brother Joseph Kondas from Rick Kondas

Saturday, March 2nd - 2:00 PM

At the Church Hall

A Baby Shower for our wonderful
Popadaja Vladanka & Father Dragan
Please sign up for your Covered dish.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FISH FRIES BEGIN

Friday, February 16th and continue to
Friday, March 29th.

PLEASE SIGN-UP TO WORK !!!!!
(Sunday school students too - or we
have to hire students)