

ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

كنيسة القديس نيقولاوس الانطاكية الأرثوذكسية

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REGULAR SCHEDULE OF WORSHIP:

Saturdays: Great Vespers 7:00pm-8:00pm

Confession 8:00pm-9:00pm (by Appointment only)

Sundays: 9:00am-12:00pm

(9:00am Orthros & 10:30am Divine Liturgy)

Agape Coffee Hour 12:00pm-2:00pm

(No official coffee hour during the summer)

BULLETIN: JULY 10, 2016 A.D.

The Church Provides Oxygen!

By: Abbot Tryphon, All-Merciful Orthodox Monastery, Vashon Island - Washington

Growing up, I was surrounded by mountains and forests. I don't remember a time when forests did not tug at my heart and fill my imagination with thoughts of adventure. As a small child my parents took my brother and I on annual camping trips to a state park. There my dad would make us small toy canoes, complete with sails, out of birch bark. This state park is virtually unchanged since that time, and I try to visit the campground every summer, when I go bass fishing with my brother. As a high school student I regularly went hiking in the mountains, together with my best friend. We would climb to the highest point of a given mountain, and pray together. We could understand the Prophet Moses meeting God on Mt. Sinai, for we too felt the presence of God on the mountain. To this day I feel closer to God when hiking in a forest, and the grandeur of the mountains that surround the Puget Sound inspire me, and lift up my soul. When we first cleared the land to build the monastery, we cut down as few trees as possible, desiring as we did to have the buildings appear as though cupped like a kitten in the hands of God. We even named our forest after Saint Seraphim of Sarov, who himself sought solitude in a forest. Our forest not only provides that needed solitude, but like the forests throughout the whole world, provides good air to breath, and fills our lungs with the sweet odour that only a forest can provide. Monks have always had a special place in their hearts for forests. Coptic and Ethiopian monks have been known to plant trees on desert mountains whereupon monasteries have been built, and calling these places "holy forests". Russian monks sought their solitude in the Northern Thebaid, forests that became their desert. For me, forests and mountains have always been associated with prayer. My first chapel was at the end of a hidden trail, in a forest that was just a short walk down the beach from our home on Lake Pend Oreille. I'd constructed a small Altar out of driftwood, and nailed a cross made out of tree branches on a tree behind the Altar. When in college, my first encounter with an Icon took place during the very summer I'd visited the Redwood Forest of Northern California for the first time. Our temples are like forests in many ways. When we enter into an Orthodox temple we are encompassed in the living presence of God, and our spiritual lungs are filled. It is oxygen for the soul that we breath in, and the forest that surrounds us is none other than the cloud of witnesses, the Saints, who join us in worship before the Throne of God. The oxygen we breath in is God's Grace that flows out to all who would seek the safety and sanctuary that awaits us in God's Holy Temple. It is the breath of life that comes in our relationship with Christ.

THE HOLY EPISTLE (2 Timothy 2:1-10)

Timothy, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory.

وَأَنْتَ يَا وَلَدِي، فَكُنْ قَوِيًّا فِي النِّعْمَةِ الَّتِي فِي الْمَسِيحِ يَسُوعَ. 2 وَالتَّعَالِيمِ الَّتِي سَمِعْتَهَا مِنِّي بِحُضُورِ شُهَدَاءٍ عَدِيدِينَ، أُوَدِّعُهَا أَمَانَةً بَيْنَ أَيْدِي أَنْاسٍ جَدِيرِينَ بِالثِّقَةِ، يَكُونُونَ قَادِرِينَ عَلَى تَعْلِيمِ الْآخَرِينَ. 3 شَارِكْ فِي احْتِمَالِ الْأَلَامِ كَجُنْدِيٍّ صَالِحٍ لِلْمَسِيحِ يَسُوعَ. 4 وَمَا مِنْ مُجَنِّدٍ يُرَبِّكُ نَفْسَهُ بِشُؤُونِ الْحَيَاةِ إِذَا رَغِبَ فِي إِرْضَاءٍ مِنْ جَنْدِهِ. 5 كَمَا أَنَّ الْمَصَارِعَ لَا يَفُوزُ بِالْإِكْلِيلِ إِلَّا إِذَا صَارَعَ بِحَسَبِ الْقَوَائِينِ. 6 كَذَلِكَ الْفَلَّاحُ الَّذِي يَشْتَغَلُ بِجِدِّ يَجِبُ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ يِنَالُ حِصَّتَهُ مِنَ الْغَلَّةِ. 7 فَكُرْ فِي مَا أَقُولُهُ، فَإِنَّ الرَّبَّ سَيَهَبُكَ فَهْمًا فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ. 8 اذْكُرْ يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحَ الَّذِي أُقِيمَ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ، وَهُوَ مِنْ نَسْلِ أَوْدٍ، كَمَا أُعْلِنُهُ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ 9 الَّذِي لِأَجْلِ التَّبَشِيرِ بِهِ أَقَاسِي حَتَّى الْفَيْوُدِ كَأَنِّي فَاعِلٌ شَرًّا. إِلَّا أَنَّ كَلِمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تَكْبَلُهَا الْفَيْوُدُ. 10 لِهَذَا السَّبَبِ أَحْتَمِلُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ بِصَبْرٍ لِأَجْلِ الَّذِينَ اخْتَارَهُمُ اللَّهُ، لِكَيْ يَحْصُلُوا، هُمْ أَيْضًا، عَلَى الْخَلَاصِ الَّذِي فِي الْمَسِيحِ يَسُوعَ مَعَ الْمَجْدِ الْأَبَدِيِّ.

THE HOLY GOSPEL (St. Matthew 4:18-23)

The Lord said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

قال الرب سِرَاجُ الْجَسَدِ هُوَ الْعَيْنُ، فَإِنْ كَانَتْ عَيْنُكَ بَسِيطَةً فَجَسَدُكَ كُلُّهُ يَكُونُ نِيرًا، وَإِنْ كَانَتْ عَيْنُكَ شَرِيرَةً فَجَسَدُكَ كُلُّهُ يَكُونُ مَظْلَمًا فَإِنْ كَانَ النُّورُ الَّذِي فِيكَ ظَلَامًا فَالظَّلَامُ كَمَا يَكُونُ! لَا يَقْدِرُ أَحَدٌ أَنْ يَخْدِمَ سَيِّدَيْنِ، لِأَنَّهُ إِمَّا أَنْ يُبْغِضَ الْوَاحِدَ وَيُحِبَّ الْآخَرَ، أَوْ يُلَازِمَ الْوَاحِدَ وَيَحْتَقِرَ الْآخَرَ. لَا تَقْدِرُونَ أَنْ تَخْدِمُوا اللَّهَ وَالْمَالَ. لِذَلِكَ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ: لَا تَهْتَمُّوا لِحَيَاتِكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَبِمَا تَشْرَبُونَ، وَلَا لِأَجْسَادِكُمْ بِمَا تَلْبَسُونَ. أَلَيْسَتْ الْحَيَاةُ أَفْضَلَ مِنَ الطَّعَامِ، وَالْجَسَدُ أَفْضَلَ مِنَ اللَّبَاسِ؟ أَنْظَرُوا إِلَى طُيُورِ السَّمَاءِ: إِنَّهَا لَا تَزْرَعُ وَلَا تَحْصُدُ وَلَا تَجْمَعُ إِلَى مَخَازِنَ، وَأَبْوَكُمُ السَّمَاوِيِّ يَقْوَتُهَا. أَلَيْسَتْ أَنْتُمْ بِالْحَرِيِّ أَفْضَلَ مِنْهَا؟ وَمَنْ مِنْكُمْ إِذَا اهْتَمَّ يَقْدِرُ أَنْ يَزِيدَ عَلَى قَامَتِهِ زِرَاعًا وَاحِدَةً؟ وَلِمَاذَا تَهْتَمُّونَ بِاللَّبَاسِ؟ تَأْمَلُوا زَنَابِقَ الْحَقْلِ كَيْفَ تَنْمُو! لَا تَتَعَبُ وَلَا تَغْرُلُ. وَلَكِنْ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ: إِنَّهُ وَلَا سُلَيْمَانَ فِي كُلِّ مَجْدِهِ كَانَ يَلْبَسُ كَوَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهَا. فَإِنْ كَانَ عَشْبُ الْحَقْلِ الَّذِي يُوْجَدُ الْيَوْمَ وَيُطْرَحُ غَدًا فِي التَّنُّورِ، يَلْبَسُهُ اللَّهُ هَكَذَا، أَفَلَيْسَ بِالْحَرِيِّ جِدًّا يَلْبَسُكُمْ أَنْتُمْ يَا قَلِيلِي الْإِيمَانَ؟ فَلَا تَهْتَمُّوا قَائِلِينَ: مَاذَا نَأْكُلُ؟ أَوْ مَاذَا نَشْرَبُ؟ أَوْ مَاذَا نَلْبَسُ؟ فَإِنَّ هَذِهِ كُلُّهَا تَطْلُبُهَا الْأُمَّمُ. لِأَنَّ آبَاكُمْ السَّمَاوِيِّ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكُمْ تَحْتَاجُونَ إِلَى هَذِهِ كُلِّهَا. لَكِنْ اطْلُبُوا أَوَّلًا مَلَكُوتَ اللَّهِ وَبِرَّهُ، وَهَذِهِ كُلُّهَا تَزَادُ لَكُمْ.

Is God Unfair?

By: Fr. Stephen Allen, Sts. Peter & Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church - Charlottetown, PEI

It seems to us that life is unfair sometimes—and when we think this way, although we would never admit it, we are implying that God is unfair. St. Paul asks an interesting question, “Is there injustice on God's part?” or in other words, Is God Unfair? (Romans 9:14). In our hearts we already know the answer. God is not unfair or unjust, but oftentimes He seems inconsistent to our finite understanding—seeing that He is infinite this is to be expected. We, however, should not get hung-up on trying to figure out God's motivations for what He does—but we should see in this scripture reading and in the entirety of the Bible the total Lordship and Sovereignty of God. It is us who need conform to God's way—not He to ours—God must become the ultimate “Decider” in all things in our lives, trusting at all time that what He does He does for the ultimate our good even though it might not SEEM like it to us. In truth, St. Paul, in today's reading, brings us face to face with the truth of God's total freedom. Although we talk a great deal about freedom, it's usually our personal freedom in view—let me do what I want when I want and how I want. We rarely think about God's freedom, yet that is the major point of Romans 9. When you come to the bottom line, God's freedom is the only true freedom in the universe. Here are Seven Short Statements about God's freedom.

1) He is absolutely free to do whatever He wants to do. He is truly “free” in the absolute sense of the term. This is why He announced himself to Moses as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). God is eternal, self-existent, and entirely self-sufficient. He exists entirely apart from the universe he created.

2) He has the right to deal with us any way He chooses. By this we mean that God was under no obligation to create you or me or anyone else. And He is under no obligation to keep us alive even one more second. He is under no compulsion to save a single member of the human race.

3) He doesn't have to treat me the way he treats my next-door neighbour. Many people struggle with this concept because they think that because God did something for a friend or a neighbour or a loved one, then God must be bound to do the same thing for them. Envy your neighbour because he has something you don't have is a waste of time because God treats us as individuals, not as groups. The truth is, He might do for you exactly what He's done for someone else, or He might do more or He might do less or He might do something entirely different. He's God. He can deal with us the way He wants—and we need to trust that what He does personally to or for us is to work out our personal salvation.

4) He doesn't have to treat me today the way he treated me yesterday. This principle needs to be stated carefully. Since God's character never changes, we know that He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is always gracious, always loving, always holy, and always just. His ways are always perfect. However, that doesn't mean that what happened to me yesterday is a pattern or guarantee for what will happen tomorrow. God's character and His love for me will never change. How that grace and faithfulness and love is expressed varies widely from moment to moment. One day we may need a remarkable answer to prayer. The next day we may be in the valley of suffering, waiting on the Lord to deliver us. He's always the same God but He does not display Himself in our life the same way all the time—and again, He does what He does to work out our personal salvation.

5) He can answer my prayers any way he chooses. A loved one with a dread disease may be spared by God for several years, only to die from that disease eventually. One day we may sense God's Spirit working powerfully in our life. Another day we may plod through the doldrums. So it goes for all of God's children. Our God is infinitely creative in the way He deals with us as He brings us to spiritual maturity. There are bright days and dark nights, and both are from the Lord.

6) He will not tolerate any rivals to His throne. This is one of the clearest themes of the Bible. There is only one God and He demands our exclusive worship. After reminding the Jews that he had delivered them from Egypt, God made this the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). That's clear, isn't it? No other gods, period. God is Number One. And there is no Number Two.

7) He is not obligated to live up to our expectations or to explain Himself to us. This may be the most important statement regarding God's freedom. He doesn't bind himself to do what we expect him to do. As a matter of fact, God continually surprised his people in the Bible. Jesus rebuked Peter, then allowed him to see the Transfiguration, predicted his betrayal, then restored him, and then predicted the way he would die. Everything happened just as God promised, but nothing worked out the way people expected.

As we read the words of St. Paul let us think about this truth of God's freedom. Properly understood, it ought to lead us to a calm confidence in God even in the midst of unspeakable tragedy. And it should make us bold in our witness and strong in our prayers. And if we believe this, we will find the strength to persevere over the long haul, knowing that even our foolish mistakes cannot cancel God's plans—and for us to become part of God's freedom all we need to do is submit to His will and praise Him and then, with our cooperation, He will work out our personal salvation.

+ Synaxarion for St. Joseph of Damascus +

On July 10 in the Holy Orthodox Church we commemorate the holy, glorious and right-victorious New Hieromartyr Joseph Mouhana Al-Haddad and his Companions. Saint Joseph of Damascus, as he is commonly known, was a weaver by trade. After he was married and ordained to the priesthood, Joseph was assigned Great Economos of the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos (Al-Mariamiyeh) in the heart of the Old City of Damascus. On Monday, July 9, 1860, the brutal massacre of Christians which began in the Lebanese mountains spread to Damascus. Some Damascenes (including Michael Hawaweeny and his young wife Mariam who was bearing in her womb a son, the future Saint Raphael), fled the city for Beirut. The majority, however, took refuge in Al-Mariamiyeh. Joseph took up his Communion kit containing the Reserved Sacrament, left his home and began to make his way to the Cathedral by jumping from rooftop to rooftop in the Old City. As he went, he stopped to confess and commune the aged and infirm who could not flee their homes, encouraging them with stories from the Lives of the Great Martyrs. On the morning of Tuesday, July 10, the Cathedral was surrounded, pillaged and burned. Those inside perished in the flames; of those who escaped and fled into the streets, most were caught and forced back into the burning building, while only a few, including Father Joseph, survived. As he roamed the narrow streets searching for survivors who needed Confession and Communion, St. Joseph was surrounded by the enemies of Christ. Seeing that his end was near, Saint Joseph took out his Communion kit and consumed what remained of the Body and Blood of Christ. Recognizing him as the "leader of the Christians," the persecutors savagely attacked and killed him with axes. Joseph and his Companions were glorified by the Holy Synod of Antioch in 1993. By their intercessions, O Christ God, have mercy upon us. Amen.