



Restoration of the Holy Icons

St. Cyril Orthodox Church

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**+ March 8, 2020 +
Sunday of Orthodoxy**

St. Theophylactus, Bishop of Nicomedia (+842)

If you cannot find love for God within yourself, then act as if you did anyway. Do not try to manufacture feelings. Feelings are not what God principally cares about. Christian love is an affair of the will. If we are trying to do His will, then we are obeying His commandment to love Him.

- C. S. Lewis

WEDNESDAY: Presanctified Liturgy, 6:00 p.m.

VESPERS FOR SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY will be held today at 5:00 p.m. at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, 3511 Yoakum Blvd., Houston. A Lenten meal will follow.

MEMORIAL SATURDAY – On this Saturday, March 14, we will have a special Liturgy to commemorate the departed. If there are names of departed Orthodox Christians that you would like remembered, please submit them to Fr. Benedict by email or text by Friday, March 13.

TREASURER UPDATE – March offerings so far: \$2,629. Projected expenses: \$9,463.

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Through His Incarnation God gave us the model for a holy life and recalled us from our ancient fall. In addition to many other things, He taught us, feeble as we are, that we should fight against the demons with humility, fasting, prayer, and watchfulness. For when, after His Baptism, He went into the desert and the devil came up to Him as though He were merely a man. He began His spiritual warfare by fasting and won the battle by this means - though, being God, He had no need of any such means at all.

- *St. Hesychios of Sinai*

We all have to die, beloved brethren, and it will be hard for us if, while we are in this world, we do not love each other, if we are not reconciled to our enemies, whom we have offended, and if one has grieved another, if we do not forgive him. Then we will not have eternal blessedness in that world, and the heavenly Father will not forgive our sins.

- *St. Peter of Cetinje, Serbia (+1805)*

The forgiveness of insults is a sign of true love, free from hypocrisy. For thus the Lord also loved this world.

- *St. Mark the Ascetic (5th century)*

Love sinners, but hate their deeds, and do not disdain sinners for their failings, so that you yourself do not fall into the temptation in which they abide. Do not be angry at anyone and do not hate anyone, not for their faith, nor for their shameful deeds. Do not foster hatred for the sinner, for we are all guilty. Hate his sins, and pray for him, so that you may be made like Christ, who had no dislike for sinners, but prayed for them.

- *St. Isaac of Syria (+700)*

On Holy Tradition

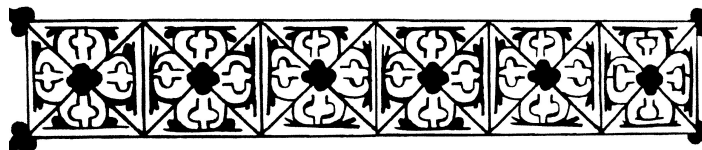
The most ancient form of transmitting the Divine Revelation is Holy Tradition. Until the time of the Prophet Moses (in the 16th century B.C.), this was done solely by word of mouth. Tradition is the name given to communication by believers under the Lord's guidance of the teachings, laws, and rules for living received from God. True life was handed down by the prophets and apostles to the next generation of believers. Its source is the eternal Spirit, through whom Revelation was not distorted in making its way through the ages, eliminating the “broken telephone” factor. Thus, the faithful preserver of Tradition is – as envisioned by the Apostle Paul - *the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:15).

[In other words, Fr. Daniel is saying that just as one might misunderstand what a person said over a poor phone line, someone might object that, over the course of the centuries, as the Holy Tradition passed from one generation to the next, it could be corrupted. But Fr. Daniel points out that the Church's tradition is guided by the Holy Spirit, to prevent this from happening. That doesn't mean that no one in the Church has ever misunderstood the Holy Tradition. It just means that, as a whole, the Church has maintained Holy Tradition down through the centuries through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Tradition remains accessible to us in Christ's Church even today. – Fr. Benedict]

If it were not for Tradition, the Bible itself would be completely inaccessible as a means of conveying God's Revelation. Can lifeless letters really give an accurate description of the living word of the Creator, when even in ordinary speech intonation and body language play such a tremendous role in helping us understand each other? So also in the Church Holy Scripture is interpreted through holy men by the same Spirit that gave it. Even Scripture itself shows that without interpretation it is difficult or even impossible to understand it correctly. In answer to St. Philip's question, *Do you understand what you are reading?*, the eunuch replied, *How can I except some man should guide me?* (Acts 8:30-31).

St. Vincent of Lerins (+445) gives this definition of the criteria for distinguishing true Tradition from mere Christian customs that are not part of Divine Revelation: “We adhere to **universality**, **antiquity**, and **consensus**. We adhere to universality when we acknowledge as true only the faith confessed by the Church throughout the world; to antiquity when we in no way depart from those concepts that have undoubtedly been approved by our holy ancestors and fathers; and to consensus when in antiquity itself we adhere to the definitions and concepts of all, or at least of the majority, of the priests and teachers together.”

– Fr. Daniel Sysoev (+2009)



On the Holy Temple and its Parts

The place of worship is called the church or temple (in Greek, “*naos*,” in Russian “*khram*,”). This is the place where the community of the faithful comes together to fulfill itself as the Church of God, the spiritual Temple. In other words, the place where the “Church” (the Christian community) comes together is called, in English, the “church.” Orthodox architecture has a long historical development and exists in a great many national expressions. But the common and central idea is that of the temple as “heaven on earth,” the place where – through our participation in the liturgy of the Church – we enter into communion with the age to come, the Kingdom of God.



The temple is usually divided into three parts:

The **narthex**, which, theoretically, has the baptismal font at its center. Holy Baptism opens the doors of the church to the newly baptized, introducing him into the fulness of the Church. For this reason Baptism was performed in the narthex, and then the new members were led in a solemn procession into the church. The narthex is the place where, historically, catechumens and the non-baptized stood.

The **nave**, the central part of the temple, is the place of the body of the faithful, or the Church itself. Here the Church gathers in oneness of faith, hope, and love to acclaim its Lord, to listen to His teachings, to receive His gifts, to be edified, sanctified, and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The icons of the saints on the walls, the candles, and all the other sacred decorations have but one meaning: the unity of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven, or rather, that they are the same thing. Assembled in the temple, we are the visible part, the visible expression of the whole Church, of which Christ is the head, and the Mother of God, the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, and Saints are members, just as we are. We are in their company, we form with them one body, we are raised into a new dimension, that of the Church in glory, the Body of Christ. This is why the Church invites us to enter the temple “with faith, reverence, and fear”; this is also why the ancient Church did not allow just anyone to “attend” its services, but only the *faithful*, those who through faith and Baptism were integrated into the heavenly reality of the Church. To enter the Church, to be assembled, gathered with the Saints, is the greatest possible gift and privilege.

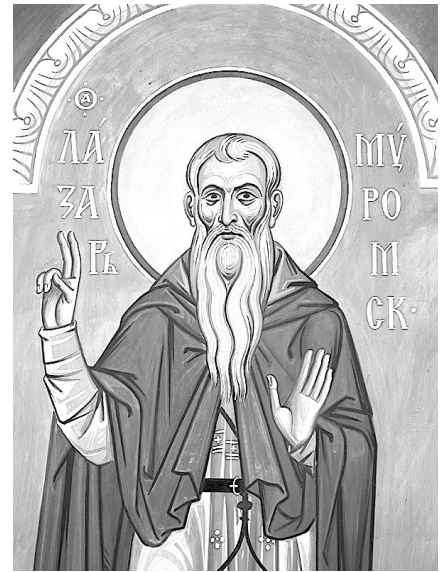
The **sanctuary** (or Holy Place) is the place of the *Altar*. The Altar is the mystical center of the church. It “represents” (makes present, actualizes, reveals to us) (a) the *Throne of God*, to which Christ has raised us by His glorious Ascension, before which we stand with Him in an eternal adoration; (b) the *table of the Divine Banquet*, to which Christ has called us, and at which He eternally distributes the food of immortality and life eternal; (c) the *altar of His Sacrifice* for us, of His total offering to God and to us.

All three parts of the temple are decorated with *icons*. The word “decoration” however is not fully adequate, for the icons are more than mere “decoration” or “art.” They have a sacred and liturgical function. They reveal our communion, our real unity with “heaven” – the spiritual and glorified dimension of the Church. Icons make truly present those whom they represent. Iconography is a *sacramental art*, in which the visible reveals the invisible.

Remembered today: St. Lazarus of Murom (+1391)

St. Lazarus of Murom was a Greek, born at Constantinople. He became a monk and was a noted iconographer. In the year 1343 he was sent to the city of Novgorod in the far-away north of Russia, to help St. Basil, Archbishop of Novgorod. For ten years St. Lazarus remained in Novgorod as the faithful assistant to St. Basil, and in 1352 upon the death of the holy bishop, he “dressed the holy body in the prepared clothing and shed many tears.”

After this, in a dream the departed bishop appeared to him and directed him “to go northward towards the sea, to Murom Island in Lake Onega.” At this time the citizens of Novgorod were making their first attempts to convert the pagan peoples of the White Sea coastal region to Christianity.



St. Lazarus obediently set out on this missionary journey, but he was prevented from settling on the island to which he had been directed. For a long time, the owner of the island, the Novgorod merchant Ivan, would not give him permission. At last St. Basil appeared to the owner in a vision and ordered him to bestow the island “to our friend Lazarus”, so that the Mother of God might be honored there.

St. Lazarus arrived alone at the blessed spot, and set up a cross, a hut, and a chapel. Soon the pagan Lopari and Chud natives living on the island heard about him. They burned down his hut, beat him, chased him from the island, and pursued him in order to kill him. But God and the Queen of Heaven guarded the saint. However, in the burned out hut he found his icon of the Most Holy Theotokos, miraculously undamaged by the fire, and from it he heard a commanding voice declare to him: “The faithless people shall become faithful, and there will be one Church and one flock of Christ. Establish on this place a church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos.”

Soon the eldest of the Lopari came to the monk and begged him to heal a child born blind, promising that they would then allow St. Lazarus to live there in peace, “as your servants have been commanded.” St. Lazarus perceived that this command had been given to them by an angel, and he gave thanks unto the Lord. He healed the blind child after praying and sprinkling him with holy water. Then all those who had been resisting the saint left the island. The father of the healed child later became a monk and all his sons were baptized.

From that time, people started coming to the saint from faraway places. He baptized them, and tonsured them into monasticism. A church was built on the island in honor of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, the first in all the coastal region; also a church of the Resurrection of Lazarus, and even a wooden church of Saint John the Forerunner. St. Lazarus directed the Murom Dormition monastery until his old age.

The time of his death was revealed to him in a vision by his faithful protector, St. Basil of Novgorod. Having chosen a worthy successor, the Athonite Elder Theodosius, and after receiving the Holy Mysteries and blessing everyone, St. Lazarus departed to the Lord on March 8, 1391 at the age of 105 years.