



St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church

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+ **September 8, 2019** +
**The Birth of our Most Holy Lady
the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary**

Wisdom has built
her house, she has
hewn out her seven
pillars . . . Come, eat
of my bread and
drink of the wine I
have mixed. Forsake
foolishness and live,
and go in the way of
understanding.

- Proverbs 9:1, 5-6

INQUIRER CLASS – We have begun a new series on the Orthodox faith. This is primarily for inquirers and catechumens, but all are welcome to attend. We will meet in the church after Divine Liturgy on Sunday, about noon or a little after.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITE: **Search the Scriptures** is an online Bible study by Presbytera Jeannie Constantinou. So far she has about 140 lessons that can be listened to online, covering several books of the Old Testament, and she has begun lessons on the Gospel of John as well. This can be found at: orthodoxbiblestudy.info

TREASURER REPORT – September income so far is \$1,544. Estimated expenses: \$11,990.

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Intercessor for Everyone

Our Panagia (Theotokos) hastens everywhere. She bestows her grace abundantly on anyone who fervently cries out to her. She is a mediatrix to Christ for everyone, because she was deemed worthy to give birth to the Lord and to become the Mother of God. She carries Him in her arms and continuously entreats Him. Since we sinners do not have the boldness to run directly to God from the start, we cry out to His Mother. She regenerates us; she intercedes; she anticipates all our afflictions. She is our protectress and helper, more honorable than all the angels, beyond compare more glorious than the Cherubim and Seraphim, second in rank only to the Holy Trinity. Oh, but she is so good, so sweet, that you want to embrace her at every moment and obtain consoling grace. The more you love, the more you are loved.

- Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

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In the eyes of God who sees our hearts, the person who wants to do something but cannot is as though he has done it. This should be understood as applying both to good deeds and to evil deeds. The mind does much good and much evil even without the body; but the body can do nothing without the mind; for free decisions precede actions.

- St. Mark the Ascetic (5th cent.)

Just as it would be improper not to thank our physicians for curing our body, even when they give us bitter and unpleasant remedies, so too would it be improper to be ungrateful to God for things that appear to us painful, failing to understand that everything happens through His Providence for our good. In this understanding and this faith in God lie salvation and peace for our soul.

- St. Anthony the Great (+356)

Orthodox Worship – unchanging, grounded in tradition

By Abbot Tryphon of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery, Vashon Island

A visitor to the monastery recently shared his preference of contemporary worship with drums, guitar, etc. He insisted that God doesn't really care how we worship, as long as we offer Him our praise. Knowing this man to be a serious Christian, and an upfront disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, made it clear to me that I could not judge him, or be critical of his views. However, it did leave me with a grateful heart, knowing that I am not convinced that he is correct.

Believing, as he does, that God does not care how we worship Him, reminded me of a question I asked my Baptist grandmother, as a boy of twelve. Why did she think the God of the Old Testament cared so much about how His people worshipped him, that He detailed just how the vestments of their High Priest were to be designed, and how they should build His temple? Her reply suggesting that once Christ appeared, God the Father didn't care about all those Old Testament rules, did not convince me, child that I was.

The key difference between the young visitor's view of worship, and that of we Orthodox Christians, is clearly based on the difference between "man centered" worship, and worship directed to God in Trinity. Worship is not about pleasing me, or the personal taste of my neighbor, but about what is truly pleasing to God. One person may find "contemporary," "pop," "folk," "rock," and other "styles" of worship appealing, but is it truly pleasing to God?

Our Orthodox way of worship is not about "personal taste", for that would make it "man centered". Our worship is, rather, centered on the God Who has invited us into communion with Him. It is a worship offered "in Spirit and Truth", and thus pleasing unto God, and we should care only whether our worship is truly God pleasing.

Worship is not about being entertained, nor should we worry about our worship being "relevant". Worship, if it be true worship, must give us a glimpse of eternity, and of the divine. Our worship can not truly be worship unless it be focused on God.

Our worship "in Spirit and Truth" asks that we "lay aside all earthly cares". But, how can this take place if we engage in forms of worship that change with the decisions made by local "worship leaders", who are constantly attempting to make worship "relevant" to the tastes of an ever changing group of church members, flowing in and out of their "mega churches".

Our Orthodox faith calls us to transform our fallen human existence by bringing it into the very presence of God Himself. He has called us into His Kingdom, not ours. God is calling us to that place where He is, rather than "where we are", or where we would like Him to be.

Our form of worship must reflect the fullness of Truth as preserved and proclaimed by the ancient Orthodox Catholic Church. It is worship centered in the Divine Liturgy that becomes the essential act of worship and thanksgiving. This is the only form of worship that has the ability to usher us into heavenly worship, uniting us to the Church Triumphant, and joining us to the ongoing Heavenly Banquet.

Our Holy Mother Theodora of Alexandria

Commemorated on September 11

Saint Theodora of Alexandria and her husband lived in Alexandria. Love and harmony ruled in their family, and this was hateful to the Enemy of salvation. Goaded on by the devil, a certain rich man was captivated by the youthful beauty of Theodora and began with all his abilities to lead her into adultery, but for a long time he was unsuccessful. Then he bribed a woman of loose morals, who led the unassuming Theodora astray by saying that a secret sin, which the sun does not see, is also unknown to God.

Theodora betrayed her husband, but soon came to her senses and realizing the seriousness of her fall, she became furious with herself, slapping herself on the face and tearing at her hair. Her conscience gave her no peace, and Theodora went to a renowned abbess and told her about her transgression. The abbess, seeing the repentance of the young woman, spoke to her of God's forgiveness and reminded her of the sinful woman in the Gospel, who washed the feet of Christ with her tears and received from Him forgiveness of her sins. In hope of the mercy of God, Theodora said: "I believe my God, and from now on, I shall not commit such a sin, and I will strive to atone for my deed."

At that moment Saint Theodora resolved to go off to a monastery to purify herself by labor and by prayer. She left her home secretly, and dressing herself in men's clothes, she went to a men's monastery, since she feared that her husband would find her in a women's monastery.

The abbot of the monastery, in order to test the resolve of the newcomer, would not even bless her to enter the courtyard. Saint Theodora spent the night at the gates. In the morning, she fell down at the knees of the abbot, and said her name was Theodore from Alexandria, and entreated him to let her remain at the monastery for repentance and monastic labors. Seeing the sincere intent of the newcomer, the abbot consented.

Even the experienced monks were amazed at Theodora's all-night prayers on bended knee, her humility, endurance and self-denial. The saint labored at the monastery for eight years. Her body, once defiled by adultery, now became a vessel of the grace of God and a receptacle of the Holy Spirit.

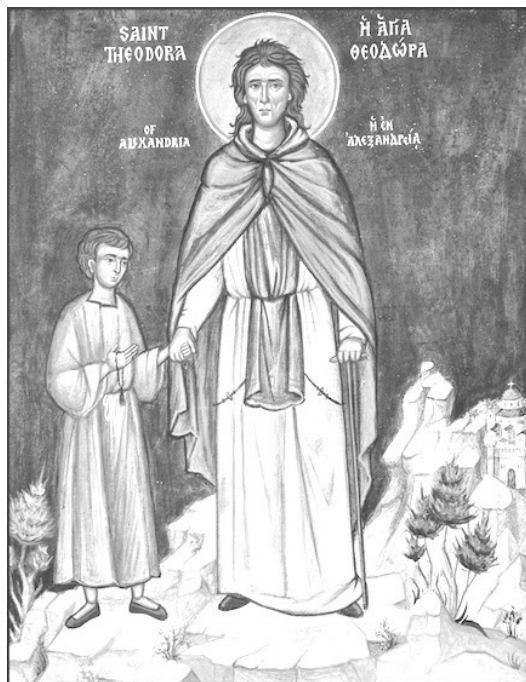
Once, the saint was sent to Alexandria to buy provisions. After blessing her for the journey, the abbot indicated that in case of a delay, she should stay over at the Enata monastery, which was on the way. Also staying at the guest house of the Enata monastery was the daughter of its abbot. She had come to visit with her father. Attracted by the comeliness of the young monk, she tried to seduce the monk Theodore into the sin of fornication, not knowing that it was a woman standing before her. Meeting with refusal, she committed sin with another guest and became pregnant. Meanwhile, the saint bought the food and returned to her own monastery.

After a certain while the father of the shameless girl, realizing that a transgression had occurred, began to question his daughter about the father of the child. The girl indicated that it was the monk Theodore. The father at once reported it to the Superior of the monastery where Saint Theodora labored in asceticism. The abbot summoned the saint and repeated the accusation. The saint firmly

replied: “As God is my witness, I did not do this.” The abbot, knowing of Theodore’s purity and holiness of life, did not believe the accusation.

When the girl gave birth, the Enata monks brought the infant to the monastery where the ascetic lived, and began to reproach its monks for an unchaste life. But this time even the abbot believed the slanderous accusation and became angry at the innocent Theodore. They entrusted the infant into the care of the saint and threw her out of the monastery in disgrace.

The saint humbly submitted to this new trial, seeing in it the expiation of her former sin. She settled with the child not far from the monastery in a hut. Shepherds, out of pity, gave her milk for the infant, and the saint herself ate only wild vegetables.



Bearing her misfortune, the holy ascetic spent seven years in banishment. Finally, at the request of the monks, the abbot allowed her to return to the monastery with the child, and in seclusion she spent two years instructing the child.

The abbot of the monastery received a revelation from God that the sin of the monk Theodore was forgiven. The grace of God dwelt upon the monk Theodore, and soon all the monks began to witness to the signs worked through the prayers of the saint.

Once, during a drought, all the wells dried up. The abbot said to the brethren that only Theodore would be able to reverse the misfortune. Having summoned the saint, the abbot bade her to bring forth water, and the water in the well did not dry up afterwards. The humble Theodore said that the miracle was worked through the prayer and faith of the abbot.

Before her death, Saint Theodora shut herself in her cell with the child and instructed him to love God above all things. She told him to obey the abbot and the brethren, to preserve tranquility, to be meek and without malice, to avoid obscenity and silliness, to love non-covetousness, and not to neglect their communal prayer. After this, she prayed and, for the last time, she asked the Lord to forgive her sins. The child also prayed together with her. Soon the words of prayer faded from the lips of the ascetic, and she peacefully departed to a better world.

The Lord revealed to the abbot the spiritual accomplishments of the saint, and also her secret. The abbot, in order to remove any dishonor from the deceased, in the presence of the abbot and brethren of the Enata monastery, told of his vision and uncovered the bosom of the saint as proof.

The Enata abbot and brethren shrank back in terror at their great transgression. Falling down before the body of the saint, with tears they asked forgiveness of Saint Theodora. News of Saint Theodora reached her former husband. He received monastic tonsure at this same monastery where his wife had been. And the child, raised by the nun, also followed in the footsteps of his foster-mother. Afterwards, he became abbot of this very monastery.