



Prophet Elias News

News in the time of self –isolation for the Orthodox Church of
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
24th May 2020



Sermon given by Metropolitan Anthony on the Sunday of the Blind Man, 14th May 1972

At the end of today's reading, words stand that we pass by very often. The blind man says to Christ, "And who is the Son of God?" and Christ answers, "You have seen Him and He is speaking to you".

For us, the first words are so natural; the first event of our life, the first event of a meeting is that we see a person, but what was this wonder of this man who had never seen anything in the world and who, touched by the life-giving hand of Christ, of a sudden saw! And the first person he saw was his Lord and his God, Christ, the Son of Man.

I remember a Romanian writer telling us in his biography what definitive, what profound impression the face of the first man he remembers made. He remembers himself as a child, and over him - the inexpressibly beautiful face of his father who was a priest, looking at him, with all human love, with all the tenderness, and all the depth of a human gaze. And he says that this was a first vision for him in the icon which a human face can



14th Century Serbian Fresco

be when it is lit from inside by love and by understanding, by depth and by eternity, a vision of God. Here this man saw God in the features of Him who was God and who had become the Son of Man.

I would like to attract your attention also to something different. On another occasion we read the story of a paralytic healed by Christ; and the Church, singing the praises of God on that occasion says, "As this man found no one to show mercy on him, the Son of Mary, God Himself, stooped down and met his need". Because this man had not found another man to show mercy, to show compassion, to show concern, God has come down to him. Now we live in another time, we live in the time with God truly having become man in our midst, and more than this: He has made us to be living members of His body, an incarnate, concrete presence of His Incarnation, the temples of the Spirit, the place of the Presence. Now any man who is in need should at the same time find in each of us a man stirred to compassion, taught mercy and understanding by God become Man, and at the same time, simultaneously, meeting with us, he should be able to see the love of God in our eyes and to perceive the active, imaginative, creative action of divine charity in our words and in our deeds.

Since Christ has come into the world, the time of man has come; but not of man as severed from God, separated from Him, alien to Him, but a wonderful time when in man, in those who have discovered Christ, who have believed in Him, who have become one with Him - those men to whom God has entrusted the care of His world - people can both receive divine and human mercy and see human compassion, human love, human joy.

Is not this a great call, is not that something which should make us capable of great things? The time of God and the time of man is one, not only in the incarnate Son of God, but in this mysterious

incarnate presence which each of us represents, the presence of God in the flesh, in human compassion, in human love, and this is an earnest claim and a challenge which the Gospel presents us with. Are we to one another and to those further afield that kind of humanity? New humanity, new creatures, new men with the newness of a renewed life, the life of God. This is what we are called to be.

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Texts for Sunday of the Blind Man

I come to Thee, O Christ, blind from birth in my spiritual eyes, and I call to Thee in repentance: Thou art the most radiant light of those in darkness!

He that was born blind thought to himself and said: 'Was I born without eyes for the sins of my parents? Was I born to be an example because of the unbelief of the nations? I cease not from asking: When is it night, when is it day? My feet cannot endure striking against the stones. For I have neither seen the sun shining nor beheld in image Him Who fashioned me. But I beseech Thee, O Christ God, look upon me and have mercy on me.'

As the Master and Fashioner of all things passed by, He encountered along the way a blind man who was seated there and who mourned aloud, saying: 'All my life I have beheld neither the sun shining forth nor laid eyes on the bright luminescence of the moon. Yet since Thou wast born of an immaculate Virgin so as to fill all with light, do Thou now fill me with Thy light, in that Thou art compassionate. And thus I shall adore Thee and cry: Sovereign Master, Christ my God, forgive me my sins, in Thine abundant compassion, O Thou only Lover of mankind.'

Seeing What Is

I have stood among the quiet trees
and didn't hear the silence, or
see the forest.

I have walked the sidewalks under
tall buildings
and never seen the city.

I have cast my eyes upon the letters
that make up the words
that make up the sentences
and completely missed the story.

I have seen and done so many things
and missed so much.

I watch the old cat limp across the room.

Perhaps I am learning to experience
what is.

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Praying with Eyes Open

As Orthodox Christians we tend to take it for granted that we pray with our eyes open, perhaps without giving it much thought. Here are some reflections by someone who came to it as a new experience.

In the book, *Praying with Icons* by Jim Forest, he speaks of the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox tradition of gazing at an icon and keeping one's eyes open while praying. Through this practice, relationship develops and deepens with the "subject" of the icon. It is nothing new, using an icon or Western depiction of Jesus, Mary, saints, or an event as a focus of meditation.

Keeping my eyes open the entire time is new. One begins to see with the eyes of Jesus—you become what you gaze upon. With eyes open, one's gaze is intermixed - Christ with the surrounding world. We often close our eyes in prayer to rid ourselves of distractions. Yet, the distraction begs for our prayer and attention. I don't mean the idle wandering of the mind when I speak of distraction, rather, that a particular person or situation comes to mind. This compels listening for how to respond. Praying with my eyes open broadens my view of the world around me. Everything is more vibrant, more alive, perhaps more real than I have previously experienced.

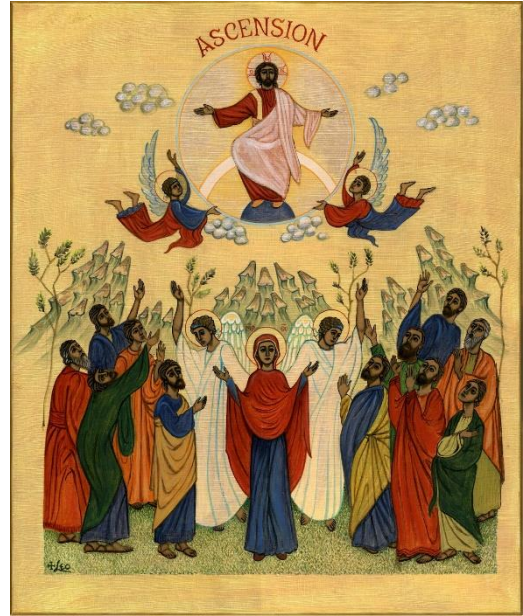
May our eyes be opened to those in need. May we be courageous and generous in our response. Every decision to respond to the needs of others is sacred and filled with all that is holy. Every decision not to respond is empty of sacredness. Praying with our eyes open transforms us and aids in making present the Kingdom of God.

*From Pat Brandwein-Ball OFS (Secular Franciscan Order): *Praying with Open Eyes* (reprinted with permission)*

This Sunday (May 24th) will be the Fortieth Day following the repose of Martin Ralchevski's father Atanas. May his memory be eternal!

Sermon given by Metropolitan Anthony on the Feast of the Ascension 11th June 1970

The feast of the Ascension of the Lord is one of the decisive links in our eternal human destiny. This destiny begins on the day that God calls the world from non-being into being with his mighty creative word. This world is placed before the face of God and by the creative word is called not only to temporal life but to remain eternally in the joy and glory of its Lord. The destiny of the world and of man begins with God's loving offer of the bliss of friendship with Him till the end of time. And when man fell away from God, when through the treachery of man the whole world was given over to suffering, God did not withdraw his love and abandon us. Never, neither in the hours of paradise nor in the dark years and centuries of the fall, was God a stranger to the world. He was constantly acting within it, arousing in men's hearts all that was good and true, sending His guardian angels, His prophets and the messengers of His word, — and when the time was ripe the Lord Himself entered the life — of the world.



Ascension icon by Fr Leo Arrowsmith
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When God became incarnate He entered into the historical destiny of man so that there is no dividing line between this historical destiny and God's eternal life. But the Lord not only entered the historical destiny of man by His incarnation, He united with Himself, with His divine nature, all that He had created — our human flesh which He put on not for a time but forever, our earth, our sky — and demonstrated its wonderful quality and glory. All that He created is capable not only of meeting God, but of being spirit-bearing, God-bearing. The created world was not destroyed by its contact with the eternal, by the burning, divine union, but on the contrary was revived, transfigured and assumed the true rights of the created, entered the true destiny of creation. But even this was not enough. After Christ had defeated death by His death, He ascended into heaven, and, ascending into the depths of divine incomprehensibility, the Lord took our human nature, the flesh received from the Virgin, the material of the created world — with Him into the Mystery of the Trinity.

St. John Chrysostom trying to describe the greatness of man says: "If you want to know how great man is do not turn to royal palaces, but raise your eyes to the throne of God and you will see, on the right hand of God the Father, the Son of Man clothed with our flesh." Here is the deepest and most glorious manifestation of man's greatness and of his glorious calling. Christ ascended into heaven on the day of a blessed and wonderful parting which turned out to be no separation, because by ascending into heaven He did not get farther away from us, for heaven is not the sky, not a certain distance, but the mystery of God's omnipresence, the glory that He had even before the world was. And when Christ says: "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me," - He is not only telling us that in our temporal existence we must tear ourselves away from all self-love, accept the whole weight of our earthly life and follow Him, firstly among the people, thence to Gethsemane and the trial and thence to the cross, He does not even say that whosoever follows Him thus shall rise again on the last day; He opens to us even greater possibilities. We are called upon to follow Him and according to His own word, to be where He is, in the eternal glory of the divine life.

In another ten days it will be Pentecost. We expect that having through Baptism become, to some extent at least, the Body of Christ and having received communion from Him over the years, we may now receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Through this gift our renewed humanity may be ignited with the fire of eternal life. Let us prepare ourselves reverently and attentively, so that the life-giving and transfiguring presence of the Holy Spirit may be renewed within us. Let us come to church on that day ready to begin a new life in Christ and in the Spirit and become truly, in reality, not just in our dreams, what St. Ignatius of Antioch calls the living body of Christ, the 'total Christ' in which the fullness of the Spirit resides. And by accepting this spirit of Christ and of Sonship, let us become - as with even greater daring St. Irenaeus of Lyons says "the Only begotten Son of God in the Only-begotten Son". May the blessing and mercy of the Lord be with us all.
Amen.

Texts from the Feast of the Ascension

Not parted from the Father's bosom, O sweetest Jesus, and having lived among those on earth as man, today Thou hast been taken up in glory from the Mount of Olives, and in Thy compassion exalting our fallen nature, Thou hast seated it with the Father. Therefore the heavenly ranks of the Bodiless Powers were amazed at the wonder, and beside themselves with fear; and seized with trembling, they magnified Thy love for mankind. With them, we on earth also give glory for Thy condescension to us and Thine Ascension from us; and we supplicate Thee, saying: "At Thine Ascension Thou didst fill with boundless joy the Disciples and the Mother who bore Thee; by their prayers make us also worthy of the joy of Thine elect through Thy great mercy!"

Thou didst renew in Thyself, O God, the nature of Adam which had descended to the nethermost parts of the earth, and today Thou didst take it up above every Principality and Power; for loving it, Thou didst seat it with Thyself; and having compassion on it, Thou didst unite it with Thyself; and united with it, Thou didst suffer with it; and Thou Who art passionless hast glorified it with Thyself. But the Bodiless Powers were asking: "Who is this Man of beauty? Not man only, but both God and man, the two natures together made manifest." And so exultant Angels, flying about the Disciples in shining robes, cried out: "Ye Men of Galilee, He Who is gone from you, this Jesus, both Man and God, will come again as God and Man, the Judge of living and the dead, granting the faithful forgiveness of sins and His great mercy!"

Troparion

Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God,
granting joy to Thy Disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit.
Through the blessing, they were assured that Thou art the Son of God,
the Redeemer of the world.

Kontakion

When Thou hadst fulfilled the dispensation for our sake, and united earth to heaven,
Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God,
not being parted from those who love Thee, but remaining with them and crying://
"I am with you, and there is no one against you!"

Streamed Services for Ascension

Tuesday 26th May 6.30pm - Leave-taking of Pascha
Wednesday 27th May 6.30pm - Vespers for Ascension
Thursday 28th May 9.30pm - Liturgy

Library Corner

I've just started reading 'Daniel Stein, Interpreter', a novel by Ludmila Ulitskaya based on a true story of a Polish Jew who managed to evade the death camps and became a Roman Catholic monk/priest in Israel. It's told in letters and articles dated between 1946 and 1996 (*so far*) revealing the story of Daniel and also touches on the division between the Christian churches. Shan't say more as I haven't finished it and don't want to give anything away. Suffice to say I'm enjoying it.