



September 20, 2009

15TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**PRE-FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS;
FEAST OF THE MARTYR SOZON OF CILICIA**

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE SIX:

The angelic powers were at Your tomb; and the guards became as dead men; and Mary stood by Your grave, seeking Your most pure Body. You did capture hell, not being tempted by it. You did come to the Virgin, granting life. O Lord who did rise from the dead: Glory to You!

PRE-FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS TROPARION-TONE FOUR:

Today from the stem of Jesse and from the loins of David, the handmaid of God, Mary, is being born for us. Therefore all creation is renewed and rejoices! Heaven and earth shall rejoice together! Praise her, you families of nations, for Joachim rejoices and Anna celebrates, crying out: "The barren one gives birth to the Theotokos, the Nourisher of our life!"

ST. SOZÓN TROPARION-TONE FOUR:

Your Holy Martyr Sozón, O Lord, through his suffering has received an incorruptible crown from You, Our God. For having Your strength, he laid low his adversaries, and shattered the powerless boldness of demons. Through his intercessions save our souls!

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE SIX:

When Christ God, the Giver of Life, raised all of the dead from the valleys of misery with His mighty hand, He bestowed resurrection on the human race. He is the Savior of all, the Resurrection, the Life, and God of all.

ST. SOZÓN KONTAKION-TONE TWO:

Let us gather today and commemorate Sozón, the true and divinely wise martyr, an expert fighter for the faith, a mystical seer of divine grace, a generous provider of healing, who prays to Christ God for us all!

PRE-FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS KONTAKION-TONE THREE:

Today the Virgin Theotokos Mary, the bridal chamber of the Heavenly Bridegroom, by the will of God is born of a barren woman, being prepared as the chariot of God the Word. She was foreordained for this, since she is the divine gate and the true Mother of Life.

EPISTLE & COMMENTARY

THE PROKIMENON (PSALM 28:9) IN THE 6TH TONE:

O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance

2 Corinthians, 4: 6-15

Brethren, for it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed - always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Galatians 6: 11-18 (Preparation for the Feast of the Cross)

See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES: PSALM 91: 1, 2

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the heavenly God.
He will say to the Lord: "My Protector and my Refuge; my God, in whom I trust."*

THE ALLELUIA VERSES: PSALM 89: 19, 20 (Preparation for the Feast of the Cross)

I have raised up one chosen out of My people; with My holy oil have I anointed him. For My hand shall be unto him an ally, and Mine arm shall strengthen him.

Epistle Commentary on 2 Corinthians, 4: 6-15

The goal of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not to glorify oneself, but our Father who is in heaven. This is only possible if one can manage to “get out of the way,” and allow the light of God’s Glory in Christ to shine through our “earthen vessel.” St. Paul reminds us in this passage that God delivers His Word to us in all humility, through the lowliness of the human form, so that the receiver of this Word will recognize the Truth of the Treasure. It is for this reason that the preacher will be “persecuted, but not forsaken...” The vessel must be humiliated in order to show that it is not the gold on the Gospel cover which makes the Word inside sacred. Rather, it is the treasure within that makes the container so valuable. Thus, the Glory of God will manifest itself through those who preach, by their lives, that those who die with Christ shall also live with Him.

GOSPEL & COMMENTARY

John 3: 13-17(Preparation for the Feast of the Cross)

Jesus said, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved.

Matthew 22: 35-46

At that time, a certain lawyer asked Jesus a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.” He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’ If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on, did anyone dare question Him anymore.

Gospel Commentary on Matthew 22:35-46

The commandments that Jesus Christ sets forth constitute a grand summary of the entire Law of Moses. It is upon this basis that all other laws derive their potency. And yet, the Pharisees, like many of us today, are arguing over the minutia of the Law—the little insignificant details—and forgetting about the important matters in front of them. This is reflected in the very next sentence about the lineage of the Christ. Jesus asks this question to lead the Pharisees to the only logical conclusion: that He is God incarnate. David, as the King of Israel, could not call anyone else “Lord,” except God. Therefore, the Messiah MUST be God.

SPIRITUAL ARTICLES

Reflection from *The Prologue* for Sept. 7/Sept. 20 by St. Nikolai Velimirovic

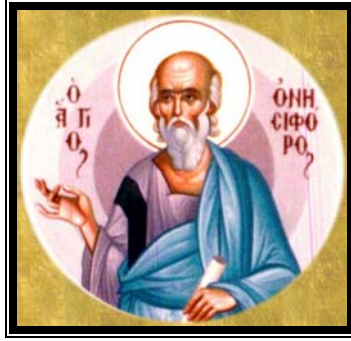
Victory over anger is one of the greatest victories of a soldier of Christ. We generally become angry either at those we wish to turn back from sin, or at those who slander us. However, in doing so we forget that anger is a mortal sin, and in desiring the salvation of others we lose our own, according to the words of St. Macarius. Anger against our enemies is usually tied to another evil impulse, the desire for revenge. St. Eupychius so overcame the passion of anger in himself, that before his death, he gave one portion of his great estate to the poor and another portion to his slanderers, because of whom he was being tortured and slain. He considered his slanderers as his benefactors. St. John Chrysostom writes: "Let us clip the wings of anger, and evil will not rise high. Anger is an evil sickness that can destroy our souls.... Anger is a terrible fire which devours everything.... If an angry man could see himself at the moment of his anger, he would need no other counsel not to become angry—because there is nothing more unpleasant than an angry face." Abba Ammon confessed of himself: "I spent fourteen years in Scetis, praying to God day and night, to give me victory over anger."

1. The Holy Martyr Sozon

Sozon was born in Lyconia. He was a shepherd and kept all of God's laws, instructing his peers and friends in his pious Faith. In a vision he was shown that he would suffer martyrdom for Christ. This was in the time of Maximian, magistrate of Cilicia, who perpetrated a terrible persecution of Christians in the nearby city of Pompeiopolis. In that city there was a certain golden idol which the pagans worshiped. Sozon left his flock, went to the city, entered the pagan temple and broke the arm off the golden idol. He crumbled it into bits and distributed it to the poor. There was a great uproar because of this, and the pagans sought out the guilty one. So that no one else would suffer for his deed, Sozon went to the magistrate and declared himself to be a Christian and the perpetrator of that act. His torturers first beat him, then suspended him from a tree and scraped his body with iron combs. When he was nearly dead, they cast him into a fire, where St. Sozon gave up his holy soul to God. He suffered in about the year 304. St. Sozon's relics were miracle-working, and a church in his name was built over them.

2. The Holy Apostles Euodus and Onesiphorus

Euodus and Onesiphorus were apostles of the Seventy. St Ignatius the God-bearer mentions Euodus with great praise in his Epistle to the Antiochians. Euodus was a disciple of the Apostle Peter, and his successor as Bishop of Antioch. The Apostle Peter himself consecrated him. Euodus wrote a work on the Holy Theotokos, in which he related how the Holy Virgin Mary was brought to the Temple at the age of three, and remained in the Temple for eleven years; how, on entering her fifteenth year, she was entrusted to St. Joseph for protection; and how, at age fifteen, she gave birth to the Lord. Euodus also wrote another work entitled "The Beacon." However, both of these works were destroyed during the persecution of Christians. He was slain for Christ during Emperor Vespasian's persecutions in Antioch. The Apostle Paul mentions St. Onesiphorus as his sincere friend and helper (II Timothy 1:16-18). St. Onesiphorus suffered for Christ in Colophon, where he was bishop. It is said that he was tied to wild horses and pulled apart. Thus, these faithful soldiers of Christ honorably served on earth, and entered into the joy of their Lord.



St. Onesiphorus the Apostle

3. The Holy Martyr Eupychius

Eupychius was the son of Dionysius, a senator. He was severely tortured for Christ, being beaten and scraped, and was thrown half-dead into prison, where an angel of God came to him and healed him. Released from prison, he distributed all of his possessions—some to the poor and some to his slanderers. He was arrested again, and his body was scraped until he gave up his soul to God. Instead of blood, milk and water flowed from his wounds. He suffered in the time of Emperor Hadrian.

4. Saint John, Archbishop of Novgorod

John was a priest who was ordained Bishop of Novgorod in 1163. He built seven churches during his lifetime. He had a vision of the Holy Theotokos, and had unusual power over demons, whom he even forced to serve him. He miraculously saved Novgorod from an attack by seventy-two princes. He suffered from diabolical temptations, but by the power of the Cross and much prayer he overcame them all. In old age, he withdrew to a monastery and received the great schema. He reposed peacefully in the Lord on September 7, 1185.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

For **Continual Education in Liturgy and Theology**, we recommend the following article:

<http://www.westsrbdio.org/Theology/SymbolismandRealisminOrthodoxWorship.pdf>

Symbolism and Realism in Orthodox Worship

Introduction

The problem we shall address in this article might be described as follows:

(a) The whole of our worship, culminating in the Divine Eucharist, is interwoven with symbolism. There is not a single act of worship or liturgical action in our Church that is performed without the use of some or other symbol. Why is this, and what is the theological justification for it?

(b) The very notion of “symbol” contains the problem of the symbol’s relationship with reality, or, more accurately, with truth. There is no such thing as a symbol which does not imply simultaneously two things: that the symbol *is not fully identified with the reality or*

truth, and that the symbol *is not entirely foreign and unrelated to the reality or truth*, but participates in it in a certain sense which has to be explained and pinpointed. The symbol is a form of paradox: it at once is not and is the reality.¹

(c) Precisely because of this paradox intrinsic to the notion of symbol, the worship that makes use of it, particularly to the extent that ours does, runs the risk of being identified with *magic*. How does symbolism differ from magic? For many Christians, perhaps not at all. It is not fortuitous that Protestantism opposed and virtually abolished symbolism in worship, precisely because it had seen the tendency in Western Christianity during the Middle Ages to introduce magical notions into Church life. Such notions often make their appearance among Orthodox too. For this reason, there is no shortage of people who would be happy to see the worship of our Church simplified as much as possible. The Roman Catholics gave into this way of thinking at the Second Vatican Council, and decided to shorten and simplify the Mass, except for certain solemn or “pontifical” Masses; to do away with the rich vestments of the celebrants and replace them with simple white vestments, etc. How many Orthodox would not honestly like something similar to happen in our Church? The long services, the rich vestments, and the varied symbolism are seen by many as incompatible with the “spiritual” character of Christian worship, the simplicity of Jesus’ earthly life, the virtue of humility, etc. Add to this popular piety with its extreme, almost magical manifestations, and the problem of symbolism assumes grave dimensions even in our Church. There is in our Church a latent psychological gulf between the “intellectuals” and “conscious” and “enlightened” Christians on the one hand, and the simple believers on the other, and every so often this comes to the surface.² It is essential, then, for our theology to pose and deal with the question of symbolism in our worship; how can it be justified theologically, and how can we avoid falling from the Scylla of magic into the Charybdis of rationalism?

I. The notion of symbol

The notion of symbol is not an invention of the Christian Church. It is a notion intimately related and inseparably bound up with that of transcendence, which to varying degrees

¹ The way the symbol is referred to by St. Cyril of Jerusalem sometimes as identical with the truth and sometimes not is characteristic. Thus he writes about baptism: “What a strange and paradoxical thing: we did not truly die; we were not truly buried; we were not truly crucified and raised up; but the imitation was in an image, while the salvation is in truth” (*Mystagogical Catechesis*, 2.5). Yet further on, referring to chrismation, he writes: “You should know that the symbol of this chrism is to be found in the Old Testament. . . . But these things happened to them in a type, whereas for you this is the beginning of your salvation not in a type, but in truth. . . .” (*Mystagogical Catechesis*, 3.6).

² The question of chanting the scriptural readings in worship is related to this. From time to time, the view is put forward in the Greek press that these readings should be rendered in a speaking voice and not sung, the argument being that this makes them more understandable for the people. Indeed, some clergy in our Church already use this manner of reading the Epistle and Gospel during the Divine Liturgy, precisely for this reason. But is this right? Is there perhaps a theological reason which requires that the readings should be chanted? Why, for instance, does the *Typikon* provide for the readings at Vespers to be chanted when they are from the New Testament, but simply read when they are from the Old Testament? Contrary to the prevailing view, the *Typikon* with all its details is not a mere “formality,” but has theological content. It is as well, then, before we adapt the *Typikon* to our practical common sense, to seek out the theological reasons behind it. See below, footnote 214.

accompanies every form of religion. The existential source of the symbol is the need in some way to bridge the gap between finite and infinite or, in our Orthodox terminology, between created and uncreated. This bridging cannot be achieved except by using the means afforded by the finite and created world, which in essence are nothing other than material and corruptible things. Even if one wants to avoid matter in bridging the gap, one will still have recourse to means which are created, and of necessity limited and inadequate, such as human reason, which the ancient Greeks used par excellence and whose inadequacy was demonstrated by the apophaticism of patristic theology. Words too, then, are symbols—something distinct from the truth. But the utter silence to which mystics often resort is equally a symbol—distinct from the truth and borrowed from our finite and created being since it has to do with human feelings such as passion and love, which the mystic borrows in order to bridge the gulf between created and uncreated. So there is no relation between man and God—even if that God is within the world—which does not have need of the symbol.

The symbol, then, in its function as a bridge between the world and God, *participates* in both these realities. The degree of participation may vary from case to case, but in order to be called a symbol it has to *bring together* (the etymological meaning of the Greek verb συμβάλλω); it must participate in what is symbolized. The distinction made by Paul Tillich³ between “sign” and “symbol” is characteristic: a sign is something that points to a reality without necessarily participating in it, while a symbol is something that participates in the reality it symbolizes. Also important are the remarks of the late Alexander Schmemmann⁴ concerning the misunderstanding of the notion of “symbol” even among Orthodox: a symbol has come to mean something different from or even opposed to reality, which leads to the arbitrary interpretation of liturgical symbolism and contempt for the “formalities” of the liturgical *Typikon* on the part of academic theology (see above, footnote 187).

If, however, we define the symbol as the means of linking the created with the uncreated, the here-and-now with the beyond, experience with truth, by ways and means which are necessarily borrowed from the created here-and-now, then we need to seek the theologically correct Christian meaning of the symbol in the very nature and manner whereby the gulf between created and uncreated is bridged *in the person of Christ*. This is where we should locate the specific difference between Christian and non-Christian notions of symbol. And only in this way shall we understand the significance of symbolism in our Orthodox worship.

II. Symbolism in the Christian faith

The fundamental difference between the biblical faith and pagan religions as to bridging the gulf between created and uncreated lies principally in the fact that pagan religions, which ontologically confine God within the world, bridge the gulf with the aid of *nature*, whereas in biblical faith nature on its own has no capacity or property of bridging the gulf; instead of being bridged with the aid of nature, this gulf is bridged only through the intervention of the *person*. Thus in pagan religions, the symbol that unites the created and

³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 265.

⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), pp. 30ff.

the uncreated makes personal freedom in a certain way subject to natural necessity (hence magic among primitive peoples, or the motion of the stars or the symbolism of the natural ages among the ancient Greeks: for example in Aristotle, Plato, the Eleusinian Mysteries, Fate among the Stoics, etc.); whereas in biblical faith, bridging the gap between created and uncreated depends solely on personal freedom—that of God in the first place, and in the second place that of man formed in his image as a creature with free will. Thus neither in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament does there seem to be a symbolism connected with nature (“observing days, and months, and seasons, and years,” as St. Paul writes dismissively to the Galatians).⁵ Biblical faith has as a bridge between created and uncreated the person, in other words freedom as love.

This precisely is the basis for the Incarnation of the Word, and it is on this basis alone that Christian symbolism can be grounded. The Son and Word of God, this *Person* which is “one of the Trinity,” in other words a hypostasis of loving relationship, *freely* takes up the created and bridges the gulf. If this had not happened, no symbolism would be possible: the created and the uncreated would remain separated by an unbridgeable gap. But since the Son of God has become man and become flesh and the gulf is bridged, symbolism has become possible; but under certain inviolable conditions, which would never allow us to lapse into natural symbolism. These conditions are as follows:

(a) No symbolism can be based on any form of correspondence between created and uncreated characteristics. Nor is the intelligible or rational world able to symbolize or provide an image of the invisible God. Only what the Son of God has *freely* chosen as a means of bridging the gap between created and uncreated is able to become a means of symbolism. And this choice on the part of Christ should not be interpreted or understood as dependent on properties of the created, because then it would not be free.

(b) Since no symbolism can be based on natural properties but only on personal freedom, all symbolism in the Church is based on historical events, because *historical events* alone are realities of personal freedom.

(c) Given that all historical events receive their meaning not from the past but from the future, the ultimate source of every symbolism is the *eschatological event*, the Kingdom of God. Each symbol is justified only to the extent that it images the eschatological reality. This is where the truth of the symbol is to be found: not in the nature of the materials used, nor simply in reference back to events of the past, but in the participation of the symbol in eschatological reality.

Let us now see how these basic principles are applied in Orthodox worship.

⁵ Gal. 4:10.