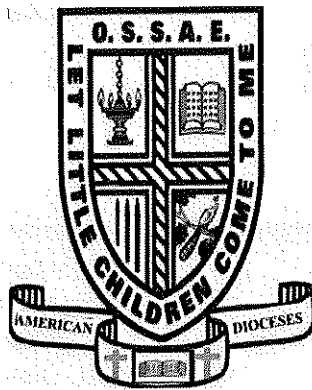


# TO SERVE THEE IS FREEDOM

Grade VIII

Student's Text Book



Revised for the use by the children of  
Northeast American Diocese & Southwest American Diocese

Sunday School Association

**The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church**  
**2011**

Christian Nurture Series  
Prepared by the Editorial Committee  
Authorized by the Standing Committee of  
**THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES**

Chairman of the Editorial Committee:  
**METROPOLITAN PAUL GREGORIOS**

**PUBLISHED BY:**

Orthodox Syrian Sunday School Association of the  
East Devalokam, Kottayam - 686 038, India

Third Edition - 1993

**Central Office**

Orthodox Seminary  
Kottayam, Kerala  
India

**Regional Offices**

1. Anba Rueis, Cairo
2. Armenian Seminary  
Antelias, Lebanon

**Review, update, reorganization and reprint by:**

Sunday School Association of the  
Northeast American Diocese of  
the Malankara Orthodox Syrian  
Church, New York, USA, with  
authorization from the Orthodox  
Syrian Sunday School Association  
of the East, Kottayam, Kerala,  
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## Preface

We thank God Almighty for enabling us to present an updated version of the text book for the Grade VIII students. The curriculum and syllabus adopted by the Oriental Orthodox Churches remain the same.

We are grateful to Mr. Korah Mani, the Curriculum Committee Coordinator for his review and revisions to the original text incorporating constructive suggestions from Grade VIII teachers of our Sunday Schools. The draft of the revised text was finally reviewed by our senior Metropolitan His Grace Mathews Mar Barnabas.

I sincerely recognize Mr. Benny Varghese, the Sunday School Secretary for his efforts in formatting this book to print form. H. G. Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, Metropolitan of the Northeast American Diocese has provided valuable suggestions from the beginning of the project to review and update all the text books originally prepared by the Oriental Orthodox Churches Editorial Committee under the Chairmanship of H.G. Poulouse Mar Gregorios.

We believe that there is room for improvement to this text. Therefore, we request you to continue your review of the contents of this text during the course of its use in your Sunday School in the coming years, and send your suggestions to the Curriculum Committee of the Sunday School Association by using the website - [www.indianorthodoxsundayschool.org](http://www.indianorthodoxsundayschool.org)

With the permission and blessings of our Diocesan Metropolitan H.G. Zachariah Mar Nicholovos, our Senior Metropolitan H.G. Mathews Mar Barnabas and the Southwest American Diocese Metropolitan H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebius, the Sunday School Association of Northeast American Diocese presents this students' text book for use by the eighth grade students and teachers of the two dioceses of North America.

New York  
May 10, 2011

**Fr. Dr. Raju Varghese**  
Sunday School Director



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# **UNIT I**

## **MESSIANIC PROPHETS**

**David, the Prophet and the King**

**Isaiah, the Prophet Evangelist**

**Daniel, the Prophet Seer**

**Ezekiel, the Prophet of renewal and unity**

**Jonah, the symbolic prophet**

# Lesson 1

## David the Prophet and the King

### The Shepherd King

The Prophet Samuel anointed Saul to become the first king of Israel. But Saul was not faithful to his responsibility that God had entrusted with him. He did not obey God's commandments.

God sent Samuel, his Prophet, to fetch a new king. Samuel came to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem and saw his sons, one after the other. But none of the seven he saw pleased God. Then he asked Jesse if he had other sons. There was the youngest son, who was with the sheep in the fields. Samuel asked to bring him.

The young shepherd, David came in and the Lord said to Samuel: 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' Samuel poured oil on David's head from his horn in the midst of his brothers. God was pleased with David because his heart was pure and he followed the ways of God. God said, "I have found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all my will."

### David, the hero

The spirit of God left Saul and came upon David. After some days David stood before Goliath the leader of the Philistines.



He decided to save the people from that giant as he saved his sheep from the mouth of lions and bears. He came forward to fight that man. Goliath laughed when he saw this young shepherd with his stick in his hand. David said to him: "You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts." (1 Sam 17: 45). David struck down Goliath throwing the stone with the sling. The Philistines fled and the people of God were saved.



Wherever David went, many people assembled around him. All the women sang, saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul heard them and was jealous. He hated David. He knew that David would become king. But Jonathan, the son of Saul loved David as his own soul. God was with David and saved him from Saul's hands. Saul, fell twice in the hands of David. He could have killed Saul, but he did not, honoring him as the Lord's anointed.

### **The Messianic king**

David became king when he was thirty years old. But he was sad for Saul and his sons, especially his friend Jonathan, who were killed in fighting. David was a good king. He got power from God. David was seeking the will of God and the glory of His name.



God said to David, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people....your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." David answered; "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far?...Because of thy promise, and according to thy own heart, thou hast wrought all this greatness.... and with thy blessing shall the house of thy servant be blessed for ever" (2 Sam 7: 8-29).

With this spirit, David lived all his life. He knew that God had given him a special mission, to prepare the way for the Lord's coming to earth. David's earthly kingdom symbolized the kingdom of heaven, when our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David, established His Church throughout the world forever.

### **The Lord's covenant with with David**

During is reign, David administred justice and equality to all the people. He cared for them with a straight heart, and loved them as he loved his sheep.

One day, God sent his Prophet Nathan to declare to David the Lord's Covenant with him: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam 7: 12-13).

This covenant has been realized in the Lord Jesus Christ who has come from David's posterity in the flesh. "Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a savior, Jesus, as he promised." (Acts 13: 23) "The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne." (Ps. 132: 11)

This promise was realized when the Angel Gabriel came to the Virgin, and said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1: 30-33).

On many occasions, the people called Jesus the Son of David. Bartimaeus the blind man, cried at Him, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." (Mark 10: 46). Crowds shouted when Jesus entered Jerusalem as king: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt 21: 9)

### **The Great Prophet**

David was not only a great king, he was also a great prophet. He was guided by the Holy Spirit in his prophecies. His psalms point to the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, His divinity, suffering and resurrection:

"I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2: 7).

"Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in (Ps. 24: 7).

These psalms are examples of David's prophecies concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul talked about the meaning of these prophecies (Acts 13: 33-37).

**For memorization:**

The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool" (Ps. 110-1).

**Activities:**

1. Read Psalms 2, 24, 110 and 132 and find out verses referring to our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. What is meant by saying that Jesus is the 'Son of David'?
4. Make a wall-magazine with your colleagues, about the life of David the king and prophet, (using the story of his life in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel).

## Lesson 2

### Isaiah, the Prophet Evangelist

Isaiah is one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets who lived around 800 B.C. He prophesied about Christ the Awaited Messiah, His suffering and His Kingdom. Through prophecy Isaiah was able to give a clear picture of the Messiah to the coming generations as though he were a contemporary of the Messiah. This is true to a degree that some of his admirers came to call his book, "The Gospel of Isaiah."

#### A royal upbringing

Isaiah came from a royal family. He spent about half a century living in royal courts and participated in running the affairs of the state due to the confidence of kings of his time, in him. He called for total reform particularly when he came in close touch with the problems of the poor classes of the people suffering from social injustice.

Isaiah witnessed the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel before the king of Babylon and the carrying away of its people into captivity.

#### How did he see Christ?

Most wonderful of all of Isaiah's words were those of certain pronouncements about the coming of the promised savior. The following are the pictures given by Isaiah in his prophecy:

#### 1. The Messiah-God Incarnate:

Isaiah tells us about the conception of the Messiah's virgin birth. It is considered to be the highest of all prophecies (Is. 7: 10-16). The prophecy was repeated clearly in chapter 9 showing that He is the true light which shines on the world (Is. 9:1-7).



**2. The Messiah - the suffering servant:** The true Son of God who comes to redeem the world is pictured by Isaiah as sent by God taking the form of "The Suffering Servant" (Is. Chapter 53). This was a very new and unusual way of describing God.



Isaiah pictured Jesus as bearing the suffering of mankind, "Surely, He has borne our griefs" (Is. 53:4), and was wounded on the cross, "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Is. 53: 5). He was pictured as the Lamb who bears our sins, ".....like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb" (Is. 53:7).

Although He did not sin, yet He was numbered among sinners: "Although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth, and was numbered with the transgressors" (Is. 53: 9, 12). Lastly, Isaiah pictured Him condemned to death in place of sinners.... "...he poured out his soul to death.... he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Is. 53:12).

Isaiah gives a clear picture of the greatness of the act of sacrifice. His (the Messiah) suffering became the means for the salvation of mankind, a sacrifice made out of love, which converts sorrow into a fellowship of love. Thus suffering is a means to succeed in achieving the blessed goals that we set up.

There are many passages dealing with the prophecies of Isaiah about the suffering of our Savior during the Paschal (relating to the Easter season) prayers in the Holy Week, showing how those prophecies were fulfilled.



**3. The Messiah-The Everlasting King:** Isaiah pictured the son of Jesse as a wise and mighty king, ruling over all nations of the world: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,--- and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Is. 11: 1, 2). His kingdom will be ruled by justice." With righteousness, He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Is. 11:4).

Peace will reign over His kingdom, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb....the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them" (Is. 11: 6). He saw men's hearts full of peace and security: "The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den" (Is. 11: 8).

The knowledge of the Lord will spread holiness while the evils of society will disappear, "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Is. 11: 9).

All these descriptions apply to Christ's spiritual kingdom which He founded on earth in the hearts of believers.

#### **Activities and discussions:**

1. Compare the following passages to show in which manner the prophecies were fulfilled:

Prophecy	Fulfilment
Is. 7: 14	Matt. 1: 23
Is. 42: 1-4	Matt. 12: 18
Is. 53: 4	Matt. 8: 17
Is. 53: 5	1 Pet. 2: 24
Is. 53: 10	2 Cor. 5: 21
Is. 53: 12	Heb. 7: 25
Is. 61: 1	Luke. 4: 18-21

2. Isaiah, himself witnessed the riches and luxury enjoyed by the kings, while he saw the poor people suffering. He saw, by the spirit of prophecy,--- in the kingdom of Christ - all the suffering the king endured, for the sake of the people's happiness. Explain the above statement showing the comparison.

3. In the epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul said about Christ's suffering: "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb. 2: 18). The Lord Jesus bore a great deal of pain and moral and spiritual suffering in order to share with man his suffering. Show how you can make use of this fact in your own life in order that you may have peace in the midst of suffering.

4. Read Is. 53; it includes prophecies about the suffering of our Lord. Remember to thank God for those life-giving pains joining the Church in its six O'clock and nine O'clock prayers.

"O Lord, Thou who on the sixth day and at the sixth hour was nailed on the cross for the sin committed by our father Adam, wipe away our sins O Christ our Lord." Dear Lord, by the nails which fixed you to the cross, save our minds from rash actions and render us to remember by holy judgments according to Thy grace."

**For memorization:**

"... ..we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8: 17).

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted" (Is. 61: 1).

## Lesson 3

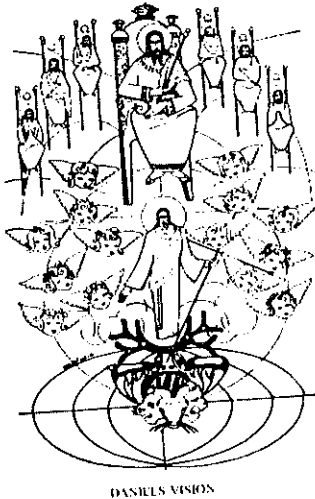
### Daniel, the Prophet Seer

King David had prophesied of a greater King - the Messiah who reigns over all creation without end. At a later date, Isaiah had prophesied of the person of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, and His kingdom of peace and joy. Here, we see Daniel for whom the heavens were opened, saw many mysteries and events concerning the Son of Man, and prophesied of His coming and the Kingdom of the saints which he saw in.

#### The Son of Man in Daniel's vision

Daniel had a dream and vision which he tells us in the book of Daniel, Chapter 7:

"I saw ... four great beasts came up out of the sea, ... The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings... a second one, like a bear... it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back"



"A fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong... and it had ten horns.. and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things... and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like the son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve



him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:7-14).

The vision of Daniel does not mean that Christ will come at a certain date that we can predict. For Christ will come in a day that we do not know. It also has no reference to any existing political power or government anywhere in the world. It only symbolizes the kingdom of God.

### **The saints and the kingdom**

What is the meaning of this vision? One of the angels standing by, said to him: “The four beasts are four kings who will reign over the world. The fourth king will conquer them all. Then he will make war with the saints of the Most High. The kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to them, and the Son of Man shall reign over them. “To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” Daniel’s vision was a prophesy for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, “The Son of Man.”

Daniel has shown the symbols of the Trinity. The Father was called the Ancient of Days. The Son was called the Son of Man. The Holy Spirit was called a river of fire. The saints of God whom Daniel saw in his vision are the Christians. They believe in the Son of God and they have become the Sons of God and the sons of the Kingdom. The Christians are the Kingdom of God on earth. They live as saints. Christ reigns over their lives and their hearts. They obey the commandments of the Lord and glorify God in their hearts all the time.

Daniel has shown us that the war is going on between the world and the Sons of God. The kingdom of the world may reign for some time, but the Kingdom of God will overcome all the powers of evil, and the sons of God will say: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8: 37).

## **The Seventy Weeks**

The angel Gabriel appeared again to Daniel and said to him: "I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding... for you are greatly beloved" (Dan. 9: 22, 23). After seventy weeks, Christ, the anointed one, will come. He is the most holy one. He shall make a new covenant with many. (Read Daniel 9:20-27)

### **Activities and discussions:**

**Choose corresponding phrase of group B to match with each of group A:**

#### **Group A:**

1. The Son of Man which Daniel saw \_\_\_\_\_
2. The four beasts are symbols for \_\_\_\_\_
3. The beast which fights the sons of God \_\_\_\_\_
4. The horn that talks against God is symbol for \_\_\_\_\_
5. The saints of the Most High for whom the kingdom is given are \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Group B:**

- a. Four kings reign over the world
- b. The governors who made false accusations against Christians.
- c. The Christians who believe in the Messiah Christ.
- d. The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- e. The Roman Empire which persecuted the Christians.

### **Answer the following questions:**

1. How did David, Isaiah and Daniel tell us of the Messiah?
2. Is it necessary for all the Christians to become saints? How?
3. Why is Christ called the Son of Man?

### **For memorization:**

Daniel 7: 13,14

## Lesson 4

### Ezekiel, the Prophet of renewal and unity

#### The Defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians

Around 597 B.C. the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachin, who was the king of Judah, was taken captive along with all the prominent people of the land, and Jerusalem was destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar “carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, except the poorest people of the land” (2 Kings 24:14).

#### The Prophet Ezekiel

Before the coming of Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel, the great Prophet, had already prophesied of the exile. The people, however, did not listen to him. During the time of the exile, Ezekiel continued to prophesy. He was in Babylon then, and the people asked him about the day of their deliverance.

Ezekiel prophesied saying: “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones...”



And he said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ And I answered, “O Lord God, thou knowest.” Again He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones:

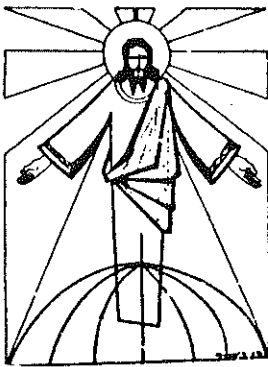
Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.... and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them,

and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ... and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host" (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

This prophecy had an immediate historical fulfillment, as well as a later spiritual fulfillment. The historical fulfillment took place about fifty years after the prophecy, when Cyrus, King of Persia permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1: 1-4).

The spiritual fulfillment took place on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given in order to enable human beings to live the new life in Christ. And now this new life is available to all who are ready to accept it. For "God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him."

### The works of the Holy Spirit



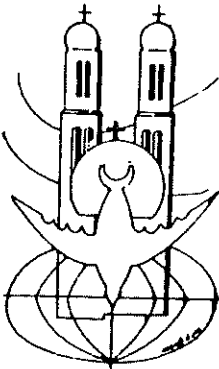
**1. The gift of the new life:** The dry bones in Ezekiel's vision stand for humanity which was condemned to death because of sin. Then Christ came, and His light shone. Therefore it is written: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Ephesians 5:14).

On the day of Pentecost, a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind. And the members of the first Church were filled with the Holy Spirit. From that day onwards their life was full of power.

The new man, who had risen with Christ, began to live his new life by the power of the Holy Spirit: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6: 4). "... ..he saved us, ... .. by virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3: 5).

**2. The source of unity:** Ezekiel prophesied concerning the unity of the Church where the Lord's Spirit is at work: "come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon the slain that they may live." The four winds stand for the four regions of the earth. The Holy Spirit is at work in His One Church, leading it and guiding it in holy unity. This is what Christ prayed for: "... That they may all be one" (John 17: 21).

### A new heart and an upright spirit



Prophet Ezekiel wrote: "Thus says the Lord, "... you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezekiel 36: 25-27).

St. Augustine wrote: "Come to the cross with your sins; come with a sincere desire to find Christ. The Holy Spirit will then remove the burden of your sin, and will give you a new life. Then you will become a holy temple of the Lord; for His spirit will live in you."

### A prayer:

"O Lord, we thank you for what you have taught us through the Prophet Ezekiel. Thank you for our burial with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life. Thank you for saving us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Keep us holy in you, O Lord, and keep your Church in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

**For memorization:**

Ezekiel 36: 25-26

**Questions:**

1. Explain how the captivity stands for the sinful life, while the return from exile stands for salvation.
2. What picture did Ezekiel give of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church?
3. What is the meaning of renewal or the new life? When do we obtain it?
4. What is meant by the One Church? How does the Holy Spirit unite the Church?
5. How can we walk in “newness of life and uprightness of Spirit”?

## Lesson 5

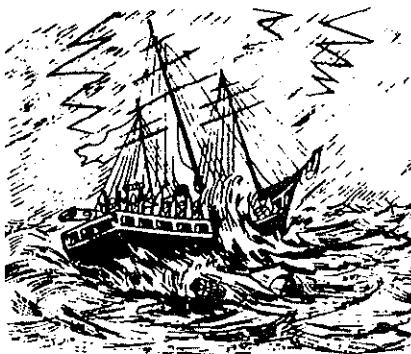
### Jonah, the Symbolic Prophet

#### Who is Jonah?

Jonah is an Old Testament Prophet, chosen by God to exemplify in his life the death and resurrection of Christ. God ordered him to go to Nineveh to preach to its people to repent and return to God so that God might not destroy them. Jonah, however, did not want to carry out God's command, so he "rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3).

#### Jonah's plight

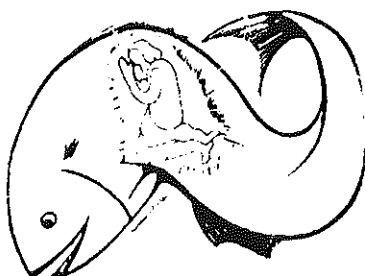
Jonah went down to Joppa and found there a ship going to Tarshish (in Spain); "so he paid the fare, and went on board, ..... away from the presence of the Lord." He forgot that God is everywhere. When the ship had sailed, there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship was threatened to break up. The mariners were afraid, and threw into the sea the goods that were in the ship to lighten it; and each one of them cried to his god to save them from drowning.



As for Jonah, he had gone down into the inner part of the ship where he was fast asleep. The captain of the ship came and woke him up and asked him to call upon his god as the others were doing, so that they might be saved. Then the mariners cast lots to know on whose account the evil was that had befallen them. The lot fell upon Jonah.

## **Confession and surrender**

Jonah confessed to the mariners the truth, and they were exceedingly afraid when he told them that he was running away from God. They tried to steer towards the shore, but the tempest grew worse. In the end, they complied with Jonah's suggestion, and threw him into the sea, and immediately the sea became calm. This made the men fear the Lord exceedingly and they offered a sacrifice to Him and made vows.



## **A merciful and compassionate God**

The Lord appointed a big fish to swallow up Jonah. While Jonah was in its belly, he prayed to the Lord, submitting himself to God's will. At the end of three days and three nights, the Lord caused the fish to vomit out Jonah upon

the shore from where he arose and went to Nineveh, as he had been commanded and delivered God's message to its people. On hearing that message, the king of Nineveh proclaimed a fast throughout the country, and he and his people humbly asked God's forgiveness. When God saw that they were sincere in their repentance, He forgave them.

## **A lesson in love**

Jonah was angry when God forgave the people, and began to plead in protest with Him: "...is not this what I said when I was in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil" (Jon. 4: 2). And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor," and were sad when it died. "And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city..."(Jon. 4:10,11).



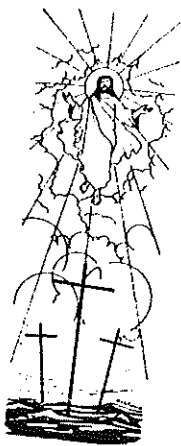
Jonah must have thought in his mind, "Your love, O Lord is beyond understanding. I felt the depth of that love when I prayed to you in the belly of the fish and you delivered me. I felt I had died but had come back to life. I wonder why you left me three days and three nights in the belly of the fish?" God wanted Jonah to be a symbol of Christ, and a sign to all generations. Jonah confesses to himself, "I am not worthy, O Lord, for this honor, not worthy to typify Your death and resurrection."

### The sign of Jonah, the prophet

The Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus one day, asking Him for a sign or miracle; but He answered them, saying... "... no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the Prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh... repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt 12: 39-41).

### Jonah as a type of Christ

God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh that they might repent and be saved. In the same way, God, in His love for humanity, chose to descend to this world to die for us and to rise again from the dead. He gives salvation to all who accept Him and believe in His redemptive work. The casting of Jonah into the sea saved the mariners in the ship from drowning. The death of Christ on the cross provides salvation from our spiritual death.



In Jonah's prayer he expressed clearly how he passed through the experience of death and resurrection: "... ..out of the belly of Sheol I cried, I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever; yet thou didst bring up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God." (Jon 2: 2, 6)

This can be related to the death and resurrection of our Lord. "...the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will... kill him; and after three days he will rise" (Mark 10: 33, 34). Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Christ was in the grave three days and three nights, then rose from the dead.

**Questions:**

1. How does Jonah typify Christ's death and resurrection?
2. What do you think of the use of lots among Christians?
3. "The Lord has chastened me sorely, but he has not given me over to death" (Ps. 118: 18). Show how these words apply to Jonah.
4. In our studies of the Messianic prophets, we have seen Christ exemplified either in their lives or in their words. Show how this is true of the following prophets:

David	Isaiah	Daniel
Ezekiel	Jonah	

**Activities:**

1. Show how the following Old Testament people had experienced similar situations as that of Jesus Christ:

Noah	Issac	Joseph
Moses	Joshua	

2. The people of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them to return to God. Christ is calling you now. Listen to His call and repent.

**For memorization:**

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12: 40).

**UNIT II**  
**THE SACRAMENT OF THE**  
**HOLY EUCHARIST**

**The Lord's Command**

**Heavenly Community**

**Praise, Thanksgiving and Communion**

**Eucharist in Daily Life**

# Lesson 6

## The Lord's Command

After the miracle of 'feeding the five thousand on five loaves and two fishes' and after He had astonished the people with this sign, the Lord wanted to draw their attention to the true miracle for which He came, and for which He died and rose. He told them, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on Him has God the Father set his seal" (John 6: 27).

The Jews then murmured at Him because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven," saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, "I have come down from heaven?" But Jesus assured them that He is the living bread; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; "and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6: 51).



On Friday, the night of the Lord's Supper, He gave them a Command. When Jesus had done the feast of the Passover, He rose from supper, laid His garments and girded Himself with a towel; then He poured water into a basin and washed the disciples' feet.

Apostle Paul tells us the command he took from the Lord, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me". For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor. 11:23-26).

This command was given to the apostles to practice with all believers this heavenly sacrament, so that Christ will be the salvation, the life, and the resurrection of us all.

And he who prevents himself from receiving this body and blood of Jesus Christ for a long time, disobeys God's command and loses his channel of communication with Christ.



### **Why did the Lord give His body and blood?**

By the sacrament of the Eucharist our sins are forgiven. Our Lord Himself said, "This is my body which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins", (Matt.26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 1Cor.11). He is the sacrificial Passover lamb on the cross through all ages.

### **We participate in the death and resurrection of our Lord**

Christ offered Himself once as a sacrifice on the cross in the place of all of us. The Holy Eucharist is a continuity of this sacrifice which we ought to partake of, regularly. Therefore, the Holy Eucharist is the act of sharing in Christ's death on the cross, His glorious resurrection, and finally confirming our expectation for His Second Coming.

"For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, verily you confess my death and witness to my resurrection, and remember me until I come"(Liturgy of St.Basil). We eat Him, and thereby dwell in Him, and He in us... as a branch is grafted to the vine from which it receives the juices of life. Likewise, we receive our nourishment from partaking of His flesh and blood in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The heart burns with a strong light and the Lord gives Himself to the faithful who commune with Him. Through this communion, the faithful gain strength of Christ's death and resurrection. The apostle Paul says, "With Jesus I was crucified. So I live, not I but Jesus lives in me". "So, what I live now in body I live in the faith, faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me".

St. Cyril of Jerusalem said, "We, by communion, become one body and one blood with Jesus." Apostle Peter said, "And so we become carriers of Jesus because His body and blood are in all parts of our body; and we become partakers of the divine nature"(2Peter 1:4).

### **Questions:**

1. How did Jesus prepare the disciples' minds to take the Holy Eucharist?
2. What did Jesus say in the night of the Last Supper?
3. What is the relationship between the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and forgiveness of sins?
4. What does it mean that we, by the Eucharist, unite with God?
5. How do we take the strength of our Lord's death and resurrection?
6. Why is it wrong if we prevent ourselves from the sacred communion?
7. What would you say to a non-Orthodox youth who asks you whether it is better to feed on Jesus by reading the Bible and praying only?

### **Suggested activities:**

1. Collect some quotations from the Liturgy about the use of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and try to ponder on their meanings.

2. With the spiritual meanings you have learned here, in mind, attend the Liturgy and write down your impressions.
3. Try to bring some of your friends to partake of the Holy Eucharist.
4. Prepare yourself for this important sacrament by examining deep in your heart and confess, as required by our Lord.

**For memorization:** 1 Cor. 11:23-25

# Lesson 7

## Heavenly Community

The offering of the Eucharist is divine, and when we partake of it, it opens before us heavenly realms. It is here on the altar, Oh Lord where Thou art, that heaven and man find one another. Behold! the place is filled with a host of angels and saints.

### Fellowship with the heavenly hosts

The Eucharist is a fellowship between God and the believers, as well as a fellowship between the seen and an unseen Church, and a fellowship between those who struggle and the ones who have completed their struggle in faith.

If we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is Himself present on the altar, then we consequently believe that the angels and archangels stand before Him, as we repeat in the prayers of the liturgy, in a heavenly fellowship. In St. Basil's liturgy, the priest says addressing the Lord on the altar, "Thou art the One before whom the many eyed cherubims, and the six winged seruphims stand praising God without ceasing saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts, the earth and the heaven are full of Thy glory..."



St. John Chrysostom said, "...all the hosts of heaven attend and participate in the hymn of praise, and the place nearest to the altar is crowded with angels that make supplication with the priest,... and the fire of the Holy Spirit descends and behold the blood gushes from the side of the unblemished Lamb to be collected in the cup for our sanctification.... therefore how do you, Oh Christian, dare to attend the offering without due reverence and awe,... for the Church is none other than heaven itself.



## **Fellowship in remembering the saints**

The prayers of the liturgy reveal the fellowship which exists between the believers alive, and the departed believers. The Church prays for the forgiveness of their sins, invoking upon them the mercy of the Lord if at any moment of their lives they fell victims of human weakness that the Lord may forgive them what they had forgetfully committed in His sight.

In the liturgy of St. Gregory, the priest says, "Render me worthy to stand before Thine holy altar without exposing myself to Thy damnation. That I may raise the bloodless offering with a clean heart, for the forgiveness of my own sins and the shortcomings and failings of Thine people, that our forefathers and brethren who have died in the Orthodox faith may rest content."

In the prayers of commemoration in the liturgy of St. Basil, the priest says, "For this, O Lord, is Thy Son's commandment, that we together remember Thy saints. Remember, O Lord, all the saints who have pleased Thee since the creation. May our holy fathers and forefathers, the prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs and confessors and the souls find rest in the bosom of Abraham, Issac and Jacob... all the ones whose names we mentioned or failed to mention, who are in the mind of each one of us, and those whom we have forgotten, grant that they should find rest in paradise, in eternal life in the heavenly Jerusalem."

The fellowship in the Eucharist is further clarified by the fact that after the commemoration prayer, the priest raises his voice in the most humble words of prayer of intercession for the deceased saints, mentioning that he and the congregation are not worthy for such a fellowship. The priest says:

"We, our Lord, are not worthy to intercede for them, but they who are present before Thy holy Son, should intercede for our weakness, and humility. Forgive our sins, turn Thy eyes from our transgression for the sake of their prayers for us - This we ask for the sake of Thine great name after which we are called."

Thus, heaven and earth are brought together in an unbreakable harmony and fellowship. The angels in heaven and our fathers, who died in the faith, pray for us that our faith may be perfected, and the struggling Church makes intercession for them. The Church, in this holy union and fellowship, gives a prominent place to the Virgin Mary, whose name is mentioned in prayers recited silently or loudly, in addition to the singing of certain hymns in her praise. The priest burns incense several times during the service in front of the Virgin's icon.

### **Meditation and discussion**

The struggling members of the Church unite with the victorious Church several times during the holy liturgy through the following prayers and activities:

1. Prayers raised by the believers for them;
2. Prayers about the intercession of saints for the believers;
3. Praises given to glorify the hosts of heaven and saints;
4. Icons placed in prominent places in the Church and incense burnt before them;
5. Burning incense during mention of their intercession as symbolic of their prayers which are like sweet incense seen by John in his apocalypse (revelation) before the throne of God and the holy altar.
6. Mention of their biographies read from the Sinaxarion (the book of the Chronicles of the Saints), holding liturgies for commemorating them on days they were martyred. Dedicate a day each month for the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael.

### **Suggested activities:**

1. Light a candle before the Virgin's icon, and before the icon of the patron saint of the Church.

2. Ask for the intercession of saints and angels in liturgical and private prayers.
3. Mention names of our deceased relatives during the liturgy.
4. Assist at celebrations held by the Church for saints.

**Questions:**

1. Why does the Church mention the names of the deceased during the liturgy?
2. Why does the Church mention the names of angels, archangels, saints, and in particular, the Virgin Mary?
3. Which are the prayers in the liturgy with the mention and praise of saints?

**For memorization:**

Learn the prayer for the deceased:

“O Thou, full of mercy, renew Thy creation at the resurrection. O Lord, comfort and absolve our departed ones, who died with hope in Thee, and await Thy coming. O Lord, make them dwell in the bosom of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob. May the living and the departed together cry out: ‘Blessed is He, who has come, and is to come, and give life to the dead’, Amen

## Lesson 8

### Praise, Thanksgiving and Communion

#### Our preparation to accept the king

The Church on earth exists in order to praise its King, its Savior and Bridegroom. It reminds us of God's favors and gifts, and to praise His holy name. Since the time of the apostles, the Christians used to meet with one accord praising the Lord happily. Because of the greatness of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the Church makes itself ready for this sacrament by reading psalms, the night before. And many a time, the holy fathers would spend the whole night praying and praising, until they were ready to participate in the prayers of the Holy Eucharist in the morning.

#### Praising in the Holy Eucharist

When John the beloved disciple was taken away to see the new Church, he saw the praising and the service in heaven: "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne... the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands... And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" (Rev. 5: 11-13)



This lovely truth that John the seer saw is the eternity we are going to live when we reign with God. And because the "Eucharist" is the living picture of the supper of the Lamb and the heavenly banquet, the Church had made the prayers of the holy liturgy full of heavenly and hot praises.

So there is the “Vespers” when we sing, in a lovely tune, psalms 148, 149, 150 (Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels, praise Him, all His host). And there is the hymn in which we praise “Mary, the Theotokos,” and there is the midnight praise that starts: “Get up, children of light, let us praise the God of hosts that He may grant us our Salvation.”

When the priest says that the archangels and the angels constantly surround God and serve Him with songs and praise, we also wish to join in their hymn and sing: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts, Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.” There are also the choir hymns, such as “The Trisagion” (Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal...), “Rejoice O Mary.” “The Cherubim worship Thee” and the Psalm: “Praise God in His Sanctuary.”

In entering the Church, one sees and hears the choir of singers praising whole-heartedly with one accord and singing the Church hymns that make your heart stop from extreme joy.

### **Thanksgiving in the Eucharist**

Again and again, the chief celebrant says, “May we offer praise and thanks to Thee, Thy only begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. To give thanks means to lead a life pleasing to God. Hence this thanksgiving service leads to a godly life.

As we consider the sacrament of the Eucharist as the sacrament of praising and love of God, it is also called the ‘sacrament of thanksgiving’ because when Jesus Christ took bread on his hands, He gave thanks, broke and gave... The faithful Christians, whatever their holiness may be, do not deserve to be slaves to God; but in spite of this, He makes them His children and, more than that, gives them the right to communion in His holy flesh and blood. This blessing is God’s greatest gift to mankind.

That is why this sacrament is called the sacrament of thanksgiving. There are many prayers in the holy liturgy that has the meaning of thanks. The priest starts the Liturgy with a prayer of thanksgiving: "Let us give thanks unto the beneficent and merciful God....". The 1st part of the canon is a dialogue between the priest and the people:

"The Lord be with you all." "And with thy spirit."

"Let us lift up our hearts." "We lift them up unto the Lord."

"Let us give thanks (or Eucharist) unto the Lord."

The whole Church is gathered together around our Lord Jesus. And when we are in the presence of God and remember all that He has done, we bow down and offer Him our thanks. We continue our prayer singing: "We praise thee, we bless thee, we give thanks to thee, O Lord, and we pray unto thee, O our God."

We must thank God who gave us through the sacrament of the Eucharist:

1. The abiding in Him. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6: 56).

2. The growing in faith and eternal life. "This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." (John 6: 58).

3. Offering us life and resurrection. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6: 54). This is why the priest says in his prayer after the communion, "Our mouth is filled with joy, and our tongue with exultation."

He makes our food the Body and Blood of His Son, so that when we receive it in the Holy Communion, we will receive the new life of Jesus Christ in us. When God has done all this, what can we do but give Him all our thanks? To thank God is the most natural and most perfect thing for man to do; then only we see God as the meaning of all our life.

**Questions:**

1. Show the Importance of praise in the sacrament of Eucharist.
2. The sacrament of Eucharist called the sacrament of thanksgiving. Why?

**Activities:**

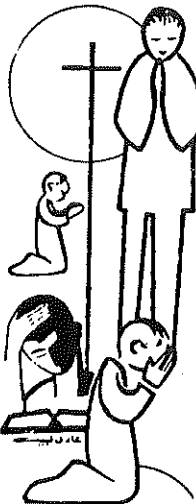
1. Make a collection of prayers and thanksgiving from the "Liturgy Book," meditate on its words and try to memorize some of it.
2. Prepare yourself for the Communion by prayer and praise giving with the congregation.
3. Beware of literal understanding or scepticism, and praise out of habit. Lift your heart always in praise with real eternal happiness.

## Lesson 9

### Eucharist in daily life

#### Our new life in the world

Our return from the 'Feast of the Kingdom' into the life of this world, to our homes, our families, friends and neighbors, is one of the most important parts of the Eucharist. Something happens to us while we are in the Church. We see and taste and feel something different. We see a vision of God's kingdom; we become a part of God's love and life when we receive His food of new life. Perhaps, we even begin to look at our world in a different way. Perhaps we begin to see it as a wonderful gift of His love. But now, as we return, we must tell others of our experiences. We must help other people to understand what it means to live a new life in Jesus Christ.



The following liturgical prayer makes us feel that, participation in the Eucharist means living the life of the risen Christ:

“Thou hast purified us, Thou wilt untie us unto Thyself, through our Communion of Thy heavenly Sacraments. Grant us, O Lord, a mind and a power of understanding that we may flee from every evil for ever, and grant that we may do Thy will at all times, proclaiming Thy glory everywhere.”

As we leave the Church we carry with us the blessing and peace and strength of Jesus Christ. We go back to our daily lives as witnesses of His glory. Prophet Elisha received the spirit of Elijah and when he came to the other disciples, they prostrated before him saying that the spirit of Elijah was in Elisha. In a similar way, those who see the participants after Holy Qurbana must say that the



spirit of Jesus Christ is in them. The work of our Lord Jesus in the world now continues through us. We are now the Body of Christ. We have the gift of new life. Through us, the world itself can be made new, as long as we live in Jesus Christ. Read carefully the prayer of Jesus to His father: "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth" (John 17: 18, 19).

### **Joy in God**

The fruit of the Eucharist is the real internal joy: the believers in the time of the apostles, used to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit because they regularly attended the prayer and communion and teachings together. And this joy is clearly noticed on their faces as a sign of internal peace throughout their daily lives.

### **Keeping the Testament**

In the holy liturgy the priest repeats the words of Jesus to His disciples: "This is my Body....this is my Blood of the New Testament. Each time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim my death and confess my resurrection and remember me until I come."

The real believer has to keep this Testament (Covenant) which he has accepted while in the Church through the following steps:

The continuous proclamation in the name of Jesus Christ: Whether by serving others or by our calm reputation, makes the sacrament abide in us.

Our confession of His resurrection: This gives us strength to overcome every bodily anxiety and desire.

Anxiously waiting for Christ: Whether in His coming, or our going to Him, are all proofs of the effect of the Holy Liturgy on us and we experience this feeling whenever we partake of the Lord's Table.

### **Prayer of the final benediction**

The priest says this prayer after the communion so that the effect of the sacrament goes on throughout our daily life:

“Abide in them, walk among them, raise their hearts from every dirty thought, and help them in every good work. Grant them Your love for the eternal life. O Lord, save Thy people, lead them forever, by the power of Thy life-giving Cross.”

#### **Questions:**

1. How do I prepare myself to attend the Liturgy?
2. How do I keep the grace of the Liturgy in my life?
3. What is the relationship between the Liturgy and my internal daily life?
4. What is the relationship between the Liturgy and my social life?
5. What is the meaning of, “I live not I but Christ in me”? How do I feel this through the liturgy?

#### **Activities:**

1. Self-examination in the light of the previous teachings.
2. Training of the self to preserve the blessings of the liturgy?
3. Distribution of a pamphlet containing the wonderful conceptions of the liturgy?

#### **Memorization:**

Responses from the liturgy

# **UNIT III**

## **THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

What is a Council?

The three Great Councils

The faith of our Church

# Lesson 10

## What is a Council?

### **The Spirit of unity**

The Early Church spread all over the world in the first century. The Holy Spirit led the apostles, the disciples and the bishops of the Church in understanding and interpreting the Christian faith. They always prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit who guided their thinking and preserved their unity. From time to time, some Church leaders who depended on their own knowledge and interpretation, started teaching in ways different from what the Church had received through the Scripture and from our Lord Himself.

But the Church was always careful to preserve the spirit of unity among the Christians all over the world, and protect our faith from any misunderstanding or wrong interpretation. When any controversy was raised, the leaders of the Church assembled together and examined the different views and declared the Orthodox faith of the Church. The bishops of the Church came from different parts of the world and met together in the form of an ecumenical council.

### **The first Council**

The first council in the life of the Christian Church was assembled in Jerusalem at the time of the apostles of our Lord. We read in the Holy Bible about this first council in the book of Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 15.

After the ascension of our Lord to heaven, His disciples and apostles received the Holy Spirit, and started preaching salvation of Christ to the world. Paul and Barnabas, two of the apostles, preached among the Gentiles (those who did not belong to Jewish religion) in different parts of the world. When they finished their mission, they traveled to Antioch, they met

with the disciples and the Church there, and told them about all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

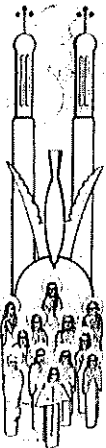
### The Controversy

While they were in Antioch, some of the Jews who became Christians insisted that the Gentiles cannot be saved unless they first follow the law of Moses before becoming Christians. Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them. They had long arguments and debates on this subject.

The Church of Antioch appointed the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, and some other members of the Church of Antioch to go to Jerusalem. When they reached there, they explained to the disciples about the dispute that arose in Antioch and asked their guidance.

### The Council of Jerusalem

The apostles and the bishops of the Church were assembled in Jerusalem to consider this matter. Paul and Barnabas told them how some of the Christian Jews insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised before becoming Christians. The members of the Council prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit. They knew that they could not decide on matters of faith by their own wisdom.



The members of the Council had long discussions about the matter. Then St. Peter rose and said that God has given the Holy Spirit to all those in the whole world who believed in Him, and purified their hearts by faith. He said, "We believe that we (all men, Gentiles and Jews) shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ". "Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10)

St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem reminded the assembly how a group of Gentiles were converted by Peter. He also said that the prophecies of the Old Testament agreed to this. He gave his opinion that the Gentiles should not be given unnecessary burden. He said, "... we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15: 19-20).

All the members of the Council agreed on the proposal of St. James, and wrote a message to the Churches informing them of the council's decision.

### **The spirit of solidarity in the Councils**

The Council of Jerusalem was a model for the administration of the Church through the centuries. The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, continued to build up clear understanding on Christian faith. Heretical interpretations were examined and refuted by ecumenical Councils. The Councils offer testimony to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. In the ecumenical councils, bishops from all over the world expressed true unity and love of the whole Church.

#### **Questions:**

1. What was the purpose of the first Council of Jerusalem?
2. What was the Law of Moses which some men tried to impose on the Gentiles who wanted to become Christians?
3. Was it necessary for the Church to discuss its problem in a Council?
4. What was the decision of the Council? And how did the members reach this decision?

#### **Discussion:**

1. Read Acts 15: 23-29, and find out the content of the letter which the Council sent to the Churches.
2. Compare the ecumenical spirit of the Church Fathers with the individual approach of the heretics.
3. How were the Councils guided by the Holy Spirit?

# Lesson 11

## The Three Great Councils

In the first three centuries, Christians were persecuted and thousands were martyred for their faith. During the time of persecution, the Christians tried to defend their faith and died for it. Christian beliefs were simple, pure and strong. In A.D. 313, the Roman Emperor, Constantine accepted Christianity and forbade all persecution of Christians. In few years, Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Statesmen and officials became Christians.

The Christian Church faced an important task in the following two centuries. They began to explain the Christian faith; and to answer the challenges of pagan schools and heretical philosophies which continued to influence the minds of many people.

### **The danger of Arianism**

At the beginning of the 4th century A.D., Arius, a priest in the city of Alexandria started a strange teaching. He taught that Jesus Christ was not God in the same sense as God the Father. He was not of the same essence, and not eternal. Arius was a scholar. He was able to popularize his ideas among simple-minded people as well as among some highly educated people who were still attached to pagan thinking. He was a good propagandist, cultivating his ideas by visits, speeches, letters, and songs in which he formulated his theological arguments.

The teaching of Arius was more dangerous for Christianity than the worst persecutions. If Christ was not God, who had become man, suffered and died for men, and had conquered death through His death, then Christianity would be only some moral idea like what pagan philosophers had offered. Arius taught that God was the Supreme Divine Being completely

separated from mankind. Christianity professed faith in God who so loved man that He Himself became man and suffered and died for the sins of man.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1-14).

### **The Council of Nicaea**

The Church of Alexandria felt the danger of the Arian heresy. Alexandrus, the Patriarch of the Coptic Church at that time, condemned the teachings of Arius and tried to guide him back to the Christian faith. Arius complained to the Emperor Constantine who finally decided to call a general ecumenical council in order to settle the dispute.

Three hundred and eighteen bishops and priests from the Churches all over the world were assembled in Nicaea in Asia Minor in the spring of 325 A.D. Among them, there was Bishop Paul from Syria with his burned hands carrying the signs of the persecution he had suffered, and St. Paphnotius and St. Potamon, both blinded in one eye and lamed from the tortures inflicted on them, Patriarch Alexandrus and his deacon, St. Athanasius the Great, from Egypt.



The Council studied the teachings of Arius and examined them carefully. Long and heated arguments took place including a lengthy dialogue between the young deacon Athanasius and Arius. Athanasius explained the Orthodox faith showing how the Son is of one essence with the Father. The Council finally confirmed that Arius had distorted the Christian faith. The fathers of the Council, led by Athanasius, proclaimed the faith of the Church in clear terms:



'We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, the things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all worlds; light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father.'

The Council of Nicaea was one of the greatest events in the history of Christianity. It has brought together for the first time, the largest number of bishops who formulated the Creed of the Church, and saved it from the Arian heresy.

### **The Council of Constantinople**

The Christian faith was again threatened by a new heresy. Macedonius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, taught that the Holy Spirit was created. A second ecumenical Council was assembled in Constantinople, in May 381 A.D. by the invitation of Emperor Theodosius the Great. One hundred and fifty bishops attended the Council. After lengthy discussions, the Council refuted the heresy of Macedonius and completed the Creed of the Church.

'We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. ...Who spoke by the prophets ... We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.'

### **The Council of Ephesus**

After fifty years, Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, preached that God was not born from the Virgin Mary, but she had given birth to a human being and God dwelt in him later on. He forced his teachings on the Church. His heresy reached Alexandria. The Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Cyril the Great, wrote to Nestorius advising him to give up his wrong teaching. He also wrote to many bishops around the world warning them of the danger of the new heresy. Finally, a third ecumenical Council was assembled in Ephesus in A.D. 431 to settle the matter. Two hundred bishops attended the Council. The Council refuted the teaching of Nestorius and declared the introduction to the Creed:

'We magnify thee, O Mother of the True Light; and we glorify thee, O saint Mother of God. For you had borne to us

the Savior of the entire world. He came and saved our souls.

Glory be to You, Christ, our Master and our King, the honor of the apostles, the crown of the martyrs, the joy of the righteous, the stability of the Churches, and the forgiveness of sins.

We evangelize and preach the Holy Trinity, one God-head. Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord send Your blessings... Amen.'

## **Summary on Councils**

### **Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325**

- St. Athanasius the Great was the notable defender of the Orthodox faith.

- Heretic from the city of Alexandria was Arius, a priest

- Council conclusions: It condemned the Arian heresy which taught that Christ was not God. It proclaimed the first part of the Creed; it also established the date on which Easter is to be celebrated.

### **Council of Constantinople, A.D.381**

- St. Gregory, the theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa were the defenders of the Orthodox faith.

- The heretic was Macedonius, the Patriarch of Constantinople.

- Council conclusions: It defined the teaching of the Church on the Holy Trinity, and in particular on the Holy Spirit. The council completed the Nicene Creed as "We believe in the Holy Spirit ..... , Amen.

### **Council of Ephesus, A.D.431**

- St. Cyril of Alexandria was the defender of the Orthodox faith.

- The heretic was Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople.

- Council conclusions: It defined the Church's teaching on the Holy Virgin (Theotokos) Mary, Mother of our Lord. It condemned the heresy of Nestorius who taught that Christ had two separate natures. It declared the text of the Creed as complete, and forbade any change to it in future.

**Questions:**

1. What did Arius teach? Why was Arianism dangerous for Christianity?
2. What was the contribution made by the three great councils to the Christian faith?

**Activities:**

1. Find out further information on the struggle of St. Athanasius the Great, against Arianism. (Refer lesson 15)
2. Make a large chart showing the work accomplished by the three Councils.

**For memorization:**

Memorize some decisions of the councils as discussed in this lesson.

## Lesson 12

### The faith of our Church

The three great ecumenical councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus stated the Creed of the Church, and preserved the Christian faith according to the Scripture and the teachings of the apostles and the Fathers of the Church. The creed has put the Christian faith in short and clear terms, easy for everybody to learn. The Churches all over the world adopted the Creed in their liturgies and in their daily prayers. Students in Church classes studied the Creed and teachers explained to them the meaning of every verse in it.

#### The Creed

We believe in one true God, the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible;

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; born of the Father before all worlds, light of light; very God of very God; begotten, not made of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made; Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven; and was incarnate of Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, by the Holy Spirit; and became man; and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; and suffered and died, and was buried; and the third day He rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sat on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again in His great glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father; and who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets and Apostles;

And in one Holy Catholic (universal) and apostolic Church; We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; We look for the resurrection of the dead and the new life of the world to come, Amen.

In one of the Sunday School classes, the teacher and two of his students held a dialogue on the topic of the councils. The responses to the students' questions are given below:

### **Why do we call God "The Father"?**

In the Old Testament, man was alienated from God because of sin. Through the salvation which Christ has offered to us, we have become sons of God and He has become "Our Father," as we call him in the Lord's Prayer. He is the source of everything, and beyond the comprehension of the human mind. He is invisible, and therefore cannot be comprehended by the physical senses. St. John explains it to us: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made him known" (John 1: 18).

### **Jesus Christ, 'One Essence with the Father'?**

The Council of Nicea formulated this statement to reply on the heresy of Arius and showed that God became man in Jesus Christ. The Son is one with the Father, and whoever has seen the Son has also seen the Father. And all that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son. At the beginning of the Gospel of St. John we read:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1: 1,14).

In the first Epistle of St. John we get the same meaning: "That which was from the beginning, whom we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands,... we proclaim also to you, so that

you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1: 1-3).

### **The Holy Spirit is ‘the Giver of life’?**

The Council of Constantinople stated this phrase to reply on the heresy of Macedonius who wrongly taught that the Holy Spirit is created. The Council answered him that the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of God, the Life Giver.”

Our Lord said that “God is spirit” (John 4: 24). He promised His disciples that, “But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses (John 15: 26, 27). Indeed, through the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to witness Christ and call the world to the Christian faith. Through living in the Spirit, we could also show our Christian witness and become light to the world.

The last part of the Creed puts together the Church, Baptism, Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. We believe in one Church because it is the body of the one Christ with whom we all are united in Holy Communion. And we acknowledge one Baptism because it symbolizes the death of Christ and His burial. We are buried with Him once since He died only once, and that was quite sufficient for the salvation of the whole world. We are then raised with Him unto eternal life.

### **Questions and Discussions:**

1. What feeling do you develop in your life as you say, ‘Father Almighty’ in the Creed?
2. How do you differentiate between the Christian faith in God’s care and protection, and those who believe in fatalism?
3. Expand the meaning of the following statements of the Creed:

- (a) 'Born of the Father before all worlds'
  - (b) 'Of one essence with the Father'
  - (c) 'Who proceeds from the Father'
4. Which parts of the Creed answer the heresy of Arius, and the heresy of Macedonius?
  5. What is the relationship of the person of the 'Son' to your personal life?
  6. What is the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives as persons and as Church? How is this action expressed in the Creed?
  7. The last part of the Creed confirms our belief in 'One Church', 'One Baptism', and 'The Resurrection of the dead'. How does this relate to our faith in the Holy Trinity?

# UNIT IV

## GREAT FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

Who is a Church Father?

Apostolic Fathers

The defender of Orthodoxy -  
St. Athanasius, the Apostolic Father

The great teachers of the Church

Oriental Fathers

The local Fathers

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Fathers



# Lesson 13

## Who is a Church Father?

In the divine liturgy of St. Basil, the Church commemorates the principal Church fathers. The priest says:

“Moreover, Lord, it is a commandment of Thine Only Begotten Son, to remember Thy Holy Saints. Remember, O Lord all the saints who have pleased Thee since the beginning: our holy fathers, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the evangelists, the preachers, the martyrs and the confessors... St. Stephen, the arch-deacon and first martyr, St. Mark, St. Severus the patriarch, the great teacher Dioscorus, St. Athanasius and St. Peter ...”

The Church remembers the saints in every liturgy, and celebrates their feasts, and requests their prayers and blessing. The Church reads the biographies of the saints and rejoices in their saintly examples.

### **The Apostolic Fathers**

The apostolic fathers were the contemporaries of Christ and the disciples of the apostles who received the teaching from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself. Among the apostolic fathers we have Ignatius, the “Theophorus” (i.e. “The Bearer of God”), bishop of Antioch who was martyred; Polycarp who was ordained bishop of Symerna by the Apostle John and suffered martyrdom in a most fascinating manner; and Clement, bishop of Rome who assisted St. Paul in his mission.

The apostolic fathers were persecuted. They faced death with great courage because they were faithful to their Christian belief. Although they were few in number, they succeeded in

spreading the Christian faith in many parts of the world. They established Churches and helped the Christians preserve the word of God. Some of them wrote letters to various Churches urging them to stand firm in their faith and helped them to understand more clearly the meaning of faith. They were honest to the message they received from the apostles who had actually lived with the Lord and were His disciples.

The apostolic fathers confronted the pagan philosophers and refuted their arguments. They were able to offer stronger and more convincing arguments supporting the Christian faith, and overcame the false teachings of paganism. But, in the course of their struggle they had to face persecution. Many of them were put to death. But their firm faith gave new vigor to the young Church.

### **The Fathers of the Councils**

When the age of persecution came to an end at the time of Emperor Constantine, a new age of suffering was awaiting the Church. Heresies spread and caused dissention among the Christians. Church fathers defended the Orthodox faith against the heretics and helped in the success of the ecumenical councils.

Among the great fathers of these councils are St. Athanasius, the "Defender of the Faith", St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Cyril of Alexandria, known as the "Pillar of the Faith." They contributed to the formulation of our faith, and helped the councils in defeating the heretics. During the period of the three Great Councils, i.e. from 325 A.D. to 431 A.D., the Church produced great teachers, such as St. Basil, the writer of the liturgy known after his name, St. John Chrysostom, the famous preacher, and St. Gregory Nazianzen. These fathers were the chief influence which led to the final defeat of Arianism and the other heresies. More on these saints is given in Lesson 15, 'The Defender of Orthodoxy', and in Lesson 16, 'The great teachers of the Church'.

## **The Monastic Fathers**

Monasticism was a new expression of the ascetic spirit which existed in the early apostolic Church. The greatness of the monastic fathers is not in what they said or did, but in what they were. They sought self-understanding through the discovery of their true self. They knew God in their inner life by means of purity of the heart and self-control. They developed their inward spirituality through a long process of practicing asceticism and struggling against evil.

St. Antony is called “the father of monks,” and St. Pachomius is known as the “founder of the Coenobitic (community) monasticism.” Among other famous monastic fathers are: St. Basil of Cappadocia and Mar Ephraim, the Syrian. The lives of monastic leaders had illuminated the way to follow the example of struggling to uphold their faith and to grow in spiritual life. The depth of their asceticism had enriched the spirituality of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

## **Local Fathers**

Each Church has its own record of great men. They left their impact on the life of their Church and became examples for others to follow. The Coptic Church remembers St. Shenouda, the great monastic and national leader, and Abba Pishoi. In the mid-nineteenth century A.D., Patriarch Cyril IV led the revival of the Coptic Church. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Anba Abraam, Bishop of Fayoum, offered an example of piety and humility. The Ethiopian Church always remembers Frumentius, known as Anba Salama, the first bishop of Axum, and St. Tekia Helmanot, the great monastic leader.

The Syrian Church always remembers St. Gregory Bar Hebraeus and St. Jacob Baradaeus as their local Fathers. The Armenian Church recalls St. Gregory, known as the illuminator and the Church celebrates feasts commemorating his birth, persecution and the translation of his relics. The Church also remembers St. Mesrob, and St. Vartan.

**Questions:**

1. Why does the Church mention many saints in the Divine Liturgy?
2. Who are the apostolic fathers? What was their contribution to the Christian faith?
3. How did the fathers of the Great Councils share in building up the Orthodox faith and conquering the heretics?
4. "The Greatness of the monastic fathers lies not in what they said or did, but in what they were. What is the meaning of this statement, and what do we learn from them?"

**Activities:**

1. Summarize on the lives of some of the local saints of your Church.
2. Identify the icons of saints in your Church, and write biographies of these saints on the wall bulletin of your class.

# Lesson 14

## Apostolic Fathers

The apostolic Fathers are the early Church Fathers who lived in the age of the apostles of Jesus Christ and became their disciples. We shall study the lives of two of them.

### Saint Ignatius

It is said that he was the child whom Christ set in the midst of the disciples as an example of humility. As Ignatius grew up, his love for his Lord increased, and his faith grew. His one ambition was to teach people about Christ. So the apostles made him bishop of the Church at Antioch.

Ignatius was zealous in his work. He wrote letters aimed at strengthening the Churches in the Christian faith as he had learned it from the apostles themselves. Through his life and teaching, he was able to win many pagan people to Christ.

**A daring faith:** On his way to fight the Persians, the Emperor Trajan passed through Antioch. There he met Ignatius, and the following conversation took place:



- Are you Ignatius Theophorus?
- Yes.
- What is the meaning of your name?
- Bearer of God.
- And do we not also bear our gods to the wars in order to be victorious?
- How do you consider these graceless statues of gods?
- Are you blaspheming against our gods?

- Know, Oh king, that there is no God but one, the Creator of heaven and earth, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who became man in order to save us. If you believe in Him, you will be truly happy.

- Let us stop this senseless talk, and do what will save your life and win you favor in my sight: offer a sacrifice to my gods, and I shall make you the greatest of my priests.

- May God increase your wealth, Oh King. But I cannot do what you ask, for I am the priest of my Lord Jesus Christ, and to Him alone I offer my daily sacrifice.

The Emperor was so angry that he condemned him to exposure before the wild beasts in the Roman amphitheatre. When his Christian friends knew of his fate, they went to see him off with tears. As he passed through Smyrna, its bishops went out to meet him, and delegations from nearby Churches sought his blessing. So he wrote to them a letter, extracted as follows:

“Let your holy war of life chasten hypocrites and evil-doers. Conquer their hatred and unfairness by love and justice; their cruelty, by patience and prayer; and their treachery, by faithfulness. For the sake of Christ, bear injustice, loss, and persecution. Indeed, for His sake I bear all this, preferring my bonds to the treasures of the world. I rejoice in my sufferings for Him. Pray for me that I may find rest in heaven.”

Before leaving for Smyrna, Ignatius wrote to the Romans, saying:

“I am bound with chains for the love of Christ. But I fear that your love for me will bring me harm. I do not want

you to prevent my death. For if I am depriving of martyrdom now, on account of your love, it may be very difficult to be martyred later. I long for martyrdom in order to prove myself a Christian, not only in word, but also in deed. Let me then be thrown to the beasts. And may the beasts eat up all my body, so that its remains will be burden to no one.”

When Ignatius arrived in Rome, the believers there were happy to see him; but their happiness soon turned to sadness when they learnt of his fate. He stretched out his hands and blessed them. He prayed for the Church. And when he had finished praying, the soldiers took him to the amphitheatre and set upon him two hungry lions which ate him up, leaving only his bones. These bones were taken to Antioch.

May the blessings of his prayer be with us. Amen.

### **Saint Clement**

He was born in the city of Rome. As one of the nobles, he received a Greek education. He came to know of Christ through St. Paul, and was a contemporary of the apostles. He wrote the biography of the disciples, showing how they were tortured by kings and rulers. He preached the Gospel in several cities, and many believed through him. Then he became bishop of Rome and won many of its people to the knowledge of Christ. He labored for Christ not only in Rome but also in all the neighboring dioceses.



He is referred to by St. Paul in Phil 4: 3, “Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, (who have labored side by side with me in the gospel), whose names are in the book of life.”

**His Letters:** He wrote many letters,

teaching Christians and confirming them in the faith, which he had received from the apostles themselves. He once heard of division among the Corinthians, so he wrote to them, saying:

“Humility was your distinguishing characteristic. In fact, you need to submit to one another, and to listen carefully to the teachings of Christianity. You used to pray for all the brethren, forgiving one another. But now I notice among you envy, clamor, and persecution. Righteousness and peace have left you, for you have abandoned the fear of the Lord, and are now walking in sin.”

**Preaching in exile:** The Emperor Trajan heard of Clement and sent for him:

- Are you still worshipping the crucified one?
- Yes.
- Forsake Him, and kneel to our immortal gods.
- Impossible. Can your so-called “Immortal gods” save themselves if someone tried to steal them?

The Emperor was furious. He wanted to have him tortured but he feared the people of the city. So he banished him to a far-off place near Black Sea, and he was forced to work in the mines. He found about 2000 Christians who had been banished like him. They were very happy to see him. He helped them and confirmed them in the faith.

Water was not easily accessible to the people in exile. Clement prayed to God and the Lord guided him to a spring of water. They drank from it and praised the Lord. This incident brought many of the inhabitants of this place to the Lord Jesus. When the Emperor heard this, he wrote to the governor, giving orders for the torture of Clement. He was bound to an anchor and thrown into the Black Sea, and thus he received the crown of martyrdom. May the blessing of his prayer be with us, Amen.



**Questions:**

1. How do we testify about Christ? Give examples from the letters of St. Ignatius.
2. What virtues do you admire in the life of St. Ignatius?
3. St. Clement was able to glorify God before the Emperor, and later, in exile also. Explain how.

**Activities:**

1. Write a brief note on each St. Ignatius and St. Clement making clear the following points: - The time in which each lived.
  - The place of his ministry and that of his martyrdom.
  - One of his well-known sayings.

**For memorization:**

“I am bound with chains for the love of Christ” (Ignatius).

“I long for martyrdom in order to prove myself a Christian not only in word, but also in deed” (Ignatius).

# Lesson 15

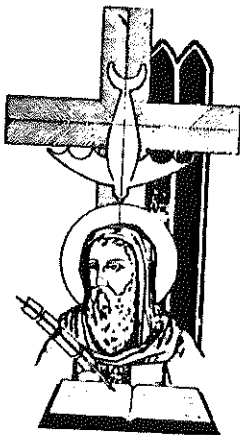
## The Defender of Orthodoxy

### St. Athanasius, Apostolic Father

#### Childhood signs

Athanasius was born in Alexandria in 296 A.D. to pagan parents. His father died while he was a child; he lived with his mother who sent him to one of the Christian schools. One day as the children were playing at the seaside, the Pope Alexandrus watched them as they solemnly acted the rite of baptism. He called them and asked them what they were doing.

The children said, "We are performing the rite of baptism on the suggestion of Athanasius, our friend". The Pope turned to Athanasius and could straight away see his love for Christianity and his eagerness to become a Christian.



When Athanasius was fifteen years old, his mother took him with her to the Pope asking to be baptized. Athanasius studied under famous doctors of the Church, and was ordained as deacon by the Pope, and then as archdeacon. He was of help to the Pope who consulted him on theological matters until the Arian heresy appeared.

#### Athanasius and the Arianism

Arius was a priest of Alexandria who started propagating a strange teaching namely that the Son had been created and therefore had no divine nature. The Church felt the danger of the Arian heresy. The great thinkers of the Church led by St. Athanasius "the deacon of Patriarch

Alexandrus” put all their efforts together to save the faith of the Church.

Three hundred and eighteen bishops responded to the call of Emperor Constantine the Great, and held a council at Nicea for the purpose of laying the principles of the Orthodox faith. The Council witnessed the debates which took place between Arius and Athanasius, the deacon, ending with the triumph of Athanasius whose arguments proved irrefutable. The Orthodox creed was formulated and Arius was excommunicated and exiled.

However, Arianism continued for the next fifty years. St. Athanasius spent the rest of his life struggling against this heresy denouncing it with his faith and courage, thus, securing for himself an immortal name in the history of the Church.

### **Athanasius as Pope**

After the death of Pope Alexander, Athanasius ascended to the see of St. Mark and peace reigned in the Church. The peace, however did not last long, as Arius succeeded in convincing the Emperor of his views. The Emperor in his turn sent word to the Pope in this sense that he too may accept him, but the Pope refused this request arguing this way:

“That which has been rejected by an ecumenical council, cannot be accepted except by the consent of another council.”

The emperor was enraged by the Pope’s answer but the Pope met him and was able to convince the emperor.

### **The conflict between error and truth**

The followers of Arius continued to fight Athanasius, convincing the emperor to exile him. A council was held at which false accusations were brought forth against Athanasius. His allegiance to the emperor was doubted and he was accused

of murdering a bishop called Arsanius. The bishop was asked to hide but his conscience was roused and he went to meet the representative of the emperor unfolding the whole matter to him. At the beginning of the council meeting, one of the conspirators held up a human arm which he claimed to be the arm of Arsanius and all accused Athanasius of the murder. While reading the charge, Arsanius himself appeared to show their wickedness and exposed their injustice.

The evil-doers struggled fiercely against Athanasius and the followers of Arius attacked him in several councils bringing many charges against him. He was accused of refusing to export grain to the emperor. As a result, the emperor exiled him to Treves in France. In his exile, Athanasius was well received, and during his sojourn there, he was able to establish spiritual relations with the local people. This was a good opportunity for him to write some important books.

Arius returned to Alexandria, but its inhabitants rejected him. The governor, fearing the revolt of the people, sent Arius back to the emperor in Constantinople with the purpose of getting the approval of the Pope on Arius' return. Athanasius prayed to God that He would solve the matter before Arius could kneel in the Church. On the day appointed for Arius to enter the Church, he was suddenly struck by some disease in the stomach and died.

Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. (Ps.34: 21)

This event greatly moved the emperor, drawing him towards Athanasius. On his death bed, the emperor decided that the Pope should return to his see.

The happiness of the Alexandrians at seeing their father was beyond description, and they received him with rejoicing. The followers of Arius, however did not cease to fight Athanasius, and they persisted in their hatred conspiring

against him. Athanasius's life was full of bitter times; once when he was told, "The world is all turned against you, Athanasius", he answered, "Me too, I am turned against the world", so he was known as "Athanasius Contra-Mundum."

After a life of a wonderful and continual struggle for the faith, Athanasius was victorious over the followers of Arius. He lived to see that day, when his struggle was at last rewarded. Thus, souls rested, and the faith started to take strong roots in the Churches due to his tears, his suffering and struggle. He was a chosen vessel to bear witness, and deserved to be called "The Apostolic", in likeness to the divine apostles. We are left with his sermons and important works which are in truth, a rich heritage for the Church.

### **Questions:**

1. What would have happened if the Arian teaching had not been suppressed?
2. Relate briefly the conflict between Athanasius and the followers of Arius.

### **Activities:**

1. Make a wall magazine about the "Defender of the Faith."
2. Ask for the intercession of this saint in your daily prayers, so that God may grant you the spirit of Athanasius and his faith.

### **For memorization:**

"We greatly wonder at the Lord's mercy; therefore we should not only carry His picture with us, but we should copy His divine life as an example, so that in times of suffering we do not complain or swear at our persecutors, but in all matters submit ourselves to God whose Judgment is just" (St. Athanasius).

# Lesson 16

## The great teachers of the Church

In this lesson, we will study the lives of four great teachers of the Church whose lives and teachings played a vital role in the growth and development of the Church.

### St. John Chrysostom

The Roman emperor had ordered the people of Antioch, a great city in Syria, to pay still more taxes and they refused. "The taxes we pay do not leave us enough money to buy bread for our children", they cried. Then a crowd of hot-tempered fellows ran out into the streets and smashed the statue of the emperor. Soon general rioting began, stores were broken into, and the soldiers who were sent to establish order were beaten up. It had happened before, that the emperor would order a whole city to be destroyed, so as to punish the city.

The old Archbishop of Antioch did not wait for the Emperor's decision. He set out for Constantinople to plead with the Emperor. It was frightening to think of all that might happen. In those days, there was just one place where Antiochians could find some comfort. In the city cathedral, a priest called John was preaching daily. Never had anyone preached like he did. He comforted them and yet he made them see their own faults. He gave them courage and hope. The old Archbishop returned bringing with him the emperor's forgiveness. The city would not be destroyed. The people would not have to suffer any more.

Who was that Father John who had kept up the people's courage, while making them see their faults? John was born in a rich family. He lost his father early, but his mother gave him a very good education and wanted to send him to a famous

university to become a lawyer. But John wanted to become a monk and live in the desert spending all his time praying to God. He went to the desert and stayed there for eight years, until the bishop of Antioch told him to come back and become a priest in Antioch. The name "Golden Mouthed Chrysostom" was given to him by a simple woman who heard one of his sermons:

"Oh, Father, she said. "You are golden-mouthed and your words are beautiful. But your teaching is like a deep well and my mind is like a short rope. It is difficult for me to dip up the water of your wisdom." John remembered what the woman said. He gave up the difficult manner of speaking and started teaching in a simple way that went straight to the people's hearts. When John began to preach everyone was silent. His sermons were preserved because people wrote them down as he spoke.



John served as a priest in Antioch for eighteen years. Then he was consecrated Bishop of Constantinople. His task was even harder and he had a lot of business to attend to. He supervised all the work of the Church to help the poor, and he went himself into prison cells, into the worst city slums, to help, comfort and teach the people.

The emperor's wife was a conceited and arrogant woman. She resented the sermons of Archbishop John because she felt they were reproaching her; so she persuaded the Emperor to have John arrested and exiled to a distant country on the shores of the Black Sea. For three years, John remained in a little town there surrounded by the love and respect of all the people. "We

would rather see the sun hidden, than have your golden-mouth silenced”, they said.

Then the emperor decided to send John further away and ordered his soldiers to treat him so badly. They hurried him along their journey without mercy. One day, he couldn't go any further and stopped at the little chapel of a martyred saint. That night the saint appeared to John, and asked for a priest to bring him Communion. Then he said quietly. “Glory be to God for all things.” And the golden-mouth was still. They buried him in the tomb of the martyr.

John did a great deal to establish the Order of Divine liturgy called “The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.” More on his life is given in Lesson 17 of Grade XI text.

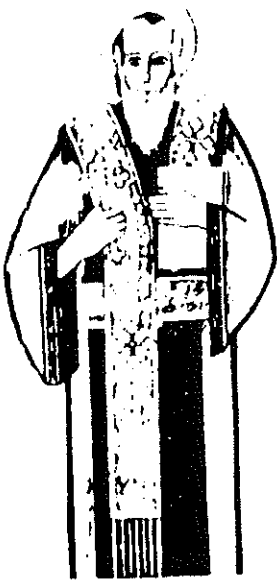
### **St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen**

In the year 357 A.D. a young man called Basil arrived in Athens from the distant city of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He had already distinguished himself in the schools of his own country and the teachers of the school of Athens quickly recognized the extraordinary qualities of his mind. But though Basil was eager to learn he was somehow different from the other students. He did make one good friend, Gregory, who also came from Cappadocia and was about three years older than Basil. It was a friendship that was to last all their lives and was to have a great influence on the future of the Church.



Gregory was a poet and a gentle dreamer. Basil was a





natural leader and organizer. Both friends had in common the same spiritual communion with God, and for understanding the eternal things.

After a few years, Basil felt that he had acquired all that the school of Athens could offer him. He did not return home but went to Egypt. There he visited the hermits who had begun to settle in the desert, devoting their time to prayer and spiritual life. Though his health was very poor, he had boundless energy. Gregory remained in Athens and became a teacher in the school.

Basil did not stay in Egypt very long. He had to go back to Caesarea to assist the bishop. Then he left again for his beloved desert, to an isolated spot not far from his home country. He did not remain there by himself; since other men joined him, Basil established a monastery. and was deeply impressed by the growth of this monastery. Basil brought his great spiritual experience and all his talents into practice in building up this kind of monastic life. He composed directions for the use of the monks, known as "The Longer Rule and The Shorter Rule."

It was a great joy for Basil when his friend Gregory came to join him. The two friends did not lead such a peaceful and happy life together for very long. When his brother died, Gregory had to go back to the city to help his father. Then Gregory and the bishop wrote Basil, begging him to return to Caesarea to serve in the defense of the Church. Basil obeyed the call. He left his beloved monastery, and came back to serve the aged bishop until his death. He then was elected as bishop of Caesarea.

A new field of work opened before Basil. No other bishop before him gave so much attention and thought to the Church's work for the poor. Infirmaries, orphanages, and schools were initiated by St. Basil. Help was given to all those who needed it. A tradition was established that the Church was to be responsible for helping those in distress.

St. Basil's name is perhaps best remembered in our Church because of the liturgy which bears his name. Throughout the eight years of his episcopacy, St. Basil defended the teachings of the Church on the Holy Trinity from the attacks of Arianism. Even the emperor turned to the side of Arianism, but Basil would not compromise on a single point of what he believed to be the holy truth either to please the emperor or to avoid division. "You can do nothing to me", he told the emperor, "Deprive me of wealth? I have none; send me into exile? I am in God's hand everywhere; torture me? I shall rejoice in suffering for Christ; kill me? You will reunite me with my Lord." In A.D. 379, he was heard in the prayer, saying, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit." He departed peacefully and the sound of hymn singing accompanied him to his grave. We will learn more on his contributions to the society in Lesson 16 of Grade XI text.

After him, St. Gregory carried on the gallant fight against Arianism for ten years. His teachings led to the triumph of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in the Second Council in A.D.381. St. Gregory was elected Bishop of Constantinople but he refused the honor and retired to his native city of Nazianz. The task was accomplished and St. Gregory died peacefully in 389 A.D

### **St. Gregory of Nyssa**

He was the younger brother of St. Basil, and one of the three Cappadocian fathers. Gregory was attracted towards the

monastic life, and joined a monastery in Pontus which had been founded by his brother, and became bishop of Nyssa in A.D.371. He fought Arianism and was thus exiled by Emperor Valens, and came back after the Emperor's death.

Gregory traveled widely to teach, and attended a number of Church councils. He was an eminent theologian with a wide scope of knowledge, and a prolific author on the subject



of the Divine Trinity, explaining to the teachers of the Church how to explain the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Salvation and the Holy Sacraments. Gregory wrote about chastity, explaining that the spirit of the chaste person is united with Christ. He also left us a record of his wonderful sister Makrina whose life and thinking had greatly influenced him and the rest of his brothers. He also left a number of treasures on the conception of the Son, and the procession of the Holy Spirit. He distinguished himself at the Council of

Constantinople where he defended the true faith.

### **Questions:**

1. What is the most outstanding gift of St. John Chrysostom?
2. His opposition of the queen's evil acts brought him trouble; what was it? Do you agree or disagree with his behavior? Explain.
3. Describe the friendship of Gregory and Basil, and what were its consequences?
4. What was the most outstanding common contribution made by the three Cappadocian fathers?

**Activities:**

Write on the bulletin board famous quotations of the great teachers of the Church, and a summary of their biographies.

**Quotations:**

“Don’t get angry at him who offends you; have you not seen that arrows pierce a hard body, but they twist as they pierce through a flexible rubber body thus likewise is the offence. It hits the one who opposes it, but misses him who takes it gently. If you react by anger, you give value to the offence, but if you remain silent you succeed in embarrassing your offender and in showing your own poise. Why are you sad when somebody points at you saying “this poor thing”. Only remember your own nature, for you brought nothing into the world, and you cannot take anything out of the world; so what poverty can exceed the poverty of man?” (St. Basil the Great)

“Let us be like Christ, for Christ became like us, Let us become like God through Him, as He became human for our sake. He became poor so that, by His poverty you might become rich, taking the form of a slave to grant us freedom” (St. Gregory Nazianzen).

“Meditation is wonderful, and so is service, for one of them lifts us from this earth to reach the holy life restoring our souls to what they were created for, the other receives Christ and serves Him, giving an evidence of this love by works” (St. Gregory Nazianzen).

# Lesson 17

## Oriental Fathers

In this lesson, we will discuss the lives of four famous fathers of the Oriental Churches whose struggle and teachings played an important role in the history of the Church and in confirming the Orthodox faith.

### St. Dioscorus

He was the Patriarch of Alexandria and one of the great champions of our faith. The name of this holy man is closely associated with holy zeal for the Orthodox faith, and steadfastness.

In his youth, Dioscorus was the disciple of St. Cyril who was known as "the Pillar of faith," and whom Dioscorus succeeded to the patriarchal see in the year 444 A.D.; it was a time of turmoil for the Church which was struggling against the rise of heresies, and in particular, the Nestorian heresy.



Emperor Theodosius asked Dioscorus to hold the Council of Ephesus in 441 A.D. to discuss the case of Eutyches who had appealed for reopening of his case after his excommunication by the patriarch of Constantinople for his heresy. Dioscorus thus headed the Second Council of Ephesus held in 441 A.D. at which Eutychus went back on his heresy and was accepted by the

Council. However, he again returned to his heresies and was once more excommunicated.

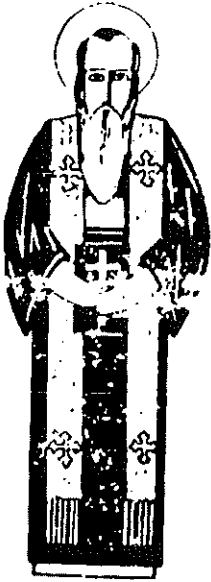
Bishop Leo of Rome sent a message with his representatives to the bishop of Constantinople, known as "Tome of Leo", which says: "In truth, Christ came in both the Divine and the Human forms; the former aroused wonder by the miracles he wrought, and the latter received the insults." But this letter was not read at the Council.

Bishop Leo attacked Dioscorus and the Council for having ignored his message and found no peace till he had succeeded in holding a counter council known as the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 A.D. in the reign of Emperor Mercion.

It was at Chalcedon that the representatives of Leo asked to read the Pope's message, the "Tome of Leo", but Dioscorus objected because of the theological defects it implied. The representatives were outraged and asked to expel him, and finally the Council was adjourned and a meeting was held at which Dioscorus was expelled from the Council by force and imprisoned in his house, and a verdict was given excommunicating and exiling him.

Dioscorus was exiled by the emperor to one of the islands of the Aegean Sea where he went through a great deal of suffering and persecution so that he sent this message to his bishops saying: "this is what we have to bear courageously for the sake of our faith." The people held firmly to the Orthodox faith bringing them under the oppression of the emperor who carried out by the help of his soldiers a number of slaughters. Much blood was shed and many were martyred for the Orthodox faith. Dioscorus himself died in exile.

## **St. Severus, Patriarch Of Antioch (465 - 538 A.D)**



He was educated in Alexandria and attracted by the life of asceticism and worship, he became a monk. Severus went to Constantinople in A.D. 508 where he successfully secured the support of Emperor Anastasius for the Orthodox monks oppressed on account of their belief in the One United Nature of Christ. In 512 A.D., he succeeded Patriarch Flavius (who was deposed) to the See of Antioch... But in A.D.518 when Justin became emperor, he deposed Severus who fled to Alexandria seeking refuge with Patriarch Thimothios. Several attempts were made for reconciliation, but they all failed and finally the emperor excommunicated him.

Severus is considered a great theological teacher who was particularly endorsed with the ability to expound and defend the belief of the One Nature which he elaborated and explained in over 125 treatises and 400 epistles.

## **St. Philoxenos of Mabbug (440-524 A.D.)**

St. Philoxenos is one of the prominent saints of the Syrian Church. Born in Tahl in Mesopotamia, the land "between the Two Rivers," he joined the monastery at Qurtamin where he was instructed in Syriac and Greek studies; then he joined the ecclesiastical school at Edessa, where he perfected his knowledge by the theological studies he received.

He attacked the Nestorian teachings which were being spread in Edessa. Philoxenos was ordained bishop of Mabbug, in the Euphratus Valley in A.D.485. He was later exiled to Trachia, and imprisoned in a house with all its outlets shut and

the house was set on fire. Thus the holy father was suffocated in his room and died for the faith.

### **St. Timothy (Aelurus)**

He was the Patriarch of Alexandria. He was given the epithet of "Aelurus" (weasel or cat) by his enemies because of his small stature. Timothy joined the monastery at Alqalamun and became patriarch in 457 A.D. when Dioscorus had died in exile. The congregation and the clergy in Egypt had refused to recognize Proterius who had been appointed by the emperor as successor of Dioscorus. Upon his accession, Timothy held a council with the purpose of denouncing the decisions passed by the council of Chalcedon, an act which greatly infuriated the Emperor who exiled him. In his exile, Timothy wrote a large number of epistles in defense of Christ, repudiating Eutyches' heresy, and confirming that Christ took a human form similar to other men.

Timothy was recalled to Alexandria by Emperor Basiliscus in A.D.475. He held a council attended by 500 bishops refuting and canceling the decisions of Chalcedon, and issued a statement which was unanimously accepted by all the eastern Churches. He died in peace in 477 A.D.

### **Questions:**

1. What was written in the Tome of Leo? What was Dioscorus' attitude towards it?
2. What do you know of the ill-famous council of Chalcedon?
3. Who is St. Timothy? Explain his struggle for confirming the Orthodox faith.



**Fill in the gap:**

- (a) Saint Severus is the Patriarch of....., who defended the.....faith and this was the cause for his.....
- (b) Saint Philoxenos is one of the famous.....saints; he fought the.....heresy in Iraq and died of.....in a house which was set on.....

## Lesson 18

### The local Fathers

**Saint Menas (of Egypt) (285-309 A.D).**

A voice from an icon: During the reign of the atheist Emperor Diocletian, there lived a man in Egypt called Audiksios. He was the governor of Mariot, which lies to the west of Alexandria. His wife, Aufimia, was barren. They were both righteous. They loved God and persevered in prayer, fasting and the giving of alms. One day, Aufimia stood before the icon of the Virgin, and prayed fervently to God, asking for a son. She heard a voice saying, 'Amen.' She told her husband of what had happened and both of them rejoiced in the Lord.

In 285 A.D. Aufimia gave birth to a child whom she called



Menas. His father taught him the holy precepts of the Church and the child increased in wisdom with God and man. When he was eleven, his parents died, leaving him a rich inheritance. He gave it all for the poor. He entered the army, and soon became famous among his companions for his diligence and noble spirit. When the worship of pagan gods was made compulsory by the emperor and as a result, persecution broke out, Menas left the army and went to the desert.

**A soldier of Christ:** While Menas was praying one night, he saw the angels crowning the martyrs, and wished to attain their crown of victory. In the morning, he returned to the capital. It was a pagan feast; so he seized the opportunity

and proclaimed his faith publicly to the assembled multitude. The governor was furious and ordered his arrest. At his trial, the following conversation took place:

- Come forward, flippant man, who are you?
- I am the soldier Menas, servant of the Lord Jesus.
- Why did you leave the army, and where have you been?
- When I received your command to worship idols, I went to the desert to worship the living God. I didn't want my soul to perish with the wicked, but wanted to be saved as it is written, "Let not my soul be destroyed with the wicked, nor my life with the men of blood."
- We have been informed of your father's position and of the prestige of your family. Repent of this evil, and you will be given an elevated position and great power.
- Such offers do not entice me. Therefore, do not waste your time trying to allure me.

The governor gave orders for his torture. Menas bore the pain bravely, and God strengthened him. Finally he was put to death, the decree being: "Since Menas the Christian soldier has refused to obey the emperor's command to sacrifice to our gods, his head shall be cut with the sword, and his body burnt with fire."

In the place where he was martyred, Menas knelt and raised his eyes to heaven in prayer. The sword separated his head from his body and he won the crown of martyrdom. It was in 309 A.D. To the surprise of all, his friends wrapped the body and carried it away glorifying God.

**Miracles of the Saint:** Orders were given to a Christian officer to lead his troops to a battle in the desert of Mariot. He took with him the body of St. Menas for blessing. When the battle was over, the camel which carried the body of the Saint stooped, and would not go any further. This was taken as a sign from God and a small grave was built there for the saint.

None of the people of the neighborhood knew that the saint was buried there till one day, a boy who was lame from birth crept to it. When he was found sleeping there, a man raised a cane to strike him as punishment. To the astonishment of everyone, the lame boy was seen to jump up and to run into the village. The people of the neighborhood glorified God, and brought all their sick to that spot. The sick who lay where the body was buried, were healed. So the people dug the ground and discovered the remains of St. Menas.

The fame of these miracles reached the emperor who had a sick daughter. She was taken to the site and was miraculously cured. When her father realized that she had been healed through the intercession of St. Menas, he built a cathedral on the site of saint's tomb. From that time onwards the locality became famous. Sick people from all over the world visited this cathedral in order to regain their health through the intercession of St. Menas.

### **St. George of Cappadocia**

**Background:** Born of Christian parents in Cappadocia, an area now in Turkey, is the patron saint of England, Aragon, Georgia, Lithuania, Palestine, Portugal, Germany and Greece;



and of Moscow, Istanbul, Genoa and Venice. The story of St. George came to light only in A.D.1483 when Caxton printed about him in a book called *The Golden Legend*. It was a translation of a book by a French bishop Jacques de Voragine, which incorporated details of many saints' lives.

When his father died, George's

mother returned to her native Palestine, taking George with her. George became a soldier in the Roman army and rose to the rank of tribune. The emperor of that time, Diocletian (A.D. 245 - 313), began to persecute Christians at the beginning of the 4th century. George objected to this and resigned his military post in protest. This infuriated the emperor who imprisoned and tortured George hoping him to deny his faith. It is said that he was dragged through the streets of Diospolis (now Lydda) in Palestine and beheaded. The emperor's wife was so impressed by George's resilience that she became a Christian for which she too was executed for her faith.

**The Legend:** The legend about St. George and the dragon goes like this. While he was in the army, he came to the province of Libya, to a city called Silene. This city had a large pond wherein a dragon lived. The people of the town started to feed this dragon two sheep every day to prevent it attacking the people there. When this process failed, they started feeding the dragon one sheep and one human being. The king decreed that the human sacrifice should be chosen by lot. This continued till the king's daughter was chosen by lot. The king tried to bargain his way out of it but the town people did not yield to the king's wishes to save his daughter.

The king got her ready as if to send her in wedding and led her to the place where the dragon was to appear for its feed. George was passing by and asked the lady what was happening. She told him the reason why she was there and pleaded with him to leave before the dragon appeared and would kill him too. George replied that he would help her in the name of Jesus Christ. She insisted that it wouldn't happen and begged him to leave her. At that moment, the dragon appeared and came running towards them. St. George, who was upon his horse, drew his sword and garnished the dragon with the sign of the cross, and rode towards it and smote it with his spear. The dragon was tied about its neck with the lady's girdle and it followed her like a meek animal.

The princess led the dragon into the city and it caused much panic. George told the people to believe in Jesus Christ and get baptized and he would kill the dragon. The king and the entire city got baptized and George killed the dragon and dragged it outside the city and threw it into the field. The king set up a church of Our Lady and Saint George where sprang up a fountain of living water which healed sick people who drank from it. St. George is honored in numerous parishes of our Church as a symbol of faith in our Lord winning over evil. There are a few parishes in America which venerate him as their patron saint. April 23rd is named as Saint George's Day.

**Questions:**

1. Point out incidents in the life of St. Menas which reveal the following traits in his character:
  - (a) his bravery.
  - (b) his attitude to money.
  - (c) his holding on to eternal life.
2. Show how St. Menas glorified God in his life, in his martyrdom and after his death?
3. What was the legend of the dragon and Saint George? Why was Saint George tortured?
4. Can a saint perform miracles after his death? If so, how?

**Activity:**

Visit a church or a monastery which is named after St. Menas, and record your impression.

## Lesson 19

### Malankara Orthodox Church Fathers

[Note: Information on our Church fathers was gathered from many sources including the Malankara Orthodox Church website and wikipedia.org. We recognize and thank them for their service.]

#### Geevarghese Mar Gregorios of Parumala

In the latter part of the 19th century A.D., there lived a holy man on a haunted island called Parumala on the banks of River Pampa in Kerala, India. He was a prophet who set a moral tone for his people. He was powerful like Prophet Elijah and zealous like John the Baptist. After many years of his departure on November 2, 1902, he was canonized by the Church. Now, Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril is also canonized as a saint.



#### Life of Parumala Thirumeni:

Parumala Thirumeni was born on June 15, 1848 in the Chathuruthy family of Kochu Mathai and Mariam in Mulanthuruthy, Kerala. After the birth of their fifth child, Mariam passed away. After the early days of education, Kochu Ipeora (as he was called as a child) was educated by Malpan (teacher) Geevarghese of Chathuruthy, Kochi, and was ordained as a

deacon on 14 September 1859 at the age of ten.

Malpan Geevarghese became seriously ill with smallpox and Deacon Geevarghese was the only one who stayed with him and took care of him. On the eighth day when the Malpan

passed away, Deacon Geevarghese fell ill. During this time, he had a vision of St. Mary consoling him and exhorting him to dedicate the rest of his life to the Lord. Very soon, the deacon recovered.

At the age of 18 in A.D.1865, he was ordained as a priest. His Grace Joseph Mar Dionysius raised him to the order of monks (Ramban) in A.D.1872. The Patriarch of Antioch, H. H. Moran Mar Ignatius Peter consecrated four metropolitans at Paravoor Jacobite Church, Kerala on 10 December 1876. The youngest among them was Geevarghese Ramban who was named Mar Gregorios. Because of his age everybody called him "Kochu Thirumeni" (Young Bishop). Mar Gregorios served as secretary and translator of the Patriarch and witnessed the historic Mulanthuruthy Synod resolution of A.D.1876 signed between Syrian Orthodox Church in India and Holy Throne of Antioch and All the East. Mar Gregorios was appointed the Bishop of Niranam. He started a monastery at Parumala.

At the Parumala Seminary he led an ascetic life. He woke up at four in the morning and spent his entire day in prayer and teaching the deacons till around midnight. On Wednesdays and Fridays and Lenten days, he would fast till evening besides observing his own special fasts. In his own words "*Prayer brings truth, religious faith, honesty and respect among the people.*"

**Saintly life of Kochu Thirumeni:** Parumala Thirumeni did not let all the responsibilities of teaching, administration, and scholarly pursuits detract him from his true calling, to serve fellow human beings. When a smallpox epidemic (a near fatal disease at the time) struck Thumpamon and surroundings areas, Thirumeni personally visited every home that had been affected against the protests from the loved ones. He comforted the sick regardless of their caste or creed. His faith and his actions gained lot of love and respect from everyone.



Kochu Thirumeni became sick after blessing a marriage at Veeyapuram church. Even from the beginning of his illness he knew that he was in his last days. He left his earthly abode at midnight on November 2, 1902. He was proclaimed as a saint in A.D. 1947 by the Indian Orthodox Church. There are many instances that proved his saintliness. Thousands of the faithful received favors and blessings through his intercession. The entire Church celebrates his memory. It is a major feast day in Parumala Church, where his holy remains are entombed. His tomb and birth place are centers of pilgrimage. There are also many parishes in America which have Saint Gregorios as their patron saint.

### **Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril**

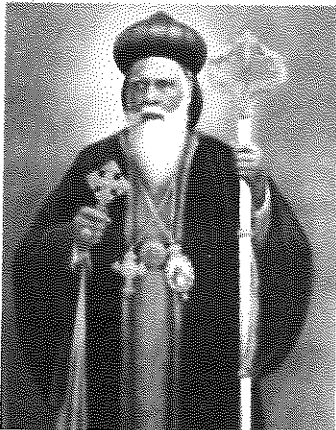
Saint Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril (Vattasseril Thirumeni), was the Malankara Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church for twenty-five years. He was known as Malankara Sabha Bhashuran (The Great Luminary of Malankara Orthodox Church) in recognition of his rich contribution to the Church. Later on he was proclaimed as a saint.

**Life of Vattasseril Thirumeni:** Thirumeni was born to Joseph Vattasseril of Mallappally and Eliamma Kolathu Kalathil of Kurichy, on 31 October, 1858. Following his elementary education at C.M.S. Middle School in Mallappally, he completed his High School education from C.M.S. High School, Kottayam. In 1876 A.D., while still a high school student, he was ordained as a sub-deacon by His Holiness Pathrose Patriarch.

Thirumeni studied at the Orthodox Theological Seminary (Old Seminary), Kottayam for four years. Geevarghese soon became a great Syriac scholar under the careful guidance of His

Grace Gregorios of Parumala who taught him at the Seminary. In A.D.1879 Thirumeni was ordained as full deacon and in 1880 he was ordained as a priest by Parumala Thirumeni. By A.D.1880, Thirumeni had become an authority in the Syriac, Church History, Faith and Doctrine, the Church Fathers and Theology. In recognition of his expertise in Syriac and Theology he was designated as Malankara Malpan.

He spent his spare time reading, studying and thinking. He wrote Doctrines of the Church. He also used his scholarship to edit and publish the order of Church worship to be used by the laity as an aid for participation in worship. He was appointed as Principal of M.D. Seminary, Kottayam. In A.D.1903, he was blessed as a Ramban (monk). He also served as the Manager of Parumala Seminary. In 1908 A.D. he was consecrated as Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. He served as the Assistant Malankara Metropolitan. He became the Malankara Metropolitan in A.D.1909 and served and led the Church in that capacity until his death in A.D.1934 when the Church triumphed in establishing the official constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.



**Legacy of Vattasseril Thirumeni:** During the period of his service as the Malankara Metropolitan, the Church was undergoing internal conflicts with two factions of the Church challenging each other over temporal matters. Though the Patriarch of Antioch asserted both spiritual and temporal authority over the Malankara Church, the Royal Court (of the British Government) granted the Patriarch only the spiritual authority. This

was the primary issue for which the two sides approached the judiciary. In A.D. 1934, the Court rejected all appeals from the Patriarchal side, thus recognizing the authority of the Malankara Metropolitan and Catholicos over the entire Church. Vattasseril Thirumeni was instrumental in establishing the Church Constitution of 1934 which is the legal document on the authority of the Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan that has been referred to, by the present day Indian judicial system.

Moran Mar Baselios Geevarghese II Catholicos, who succeeded Vattasseril Thirumeni as the head of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, remarked in the speech at the burial of Vattasseril Thirumeni:

“When we look at the highest solemn position held by Vattasseril Thirumeni and his deep and firm faith in God, he seemed similar to Moses who led the sons of Abraham from the captive land of Egypt to the promised land of freedom and happiness. There is no doubt about it. Moses had spent his entire life for the freedom of his people. But he could not enter the Promised Land. He was able only to see the Promised Land from a distance. Likewise the Moses of the Malankara Church has also watched the freedom of his Church from a distance.”

Vattasseril Thirumeni was a good orator, well aware of the importance of the vitality and moral persuasiveness of words when delivering the speeches to the faithful. In addition to not publicizing his own spiritual advancement, he also avoided spiritual hypocrisy and arrogance throughout his life. Prayer and fasting were the pillars that were Vattasseril Thirumeni's spiritual foundation. In addition to the liturgical hours of prayer, Thirumeni spent much time in private prayers and silent mediations behind closed doors and away from the attention of people. In spite of his busy schedule, he was also able to focus on three to four lessons from the Holy Bible everyday. He was a living saint. He followed Christ's instruction to pray in private and not to show people when in prayer.

## **Eldho Mar Baselios**

Eldho Mar Baselios was born in A.D.1593 in a village called Kooded (now known as Karakosh near Mosui in Iraq) where Morthsmooni and her 7 children suffered martyrdom. At an young age he joined the Mar Bahnan Monastery and became a monk. In A.D.1678 he was consecrated Maphryono (Catholicos) by the Patriarch of Antioch, Moran Mar Ignatius Abdul Masiha I.

In A.D.1685 at the age of 92, the Holy Father started the difficult mission to India at the request of Mar Thoma II of the Malankara Orthodox Church in India. The Maphryono was accompanied by his brother Jemma, Mar Ivanios Episcopa and two monks Yovey and Mathai. Fearing Portuguese persecution, they took a lengthy route of traveling to Thalassery, moving around incognito and finally reaching Kothamangalam in Kerala on September 14, 1685.

His mission was to reorganize the Syrian Christians, and train them in their faith. The excessive influences of the Portuguese elements had forced the Syrian Christians to slowly drift away from their ancestral precepts and ethos. Mar Thoma II needed assistance. Knowing about the situation prevailing in Malankara, Maphryono (Catholicos) Mar Baselios Yeldho volunteered for the service, relinquishing his administrative charge at home.

Soon after reaching Kothamangalam, he consecrated Mar Ivanios as Episcopa and gave him the title, Mar Iyanios Hidayuttullah. On September 27th, he received the last sacraments of anointment with oil. Two days after this, on September 29, 1685, in the afternoon, the saintly father departed for his heavenly abode.

Feast of Saint Eldo Basalios Bava is celebrated in the Cheriapally Mar Thoma Church at Kothamangalam with spiritual grandeur every year on October 2 and 3. In northern Kerala parishes, it is very common practice among the faithful to name their new born babies as 'Eldho' or 'Basil' during baptism. The parents believe that by doing so, the saint will protect their children from all evils.

# UNIT V

## MONASTICISM AND THE CALLING OF GOD

The Fathers of Monasticism

Monk's life of worship and prayer

The monk as a messenger and teacher  
of the Society vocation of priesthood

The call of God and my work

# Lesson 20

## The Fathers of Monasticism

### Monasticism as a way of life

Since the beginning of Christianity, some Christians wanted to consecrate their lives fully to the life of worship. They left the ordinary life with all its occupations and lived in the deserts so that they could set themselves free with the Savior in continuous prayer, fasting, meditation, reading of the Bible and helping others. The ideal of their lives is purity of the heart. They were humble and silent men. The simplicity of their life shows the depth of their faith. When someone asked them a question, they replied in few words and to the point. They always preferred to give concrete examples. Their method of teaching was by telling simple stories.

This type of life is called Monasticism. The monk is a person who dedicates his entire life to the Savior. He is dead to the world, in body and mind. He cares no more for money or position or house or family. He chooses to live in poverty and obedience to his elders. Humility and celibacy are fundamental rules for this type of life.

Monasticism was first known in the Egyptian deserts where the great monastic leaders taught their disciples from all over the world. Many of those disciples returned to their own countries and founded new monastic orders in their Churches. St. Antony, St. Pachomius and St. Basil stand out among the great founders of monasticism.

### St. Antony, the Father of Monasticism

Antony was born of wealthy parents at Keman in Upper Egypt around 251 A.D. His parents died before he was eighteen. He was left alone with his younger sister. One day when he

went to the church, he listened carefully to the Gospel. The deacon was reading the words which Jesus said to the rich man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matt 19:21). Antony felt that these words were addressed to him personally and he decided to obey His commandment.

He sold his property and distributed all that he possessed to the needy and left a small property to his sister. He left his sister with a Christian family and went to the desert where he lived alone for twenty years as a hermit. He divided his time between prayers and planting palm trees while ignoring the worries of the world in order to spend his life in prayer and meditation. He became famous for his ascetic life and many persons followed him. His disciples built cabins around his cabin and he was their abbot. They asked him for advice in spiritual matters, and gathered together on Sundays for the Holy Communion.



St. Antony left his solitude and went into the city only twice: once to encourage the martyrs and stand by them in the law courts; and another time when he was more than ninety years old. He then went to support the Nicean faith against the Arian heresy. He was closely associated with St. Athanasius, in his struggle against Arianism. St. Antony is known as "The Father of Monks".

### **St. Pachomius and communal monasticism**

Pachomius was born of pagan parents in Esna in Upper Egypt around 290 A.D. As a youth he served in the Roman army. One day he was sent with the troops to Ethiopia. On their way, the Christian communities in the villages where they passed by, came to meet him. They welcomed the soldiers and offered them their hospitality. Pachomius was impressed with the goodness of those Christians who washed the soldiers' feet and offered them food in spite of the fact that they harshly treated the poor villagers. After the war, Pachomius was baptized and became a Christian. He followed the famous hermit Palaemon who trained him on the monastic life.

St. Pachomius became the leader of the Communal Monasticism (also called Coenobitic Monasticism). He founded many monasteries and gained reputation because of his monastic rule. When a person wished to join his monastery, he examined him to find out the extent of his sincerity and determination to become a monk. The new monks were continually tested for their ability to be detached from the world and were given hard assignments to complete. The essential requirements for becoming a good monk were: celibacy, obedience, chastity, poverty and devotion. St. Pachomius emphasized the study and the learning by heart of the Scriptures. The monks also were instructed in Christian doctrine. Illiterate monks were taught to read and write.

### **St. Basil the Great**

St. Basil was born of a Christian family in 329 A.D. He learned the principles of Christian faith from his sister St. Makrina. He completed his higher studies in Athens and visited the famous monks from whom he learned the ascetic life. He loved to meditate in nature. His time was spent in prayer, fasting, hard work, reading and writing. He wrote doctrinal books and commentaries. He also wrote the liturgy known after his name.



St. Basil was also a great teacher. He warned the Christians against the heretic teachings. He urged the rich to be merciful to the poor and he distributed his own property to the needy. He established some hospitals and hostels for the poor. More details on St. Basil are given earlier in this text (The Great Teachers of the Church) and in Grade XI text book (The Basileiad).

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What are the fundamental principles of monastic life?
2. Compare the two types of monasticism founded by St. Antony and St. Pachomius.
3. What are the contributions of St. Basil to the life of the Church?

# Lesson 21

## Monk's life of worship and prayer

Monasticism is an expression of love, the love for God and the love for all human beings. The love for God leads the monk to consecrate himself to the life of worship and prayer. The love to human beings is because they all are created in the image of God.

### **The monk's life**

For the sake of the love of God, the monk goes into seclusion, devoting his mind and heart to the life of prayer and meditation, ceasing to have worldly occupations and finding his full satisfaction and happiness in the Creator alone. Motivated by the love to his fellow beings, he offers himself at their service, in self-denial. He gives the world all what he possesses. He has no material possessions. But he uses his spiritual gifts in the service of humanity as Peter said: "I have no silver or gold, but I give you what I have" (Acts 3:6).

St. Augustine said, "There are two truths before the eyes of all men, the first is to act and the second, to meditate. The first truth is for us to work and struggle to purify our souls, while by the second, we receive peace to see God". St. Gregory said that the Lord Jesus Christ has shown two kinds of life: the life of service, and the quiet life of meditation. Both the monk and the lay person need both ways of life, the life of service and the life of prayer.

### **The basic elements of monastic life**

**1. Virginity or purity:** God wishes that every Christian be a saint, keeping his senses, body and soul pure. The monk vows to surrender his life to the ascetic life and to free himself from the attractions of the world. He lives in communion with God alone. Married people can also practice saintly life if they

live with pure heart and undefiled senses, because marriage is a holy sacrament.

St. John Chrysostom urged married people also to follow the vows of the monk in consecrating themselves to the purity of the mind, heart and senses. The monk, on the other hand, who dedicates his life to God, has preferred asceticism to give all his heart to Christ.

**2. Prayer:** We all need the life of worship and continuing prayers. The monk offers his prayers not only for himself but also for the entire world. The monk's prayers are like pillars of light, rising up in the darkness when all people are asleep. Monks pray to God that He may end wars, pestilence, evil, sin, doubts and the works of the devil.

The lay person might be busy in his daily concerns, but he also needs the life of communion with God. He needs God's help and assistance in his life and he prays for that. But the saintly monk and lay person experience the life of prayer and enjoy personal relationship with God.

**3. Ministry:** Ministry is a consequence of great love for Christ. One of the saints said, "No one serves Christ except he who loves Him". This was the same test Jesus applied on Peter after His resurrection: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?, he answered," Yes, Lord, you know that I love you". The Lord said, "Tend my sheep"(Jn.21:16). In this sense, the monk as well as the lay person lives the life of service in love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The monk's ministry can be seen in the following ways of life:

**a) As an example:** The world needs such high ideals of spiritual standards. The monks struggle to achieve Christian perfection. For who reads the biographies of the saints and would not long for the life of virtue and holiness? Mar Isaac said, "Scorn the evil-doers not with words, but with the

example of your own life". St. Augustine himself was an evil man in Italy, but when he read the biography of St. Antony, the Egyptian monk, he repented and became one of the greatest saints of the Church.

**b) To encourage believers to be virtuous:** The monastic life is the embodiment of Christian virtue showing us that we can live up to the moral standards set for us by Christ. A man with an unclean spirit slapped a monk on his cheek, so he turned his other cheek to him; immediately the evil spirit went out of the man crying, "Woe to us from you. O monks, you terrify us by your obedience to the words of Christ".

**c) Teaching and writing letters:** The Church treasures the teachings of the Church fathers, because they express their practical experience of their continuous relationship with God, and knowledge of Him, and their communion with the Holy Spirit. The teachings of the fathers are very effective in their simplicity. They are considered a great source for Christian teaching.

**d) Discipleship:** The teaching of the fathers was not only found on the pages of books and letters, but they propagated this valuable spiritual teaching to the coming generations through discipleship. Whenever the fame of one of the pious fathers came to the ears of men, many disciples flocked to his feet and sometimes their numbers reached hundreds and thousands. This was in fact the origin of the idea of the university, as one historian said, "The first literary and intellectual renaissance which took place in the 12th and 13th centuries, and which was associated with the start of human sciences and the first appearance of the monastic communities which owe their origin to the genius of St. Pachomius who was the founder of coenobitic monasticism".

**e) Obedience and discipline:** Monasticism is characterized as the life of obedience, discipline and prayer. The monk subjects himself to the will of God, the Bible and

the Church. His obedience to God is a good example for the present generation, showing the true meaning of obedience which promotes harmony in family, society and Church relationships. Discipline is a basic element for the success of the life of individuals and communities.

**Questions and activities:**

1. What are the three basic elements in monastic life?
2. John Chrysostom says that the vows of the monk should also be observed by the married people. How is it possible?
3. How could the lay Christian and the monk combine both the life of service and the life of meditation?
4. What aspects of monasticism are relevant to the life of the laity?
5. Take a trip to a monastery and observe the life of the monks, and learn the contribution of monasticism to society.
6. Study the biographies of monks who rendered great service to the Church.

## **Lesson 22**

### **The Monk as a messenger and teacher of the society**

Since the time of St. Antony and St. Pachomius, monasticism spread in many Churches all around the world. The monks everywhere followed the rule of celibacy, purity of the heart, self-chosen poverty and complete obedience to the elders.

The monk trains himself to become a servant of God and his fellowmen. He consecrates himself entirely to the life of worship, meditation and labor. In their prayers the monks remember the Church and all people and pray for them. Before printing was known, many monks used to spend a lot of time copying the Bible and religious manuscripts. Some monks also wrote spiritual books and prayers. Other monks were engaged in translating religious and philosophical books to different languages and helped many people to read in their own language, the genuine spiritual heritage of the Church.

#### **The teachings of the Desert Fathers**

The people always liked the monks' deep writings because they were full of spirituality and they used to go to the monasteries to ask the monks about religious and spiritual matters. The fathers were humble and silent men. They replied to questions in few words and to the point. They taught by using practical examples and stories. A sample story goes like this:

A disciple came one day to St. Macarius and said, "What must I do to save my soul?". Macarius answered, "Go and insult the dead". The disciple went to the cemetery, insulted the dead, and came back to report to Macarius. "What did they say?", asked Macarius. "They said nothing", he said. Then

Macarius asked him to go back to the cemetery and bless the dead. The disciple did as asked by Macarius and returned to report to him. "What did they say?", asked Macarius. The disciple said, "They said nothing". For this, Macarius said, "Go and do likewise. Judge nobody and learn to keep silent".

### **The monasteries become centers of education**

Some monasteries became schools for higher learning. The first universities which the world has known grew out of some of these earlier monasteries. The libraries of the monasteries became centers for research, providing the greatest books and references in various fields of knowledge. Monasteries also established many schools and taught children and youth.

### **Monks going out to serve the world**

The monks served as missionaries to many parts of the world. They carried the Gospel to nations which had no knowledge about Jesus and many became Christians. Near the end of the 3rd century A.D., the Egyptian monks taught Christianity in Switzerland. They reached the Lake of Zurich and baptized the converts. They were captured by the Roman governor and were ordered to worship the idols. The monks refused to do so and were martyred. The pictures of three such Egyptian monks appear on the official stamp of the city of Zurich until today.

Another seven Egyptian monks left their monasteries in the Egyptian deserts in the 6th century A.D. and traveled for months until they reached Northern Ireland. They taught Christianity to the Irish people and left great influence on Irish art and worship. We see great similarities between the Coptic art and liturgies, and those of Irish Church.

These seven monks were buried in Desert Olida in Ireland. In the Irish liturgy, there is a special supplication for them, "Remember, O Lord, the Egyptian monks who carried the faith to us".

## **The monk in service for his culture**

Some monks have contributed to the formation of their cultural heritage. St. Mesrop Mashtots offers a good example for cultural leadership. Mesrop was secretary for the Armenian king Varashaboh in the 4th century A.D. At that time, the Armenians were divided in two parts: one under the rule of the Persians in the east, and the other under the Byzantine emperor in the west. The two parts were in continuous wars.

Mesrop was a very pious young man. He entered the monastery and became a monk, lived in continuing worship and led a truly ascetic life. He wanted to serve his Church and his country. Until then, the Armenians could not read the Bible in their own language. They had to read it in Greek, because their language had no writing at that time. Mesrop went to the head of the Armenian Church; the Catholicos St. Isaac Bertriev and others agreed on making a special alphabet for their language in order to be able to use it in writing and to translate the Bible to Armenian. Their king was delighted with this idea and encouraged Mesrop to carry on this task.

Mesrop went to Asseyria and from there he brought twenty four letters which were used by Prophet Daniel. One day, Mesrop saw a vision. Immediately, he rose up and wrote down the letters. He asked an artist to draw the letters for him and returned to Armenia with 34 letters. The king and the Catholicos warmly welcomed him.

The first thing which he translated and wrote in the Armenian language was Solomon's Proverb: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". Mesrop and his disciples worked hard to translate the Holy Bible from the Syrian to Armenian language. He then sent some of his disciples to Greece where they mastered the Greek language. They returned to Armenia and translated the Holy Bible from Greek to the Armenian during the period, 404 to 412 A.D. and found the new translation an excellent work. Mesrop and his disciples opened



many schools and taught the Armenian language and writing skills. They began to read the Bible in their own language.

When the Catholicos Isaac died, Mesrop became the Acting Catholicos in charge of the Church for about nine months before his death. The Armenians considered Mesrop a great saint and a prominent national leader.

### **The monk as a national leader**

The monasteries provided leadership to their countries at times of foreign domination. In Egypt, St. Shenoute of Atribis was a great national leader in the 5th century A.D. He was the Abbot of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt. He opened his monastery for the refugees who fled from the invaders. He led his monks in fighting against paganism and destroyed pagan monuments and temples. He opened the doors of his monastery on Saturdays and Sundays to the lay congregation to attend the Church services in the monastery and listen to his sermons. His sermons led to a great moral and spiritual revival. Shenoute also led a nationalist movement against Greek domination. Under his leadership, the Copts preserved their own forms of liturgies and cultural heritage.

### **Questions and activities:**

1. What are the services which the monks and the monasteries offer to the Church and the world today?
2. Find out some examples of important leaders of monasticism in the Oriental Orthodox Churches. What was the contribution of each one of them to the Church?
3. What are the characteristics of monastic life and how did the monks live?
4. Try to arrange a trip to one of the monasteries in your area and discuss with the monks the way they live and the services they offer to the Church and to the world.

# Lesson 23

## Vocation of Priesthood

We have learned the life of monks who leave all worldly possessions and serve the Lord. However, many monks took important roles in society as reformers, educators and as national leaders. In this lesson, we will learn about another Holy Order of men who serve the Lord by their special vocation as the priest and shepherd. Priesthood is one of the seven Holy Sacraments of our Church.

### **Holy Orders**

In the early days of Christianity, the apostles went to preach the Gospel to all nations as instructed by our Lord during His ministry. In every town, they appointed men of faith as bishops and gave them these instructions:

“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son” (Acts 20:28).

“Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:23).

The bishops ordained priests and deacons to serve and teach (Ref. Tit 1:5). This was done by laying hands upon them and praying to the Lord to grant them the authority and the gift of priesthood through the Holy Spirit.

### **The Bishop as a good shepherd**

The bishop is the head of our Church. He is our representative to God and is also the representative of Christ to us. As St. Ignatius said, “Where the bishop is present, there

let the congregation gather just as where Jesus is, there is the Universal Church". The bishop is chosen by the congregation and then presented to the other bishops who lay their hands on him and pray to God to grant him the gifts and authority of the Holy Spirit, saying:

"Grant him, O Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of power and consolation, the spirit of knowledge and piety. That in pure prayer, and illuminated heart in love he may raise the offering for the ignorance and sins of the people, and bring them back to Thy holy fold, that they may be one flock belonging to one shepherd".

The bishop is a shepherd of his diocese. He preaches, teaches, and administers all the sacraments. He cares for his people in every way and guards them against wrong ideas or doctrines. This is mentioned during the prayer of ordination:

"Be an imitator of Christ, the true shepherd, who did lay down His life for His sheep. Be a leader of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a teacher of the young, a lamp to the world".

### **The vocation of the priest**

The priest is ordained by the bishop to watch over his parish as an honest steward watching over the mysteries of God. He is a pastor and shepherd who loves and cares for his people. He can administer all the sacraments of the Church except the Sacrament of Holy Orders. St. Ignatius describes the priests as 'the council of the apostles'. As the apostles were gathered around Jesus Christ and carried out His work, the priests are gathered around the bishop and help carry out his work.

The duties of a priest are contained in the prayer for ordination, as follows:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted you with His life-giving sacraments. Know that you carry upon your hand, Emmanuel who was carried by Simon, the priest. Guard these sacraments as the Cherubim guard the Tree of Life."

“O Lord, fill him with Thy Holy Spirit, that he may be worthy to stand before Thine Altar; to proclaim the Gospel of Thy Kingdom; to minister to the word of truth; to offer unto Thee spiritual gifts and sacrifices”.

The priest should be called and chosen by God. “And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Heb 5:4).

The priest should follow the example of Christ: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). He is ready to sacrifice his life unto death, to search for the lost sheep, to mend the broken homes, to strengthen the weak. In his struggle during his ministry, the priest offers himself as a sacrifice on the altar of witness.

### **The Deacon**

The deacon should be a good servant of the Church. He bears the task of social service for widows, orphans, and poor people, and for different activities of the Church. St. Ignatius says that the deacons have the ministry of Jesus Christ who was the greatest servant. He gives himself completely to God and to his fellow beings.

#### **Questions:**

1. What are the three categories of the Holy Orders? What is the function of each of the Holy Orders?
2. Explain the meaning of “sacrifice on the altar of witness”.
3. Read 1 Tim. Chapter 3, and find the necessary qualities of a bishop and a deacon.
4. How did St. Paul explain the vocation of priesthood? (Read 1 Tim 4: 11-14).

#### **Activities:**

Attend the ordination service of a bishop, a priest or a deacon.

## Lesson 24

### The call of God and my work

This conversational lesson is meant to illustrate how you can serve God at the many professions that you may occupy, once you complete your school years.

#### **A dialogue on service**

One evening Father Joseph was celebrating the engagement of John, his old colleague in the Church School, to his fiancé, Phoebe, who too was in the same Church School fifteen years back. They were colleagues in the university and graduated in the same year. John continued his work as teacher while Joseph was called by our Lord to be consecrated for His service, and he received the Sacrament of Priesthood.

Father Joseph met three of his old colleagues, Luke, Paul and Mark at this ceremony. Afterwards, they sat gladly together and talked about their individual professions and the way how they could serve the Lord. Father Joseph explained how he became a priest: "It is after God's invitation to me, my friends. After finishing my studies, I felt a very strong call inside, urging me to offer myself for the service of God. I felt that God is calling me to the service of priesthood. After my marriage, I was ordained priest in a nearby town and I have been serving that parish since then."

His friends were astonished at the decision taken by Fr. Joseph, for which he continued, "Do you think that any person can serve God only if he is a priest? I am sorry that this is a wrong idea that has been around our people. For sure, God does not want all the people to become priests. Or else, who will take care of the great projects required for developing our communities and the country?"

For this, Paul asked, "How can everyone serve God through the work they are involved in?" At this point, John and his fiancée Phoebe joined in the discussion; and they were anxious to hear the discussion. They too asked Fr. Joseph: "How, Father?"

Fr. Joseph said, "Every person can serve God in his work in many ways. Honesty in work is service to God. The consecration of God's day in worship and serving others is also service to God. When one offers himself as a good example before other colleagues in his work, it is also a way of serving the Lord. There are also special ways of serving our Lord through particular professions or jobs of each one us."

Then Paul, a lawyer said, "Yes, Father, suppose a person comes to me and asks me to defend him in the court, and I know that he is not innocent; shall I go to the court and defend him? Will this action serve the Lord?"

For this, Fr. Joseph replied, "Through your job, you should always defend truth against falsehood. You should defend those who fall under false accusation. If you do that, you will resemble our Lord Jesus Christ in caring for the people who are in need of help, till he brings justice to victory. Your profession gives you a chance to bring peace to conflicting parties. You will become a maker of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9). And you, Mark (a merchant), you can offer glory to God by your honesty with your customers by not becoming a lover of money, and by being "not greedy" (1 Timothy 3: 8).

Then Phoebe asked: "Father, you have said much concerning the professions of men. But how could I serve the Lord, after I shall get married?"

Fr. Joseph responded, "You are right, Phoebe, but don't you know that you will serve God when you fulfill your responsibilities in your own home, with your husband? You shall be the source of happiness to your husband and children. You will serve God also by bringing up your children into the knowledge of our Savior. St. Paul has said that the "woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Tim 2: 15). Fr Joseph looked at all of them and said in conclusion that each one of them has a call from our Lord to serve Him in different ways.

### **All are called to serve**

We have seen that God has given different kinds of gifts and talents to the members of His Church. He has given these gifts to build up His Church and bring everyone to full life in Jesus Christ.

Each one of us is given special gifts and talents that we must use in our daily life. We have to perform our duties as a teacher, a bishop, a priest, a monk or a nun, or as a good Christian father or mother. If we put our trust in God and pray, "Thy will be done", we may discover our special gifts, and how God wants us to use our gifts.

Do you remember the story of Mordecai whom God called to work as a guard in the King's palace? He was able by his faith and courage to serve God and overcome the evil acts which were planned against the king and against God's people. And Esther, the orphan girl, became queen and was able to perform a great role in saving the people. She was ready to sacrifice herself and her throne for serving God.

Some of us will use our gifts as special services in the world. If we have talents as artists, musicians, doctors, teachers, merchants, or nurses. We must try to develop and use them as best as we can, to the glory of God. Others may be called by God for special services in the Church, to serve His Church as bishops, priests or deacons.

But, God has given the duty of service to all members of the Church. He has made us all members of His Church. He has made us all members of His royal priesthood. He has made us the people of God, His laity or laymen and laywomen. Everyone is first ordained in Chrismation to be a layman of God, one of God's own people. As laymen, we are called to offer our service of praise and glory to God forever. We are called to live in communion with God as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. We are called to use God's gifts of the Holy Spirit all through our lives.

### **Models and images**

St. Paul mentioned in his letters to his disciple Timothy the ways of serving God through one's vocation in life:



The father who cares for his family: "If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).

- The rich man who uses his wealth in good works: "As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, not to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed"

(1 Tim 6:17-19).



- The young men and women who preserve themselves pure: "If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work" (2 Tim 2:21).

- The bishop who is a good shepherd: "Now a bishop must be above reproach ... temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, ... no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money" (1 Tim 3:2,3).

- The person who seeks the righteous life: "But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (1 Tim 6:11).

### **Questions:**

- 1 "...that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5: 15). What is the meaning of this verse with reference to the discussion between Father Joseph and his friends?
2. Explain and discuss the kinds of services that could be offered in the following types of work: the farmer, the doctor, the telephone operator, the engineer, the nurse, the carpenter, the taxi driver, and the teacher.
3. What type of work would you like to do in your future?
4. How will you serve God in the job you have chosen?
5. If your job requires your entire time and attention, how then will you serve God?
6. If your job keeps you busy six days of the week, what would you like to do on the seventh day?
7. If you work among persons who do not know Christ, how will you serve God among them?
8. How will you serve God in your family after you get married and having children?

**Activities:**

1. Write an article on the profession which you would like to choose when you will grow up, and show how you will serve God and men through your work. Bring your article to the class, next week.
2. Invite a few professionals to the class....a doctor, a lawyer, a factory worker, and make them discuss with the class, how they can serve God through their different professions.
3. Read the following verses from the Bible and find out the message you get from each one of them.  
Is 49:1-3; Jer 1: 4-10; John 12: 23-26;  
2 Tim 4: 6-8; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Pet. 4:10
4. Write a short article listing your hopes and goals for your future.



