



Sunday School of the American Dioceses
of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

11th Grade

Work out our Salvation



Grade 11

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Lesson 1: One Baptism

Lesson Goals

- *I can defend the Orthodox understanding of Holy Baptism against misconceptions*
- *I can defend infant baptism and the infants' right to receive all the sacraments of the Church including Baptism*
- *I can explain the power and role of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Chrismation and correctly relate to the Orthodox understanding of salvation.*

For many Orthodox Christians, a person's birthday is not when they are born but the day they were baptized. This "name day" is a special occasion regardless of whether the person was baptized as an adult or a child. A white dress used during the Baptism symbolizes purity and innocence, and following the service the families often celebrate with a meal shared among friends and loved ones.

Holy Baptism represents a spiritual rebirth and transformation. It is the day the person who is baptized is "born again". This marks the start of a journey within the Church toward Salvation. This sacred Sacrament, often referred to as the "first Sacrament," is essential for all Christians who wish to become full members of the Church. It serves as a public declaration of our acceptance of the Lord as our Savior.

Holy Baptism is a "new birth by water and Holy Spirit into the Kingdom of God" (**St. John 3:5**). The opening prayer recited by the Priest or Bishop emphasizes this by petitioning God to "hold us worthy" of the spiritual role entrusted to the apostles to baptize with fire and Spirit. This reference comes directly from St. John the Baptist's proclamation: "He who is coming after me...will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (**St. Matthew 3:11**).

The method of Baptism underscores that it takes place through Christ, involving both fire and Holy Spirit. The concluding portion of the prayer clarifies the intention: "Now also accomplish, O Lord, that through the mediation of us sinners, salvation be given to the soul of the one being baptized, and he may find mercy and clemency." This intention reinforces the understanding that Baptism is meant to cleanse the catechumen—the one being baptized—renewing them in fire and Spirit, irrespective of any imperfections of the clergy officiating the ceremony. Baptism is perfect, as it is established through Christ's perfection.

Being baptized signifies being baptized into Christ, thereby “putting on Christ” (**Galatians 3:27**). This incorporation into Christ is akin to joining the family of God. It necessitates relinquishing one’s previous life and the worldly dynamics of relationships to embrace a new community created by God. This new community, while new to the individual being baptized, is the same lineage established by Yahweh through Abraham, meant to exist eternally. Before His crucifixion, Christ sanctified Himself (**St. John 17:19**). Those baptized into Christ share in His holiness and are thus integrated into His family (**Hebrews 2:11**).

The hymn sung after the Quqlion further intertwines the mystery of Baptism with humanity’s thirst for salvation, a thirst epitomized by Adam. After Adam’s fall, he cried out to God in desperation. God responded by coming to the rushing waters of the Jordan, renewing humanity that had succumbed to corruption. St. Jacob of Serugh, an early Church father and Syriac theologian, describes Christ as the “coal of fire” that washed the streams of Jordan and sanctified its water by fire. This coal of fire is directly taken from Isaiah’s vision of heaven in **Isaiah 6:6**.

Hymn after Quqlion

David stands here in spirit by those who are to be baptized

Let us hear him say “All you who thirst come to the Lord

Be strengthened and be clothed in might!”

After Adam fell he cried out to God with a sigh

God answered Adam and came to the rushing waters of Jordan

And renewed him who had fallen into co-rrup-tion

During the Baptism service, a comparison is made to the blood marked on the doors of the Israelite homes in Egypt, which signaled the angel of death to pass over those houses, akin to the seal of grace bestowed upon us at Baptism through the Holy Spirit’s oil. This seal signifies spiritual protection, illustrating the biblical bond between water, oil, fire, and Spirit. The initial moments of the service establish a foundation that underlines the significance of not only Baptism but also the sacrament of Chrismation that follows in the Orthodox tradition.

The Baptismal Font: Rebirth and Resurrection

The Baptismal font serves as the site of purification and rebirth, with dual symbolism. First, it represents the spiritual womb, where the theology of renewal is evident from the outset. The act of rising from the font following immersion echoes the act of birth. Secondly, it symbolizes the tomb where Christ was laid, establishing an important connection between Baptism, Christ's death, and resurrection. This connection underscores that rebirth is inherently linked to death; Christ's death and resurrection form the cornerstone of Christian belief. It is through His death that humanity receives salvation, thus highlighting that Christian life is initiated through our own death and resurrection.

In Baptism, this experiential rebirth enables the soul to reflect on its transformation. The promise of Christ's Second Coming serves as a reminder of physical resurrection. The act of dying and rising with Christ during Baptism aligns with the words in the Epistle reading from **Romans 5:20-6:11**: "...Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried 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 the newness of life" (**Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12**). St. Paul illustrates that Baptism transcends symbolism; it is an event of profound significance, whereby the catechumen experiences a genuine process of burial and resurrection with Christ.

Infant Baptism

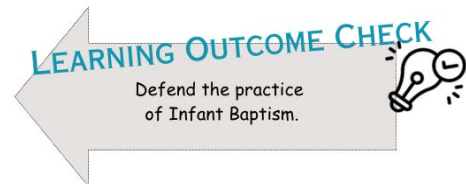
The Orthodox Church's practice of baptizing infants is often challenged by certain Protestants such as Baptists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. They argue that faith is a product of reason and only after a certain age, are we capable of understanding what we believe and therefore qualify to be baptized.

This objection though was not found in the ancient Church. More so, infant Baptism was practiced during the New Testament times, in the early Church! A few examples are:

- **The Household of Cornelius (Acts 11:13–14):** *"Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved."*
- **The Household of Lydia (Acts 16:15):** *"And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us."*

- **The Philippian Jailer's Household (Acts 16:33):** *"And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized."*
- **The Household of Crispus (Acts 18:8):** *"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."*

In the Bible, the term 'household' or 'family' encompasses more than just immediate relatives; it includes extended family and anyone dwelling within the household. This understanding reflects God's covenantal relationship with mankind, which is not limited to individuals but extends to entire families. For instance, God commanded Noah to enter the ark with his complete household (**Genesis 7:1**), and Abraham received circumcision for himself, his male children, and servants as part of his household (**Genesis 17:23**). The Israelites, when departing from Egypt, took their full households, including children, as they partook in the Passover (**Exodus 12:24–28**). These Old Testament traditions laid the groundwork for the early Church, where the Apostles neither excluded children from receiving God's grace nor baptism, adhering to Christ's teaching that children should come to Him (**St. Luke 18:16**).



Furthermore, the practice of infant baptism parallels the Old Testament tradition of circumcision, which marked male children as members of God's covenant community. **Colossians 2:11–12** emphasizes that baptism serves as the Christian equivalent of circumcision, signifying inclusion in God's family for both males and females. Following Pentecost, entire families, including children, were baptized, indicating that baptism was performed collectively rather than individually. The role of godparents becomes crucial in this context, as they speak on behalf of the child, facilitating their entrance into the Church and ensuring their spiritual growth. Baptism, as exemplified by Jesus, signifies the beginning of a new life in Christ, affirming our identity as children of God. Thus, the ancient practice of infant baptism is defended through scriptural examples and the theological understanding of inclusivity within the covenant community.

Baptism in the Name of Jesus

It is essential to perform the Sacrament of Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as commanded in the Great Commission found in St. Matthew's Gospel (28:18-20). This Trinitarian formula is viewed as foundational for a valid Baptism.

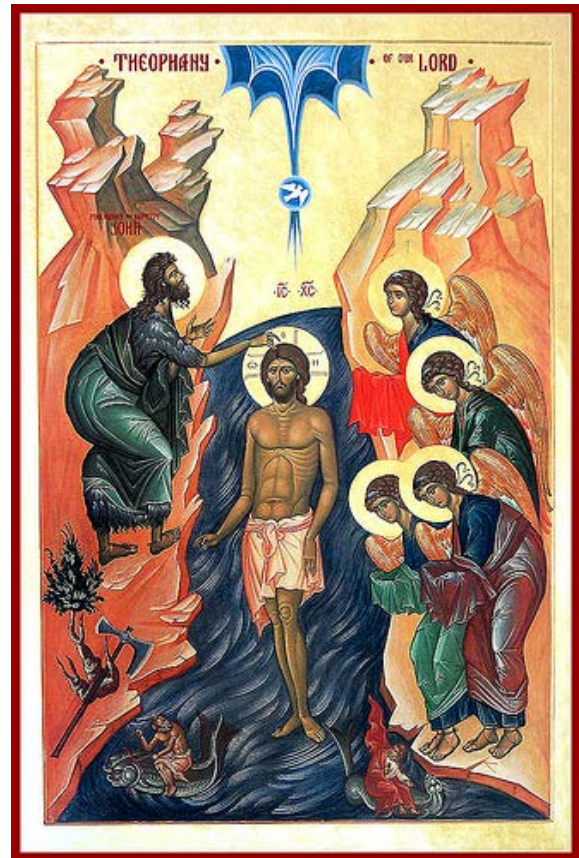
Some Protestant denominations may perform Baptism solely “in Jesus’ name,” which is considered incomplete and not valid within Orthodox theology. When individuals who have been previously baptized seek to join the Orthodox Church, a thorough catechism is conducted, and it is up to the Priest or Bishop to determine the appropriate next steps regarding the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation. If the previous Baptism was conducted in accordance with Orthodox standards—specifically as a Trinitarian Baptism—it is typically recognized, and the individual is welcomed into the Church through the Sacrament of Holy Chrismation. However, according to ancient canon, the practice of re-Baptizing individuals with legitimate prior Baptisms is strictly forbidden, as it undermines the belief in the efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Conversely, if a person’s Baptism is deemed invalid, they will receive the full Sacrament of Baptism and Chrismation to ensure their proper initiation into the faith.



The Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ

The baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ in the River Jordan is a pivotal event in Christian theology, considered a prototype for all Christian baptisms. This significant moment is detailed in the Gospel of **St. Luke 3:15-21**, which begins with John’s foretelling of Christ and culminates in the proclamation of Christ’s identity as the Son of God by the voice of the Father, flanked by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This Gospel is also read at the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

This revelation not only represents the manifestation of the Holy Trinity but also signals the commencement of Christ’s public ministry. The celebration of Christ’s baptism, known as “Denaha” (meaning “sunrise” in Syriac) or “Epiphany” (appearance of God) serves as a reminder that through His baptism, we are also invited to a spiritual rebirth.



The significance of Christ's baptism is further illustrated by the iconography that depicts Him blessing St John the Baptist, highlighting that it is Christ who imparts a blessing to the waters, making them holy. John is bent over in supplication while the hand of Christ is purifying the River Jordan and driving away evil. Christ renews Creation and sanctifies the waters, and today we are baptized in water. This is why our Priest puts the Cross in the baptismal water, and asks God to sanctify the water and then calls the congregation to "stand by the waters of the River Jordan". The holy water used in baptism becomes the waters of the cleansed River of Jordan itself as the priest invokes the Holy Spirit over it.



This is how the Baptism of our Lord became the basic baptismal theology of the early Church and how Christian baptism was modeled after it¹. St. Paul further articulates the connection between baptism and the death and resurrection of Christ. Our baptism represents a participation in this transformative event, signifying our liberation from spiritual death and our recommitment to God. Early Christian communities understood how baptism was intimately tied to the Easter celebration and in ancient days those who wished to join the Church (catechumens) would prepare during the Great Lent so as to be baptized before the Easter service. Baptisms were Church events and celebrations of new life. Holy Baptism is not merely a ritual, but an essential sacrament that encapsulates our journey of faith, inviting us to embrace the new life that arises from Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.

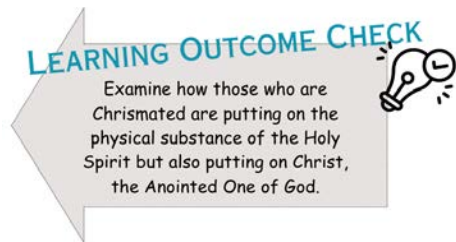


At the cross, Christ's side was pierced and blood and water flowed out. The Syriac tradition likens the blood and water to Eucharist and baptism². Christ is the new Adam, and just as the side of Adam brought Eve we see how Christ brought us life in the Church through Baptism and the Eucharist.

¹ Schmemmann Alexander. *Of Water and Spirit*. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974

² *Order of the Sacraments*. Translated by Fr. Dr. B. Varghese. 2nd ed. Kottayam, Kerala: Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, 2018.

Following Baptism, the new Christian is anointed with Holy Chrism signifying not only the reception of the Holy Spirit but also their new life in Christ. Some denominations delay the reception of Holy Communion until later, but the Orthodox Church gives the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ immediately. This underlines our understanding that Baptism is an inception to a new life, wherein the individual is guided by the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Holy Eucharist. This life is for all members of the Church as it is our covenantal relationship with God. This is why in the Nicene Creed, we declare, “and we confess one baptism for the remission of sins.”



Various objections arise from misconceptions and misunderstandings have emerged over time particularly concerning the practice of infant baptism. Baptism marks the beginning of a lifelong journey toward salvation (theosis) for all, highlighting the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the importance of cultivating a nurturing spiritual environment through the Church.



Misconception/Misunderstanding	Truth
We are born with Adam's guilt, and Baptism is used to take away original sin and all punishment due to sin.	Baptism is the person's death and resurrection in and with Jesus. It is a "new birth by water and the Holy Spirit" into the Kingdom of God (St. John 3.5).
A person needs to be at an "age of reason" in order to truly accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Therefore, infants cannot choose to be baptized.	Anyone can join the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church) at any age. Infant Baptism was practiced in the early Church as evidenced in the Holy Bible. For infants, the godparent speaks on behalf of the child using the child's name in all the prayers.
Salvation is a one-time event and achieved through baptism.	Baptism is the start of a life long process towards Christ and salvation. The entire Church has the responsibility to care and nurture the spiritual life after Baptism.

Summary

St. Gregory of Nyssa compares the crossing of the Red Sea³ with the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. He noted that the cloud acted as a guide and is a representation of the grace of the Holy Spirit that can lead toward goodness. Anyone who follows this guide (the cloud) passed through the waters of the Red Sea (**Exodus 14: 19-31**) because of the path that was created for them. The Israelites who obeyed were safely brought to freedom, while the one who tries to ensnare them in bondage is overwhelmed and destroyed by the water. St. Gregorios noted it is important that no one misunderstand the significance of the water in this context. The one who descends into it alongside the enemy's army emerges alone, leaving the enemy soldiers to drown. St. Gregory goes on to clarify further that those who are baptized in the sacred waters must eliminate all forms of evil that they possess such as greed, uncontrolled desires, harmful thoughts, pride, rash impulses, anger, malice, envy, and similar vices. Since these negative emotions naturally pursue us, we need to actively work to extinguish both the harmful thoughts in our minds and the actions that stem from them.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we “drown” all evil and emerge truly free. However, just as the Israelites fell back to sinful ways and some even longed to return to slavery in Egypt, we too must work to remain faithful and stay focused on our path ahead to our Salvation but empowered and sealed with the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit” in us!

Reflection Questions

1. In the Nicene Creed, we profess “one baptism for the remission of sins”. How can we connect this and educate others about the true nature and significance of Holy Baptism?
2. During the Baptism of an infant, it is the Godparent who responds to the Priest using the name of the child. How would you use this to defend infant baptism with those who argue against it? With this in mind, what is the calling of a Godparent in raising the child in the Church?
3. Reflect on how the Holy Spirit is active in the sacrament of baptism, and how we are born-again in Christ. Can you personally recognize or witness the effects of the Holy Spirit in your own life and in the lives of others who have been baptized?

³ St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses

Lesson 2: Temple of God

Lesson Goals

- *I can explain how the indwelling of the Holy Spirit received during Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation sanctifies us and makes us the Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16).*
 - *I can identify the connection between Chrismation and the Consecration of the Church.*
 - *I can defend why God sets apart what is holy.*
-

Holy Things

Think about something that you have set apart as valuable (a Cross, jewelry, an autographed baseball, etc...). These are just material objects. Sanctification takes a thing, a place, or a person and sets that apart for use only for the sacred. Something that is sanctified is offered back to God with a promise of purpose and identity, and the Holy Spirit is called to be the Perfector and Fulfiller and make it or them holy.

Sanctification is the act of being set apart and made holy. This is an important concept in Orthodoxy and the reason for much of what we see at our Church. Have you ever witnessed the sanctuary being used for anything else but worship? The chalice used to hold the real Body and Blood of our Lord is never used for any other purposes. Similarly, the sanctuary (or madhbaha) is used for our worship alone and we never allow other programs or events to take place in that sacred space.

During the Elevation of the Holy Mysteries in the Holy Qurbana, we are reminded that God alone is Holy:

Priest: *Holy Things to the holy and pure.*

People: *The One Holy Father, the One Holy Son, and the One Holy Spirit, alone is holy! Amin!*

Scripture as well reminds us that for Christians the only measure is God alone (**Leviticus 12:44; Revelation 15:4**). God makes other things holy (**Genesis 2:3; Exodus 3:5; Exodus 26:34**, etc.) and makes the people He has chosen Holy (**Exodus 19:3**). Those who approached God were commanded to be Holy (**Leviticus 20:7-8**). God loved His children and did not want them to fall into corruption and die.

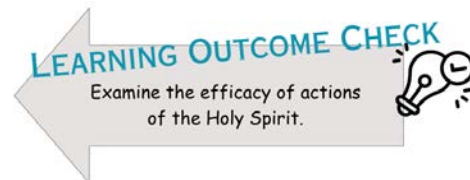
Restoring Creation

Our relationship with God is made possible because Christ “*redeemed us with His precious sufferings*” (our response during the Elevation of the Holy Mysteries in the Holy Qurbana). Our identity as a holy priesthood (**1 Peter 2:9**) became more intimate with an invitation to be the temple of God (**1 Corinthians 3:16**) through Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation. The original purpose for man was to be caretakers of His creation (**Genesis 1:28**). Mankind was chosen to become His presence in the world (**1 Peter 2:9**). God made everything good, and man at the crown of His creation.



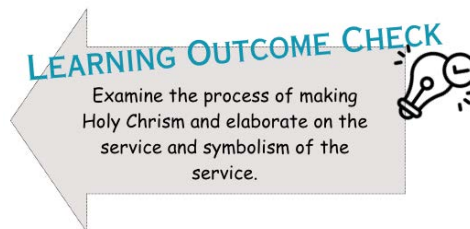
It was through Adam’s free will that misery, suffering, sin and evil came on us and on the world at large. The salvation of the world, therefore, required pre-eminently the healing of man and the redemption of humanity. The saving work of God accomplished through the Incarnation is to both individual and corporate. This divine work is carried through the work of the Holy Spirit in each of us as individuals and the Church as a whole. (**Ephesians 2:19-22; St. John 14:16; St. John 14:26**).

Salvation, accomplished by God through the suffering, death, and resurrection of His incarnate Son, is perfected through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples that after His crucifixion and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit will guide them to all the truth. (**St. John 16:12-15; Acts 1:4-9**). It is our faith that the Holy Spirit in His fullness dwells in the Church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. To perfect this restoration of all creation, in accordance with God's plan and intention, is the task placed on each of us, who are joined to the Church. (**Ephesians 2:12-22; Ephesians 1:9-11**)

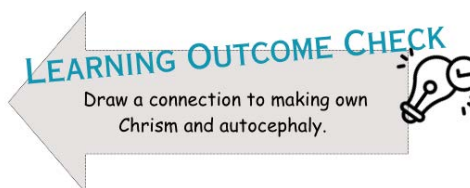


Holy Chrism

The Baptismal service begins with the anointing of the candidate with the Oil of Gladness [**Psalm 44:8** (45:7)] as the sign of Christ coming into the life of the person leading from darkness to light. After special prayers for the blessing of the water, specially prepared perfumed Oil called Holy Chrism or Holy Myron is poured into the water. The use of Chrism is sacred in the Church, and St. Paul refers to its importance: *"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."* (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).



The making of Chrism is such an important and sacred act in the Church. The use of this Holy Oil in only Holy Baptism and the Consecration of a Church shows the importance of the consecration of this oil. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church became an **autocephalous** Church in 1912 and ever since is able to prepare its own Holy Chrism. In other words, the sacrament of consecration of Holy Myron is one symbol of autocephaly of our Holy Church. It can only be led by the leader of the Church, His Holiness the Catholicos, with the consent of the bishops and the participation of at least 12 priests, 12 deacons, and 12 subdeacons. The oil is carefully prepared using over 50 ingredients from all over the world. His Holiness and the bishops fast and pray for the consecration of Holy Myron, preferably for 40 days. The Consecration of Holy Myron is done on an as needed basis, when the Church is in need of more Chrism. This usually happens once in about ten years according to our current need.



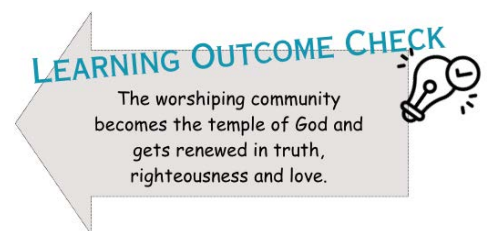
Moses Bar Kepha (9th Century Church Father) writes that the priest pours the Chrism to show that it was for the sake of our regeneration by baptism that the Word of God came down and emptied Himself even unto the enduring of the cross and death. He further expands that the Myron (Chrism) that is poured upon the water here typifies the Holy Spirit. For as the Spirit of God brooded upon the waters in the beginning of creation, that it might impart to them generative and fertilizing power, so also here the Holy Spirit “broods” upon the waters of baptism, through the pouring out of the “Myron” upon them, that it may impart to them power to bring forth spiritual sons of a heavenly Father.

Chrismation is the reception of the Holy Spirit as well as the seal of Christ, *“the sweet fragrance of Christ, the mark and sign of true faith and the perfection of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Having put on Baptism and Chrismation, let us not forget St Paul’s reminder (1 Cor. 3: 16, 17) of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit as the temple of God and the great calling it is to be anointed to participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2: 9,10).

As St Cyril of Jerusalem teaches, *“While the body is anointed with visible ointment, your soul is sanctified by the Holy and Life-giving Spirit. Having put on the whole armor of the Holy Spirit after Holy Baptism and the mystical Chrism to stand against the power of the enemy, (you) vanquish him saying, I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me. When you are counted worthy of His Holy Chrism, you are called Christians.”*

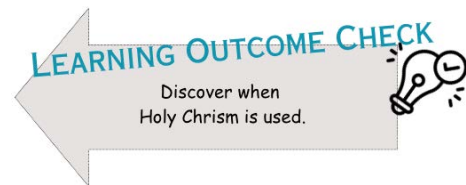
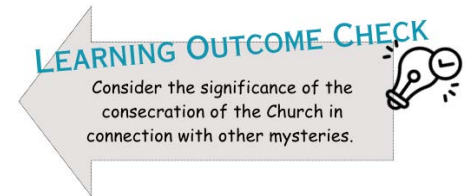
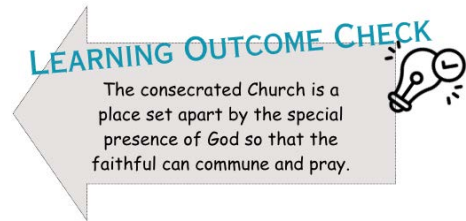
Holy Chrism - Consecrated and Sanctified Church

We place the primary vocation of man to be worshipping God, as a liturgical being to fulfill the very purpose for which he was created, to live in communion with God and His creation. The Christian, initiated to the life in Christ through baptism and chrismation, gathers together with the heavenly community. The heavenly community comprising the living and departed, the saints, hosts of angels and the baptized participate in the Holy liturgical worship especially the Holy Qurbana; the celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ.



Today as baptized Christians, we have God in us. As St. Paul asks each of us, *“do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

In the Old Testament, the temple was regarded as the dwelling place of God, a sacred space consecrated for worship and communion with the Divine. This physical sanctuary was set apart as a holy place, devoted to the reverence of God and the spiritual needs of His people. Similarly, the Church today, consecrated with Holy Chrism, serves as our modern sanctuary—a place designated for gathering, worship, and prayer. It is in this sacred environment that we come together to commune with one another and with God, and where Sacraments are able to manifest in this world.



Moreover, Holy Chrism plays a vital role in this consecration process. When we receive the anointing of Holy Chrism, we are not only consecrated as individuals but also made holy through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We also become living temples of God! This allows us to embody His grace in our everyday lives. Just as the Old Testament temple was a physical representation of God's presence, the consecrated Church and also the faithful who are anointed by Holy Chrism continue this tradition, fostering a deeper connection with God and among the community of believers.

Reflection Questions

1. Considering the significance that the same Holy Chrism used in both the consecration of the Church and the newly baptized individuals, what implications does this have on your ongoing spiritual growth and commitment to living a life that reflects Christ?
2. How would you justify the importance of maintaining a regular spiritual life so that one does not become a "Sunday-only Christian"?
3. How does the Holy Spirit's presence during the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Chrismation contribute to our spiritual growth in the Orthodox faith?

Lesson 3: The Salt of the Earth

Lesson Goals

- *I can realize that as Orthodox Christians we are called to act with integrity.*
- *I can discern that integrity is the work of the Holy Spirit.*
- *I can identify the sacramental preconditions for indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*

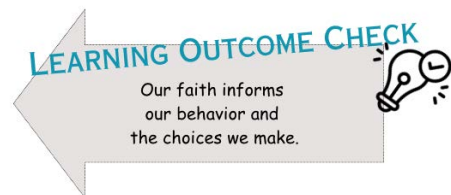
“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.”

- St. Matthew 5:13

The Sermon on the Mount (**St. Matthew Chapters 5 to 7**) by Christ Himself serves as the foundational text for Orthodox Christians, profoundly shaping the principles of ethical behavior and moral decision-making within the faith. In this pivotal sermon, Christ calls His followers to a higher standard of conduct that transcends conventional notions of justice and morality. He emphasizes the importance of internal motivations and intentions, urging believers to act righteously not merely in public view for the sake of appearances, but sincerely and humbly as a reflection of their faith. This teaching underscores the call to integrity, urging Christians to align their actions with the divine will, fostering an environment where love, compassion, and mercy can flourish.



Our faith profoundly informs not just how we interact with others but also how we approach the challenges and dilemmas we face in daily life. The teachings of Christ, particularly those illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount, illuminate the path of ethical decision-making by encouraging self-examination and self-sacrifice. As believers, we are reminded that our choices should consider not only the immediate consequences but also the eternal implications of our actions. By understanding ourselves as partakers of God’s grace and recipients of His forgiveness, we are empowered to extend that same grace to others. This modeling of Christ’s love calls us to prioritize the



wellbeing of our neighbors and to engage with the world around us in a manner that reflects our commitment to the principles of Christian ethics.

Jesus teaches that believers are called to be “the salt of the earth” (**St. Matthew 5:13**). We play a vital role in the divine plan. Salt, alongside food and water, is an essential element for sustaining life. Animals instinctively search for sources of salt, often risking their safety in the presence of predators, due to the scarcity and value of salt in the natural environment.

We are also “the light of the world” (**St. Matthew 5:14-16**), emphasizing our special purpose in benefitting the broader community through right worship and good works. The essence of true worship lies in reconciling humanity with God. Good works, motivated by our faith, should flow naturally from a heart transformed by Christ (**St. James 5: 18**). Integrity, defined as doing what is right when no one is observing, is crucial for Christian living, as Christ elevates the standards of the Mosaic Law to focus on the intentions of the heart rather than mere adherence to rules. This includes a call to reject hypocrisy, reminding followers not to judge others harshly for faults they themselves possess. Instead, Jesus encourages self-reflection and reconciliation, urging believers to forgive generously and interact justly in all relationships, following the principles of the Silver and Golden Rules. Such ethical behavior is vital for fostering compassion and justice in society, ensuring that even the most vulnerable are protected.

Furthermore, the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and shaping our behavior cannot be understated. Through sacramental practices and participation in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, believers cultivate a deeper awareness of God’s presence within them, aiding them in discerning right from wrong. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit provides internal guidance that fortifies one’s resolve to act justly and lovingly, even in difficult situations. As Orthodox Christians, we recognize that our faith is not a mere set of rules to follow but an active expression of our relationship with God and His creation, informing our choices and inspiring us to take actions that are just, compassionate, and reflective of the light of Christ in the world. By embodying this faith-informed approach to life, we fulfill our role as “the salt of the earth,” positively influencing those around us and drawing them closer to the truth of God’s love.

Christian behavior is fundamentally different from an animalistic ethic of justice, as it is rooted in the promise of eternal life through God. For Christians, the pursuit of worldly resources is not the ultimate goal; rather, these resources serve merely as tools for

achieving a higher purpose. If Christians are citizens of an eternal kingdom, the desire to covet or steal something as trivial as an apple, which provides only temporary satisfaction, becomes absurd. Instead, the apple should be shared to help someone in need.

The concept of punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous to sustain group identity does not align with Christian teachings. Indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ teaches that God provides for both the righteous and the wicked without discrimination, indicating that Christians should show love and compassion to all, regardless of their moral standing (**St. Matthew 5:45**). How can we do all this? The answer lies in the understanding presented in the Elevation of the Mysteries in the Holy Qurbana:

*“With us is the One Holy Father who created the world by His compassion.
+ With us indeed, Amin.*

*With us is the One Holy Son who redeemed us by His precious sufferings.
+ With us indeed, Amin.*

*With us is the one Living Holy Spirit who is the Perfector and the Fulfiller of all that has been and all that will be. May the Name of the Lord be blessed forever and ever.
+ With us indeed, Amin.”*

As members of the Holy Church, we truly blessed as we have God! We are able to become perfect like the Father (**Matthew 5:48**) through the Sacramental life and teachings of the Holy Church. This process is called theosis. We also have our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not only as our role model (**John 15:12, Matthew 16:24**) but also with us when we are gathered in fellowship (**Matthew 18:20**). And with the Holy Spirit within us, we are able to reflect God as He is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

The Guidance of the Holy Spirit

In our lives as Orthodox Christians, we recognize that the voice encouraging our understanding of right and wrong comes from the Holy Spirit working within us. This divine guidance invites us to strive for perfection, which requires honest self-examination and above all humility. When we reflect on our own faults and shortcomings, we are less inclined to judge others harshly. Instead, we find common ground with those who may struggle similarly, fostering empathy and understanding.

When faced with sin—whether through our actions or the anger of others—we are called to respond with humility and self-sacrifice, exemplifying Christ’s teachings. For instance, if we are confronted in anger or treated unjustly, we should remember that we, too, have experienced anger. By choosing not to retaliate, we embody Christian virtue and invite others to reconsider their actions.

This continual self-examination can be challenging, and at times, we may feel overwhelmed by our imperfections. However, we must find hope in the understanding that our journey toward holiness is not reliant solely on our strength, but on our faith in the Holy Spirit. This faith shapes our decisions and leads us to discern right from wrong in every aspect of our lives.

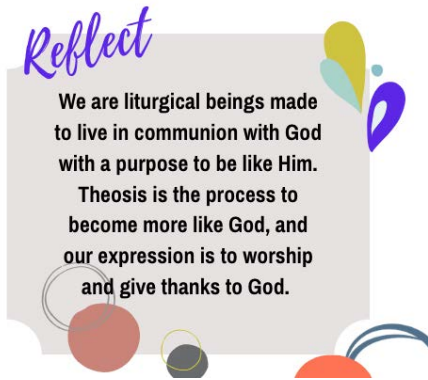
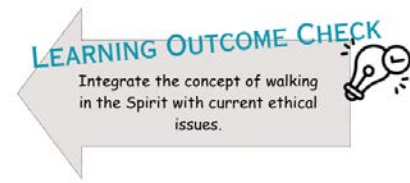


As we navigate ethical dilemmas—whether they pertain to personal identity, happiness, or success—we should frame our decisions within an eternal perspective. This means that, instead of focusing on immediate or material concerns, we should consider how our choices reflect our commitment to serving God and His creation.

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in this process of discernment. In the life of the Church, the Holy Spirit is present through the sacraments. For example, Holy Baptism signifies the beginning of our spiritual journey, washing away sin and marking our rebirth as new creations in Christ. Following baptism, we receive Holy Chrismation, which anoints us as members of God’s Royal Priesthood, sealing us in purity and protecting us from external evil influences.

The Holy Qurbana, or the Eucharist, deepens our connection with Christ, allowing us to partake in His Body and Blood. As Scripture reminds us, “You are what you eat,” meaning that through communion, we incorporate Christ into our very being, which strengthens us in our faith and guides us in our ethical decisions (**2 Corinthians 4:6-7, Romans 8:10**). Orthodoxy emphasizes the significance of Baptism not merely as a singular moment of forgiveness but as the beginning of a lifelong journey towards knowing God and His love—this process is called theosis. As we continue to partake of the Holy Qurbana, we enable our children and ourselves to grow closer to God, fostering a deeper understanding of His will.

In addressing contemporary ethical issues, walking in the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16**) becomes paramount. By allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, we are better equipped to tackle the complex moral challenges of today.



This commitment to walking in the Spirit ensures that our actions reflect Christ's love and teachings, helping us to navigate the pathways of life with grace and integrity.

What is important for us is to work together with the Holy Spirit. Remember that God is Love, and He never forces us to do anything against our will. We need to continually seek to emulate God's love and striving for holiness in all that we do.

Reflection Questions

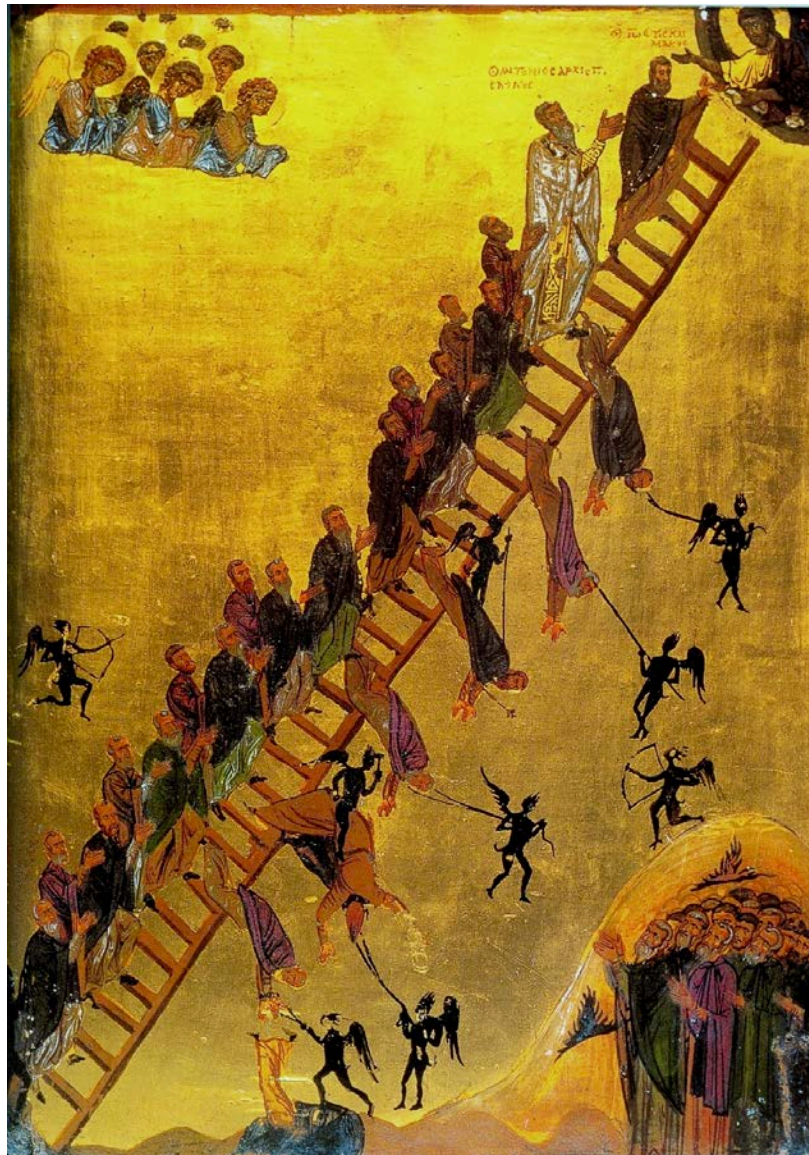
1. From where do we derive our understanding of ethical behavior as Christians, and how do the Sacraments bring us help to align with this source in our daily lives?
2. How does the Christian perspective on justice differ from more conventional ideas about favor and disfavor, particularly as illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount? How can understanding this inform our moral decisions today?
3. In what ways can we apply the concept of walking in the Spirit to understand and address contemporary ethical dilemmas?

Lesson 4: Renew Yourself

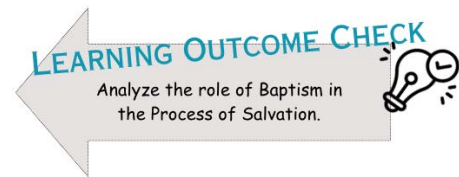
Lesson Goals

- *I can understand the need for a repentful nature.*
 - *I can understand the process of Salvation and illustrate with examples.*
 - *I can understand why only one Baptism is necessary for the remission of sins.*
-

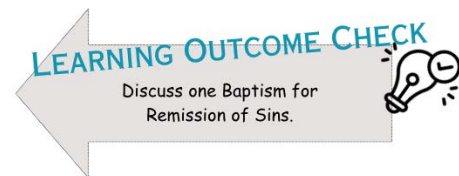
As Orthodox Christians, we are called to be humble and repent which leads us towards constant renewal and brings us closer to God. Baptism marks the start of this process, and is not a “one-time event” for salvation. If so, why would we need to repent?



In Holy Baptism we are born again, and this is only one time. This is a cleansing and liberation of ourselves from all the holds of the evil one, and the start of a new life with Christ. Without being baptized, we cannot start our journey in the Church which is the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:27**) and grow towards perfection and unity with God. We cannot participate in any of the other Sacraments of the Church.



We only need to begin this journey once, as God is Love and if we ever fall we just need humility and repentance, and use other healing sacraments such as Confession. There is no need to be baptized again as our journey has already begun! St. Paul is very clear in his writings that we believe in only one baptism for the remission of sins (**Ephesians 4:4-7**) and that baptism is the death of our old life and the start of a new and beautiful journey with Christ (**Romans 6:3-5**).



The Sacrament that gives us healing from sin is Confession. Only those who are baptized can confess and receive pardon and forgiveness. This is a healing of the body and soul, and not to be considered punishment or obligation. Baptism is the beginning of our journey towards Christ and towards Salvation, but the path is often difficult and confusing which is why we seek guidance in the sacraments of the Church.

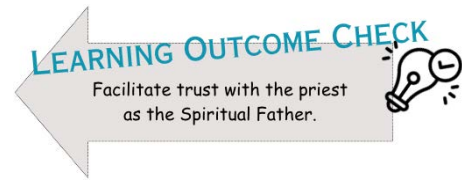
Healing through Repentance

Although we are called to perfection (**St. Matthew 5:48**), we know that we are often weak and succumb to the temptations. These may be sins that we do willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly. In our constant and continuous prayers we must always remain humble and understand we are sinners. In the words of King David in **Psalms 50 (51)**, *"I acknowledge my fault and my sins are before me always"*.

But God is a loving, and in the same Psalm we are reminded *"the sacrifice of God is a humble spirit; a heart that is contrite God will not despise"*.

When we participate in the Sacrament of Confession, we engage in a profound process of remembering and repenting for our sins. This sacred act allows us to reflect on

the consequences of our actions and seek guidance from the priest, who serves as our Spiritual Father. The priest assists us not only in understanding the weight of our sins but also provides encouragement and wisdom to help us avoid falling into the same patterns again.

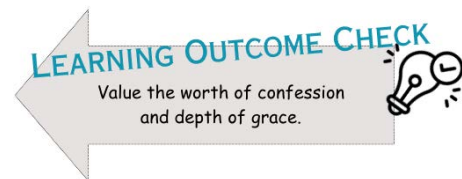


Holy Baptism cleanses us from sin, while Holy Chrismation equips us to be instruments for God's work in the world. The Sacrament of Confession plays a vital role in this journey. It continually refreshes and refines our spirits, preparing us to fulfill our divine purpose.

C.S. Lewis, in his insightful book 'Mere Christianity,' highlights the nature of repentance beautifully. He writes, "Remember, this repentance, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, is not something God demands of you before He will take you back..." This means that true repentance is essential for our reconciliation with God. It requires us to sincerely recognize our mistakes and turn away from them.

Genuine repentance leads to authentic confession, where we fully acknowledge our true selves and the greatness of God. All sins create a barrier between us and God. Therefore, it is through sincere repentance and acceptance of God's ways that we find our path to redemption. Just as a vessel must be emptied before it can be filled with something new, we too must let go of our sins to receive God's grace.

It is important to remember that this journey is often a struggle. The Sacraments, especially Confession, are designed to heal, strengthen, and inspire us to pursue our relationship with Christ with greater love and enthusiasm. As we engage in Confession, let us foster a trusting relationship with our Spiritual Father, recognizing the immense value of this sacrament and the depth of grace it offers us. Through these practices, we move closer to the ultimate goal of theosis—becoming one with God in love and purpose.



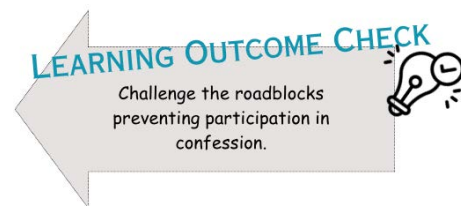
Summary

Confession holds a vital place in the spiritual life of an Orthodox Christian, as it serves as a conduit for God's boundless love and mercy to touch our lives. Despite the absolute knowledge and compassion of God, individuals may question the need to communicate their sins to a priest. This inquiry often arises from two extremes: the sin of pride, which leads one to believe that forgiveness is unnecessary, and the sin of despair,

which fosters a sense of unworthiness to receive God’s grace. However, it is essential to understand that, like the prodigal son embraced by his father before uttering a word of repentance (**St. Luke 15:20**), God awaits our return with open arms. St. Isaac the Syrian reminds us that our sins, even the gravest, are but “a handful of sand thrown into the ocean” compared to God’s infinite capacity for forgiveness.

The Church embodies a sanctuary for those seeking spiritual healing, akin to a hospital for the soul. In this sacred space, Holy Baptism and Holy Confession provide essential pathways to renewal and growth. St. John Chrysostom encourages us to reflect on the importance of daily repentance, urging us to “renew ourselves” continually, much like we maintain our homes. This ongoing process of repentance cultivates joy, gratitude, and the assurance of salvation, as articulated by St. Peter of Damascus.

It is imperative for individuals to confront the roadblocks that hinder their participation in Confession—fear of judgment or feelings of inadequacy—so that they may embrace the transformative power of God’s forgiveness and the reaffirmation of their faith. By committing to regular self-examination and efforts to put things right through repentance and good deeds, we open ourselves to the depth of divine love awaiting us.



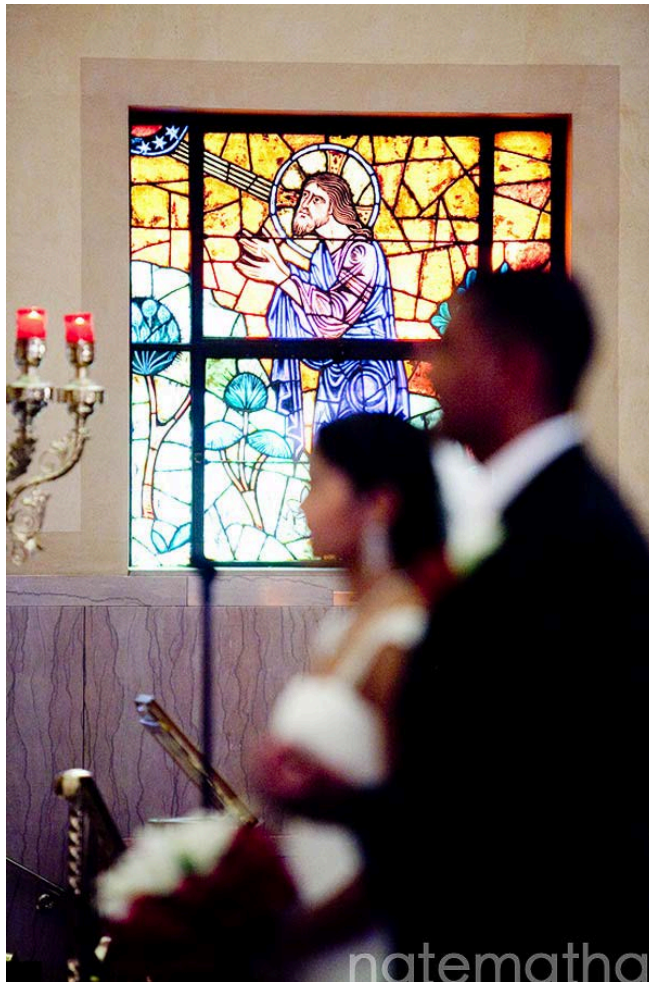
Reflection Questions

1. In the context of Holy Baptism and the process of salvation, why is it necessary to repent even after we have been baptized?
2. Why should we seek the guidance of a priest for confession instead of always confessing our sins directly to God?
3. Reflecting on the statement that God “does not desire the death of the sinner but rather that he repent and live,” how can feelings of overwhelming shame or guilt about our sins discourage us from attending Church, and what does this reveal about our understanding of God’s grace and forgiveness?

Lesson 5: A Path to Holiness

Lesson Goals

- *I can contrast the Orthodox teaching that the goal of marriage is sanctification with the secular teaching of self-fulfillment.*
 - *I can explain the goal of a Christian marriage is leading each other to salvation.*
 - *I can defend why marriage is a covenant through God's love.*
-

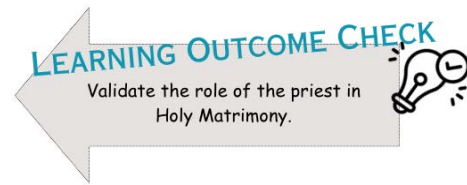


Have you ever wondered why the man and woman do not exchange vows with each other in Orthodox Christian weddings?

The model for an Orthodox Christian marriage is the love between our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Church (**Ephesians 5:25**). This is the highest form of love and seen in

the self-sacrificial love of Christ. The love between a husband and wife lays aside pride and self-interest to always be one with God.

Matter bestows grace in all the Holy Sacraments of the Church. In Holy Qurbana, bread and wine offered with thanksgiving become the Body and Blood of our Lord. In Baptism, water is blessed by God through the hands of the priest to be a vessel of sanctification as a catechumen is born again of water and Spirit. In the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the physical matter being sanctified and perfected are the rings, crowns, and the bride and groom too. The prayer over the crowns says, “May the crowns and the heads upon which they are placed be blessed and perfected.” It is not the crown that makes the king and queen. We are asking God to make the groom and bride worthy to bear the crown by His sanctifying them. This grace is given to them by the hands of the priest who has become an instrument of the Lord’s grace by the sacrament of ordination.



Imperishable Beauty

The word “beauty” is used a lot on the day of a wedding. So much effort goes into the wedding planning to make sure everything looks perfect.

Oh, the Bride is so beautiful! Look at those beautiful flowers! Wasn't that such a beautiful moment? What a beautiful flower girl! Look at those beautiful centerpieces! It sure is a beautiful day! What a beautiful cake! And even the priests hear it... Father, the service was beautiful!

And yet, the flowers will wilt, the cake will be cut. Most things that are beautiful perish. The Church, in its prayers on the day of the wedding addresses this reality.

During the Prayer for the Bridegroom and Bride in the Betrothal Service of the Rings, one phrase stands out: “Adorn them with imperishable beauty.”

Again, as the crown is placed on the groom, the priest blesses him saying: “May the Lord crown you with the crown of righteousness, adorn you with imperishable beauty...” And then for the bride as well, he blesses her saying: “May the Lord crown you with the crown of righteousness and adorn you with incorporeal beauty...” In the moment that people have spent great efforts to make their body the most beautiful, the Church responds saying, may you be clothed with a beauty that will not fade.

The service speaks of this as becoming “mature in virtue,” being adorned with the “seal of purity rather than ornaments of gold,” and granting “them strength to keep their conscience pure, which is more fragrant than sweet-smelling lilies.” The service is not discouraging the beauty of the body on the wedding day, but is meeting them where they are and guiding them to focus on the beauty of the soul. A similar theme is struck in the funeral service as well, lamenting on the corruption of beauty by death and asking for the Lord to clothe His image which has become corrupt with a garment of glory. The beauty of the body is important because we lament its corruption and seek its restoration. But we seek the beauty of the soul which is imperishable, incorporeal, eternal. Even the beauty of the soul can shine forth in the body as well, as it can be seen in the miracles of the saints bodies not decaying but being incorrupt or smelling fragrant long after their death.

First Qolo from the 3rd Service of the Funeral for Women

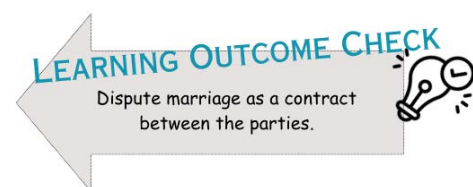
1. As I was passing by the doors of the city, I heard a voice
I drew near and I stopped to listen to the voice full of sorrow
2. I saw young men and boys and noble women and maids lamenting
I was filled with great sorrow and asked them, “Women, why do you weep?”
3. “Why are you singing these songs of lamentations and of sorrow?”
They said, “Be silent for your beauty will be corrupted by Death.
4. Death will destroy the beauty of the garments that we have put on
And corrupt the adornments that we wear to beautify ourselves
5. Our beauty resembles the Sun which rises and sets ev’ry day
Our beauty is like the dew which falls on the grass and remains there
6. Our beauty is like the flow’r which grows faint and withers in the night
Have mercy, O Lord on Your image which is corrupted in death
7. Comfort Your image and give life to it and raise it on that day
Clothe it with the garment of glory. Glory to You Lord of all!

This then begs the question, for what purpose are a husband and wife made an instrument of grace? The answer may seem obvious, but it rarely shows up in the vows people write in a typical non-Orthodox wedding. If we were to ask a typical bride and groom why they want to get married, their answer almost always will be some form of, “because this person makes me happy.” The word happy might take different forms such as: ‘safe,’ ‘cherished,’ ‘honored,’ ‘supported,’ ‘a better person,’ or some other qualities. These are all good things and probably necessary in the process leading to marriage. After all, one should look for these qualities in a potential spouse.

But, after receiving the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, the relationship cannot stay in that state. Having been sanctified, the bride no longer seeks for herself. The groom no longer seeks for himself. It’s not about the spouse making ‘me’ happy, it’s about ‘the other’ person. Remember Christ loved the Church that He gave his life for her (**Ephesians 5:25**). For the husband the focus is his wife, as St. Peter exhorts the husbands “to honor their wives as being heirs together of the grace of life” (**1 Peter 3:7**). For the wife the focus is her husband, to model themselves just like the Church is submitted to Christ (**Ephesians 5:22**). For both husband and wife, they are to be called to be Christ to each other and to the world.

In the secular world, we see even in dating relationships that the emphasis is on the pleasure of oneself, e.g., “this person makes me feel good”. This leads to other thoughts such as how to dress or act in order to attract the other person’s attention. Lust creeps into these types of situations, because fundamentally it’s a sin of using the other person or even the thought of the other person for selfish purposes. This is not the foundation for a healthy marriage.

Unfortunately, many walk into marriage with these types of expectations and when they don’t receive what they expected, it all comes crashing down. This is more contractual in nature. However, the Lord is calling us to something greater in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

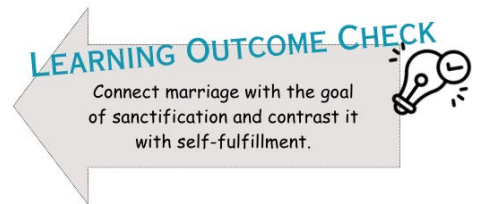


Reflect

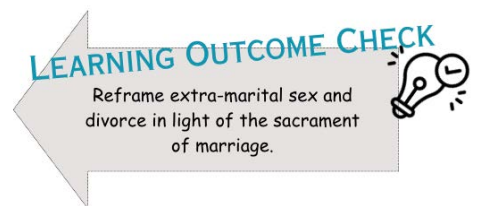
The Husband and Wife should be able to put their own name in place of “love” in the verse
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The bride and groom stand side by side facing the altar because it’s not a contract between the two (this is why there are no vows), but instead a joining of the two as one as they walk together towards Christ and the Kingdom. As they walk, they learn to bear with one another, support one another, and love one another unconditionally.

As they learn to love one another, the bride and groom cultivate virtues like patience, kindness, gentleness, simplicity, faithfulness, obedience, wisdom, honesty, and humility. These virtues bear fruit in the ministry of the couple, to the world around them. They offer hospitality to guests, welcome strangers, heal the wounded and tend to those in need. If they are entrusted with children, the couple will pour their love upon them and train them up in virtue as well. Marriage is like a tree that produces fruit that the tree does not consume, but instead it nourishes the world around it and multiplies. This is something to aspire to. Never settle for anything less than what God is desiring to give you.

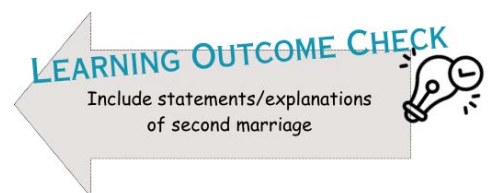


Unfortunately, there are times when the brokenness of sin enters a marriage and the husband and wife cannot continue in their calling. In the case of extra-marital sex or abuse, the spouse has not lived up to the calling that God has placed upon him or her in their marriage. This is an unhealthy situation and one that requires prayer, Confession, and therapy. While the Church does not encourage divorce as a solution since marriage is a promise before God and we should not separate what God has joined together, the Holy Church is ready and willing to pick up the broken pieces and try to make each person whole again. Especially for cases such as abuse, separation is necessary in order for the abused to find safety and also not enable the abuser to continue in his or her sinful practice. Unhealthy or dangerous marriage relationships does not reflect the model of Christ and His Church.



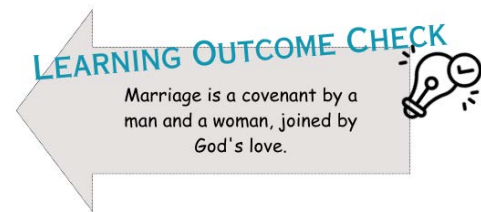
In the case of the death of a spouse, the surviving spouse is physically separated from their soulmate for a period of time. This is a very painful separation, the result of living in a fallen world. Because our life in Christ is eternal, the separation is not spiritual. That physical separation is temporary. From the perspective of the Kingdom, it will always be a short time. And yet in that time, sometimes the surviving spouse may not be able to bear the burden of loneliness and may be granted permission for a second marriage.

If both the bride and groom are receiving marriage for the second time, a service of the second marriage is to be done. In that service there are no rings or crowns given because the bride and groom



have already received that grace in their first marriage. If either the bride or the groom is receiving marriage for the first time then the normal service for Holy Matrimony is to be given, but the crown only given to the person who is receiving marriage for the first time. Canonically, a third marriage is not permitted and is considered a violation of the law. After a time of penance, it is possible that the couple could be reconciled to the Church. Gregory the Theologian states “that which is beyond that [4th marriage onwards], is a way of life that befits swine.”⁴

The Orthodox perspective of marriage is a union between a man and a woman for their oneness and holiness, walking hand in hand to the Kingdom. Marriage is considered as a calling, a vocation that can only be lived with the grace of God. Marriage is a journey together in Christ, of getting to know each other, living life towards oneness, learning to love with God’s love. The Holy Spirit guides the husband and the wife to grow in virtues such as: patience, kindness, gentleness, peacefulness and simplicity throughout their journey. The virtue that is cultivated in that journey becomes to them true incorporeal and imperishable beauty.



Reflection Questions

1. When most of your peers in high school date, what are usually the reasons behind that? Are there selfish desires underlying those reasons? What are some things that you would consider red flags or unhealthy relationships?
2. Think of a depiction of unhealthy relationships in popular culture or movies. How might that lead to unhealthy expectations when entering into marriage?
3. What is the ultimate goal of an Orthodox Christian Marriage? What could the husband or wife do during their daily life after marriage to remember their promise to God?

⁴ Gregory Bar Hebraeus. trans. Fr. Baby Varghese. *Book of Guides (Hudaya) or Nomocanon*. Malankara Orthodox Church Publications (2014) p. 147

Lesson 6: Another Path to Holiness

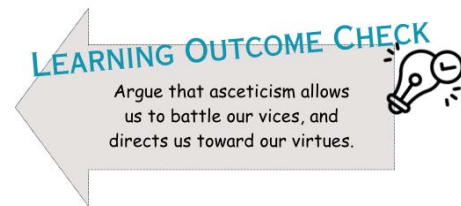
Lesson Goals

- I can explain why Monasticism and Marriage are both acceptable paths toward salvation.
 - I can explain how asceticism allows us to battle our vices and directs us toward our virtues.
 - I can understand the Service of Tonsuring of the monk.
-

Asceticism and Monasticism

The origin of the word “asceticism” is from the Greek word “askein” which means “to work.” It is part of a training regimen and was used to describe athletes in preparation for an athletic event. Philosophers took up this word to speak about the training of the spirit and mind. A person who plans to attain a higher state tries to get to the higher level sacrificing the easier and more enjoyable physical activities for the higher spiritual level.

Asceticism is practiced as a healing discipline in the Orthodox tradition. We often feel the need for healing. Thus, we feel the need for asceticism as there has been some damage done to our human nature and some essential quality of goodness needs to be restored. We do feel our life to be incomplete, and thus, we are drawn to asceticism as a means to make our life whole. One can draw parallels to asceticism as a tourniquet being applied to a wound. It is not destructive in any manner. Asceticism is considered as a therapy; curing, saving and making a person whole. Asceticism repairs and cures a sinner to be blessed by the sanctifying grace to the true path of holiness.



In the Orthodox Church, monasticism is a personal calling for repentance in a life dedicated solely to serve God. One of the common misconceptions of monasticism or monastic life is that a monk runs away from the common problems of the world and becomes a recluse. This is far from the truth as monks live in a community of monastics who have a common goal and each of them performs tasks for the welfare of the community.

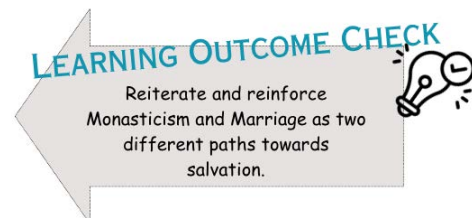
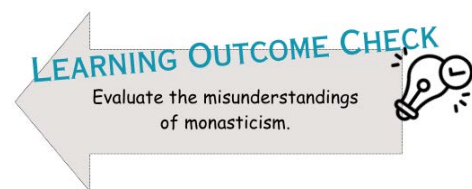
In the Orthodox Church, it is not only the monks and nuns who follow ascetic disciplines. Every faithful is called to follow a certain level of ascetic discipline for spiritual training; maybe of varying degrees. Lent and fasting, abstinence from food, temperance in physical relationships, special control over one's words, actions, and conduct, awareness over spiritual goals to be attained etc., are all ascetic disciplines ; assigned not only for monks and nuns, but also for every faithful. A regular faithful is also expected to reign their eyes, ears, tongue, and mind from wandering towards unhealthy passions. The faithful living a regular life abstaining from all animal products during fasting times or observing abstinence from coital relationships during Holy Lent are all part of a degree of ascetic life in the world. This is because the reward for both the monastic faithful and the non-monastic faithful is the same, a share in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it will be interesting to contrast monastic life with married life.

Monasticism and Marriage

There is a common misunderstanding that there are different requirements for a Christian who is a monk and one who is not. The most significant difference is that those who do not choose the monastic life could also decide to get married, whereas this choice is not permitted in monasticism.

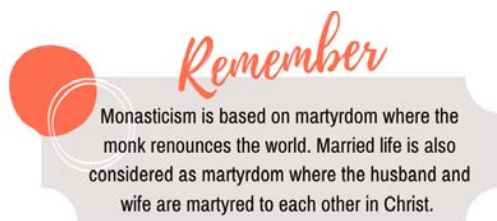
In the words of St. John Chrysostom, *"You certainly deceive yourself and are greatly mistaken if you think that there is one set of requirements for the person in the world and another for the monastic. The difference between them is that one is married and the other is not; in all other respects they will have to render the same account, for all people are called to reach the same point: [the full measure of Christ; to become perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect]. And this is what throws everything into disorder: the idea that only the monk is required to show greater perfection while the rest are allowed to live in laxity. But this is not true!"*

The Orthodox church sees two paths towards salvation - the married life or the monastic life. As St. John Chrysostom mentions above, the two paths are very similar. Both the paths have the same spiritual responsibilities. The monastic path is narrower as it is more stringent. Married path is not wide or easy as it brings enough challenges to spiritual life and the fight against evil is there too.



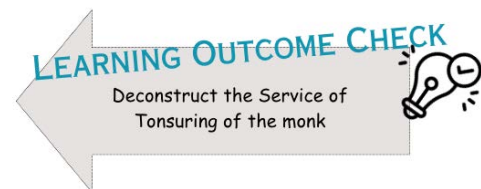
Both the married and monastic must adhere to self-denial and sacrifice themselves in order to live for Christ. Monasticism is considered a mystical death which is a death to self. Marriage is a death to self in which one must live in and serve, love and submit to the spouse. Both these paths are self-sacrificing and the eventual goal is to regain the paradise that was lost when Adam and Eve fell. Monasticism is based on martyrdom where the monk renounces the world. Married life is also considered as martyrdom where the husband and wife are martyred to each other in Christ. They are to give 100% to each other. Two perfect examples taken from the Old Testament are Abraham, a married man and prophet Elijah who is the fore figure of the monastic.

An unmarried person or a widower/widow can join a monastery with the intention of leading an ascetic life for the remainder of their life. There is a period of preparation for a person getting acclimatized with general monastic disciplines as well as those of each individual monastery. During this probationary period, a person fully participates in the life of the monastery to find out whether one fits there in. Once the Abbot or Mother of the monastery finds the person worthy to receive membership, they are offered the ceremony of tonsuring, namely cutting the hair symbolizing cutting away all deadly and worldly



passions as hair is the only part of the body which grows but is not living. Tonsuring is a prayer service where the official monastic vow is laid down. This is not a sacramental event. Tonsuring is presided over by the Abbot of the monastery and a bishop is not required to be present there.

The rite of the tonsuring of the monk is where the monk pledges himself to permanent monasticism. It begins with the candidate prostrating himself before the Abbot. There are long exhortations from the Abbot cautioning the candidate of taking such a momentous step and not turning back if the candidate changes his/her mind. The Abbot questions the candidate about what he/she really wants in order to elicit a reply from the candidate that he/she wants to live a life of asceticism and is choosing this life of his/her free will. Then comes the time for tonsuring (cutting of the hair). This signifies consecration to God. In ancient times according to Mosaic law, the Nazarites offered their hair to God as a sacrifice. The new monk is shorn as a sign that he now belongs to God and not to the world, but to God alone sitting in solitude before Him.



After the tonsure, the monk is dressed in a long robe, a monastic veil, a wooden cross, and prayer rope. This represents the monk's new life of solitude and struggle.

It should be noted that there are many Christians who are not married and do not choose a monastic life. As it is mentioned above, the married and the monastic life demands sacrifice and dying to self. The same applies to one who does not choose to be married. When choosing to be single, one offers their time to serve others just as a monk or nun chooses to lead a life of rigorous discipline and prayer life within the confines of a community. As a married person one chooses a life of discipline with limitations within the confines of a family. Both are equally important choices with big responsibilities to discharge. Within the family, one raises the next generation as God-fearing faithful. Within the monastery, one nurtures the next generation in spiritual comfort and ceaseless prayer so that the faithful living in the worldly community are leading a life of virtue pleasing to God.

Regardless of your choice, as Orthodox Christians baptized into a new life, we make the same promise and have the same accountability to God. Monastic persons willingly submit themselves to a more disciplined and structured community and learn to grow closer to God. The same can be achieved without being a monk. Both single and married Christians have the same promise of new life in Christ.

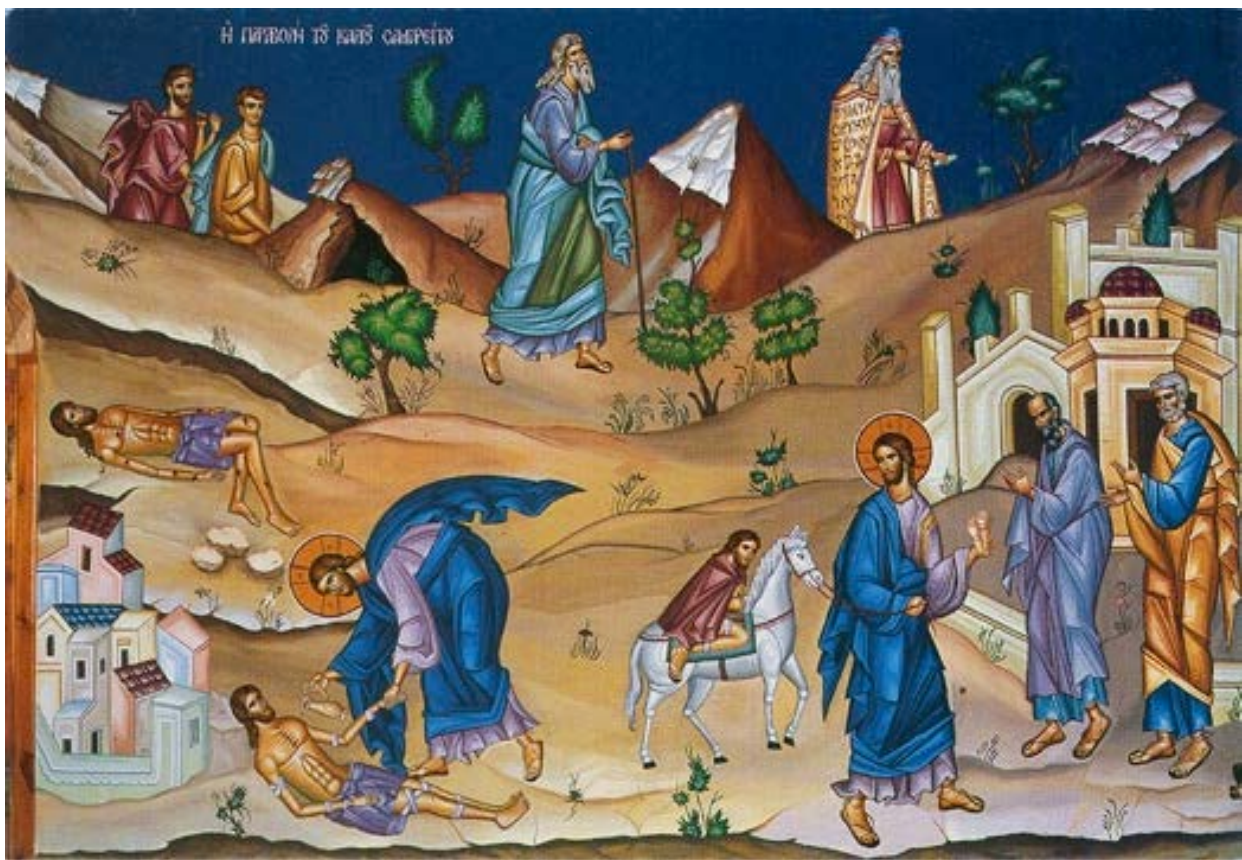
Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do monasticism and marriage represent different paths toward salvation?
2. Discuss how the practices of asceticism in monastic life contribute to the shaping of one's character. In what ways can these practices help individuals confront their personal vices and cultivate virtues?
3. What are some common misconceptions about monasticism that may arise in society today, and how can addressing these misunderstandings promote a deeper appreciation of the monastic tradition?

Lesson 7: Restoration of the Sick

Lesson Goals

- *I can understand why there are two Sacramental services for the Sick.*
- *I can appreciate that the Sacrament of Holy Unction can be utilized throughout life and not just as a last-rite before death.*
- *I can defend how healing is an important part of the mission of the Holy Church.*



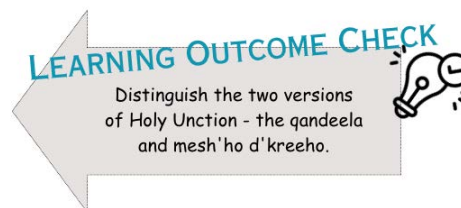
There are times in life when we feel beaten down both literally and figuratively. Sometimes it's sickness in various forms - physical, mental, or spiritual. In those moments, the Lord draws near to bandage wounds, pour oil and wine to heal, and brings the wounded to the Holy Church.

The Church is a spiritual hospital called to take care of those who are wounded, tending to them and bringing them back to wholeness and holiness. One of the sacraments that the Church uses to bring healing to those who are suffering is the Anointing of the Sick.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (**St Luke 10:30-37**) is read during the 2nd Gospel of the Service of the Anointing of the Sick to remind us the Church is a hospital for sinners.

This service is also called Holy Unction, and “Thailabhishekam” in Malayalam. In Syriac, “mesh'ho d'kreeho” means anointing of the sick and is also known as the service of of Qandeela (or Qandilo).

There are two services in the Malankara tradition - a longer version that has five services and an abridged version with one service. Since the anointing service may not always be planned with much advance notice, the Church has the condensed version of the Sacrament that uses previously blessed oil. This is convenient for hospital visits and on short notice when the whole community is unable to gather together. One simply has to call the priest and he will bring a small vessel of the previously consecrated Oil for Anointing the Sick and come with a few of the faithful elders and acolytes of the church to pray over the person who is sick similar to what we read in in **James 5:14-15**.



The longer service of the Qandeela has 5 services, done one after the other. Each service has the normal structure we see in most of our services: Opening Prayer, Promion/Sedro, Ethro, Epistle, Gospel, Litany, Sacramental Action, and Concluding Prayer.

The Presbyters (qashishe) (priests) of the Church shall gather together. They shall bring a dish made of ceramic or glass and make in it dough in round shape and fill it with oil. They shall fix in it five cotton wicks in the form of a cross, one in the east, one in the west, one on the north and one on the south, and a (fifth one) in the middle and place it on a table, with cross, the Gospel before it and two lit candles on either sides. The penitent shall kneel down on the side of the table (or shall lie down on a bed, if he is too weak).

The number five (symbolizes) the five wise virgins as well as the five senses. At the beginning of each of the services, the wicks are lighted (in the following order): first that of the east, secondly that of the middle, thirdly that of the west, fourthly that of the north and finally that of the south.⁵

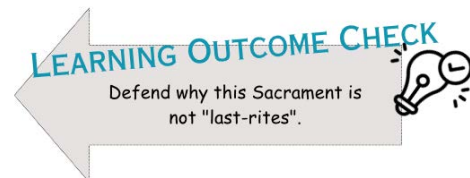
⁵<https://dss-syriacpatriarchate.org/church-rites/anointing-of-the-sick-qandilo/the-service-of-qandilo/?lang=en>

At the beginning of each of the 5 services, one more wick of a lamp is lit and the olive oil in the lamp is blessed by the priest. That blessed oil is then used to anoint the person who is sick on their forehead, their heart, their knees, their right hand, and then their left hand. This anointing makes a sign of the cross over their whole body. Then they are anointed again on their eyes, their nose, their lips, their right ear, and then their left ear. This anointing makes a sign of the cross over their face. The final set of crosses is done over their abdomen area.

Afterwards, all who have gathered for the service are also anointed on their foreheads for their own healing from sin. The prayers and the anointing provide healing both for body and soul.



This sacrament is sometimes misunderstood to be the “last rites.” That is not a correct understanding. One can receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick as many times as needed and throughout his/her life in consultation with his/her parish priest.



The sick person has the opportunity to sacramentally confess during the service as well. If possible and available at the time, the priest will also give the Sacrament of Holy Qurbana after the Holy Anointing service is completed. Some parishes will keep a small piece of the previous celebration of the Holy Qurbana in reserve in a special place inside the Altar for this purpose.

Summary

The Church as the extension of the hands of Christ, healing both body and soul through the Holy Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. It is part of the mission of the Church to bring healing to a broken world that is ailing from the disease of sin. One by one, the Church, as a hospital, welcomes the broken, bandages their wounds, cares for them, builds them back up to wholeness and holiness, and empowers them to go do likewise, welcoming in and healing others in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Anointed One Himself.



Physical healing merely postpones bodily death, but spiritual healing grants us life, both in this world and in the world to come. Our Lord has given the Church a healing ministry. As our Lord Jesus Christ extended His hands and healed the broken hearted, so too the Lord by His grace and operation of the Holy Spirit makes us worthy to offer the same healing to those who are afflicted with various bodily diseases and the disease of sin, .

Reflection Questions

1. Articulate your understanding of why the Sacrament of Holy Unction is often misconceived as “last rites.” What theological and practical insights can you offer to counter this misconception, and how does this understanding impact the way believers approach this sacrament throughout their lives?
2. Reflecting on Sacrament of Holy Unction, how does it demonstrate both spiritual and physical healing within the Church community?
3. Why are there two services for the Sacrament of Holy Unction?

Lesson 8: Temple of the Spirit

Lesson Goals

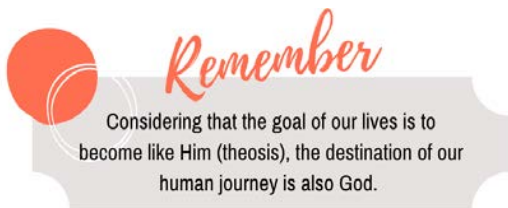
- *I can defend that the temple of God gets renewed in truth, righteousness and love through worship.*
- *I can connect the consecration of the Church and the blessing of home.*
- *I can relate with the repentance of Zachaeus.*

We are the Temple of God

The source of human journey is God. We are created in His own image (**Genesis 1:26**) and the goal of our lives is to become like Him (theosis) and the destination of human journey is also God.

This journey starts with Holy Baptism and we receive the Holy Spirit at the time of Chrismation; all of the sacraments sustain us during our life journey. David describes how God knows us even when we are not formed and how we are “fearfully and wondrously made” (**Psalms 138:13-16**). In spite of all the technological advances made over the course of human existence; no machine or system created by man can match the complexity, variety, distinctive personalities, features, independence and intelligence of our bodies. St. Paul again describes our bodies as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (**1 Corinthians 6:19**) and also warns us that if we defile the temple of God, He will destroy us (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**). Jesus Himself makes this comparison (**St. John 2:19**) when he cleanses the temple following his triumphant (Hosanna) entry (**St. Matthew 21:12-17, St. Mark**

11:15-19, St. Luke 19:45-48, and St. John 2:13-16). The word “temple” usually evokes an image of the Holy Altar. In other words, the constitution of the Church building and constitution of our body are easily comparable.

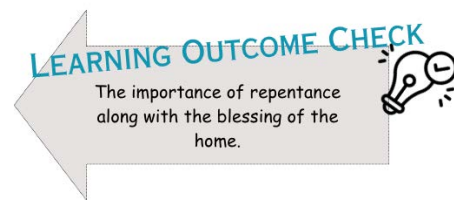


LL Metropolitan Yuhanon Mar Severios wrote⁶ that the “Church building is the symbol of the Holy Church, and the image of Heaven. The Holy Church is visible through the Church building, and there is no Church building without the Holy Church. We believe that in the Church building, the Son of God is present upon the Holy Altar as bread and wine,

⁶ H.G. Yuhanon Mar Severios. (1983). Orthodox Suriyani Sabhayude Shushrusha Samvidhanam.

and the Angels and Saints of the invisible Church assemble there. Thus, Heaven is portrayed there and therefore, the living faithful can grow in the experience of Heaven similar to the one on Mount Tabore. The Holy Church conjoins and encompasses Heaven, the Paradise, and the earth. Similarly, the Church building encompasses the Holy Altar Room, the Transept, and the Nave.”

When we look at our bodies from this perspective, we should become self-conscious about what we put inside our bodies and what comes out of it as well. When we enter into the consecrated Temple of God with devotion, piety, repentance, and faith, we are getting renewed as individual consecrated temples of God in truth, righteousness and love through worship. We join the heavenly hosts, and saints, along with the faithful of our times in the church building, which is the replica of the heavenly Church, where Christ is presiding over the worship. Our goal in going to Church is to attain this renewal everyday.



St. Theophan the Recluse in “The Path to Salvation” says – “In freeing the soul from the world’s onerous influence, it allows the soul to breathe freely and to taste the sweetness of spiritual freedom.” He continues on how this can be accomplished – “ Walking into church, we walk into a completely different world, are influenced by it, and change according to it.”

Our Home and our Family as the Temple of the Spirit

After his military successes and God’s covenant with him, King David prays for God’s blessing **(2 Kingdoms 7:29)** on his family – “Now You may rule and bless the house of your servant, that it may continue before you forever.” David recognizes that without God in his house and family, he could not have been the King or have accomplished anything for the people of Israel. For his accomplishments to stand beyond his time, he needed God’s presence in his home, and His grace to abide with his family. St Paul compares the work for the Church to the building of a house and reminds us **(Hebrews 3:3-4)** that though people build it, the success of the project and the credit for the beauty of the structure would go to the architect, God Himself – without Him, the project may not have even happened. Each family is a miniature kingdom of God, a miniature Church, built together through **Holy Matrimony**. Therefore, the sanctification of our homes is of great significance.

When our homes are sanctified, we ask God to come and abide with us. Zacchaeus was transformed (**St. Luke 19:1-10**) when Jesus came to his home. We read in the Gospel that Zachaeus was restored to the sonship of Abraham through Christ coming into his house and thus his house became a home.

LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

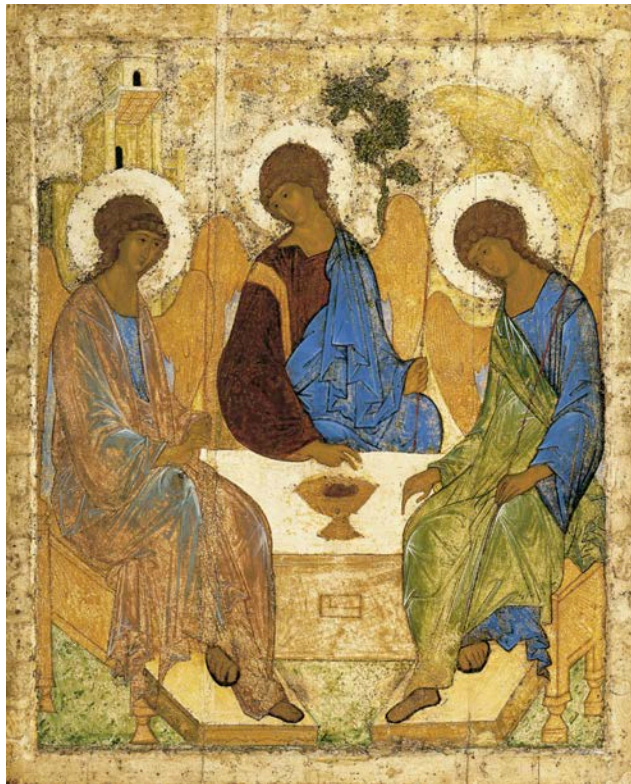
Evaluate the restoration of Zacchaeus into the Sonship through the presence of Jesus in his home.



In the service of House Blessing, we remember the image of the Holy Trinity visiting Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-2). Elijah blessing the widow of Zarephath in her home so that the jar of flour was never used up, nor the oil ran dry is another comforting image used at the House Blessing (**III Kingdoms/1 Kings 17:7-16**).

LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

Connect the remembrance of the Old Testament fathers to the blessing of the home.

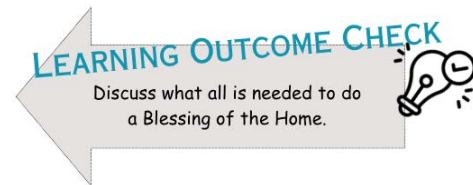



Similarly, the prayers speak about Jesus turning five loaves of bread to feed the multitude as well as about the importance of welcoming anyone coming in the Name of the Lord into the house (**St. Luke 10:16**). We implore God to protect the household like He protected **Noah** and his family, **Abraham** from the swords of the enemy kings, **Lot** from the fire of Sodom, **Jacob** in the house of Laban, **Joseph** in Egypt, **Job** during his troubles, saving the **children of Israel** from the wrath of Pharaoh, through the prayers of Moses and Aaron as well as the sword of Phinehas.

We ask God to protect the home being blessed also just like He protected the fathers of the old. Conversely, for God, to continue to abide in our homes, we need to keep sin and evil away just like the fathers of the old did. The words of Christ admonish us: “if you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be

done for you” (**St. John 15:7**). Everything in the home is blessed during the house blessing and if there is something that is not worthy of being blessed, it shall not be in the home.

What all shall one get ready for House Blessing? A table with a neat tablecloth, preferably white, shall be placed in the middle of the room where the prayers are to take place. A little water in a clean bowl and a small bunch of leaves for the Achen to sprinkle the blessed water are required. Achen will usually bring the candles, cross, censor, and incense. Achen wears the Hym'nikha during the prayers. After prayers, Achen will bless the water and use it to make the sign of the cross on the lintels and doorposts of the house, reminding of the blood of the lamb, which was put on the lintels and doorposts of the children of Israel on the night before passover. This is a meaningful and beautiful service, which assures the reinstatement of the inhabitants of the house into the kingdom of God and the sonship of Abraham.



The Church as the Temple of the Spirit

St. Paul describes the Church as the Body of Christ (**Ephesians 1:23**), with the members of the Church **unified** with the saints in the household of God (**Ephesians 2:19-22**), growing together into a **holy** temple in the Lord where the Spirit of God dwells. To be unified (become **one**) with the saints and God, it is essential that we have the essential attribute of God, **love**. St John says that our love for others is proof of our love of God (**1 John 4:20-21**). God spoke to the people of Israel through Moses (**Leviticus 20:26**) and urged them to be holy which is reiterated by St Peter (**1 Peter 1:15-16**). However, the reality is that we, the members of the Church, are sinners. St. Justin Popovich says that the Church tolerates, shelters and instructs sinners so that they are roused to repentance, spiritual recovery and transfiguration and does not hinder the Church from being holy. However unrepentant sinners separate themselves from the Church and God by their own choices and free will. C S Lewis in “The Great Divorce” describes this beautifully – “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.” All that are in Hell, have chosen it. Without that self-choice, there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find. And for those who knock, it is opened.”

After His resurrection, Jesus instructs His disciples to stay at Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit which He describes as “the Promise of the Father.” The Baptism by Fire on

the Day of Pentecost empowers them for the **apostolic** (Gk. send) mission that would enable them to be witnesses for Christ across the nations and peoples of all time. We continue to experience this empowerment and renewal through the Holy Sacraments as the Spirit works in different ways **(1 Corinthians 12:7-14)** in each of us to complete the mission of the Church.

The Church (building) as the Temple of God

The church buildings of today have their origins from the Jewish tabernacle and the image of God's kingdom from the book of Revelation. The living join their dearly departed in the nave of the church for an eternal worship of the Triune God during **Holy Qurbana**. Christ is enthroned on the altar with the angels and saints around Him. The baptized and chrismated members of the Church join to become the One Body of Christ in the church building which has also been consecrated with the same Holy Myron. After entering the building as sinners, we need to repent and reconcile to separate ourselves from our sins and allow Him to be enthroned in our hearts; or else as mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel **(Ezekiel 8:6)** God will move away from the sanctuary. God's presence in the parish and the Church depends on His presence in our homes, families and our hearts. Jesus Himself alludes to this when he talks to the Samaritan woman **(St. John 4:23-24)** about worshipping God in spirit and truth.

Consecration of the church building is an elaborate service that starts in the evening and goes into the afternoon of the following day. The foundation stone of the Church is laid usually after evening prayers. This 6 inch cube stone is specially prepared with a small hewn space to place a silver urn in it and the stone will have a lid. The small silver urn will contain 12 small precious stones and a small golden cross. This symbolizes Christ and 12 Apostles. At the same time, these stones remind us of the 12 stones symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel, which the priests of Israel collected as per instructions from Judge Joshua from the bed of River Jordan, when the children of Israel were crossing it **(Joshua 3:1 - 4:3)**. Holy Mooron is poured into this urn. This stone is placed prayerfully under the Holy Altar in the Name of the Saint, whose name will be the name of that particular Church. This stone is different from the stone laying at the beginning of construction of the church.

The next morning after the morning prayers, but before the Holy Qurbana the second part of the consecration of the Church takes place. There are two occasions when we use the Holy Mooron in our church life. One is during Holy Chrismation and the other is during the consecration of the Church. Holy Mooron is used to bless the Holy Altar, the

Tablet, and doorways of the Church in the Name of the Holy Trinity. One special bible reading is the prayer of Solomon at the consecration of the Temple of Jerusalem (**III Kingdoms - I Kings 8:22-39**). Through consecration of the Church, we are setting apart a building to be a Church where we can meaningfully pray to God. That space reminds us of the Tabernacle of Testimony (**Exodus 33:7**), Temple of Jerusalem, the Zion, Heaven, and our own refuge in the earthly sojourn to the Kingdom of God. This awareness is highly important, because it reminds us how one shall behave oneself in the House of God. “Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (**Exodus 3:5**) was the commandment of God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Through the Holy baptism and observance of a Holy life, we are allowed to come near that burning fire in the consecrated Church. That is where all the sacraments are given to us. That is where we join the Church and that is where we end our journey on earth. “How beloved are Your dwellings, O Lord of hosts. My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh greatly rejoice in the Living God”, (**Psalms 83: 1-3 OSB and 84:1-3 KJV**) sings King David. If we keep this awe and wonder all through our lives about the Church building, our homes will also reflect the same sanctity, because we become transformed Christians thereby. That is why the Prophet Habakuk (**2:20**) says: “But the Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth be reverent before Him.”

Conclusion

When we manage to overcome the passions of our body and sin through Christ and make our families a miniature kingdom of God living together in homes sanctified by the presence of Christ, we are blessed and strengthened in our spiritual journey through the Holy Sacraments we receive in our Church. This in turn nurtures and sustains us as families and individuals, and brings us further closer to salvation and the kingdom of God.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you explain that a worshipping Orthodox community becomes the temple of God renewed in truth, righteousness and love?
2. Evaluate the restoration of Zacchaeus into the Sonship through the presence of Jesus in his home.
3. In what ways is the blessing of a home similar to the repentance of a person?

Lesson 9: The Monastic Life

Lesson Goals

- *I can reframe the monasticism to the full understanding given by our Church.*
- *I can appreciate the importance of monasticism in our Church.*
- *I can relate to the lives of the monastic Saints and apply their examples in my life.*

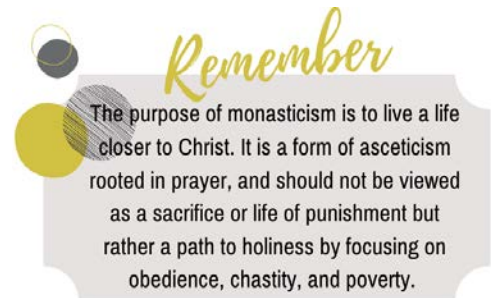
The Way of the Monk

Any unmarried person or a widower/widow can join a monastery with the intention of leading an ascetic life for the remainder of their life. After a period of preparation that allows the person to better understand and assess the monastic disciplines and rigors of that particular monastery, they can choose to request to be a monk.

The purpose of monasticism is to live a life close to Christ. It is a form of asceticism rooted in prayer, and should not be viewed as a sacrifice or life of punishment but rather a path to holiness by focusing on obedience, chastity, and poverty.

All Oriental Orthodox churches uphold monasticism in a very important and special place. The health of the Church could be measured by the quality of the monks. Orthodox monastics are known to separate themselves from the world in order to pray unceasingly for the world.

Becoming a monk is a long and intentional process as the vow is a lifelong commitment to God. After completing the period of training (novitiate), the monastic will be admitted as a member of the monastery by the Abbot.



Olmoyo and Dayaroyo

The Western Church developed a dichotomy of laity and clergy. According to this convention, laity are not ordained to serve God and clergy are ordained to serve God. Therefore, all women, no matter whether one is in the convent or not, are laity. All those in the monastery as part of a brotherhood are laity. Ordained or not is the only question that matters there. In our Church too, this misconception is how many look at our ordained

people. But in actuality, our Church does not follow the laity-clergy dichotomy. We have a different dichotomy called olmoyo-dayaroyo.



The Syriac word 'Olmo' means world and an olmoyo is one, who lives a Christian life of virtue in the world, where one deals with the problems of the everyday world. One lives in a family, gets married to start a family, takes care of each other, begets and gives birth to

children, takes care of them, takes care of the senior generation, observes remembrances of their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters or children once they pass away. One discharges responsibilities as an Olmoyo to the society, community and the nation at large. An Olmoyo may choose to work in the society to preserve and protect. All kinds of jobs like teaching the next generation, healing the sick, trade and industries, businesses, administration at various governmental authorities, sports, travel, news and entertainment, service sector, distribution of electricity, water, logistics, and all similar engagements are responsibilities of an Olmoyo. As an olmoyo, one goes to Church on a regular basis and contributes spiritually, and physically to the well-being of the Christian community. One donates time and money to the Church so that the Church becomes a safe-space for everyone. One participates in the administration of the Church as a responsible Christian and follows a sacramental life and partners with the fellow Christians to make a Church, where everyone feels Christian charity. What one has to know here is that this community also includes ordained priests, who are married or unmarried, but not part of a monastic community. Therefore, the convention our Church follows is not whether one is ordained or not, but whether one lives in the world or not. World is a place for us, where we lead a life of order as intended by God for His creation.

Dayaro means a special inhabitation for monks, who live in seclusion. They follow special prayer cycles on a strict time schedule, work between the daily canonical prayers, wear special type of clothing, follow a different diet, observe a lot of silence, and remain unmarried to be free of any conjugal relationship. They learn to control their bodies and mind, soul and spirit to attune with God. They have to learn to find God in seclusion and that does not mean that they are running away from problems of life. Monks usually do not travel a lot, but stay put at the monastery. Life or death do not scare them and they try to follow Jesus Christ and His teachings as strictly as they can be. A dayaroyo can be an unordained man, an unordained woman, an ordained priest, a professed monk, or a bishop.

Contributions of Monasticism

That the process for monkhood described is lengthy and intricate reflects the importance in the Church. Saint John Chrysostom said of monks that “they are angels of God who live in accordance with the Gospel”. Some of the roles and contributions of monks in our Church:

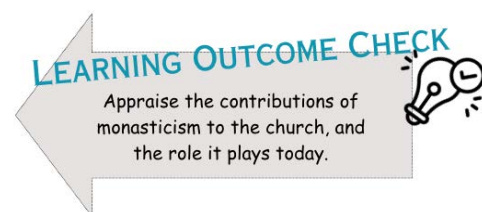
Spiritual Counsel: Monastic elders can be sought out for spiritual advice. Sometimes their perspective can be eye-opening because of their difference in perspective living apart from the everyday world. Some monastic saints, such as St John Chrysostom or the Russian St Theophan the Recluse, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have written profound and yet very practical advice for those who are married or raising children.

Preserving the faith: During times of heresy, monasteries are safe havens as the monks specifically cut themselves off from the world, so they remain unaffected by the world’s influence through which heresy often enters.

Prayer for the World: Monks lead a life of poverty totally dedicated and devout to God. They have more time to pray for the world than most people. James 5:16 says “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” There are monasteries that have a strict schedule where there is one monk always praying.

Spiritual Rehabilitation: A monk is always seeking spiritual growth and trying to become reconnected with God and trying to attain theosis. There are instances of church faithful sending their children to the monasteries for them to get educated on the true faith and its importance. A balanced, God-centered life is what they get from the monks, and this helps them get back on track in life.

A major contribution of monasticism to the Church is the prayer that they offer on behalf of everyone. Monastic communities provide a strong witness to a world of lifestyle rooted not only in prayer, but in service, hospitality, and concern for salvation of others. Monasteries simply provide a place of refuge when the church faithful can lay aside all earthly cares and seek spiritual guidance. Often, for a church, strength is found in the presence of its monastic communities. Monastics who live this angelic life provide a tremendous witness to the faithful by their detachment from the care of the world and they provide a living example of what St. Paul

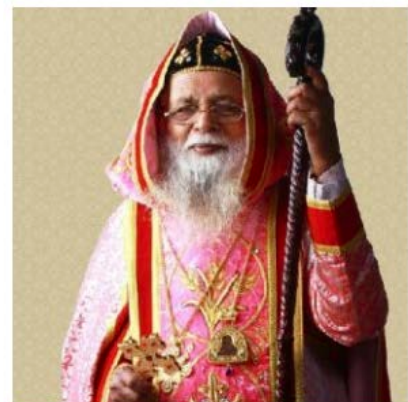
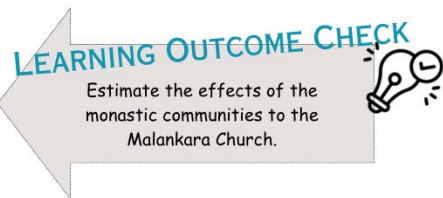


writes as “we are in the world but not of it”. The task of a monk is to listen to the will of God and to bring one’s own will as close to the will of God. This communication of God’s will to church members verbally or individually through the example of the life of a monastic community in the spirit of brotherly love and peace of Christ, is the fulfillment of the ministry in the church.

Effects of monastic communities to the Malankara church

The life and strength of a Church depends on its monastic communities. Deacon Alexious, the founder of Bethany Ashram understood the need of a monastic community in the church and established Bethany Ashram in 1918. This started the spiritual revival in the Malankara Orthodox Church. Deacon Alexious went to Perunad, a forest place where he struggled physically and mentally, but always as a man of prayer he endured all the trials and tribulations. Many people who watched this simple life of Father Alexios were attracted to the monastic life and took the oath of asceticism. Father P.T. Geevarghese joined him in 1920 and in the time of prayer and contemplation, he came across writings of St. Basil on monasticism which had a great influence on him. His experiences made him start an order of missionaries to carry the task of evangelization in India. Bethany Ashram became a place of pilgrimage and spiritual experience for many people. He envisioned the ashram being a shelter for the poor and marginalized people. He also started a house for orphans in the ashram. Fr. PT. Geevarghese was consecrated as bishop in 1925 for Bethany Ashram. Unfortunately, he left our Church to join Catholicism in 1930. This is one of the disappointing episodes in our Church history.

Another example is St. Paul’s Ashram in Kozhikode which was started by **His Grace Dr. Gheevarghese Mar Osthathios** who is also referred to as “The Jewel of the Malankara Church”. His Grace Mar Osthathios was the metropolitan of the Niranam diocese and is laid to rest at St. Paul’s Mission Centre Chapel, Mavelikara. Thirumeni is the only person in our two-thousand-year-old Malankara



church to be bestowed the title of “The Jewel of the Malankara Church”. He was a church father who did not desire any title or awards or any kind of recognition.

Thirumeni was born in a poor family, however his mother always helped the poor and needy despite their meager resources. Georgekutty as he was known before becoming Thirumeni learnt the primary lessons of love for God and man from his mother. Thirumeni completed his seminary studies in the USA and returned back to be ordained a priest and then was consecrated as Metropolitan in 1975. H.G. Dr. Gheevarghese Mar Osthathios dreamed of a world of equality founded on love of God and justice, a classless society. He tried to fulfill his dream through prayers and activities.

During his studies in the US, Thirumeni was often invited to preach in churches in different regions of the US as he was a well known fiery speaker. He used the honorarium he got from the churches to buy land for the St. Paul’s mission center, Mavelikara. Several priests and deacons used to come to this center during summer for learning about leadership in the Malankara church. In 1979 St. Paul’s mission center was declared as the Mission Training Center of the Orthodox Church. In 1984, the National Association for Mission Studies was founded here. Thirumeni used to say that mission work should reach all the villages of India. He desired for the development of a mission oriented Orthodox Community which would serve the poor, the lepers, the Aids victims, the illiterate, the addicts, the destitutes and the orphans. Even though the missionaries who got their training have started activities in various places, the dreams of the Metropolitan are not yet fully realized. We should all pray for a generation bearing his dreams to rise up in our church and remember that we are also sent as missionaries into the world, to model our faith and evangelize. Thirumeni also founded the Puthuppady Children's Home and the St. Paul’s Monastery. The children’s home was the very first beginning of the organized mission and charity work of the Malankara Orthodox Church. It can be stated that this children’s home of Puthuppady was the inspiration for all the works of charity that have been founded in our church in the subsequent decades. It was under Osthathios Thirumeni’s initiative that the Sunday after July 3rd is observed as Mission Sunday. The donations collected on that day are spent on missionary activities. The itinerant mission organ of the church “Message of Love” is also a brain child of the metropolitan.

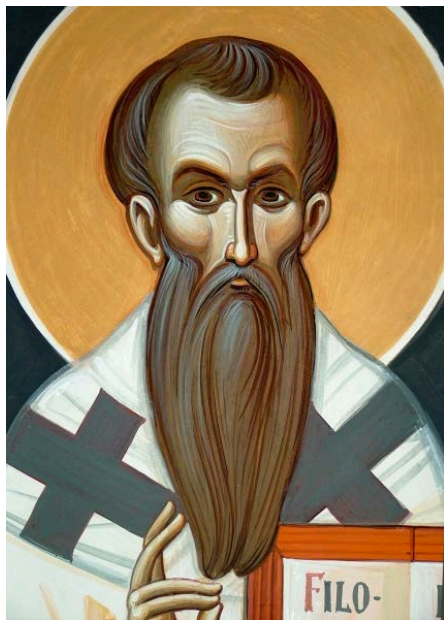
Monasticism Influencers

Christian monasticism in Cappadocia (present day Turkey) is attributed to being started by **St. Basil the Great**. He started monasteries to address crucial



problems of the fourth century church. St. Basil described the dire terms of the Christian leadership as ambition of those who do not fear the Lord and rush into foremost positions as a price of impiety. Many people protested these status seeking converts and made a mass exodus into the desert as solitary (eremitic) monks. For them the ascetic life replaced the institutional church as the means of salvation. These solitary monks separated from the institutional church; however, they became like a sheep without a shepherd. They had zeal and passion but lacked leadership and moral guidance.

St. Basil was born into a wealthy Cappadocian family, studied in the prestigious Academy of Plato in Athens and toured monastic communities in Egypt and Syria. He sold his personal possessions and organized a communal monastery for relatives and friends in his family estate. This was the fulfillment of his dream.



St. Basil soon became disillusioned by many problems in the church and sensed that a retirement to monastic life was selfish. He felt called to use his education and leadership abilities to restore Christians to their true calling. He seized upon communal monasticism to both renew the institutional church and reform marginalized ascetic monks. Through communal monasticism, St. Basil reformed Christianity at both the institutional level and grassroots level. St. Basil incorporated the monastic movement into the church so that they could benefit from each other. As a powerful bishop, St. Basil used his authority to speak against secularizing forces, refute heresy of Arianism, appoint monk bishops to leadership positions and advocate for the poor among the rich. His monastic communities were organized into disciples motivated by love. These groups grew and strengthened the church by providing true teaching, spiritual ministry, and capable leadership.

St. Pachomius the Great is generally recognized as the founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism. He is remembered as the renewer of the church and his feast is celebrated in the Coptic churches on the 9th of May and other churches on May 15. He is one of the few non biblical saints to be venerated by Oriental Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism and some Protestant churches.

St. Pachomius was born in Egypt and at the age of 21 was called to serve in the Roman army. When he was arrested at war, he stayed in a prison run by Christians. He was so impressed by their love of their neighbor that he vowed to become a Christian after his military service ended. St. Pachomius got baptized and began practicing ascetic life. After 3 years, he withdrew to the desert and after 10 years in the desert, he heard a Voice telling him to found a monastic community. St. Pachomius had a vision where an angel came to him clothed in a schema and gave him a rule for the cenobitic life. This was of huge significance as until this time ascetics were living alone as hermits and not together in a community. Pachomius' rule balanced the communal life with solitary life. The monks live in individual rooms but work together for the common good. St. Pachomius gave everyone the same food and attire to the community of monks that began to grow around him. The monks were not allowed to possess any money or accept anything from their relatives. St. Pachomius considered this as a zeal for obedience and the monks in the monastery fulfilled the obedience as assigned to them for the common good of the monastery. Towards the end of his life, he was granted another vision by God where the Lord revealed to him the future of monasticism. The saint learned that future monks would not have experienced guides, so he prostrated to the ground and wept bitterly calling out to the Lord and imploring mercy for them. Pachomius heard a Voice answer and said "The monks of the future shall receive a reward, since they too shall have occasion to suffer the life burdensome for the monk".

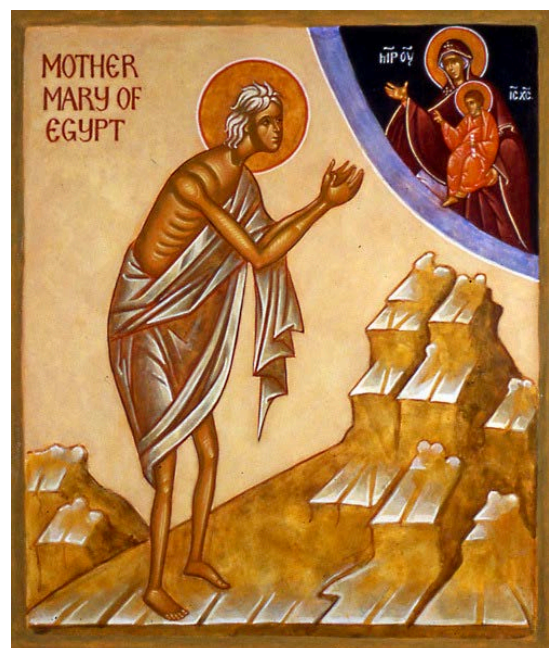


Although St. Pachomius had no opportunity to go in search of real martyrdom as St. Anthony had done, his substitution of the austerities of the ascetical life for the sufferings of martyrdom is no less clear. St. Pachomius is our authority for "little martyrdom". Shortly before his death he called his disciple Theodore to him and recalled for him the details of the vision. He recounted how he was met at the gate of life by a luminous figure who consoled him and told him that he must return to earth, since it was necessary for him to endure a "little martyrdom" before the Lord visited him. Then he told Theodore, "by the

grace of God I have accomplished the confession of martyrdom” of which I was told in the vision, for “now I think the days of my death are near.” But no vision or special command of the Lord was necessary to convince Pachomius that a man might become a spiritual martyr through the observance of the practices of ascetical life. He made it abundantly clear in his instructions to his monks that anyone who wishes may become a spiritual martyr, and that this could be done through observing the rules of the monastic community. He explained this clearly to one of his disciples who had asked him to pray that God might grant him the grace of martyrdom.

Saint Mary of Egypt ran away from her parents at the age of twelve to the city of Alexandria where she lived an extremely dissolute life. She was driven “by an insatiable and an irrepressible passion” and she mainly lived by begging. After seventeen years, she traveled to Jerusalem for the Great Feasts of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It was an anti-pilgrimage she took to fulfill her lust and she paid for her passage by offering sexual favors to other pilgrims. When she tried to enter the church for the celebration, she was barred from doing so by an unknown and unseen force. Realizing that this was due to her impurity, she begged for forgiveness upon seeing the icon of the Theotokos outside the church. She promised to give up the world and become an ascetic. She again attempted to enter the church and was permitted to do so. After venerating the relic of the true cross, she came back to the icon to give thanks and heard a voice telling her “If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest”. She immediately went to the monastery of St. John the Baptist on the banks of the river Jordan. She received absolution and Holy Communion and then headed into the desert to live in the wilderness.

A year before her death, she recounted her life to Saint Zosimas of Palestine, who had encountered her in the desert. She narrated her life story to him and asked him to meet her on the banks of river Jordan on Holy Thursday and bring her Holy Communion. When he fulfilled her wish, she crossed the river to get to him by walking on the surface of the water and received Holy Communion. She told him to meet her again in the desert the following Lent.



The next year, when Zosimas traveled to the same spot, he found her lying dead. According to the inscription written in the sand, she had died the very night he had given her Holy Communion and had somehow miraculously been transported to the place he found her, and her body was preserved incorrupt. He buried her and on returning to the monastery told her story to his brethren and it was preserved among them as an oral tradition until it was written down by St. Sophronius.

St. Simeon the Stylite was born in 390 AD and was a young shepherd. Once while passing a Church he heard the Beatitudes and his life changed. He began asking questions and the answers he heard brought him more towards the Church and eventually to a monastery where he was eventually tonsured at the age of 18. However, St. Simeon's prayer life and dedication to prayer and fasting alarmed those at the monastery that he was asked to leave.

News of St. Simeon's holiness spread through the town and people began to seek his wisdom and he shared with love what he knew. But more than anything St. Simeon wanted to continue his prayer life and be closer to God. So he found a cave and lived for three years during which he would go the entire Great Lent without eating or drinking. God strengthened him and his praying and fasting would grow even more extreme. He would pray standing for weeks. But all of this brought him closer to God and St. Simeon would be visited by angels.



More people heard of St. Simeon and would seek him where he prayed in the caves wanting to be blessed by the holy Saint and listen to his wisdom. St. Simeon would attend to the people, but wanted to continue praying and being with God. So he went higher in the mountains and looked for more quiet places, but the people would still follow. Eventually he chose to go up on a pillar and would pray in a small space.

Other monks living in the desert heard about St. Simeon and once they were convinced that his actions were not for self-grandeur or pride, they helped him. St. Simeon would grow higher and higher to concentrate more on his prayers. St. Simeon was humble and obedient and would help those who came to see him, but would yearn for his time in prayer with God. He overcame many temptations and is said to have spent 47 years of his 80 years of being a monk on the pillar. His final pillar was said to be 80 feet in height, and the Church was blessed by this most holy Saint.

Paths to Holiness

All Christians are called to holiness. This is theosis, which is our transformation to strive to be perfect like God (**St. Matthew 5:48**). Becoming tonsured as a monk is a specific path to holiness, but there is much we can learn from the calling and their lives. What we all have in common is, our work towards salvation, cooperating with the Holy Spirit to become like Christ, and being perfect like God the Father.

His Grace Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros said, “Orthodox spirituality gives enough and equal space for family life and monastic life.” The Church views those who follow family life and monastic life as equal as the goal is the same. We should all be striving to grow in our prayer life and our understanding of Christ.

Orthodox spirituality is not an ecstatic movement like some contemporary so-called spiritual movements. It gives us a lesson for the perpetual and continuing bliss that one can really experience in the Eucharistic worship of the Church. Flight from division, ascetic silence and hospitality are highly extolled in Orthodox spirituality. For the Church Fathers, ‘to flee from the world’ means to flee from every thing that divides. Also, spirituality must ultimately be understood in terms of paschal mystery. It is an affirmation of the Cross as the path of resurrection. The ability to bear the cross comes from the joy of being saved. Joy in our Lord is our strength. The aim of the exercise that at times is found painful is a purified love of God, of neighbors, and of the whole creation. But that also means an increase of joy.

Reflection Questions

1. St. Basil the Great had reflected that "monasticism is nothing else than life according to the Gospel". With this in mind, how can we apply the monastic discipline in our lives?
2. How can we assess the impact of monastic communities on the spiritual and communal life of the Malankara Church, particularly regarding their practices and beliefs?
3. Considering the lives and teachings of St. Basil the Great, St. Pachomius, and St. Mary of Egypt, how can their examples inform our understanding of monasticism and asceticism in our own spiritual journeys?

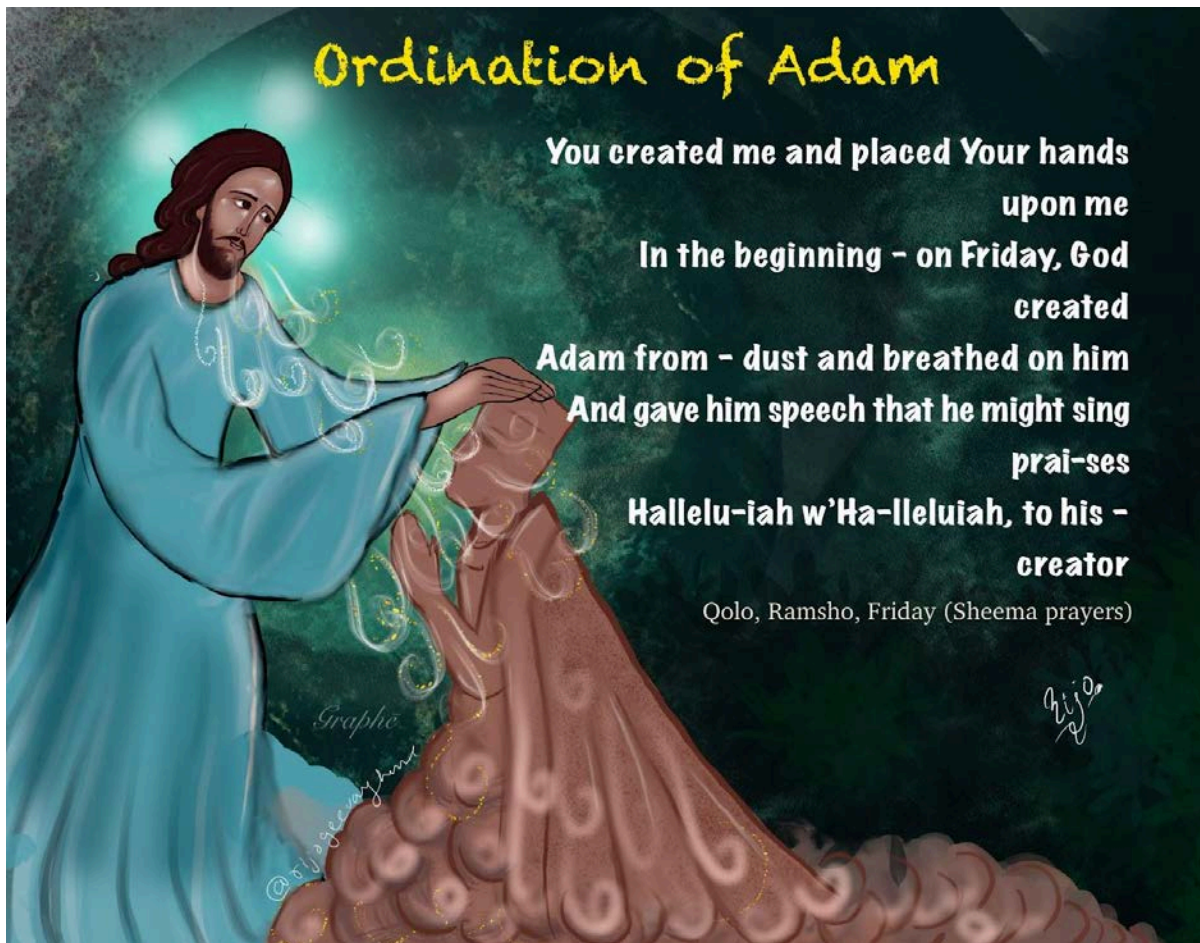
Lesson 10: The Royal Priesthood

Lesson Goals

- *I can understand that I have been given the gift of the royal priesthood.*
- *I can understand that Apostolic Succession besides laying on of hands, is also about faithfulness to the Confession of Faith that is being handed down.*
- *I can understand that the ordained priests are not separate from the non-ordained faithful in any fashion. They are part or subset of the same people of God.*

Origins of the Priesthood

The Christian priesthood has its origins all the way back to Genesis and to the creation of Adam and Eve.



God blessed them and told them to “fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (**Genesis 1:28**). This is a continuation of the ordering and creative work of God in the Days of Creation. Adam and Eve were meant to make the Paradise they were placed in, to grow and expand.

This is why the Sh'himo prayers on Friday say that God created Adam and laid His hand upon him.

*You created me and placed Your hands upon me
In the beginning - on Friday, God created
Adam from - dust and breathed on him
And gave him speech that he might sing prai-ses
Hallelu-iah w'Ha-lleluiah, to his- creator .. Barekmor*

This is God giving the priesthood to Adam. Said otherwise, the priesthood is understood to be mankind's continuation of God's work in creation.

Before the building of Solomon's temple and the office of the high priest was established, offerings to God were usually made by the head of the household – consider the examples of Noah, Abraham, and Job. After mankind's expulsion from Paradise, humanity became increasingly corrupt. Only Noah remained who was righteous and was worshiping God. Noah worked to save all of creation, in addition to his own family.

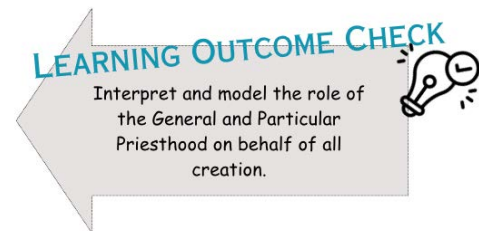
Abraham was the head of his family, and in biblical times, family did not simply refer to the father, mother, and children. It also included aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, other extended relations, and even servants. God made His covenant with Abraham and his descendents. From the book of Job, we learn that Job would continually “consecrate [his children and household], and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all" in case any of them sinned and cursed God in their hearts (**Job 1:5**).

God spoke to these men as leaders of their households and families, and they also were the ones who would offer sacrifices and offerings to God on behalf of their families. Once the system of the tribal elders of Israel became established, the elders would be the ones to lead worship on behalf of their communities.

We see this concept in the Sh'himo prayers during Vespers, Saturday.

Abraham offered incense
Noah offered sacrifice
We offer - incense for - Your servants
Lord, give rest - to them .. *Barekmor*

To serve in a more specific role however, God chose certain men who would intercede to Him for the people and who would offer sacrifices on behalf of themselves and of the community. Two such individuals were Moses and Aaron, whom God singled out for the role of the high priest. In **Exodus 24**, Moses, Aaron, and the seventy (or seventy-two) elders of Israel worship the Lord on behalf of the people and offer sacrifices to God. After the incident with the golden calf where the elders rebelled against God, the priesthood was taken away from the elders and given to the sons of Levi. Moses says to them, "Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord," (**Exodus 32:29**). The elders still have roles of leadership in the community, but God would no longer honor their authority to offer sacrifices for the community.

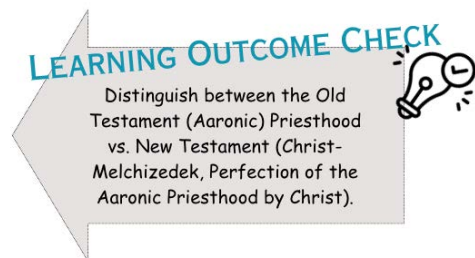


In another incident, after Korah, his family, and a number of the Israelites rebel against Moses and Aaron, a plague enters the Israelite camp. Moses instructs Aaron to take the censer along with fire and incense from the altar and carry it through the congregation. Aaron obeyed God and "made atonement for the people," (**Numbers 16:47**). The unauthorized incense of Korah cost him and his allies their lives. Following this rebellion (**Numbers 17:1-11**) and the grumbling of the people against Moses and Aaron, God instructs Moses to collect a staff from each of the twelve tribes and place them in the Tent of Meeting. The next morning, it is Aaron's staff that buds, signifying that he – and by extension his descendants – are being chosen by God to be the high priest and make offerings on behalf of the community. The staff was placed in the tent next to the altar so that all the people would know that God had chosen him. The dry staff of Aaron budded and similarly, the dry and lifeless humanity receives life through the service of priesthood. God installs priesthood upon Aaron and Moses, and by virtue of them, upon the tribe of Levi.

In the priesthood outlined above, we see that Moses is still God's representative to lead the people and to whom God speaks, but Aaron is the one who is offering the incense and sacrifices on behalf of the people. This Levitical priesthood continues into the Second Temple period and into the time of Christ. This is outlined in the qolo of the intercessory prayers for departed priests:

Moses and Aaron received
The priesthood which was passed down
It went to Zachariah
Then it was given to John
John then gave it to our Lord
Who ordained the apostles
And the apostles
Spread it throughout creation

The Levitical priesthood is not the only type of priesthood we see in Scripture. In **Genesis 14**, we are introduced to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He is again referenced in **Psalms 109 (110)** as a prophecy regarding Christ, and this is further explained by St. Paul in **Hebrews 7**. Melchizedek is a priest-king similar to those of the other nations, which were usually involved in pagan worship and would demand worship of themselves from their people. Melchizedek, however, is a priest of God. When he meets Abram (later Abraham), he blesses him and brings an offering to God of bread and wine. He does not seek his own glory or worship from Abram. Rather, he makes an offering to God with and on behalf of Abram, who gives him a tenth of the wealth and possessions he brought back from battle when he was rescuing his nephew. The practice of giving a tenth, or tithing, will later be implemented among the tribes of Israel for the Levites.



Melchizedek is a type which prefigures Christ in the Old Testament. St. Paul explains in **Hebrews 7** that as Melchizedek appears to Abraham, without a beginning or genealogy, and departs leaving no successor, he is foreshadowing Christ. His name means "King of Righteousness" and since he is the king of Salem, he is also the "King of Peace." The wine and the bread offering are a clear reference to the Holy Eucharist. The Levitical priesthood

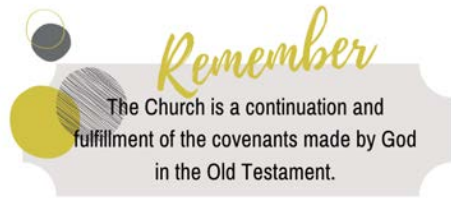
was based on the Law given to Moses and required succession through heredity by the priest's offspring. The priesthood of Christ, on the other hand, is a priest forever – an everlasting priesthood. Christ was not a Levite, but was an earthly descendant of Judah – representing leadership – and He offered Himself for us as a sacrifice – representing priesthood. Therefore, as St. Paul explains, Christ is the fulfillment of the pattern of the priest-king Melchizedek, and in Christ, the Old Testament priesthood is not abolished, but reaches its fullness. The priestly roles of leadership and offerings that were made separate for the Israelites are brought back together in Christ.

This connection of the Christian priesthood to Aaron and Melchizedek is also seen in the Malankara Orthodox Church before the Divine Liturgy in the preparatory Service of Thuyobo, which consists of two parts – the Service of Melchizedek and the Service of Aaron. In the Service of Melchizedek, the priest makes atonement for himself and selects and offers the bread and wine that will be used for the Divine Liturgy. In the service of Aaron, the priest is vested and ascends the altar. At this time, the congregation, the penitents, the names submitted for various blessings, healings, memorials, and all the departed from Adam and Eve until today are all remembered and prayed for, over the bread and wine. At the conclusion of the Preparatory Service (Thuyobo), the Divine Liturgy starts, continuing the priestly service from the Old Testament to its fulfillment in the Holy Eucharist of Christ, which He instituted and which the Church continues today.

The Apostolic Succession of Priesthood

The Church is a continuation and fulfillment of the covenants made by God in the Old Testament. According to St. Paul, the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied that a remnant of Israel would be purified and preserved after judgment and would become the basis for the new Israel, into which the Gentiles would be grafted in. The Church is this new people of God, the renewed Israel, made up of this faithful remnant of Israel and Gentiles who have come to Christ (**Romans 11**). As mentioned earlier, the priesthood of the Church is passed down from Moses and Aaron to Zachariah and John the Baptist. This is important for us to understand that John the Baptist connects the Old Testament priesthood with its New Testament fulfillment in Christ. The structures of leadership in the Church parallel those of Israel in the Old Testament. The twelve apostles are connected directly to the twelve patriarchs and the seventy (or seventy-two) Evangelists are connected to the tribal elders.

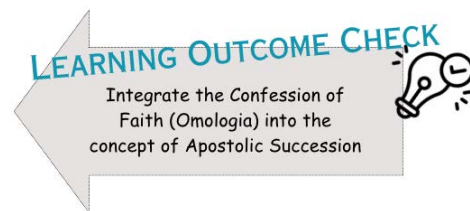
In the Book of Acts and throughout the letters of St. Paul, we see that the apostles appoint successors to continue the ministry of the Church. Bishops, priests, and deacons are appointed very early on in the Church (**1 Timothy 3**).



Apostolic Succession is based in this relationship of the Apostles and their successors in the direct line of apostolic ordination, Orthodox doctrine and teaching, and full communion from the Apostles to the current episcopacy of the Orthodox Church. St. Paul encourages his spiritual children to be his imitators in everything he has taught them (**1 Corinthians 4:14-17**). He says, "I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church."

The successors of the Apostles adhered to their teaching, which they received from Christ. The new individuals who are added to the orders of the Church leadership are ordained through praying and the laying on hands (**Acts 1, 6, & 19**).

This adherence to the Apostolic faith and succession by laying of hands is seen in the Church today in the Service of Ordination. When new deacons, priests, or bishops are ordained, they must first agree to follow and practice the teachings of the Apostles and the Holy Church. This is outlined in the instructions given by the bishop to the ordinand in a part of the service called the Amologia.



The following is an excerpt from the Amologia of the priest ordination service:

Beloved, who are our brother, through our Lord, Jesus, and communicant and spiritual son, through the precepts of the holy apostles and the sacred synods, listen and comprehend:

You have desired to experience the sacred mysteries of our Lord, and to receive this most respectful and invaluable gift from the hands of us, who do not deserve this office, and approach this most sublime and unparalleled divine service and this spotless office.

Blessed and beloved son, we will demonstrate to you how you can

live without stain and conflict in a manner followed by the faithful who gaze at the Mysteries of our Lord, after you have received this noble office.

Blessed son, you will have to primarily adhere to the Orthodox faith taught to the holy apostles, by our Lord, and recorded in the Holy Gospel. The apostles had entrusted this faith to the holy fathers of the Church, and to the Orthodox doctors, and to the children of the church. Following the apostles, they also had confirmed and taught this faith.

...

If you observe all that I commanded, you will be made worthy of all that you have received, and you will be known as a priest of God, and His proper minister, or else you will be responsible before the Lord, Jesus Christ, on the day of His great judgment. If you will then be guilty, I shall have no part in it. If you lead a life, in accordance with what I have exhorted you, you will prove that you are a good priest and minister.

We see that the succession is not simply about the line of individuals, but the receiving and transmitting of the faith and doctrines that are entrusted to the ordinand. As St. Paul says, "Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by our word or by epistle." (**2 Thessalonians 2:15**). During this part of the service the ordinand agrees to accept the instructions and teachings of the bishop and to be obedient to the church leadership. There are very real and eternal consequences for those who do not take this responsibility seriously.

The individuals called to serve the Church in these specific ordained capacities are no different from the other faithful members. As in the case of the deacons and, by extension, the other orders, the brethren picked out from among their own numbers "seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty." They chose those seven deacons for a purpose, to fulfill a duty. The priesthood is not open to all men, but only to certain men, and only to fulfill that role of making offerings on behalf of the people.

The priest is not doing anything on his own accord, or by some power of his own, rather, the priest is functioning as a conduit between God and the people. In Exodus 28, there is a detailed description of Aaron's priestly vestments. The ephod, or breastplate, had twelve stones engraved with the names of twelve tribes so that, when Aaron enters the Holy

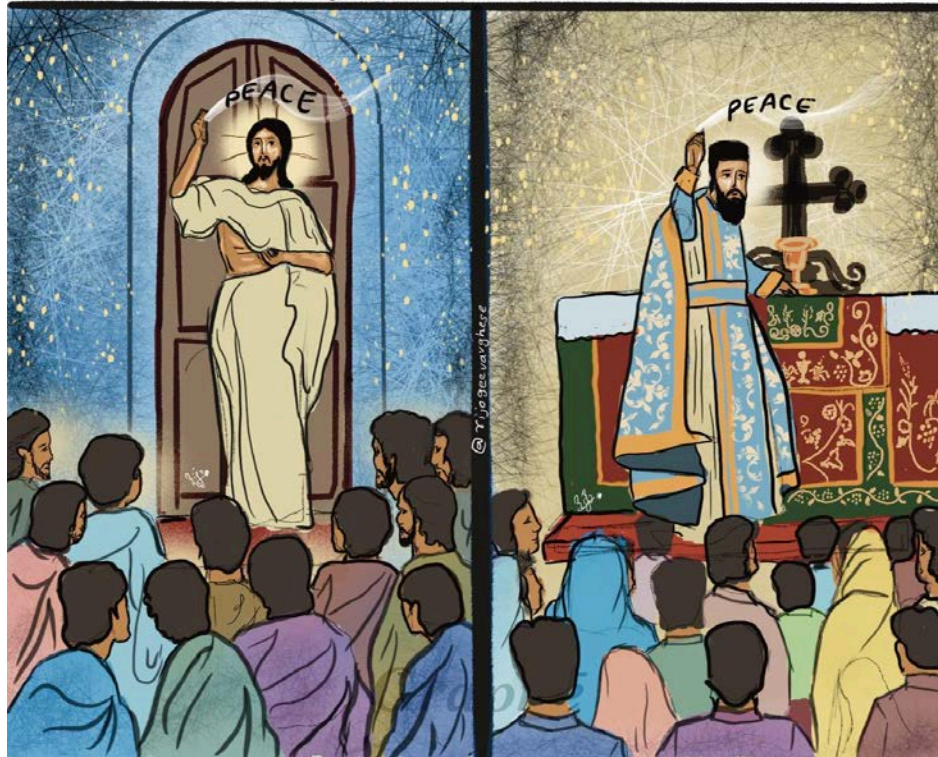
Place, he will “bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord.” On a gold plate tied on his turban over his forehead is the inscription, “Holy to the Lord.” This inscription is to remind the people that God consecrates gifts so that they will be acceptable to Him. These passages show that the priest is standing on behalf of the people before God, and he is representing God before the people.

In his letter to the **Hebrews**, St. Paul explains the fullness of the priesthood in Christ. In the tent that Moses set up outside the Israelite camp, there were two sections, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies). The high priest would enter the Most Holy Place once a year, year after year, with blood to make an offering for himself and the sins of the people. But as Paul explains that we have a great high priest in Jesus Christ (**4:14**), one who is “seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man,” (**8:1-2**) and that He entered the holy places just once for all, “not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption,”(**9:12**).

In his work *On the Priesthood*, St. John Chrysostom describes the priesthood in his essay *On the Priesthood*: “There stands the priest, not bringing down fire from Heaven, but the Holy Spirit: and he makes prolonged supplication, not that some flame sent down from Heaven may consume the offerings, but that grace descending on the sacrifice may thereby enlighten the souls of all, and render them more refined than silver purified by fire.” The Holy Spirit descends upon the offerings to consecrate them – the people offer bread and wine and God offers Himself back to the people. In all this, the priest does not take or receive anything, but stands as the icon of Christ, who is the true high priest of the mysteries. He is the instrument through whom God is working.

Christ is the true image of His Father to the people because He is True God, and He is the true image of humanity presented to God the Father, as He is True Man. The priest stands as the icon of Christ during the liturgy. It is not his hands that wave over the offerings, but Christ’s, and it is not his hands that distribute the mysteries to the faithful, but Christ’s. The pattern of the sacrifices and priestly services in the old covenant come to their true fulfillment in Christ’s sacrifice and mediation.

Priest, an Icon of Christ



The Royal Priesthood

What the priest does for the parish, the Church does for all the world and creation, and also what we as individuals, can do for those in our lives. At its essence and core, the priesthood brings God to the people and the people to God. All people are called to participate and be a part of this priesthood, which St. Peter refers to as the “Royal Priesthood” (**1 Peter 2:5,9**). Recall from earlier that Adam and Eve were created to continue God’s work in Paradise and to spread Paradise to the rest of the Earth.

LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

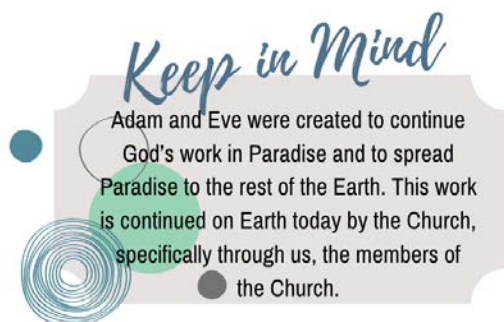
Conclude that the Priest is ordained as a part of the faithful (laity) not separate.



This work is continued on Earth today by the Church, specifically through us, the members of the Church. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, **that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness** into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but **now you are God's people**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy,” (**1 Peter 2:9-10**). The work of proclaiming God and His works to creation is part of the

priesthood of the Church. In the same way, the priest bears the image of God for the people, we who are made in the image and likeness of God, are to bear that image to the rest of the world.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann⁷ writes, “The bread on the paten and the wine in the chalice are to remind us of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the cross and death. And thus it is the very joy of the Kingdom that makes us remember the world and pray for it. It is the very communion with the Holy Spirit that enables us to love the world with the love of Christ.” Our work in the Royal Priesthood is to continue to pray for the world. To be included in the Royal Priesthood means we offer our prayers and sacrifices for the sake of the whole world. We offer ourselves to our neighbor in self-sacrificial love. We offer sacrifices of praise on behalf of all creation in our worship. This is not a small task. God loved the world enough to give His only begotten Son for it, and so this reminds us that the world is worthy of our love. We make the world better by taking the image of God to the rest of the world. We transform the world when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. As the priest is the conduit of God to the congregation, we are the conduit of God to the world.



We accomplish this by putting away from ourselves all “bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice,” and by being “kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you,” (**Ephesians 4:31-32**). We will have clear evidence of this transformation in our lives and within our circles of influence by the fruit that we bear. A tree is known by its fruit,

after all, and when we as individuals, as families, as parishes produce the good fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – we will know we are fulfilling our ordination into the Royal Priesthood.

Conclusion

God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. As mentioned from the beginning, God created Adam and Eve with purpose.

⁷ Schmemmann, Fr. A. (1973). *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*. St Vladimir’s Seminary Press.

When the Scripture says that God commanded humans to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to have dominion over it, it is not in a model of abuse or exploitation because those are selfish and self-serving. Humanity was put on the Earth to fill it by expanding God's Paradise, not to pursue its own desires.

At its very core, the priesthood connects God and His people. No one accomplishes this in a more true or full way than Jesus Christ. Therefore, the priest is the icon of Christ to the church community in that through the Eucharist, he truly connects God and the people. In that mystery, the priest's personal identity is irrelevant because he is the instrument through which God is acting in the sacraments.

When we interact with the world and in our personal circles, as part of the Royal Priesthood our identities should always be as an image of God to them.

"The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the "matter," the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament." – Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Reflection Questions

1. What are the differences between the priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek? How does Christ's fulfillment of them transform the priesthood?
2. Why is it significant that the Confession of Faith and Apostolic Succession are connected?
3. Explore the Omologia and discuss some of the differences between how the "Particular Priesthood" and "General Priesthood" express/ uphold it.

Lesson 11: Glory of God

Lesson Goals

- I can elicit the meaning of the persons involved in the Holy Transfiguration.
 - I can summarize our Church's teaching on the living and the departed.
 - I can respond to the importance of the Feast of Transfiguration in my spiritual life.
-

Every day we see people, on the street, on the bus, at school, at church. Though they may seem like ordinary people generally, everyone is special and some may even be extraordinary. A great soccer player, musician or working 3 jobs to make ends meet or struggling to take care of their sick parents or just a common man. Though Jesus may have appeared to be just a miracle worker; one day, He appears to His disciples in His full glory.

"...On the way, He questioned His disciples: 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'

'But what about you?' Jesus asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' And Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. - St. Mark 8:27-30.

Christ inquires of His Apostles about the people's perception about Him prior to the Transfiguration. The Apostles report that the people recognize His greatness but the Son of God then asks them what they think. Peter proclaims Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. There's an interesting debate whether at that time Peter meant the foretold anointed, i.e. Messiah, designated to redeem Israel from its political oppressors or if Peter is calling Jesus God, as Thomas did on the eighth day after Holy Resurrection.

Immediately after the Lord was recognized by His apostles as "the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Living God," He told them that "He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and on the third day be raised" (**St. Matthew 16**). The announcement of Christ's approaching passion and death was met with indignation by the disciples. And then, after rebuking them, the Lord took Peter, James, and John "up to a high mountain"—by tradition Mount Tabor—and was "transfigured before them." His face shone like the sun, and His garments became glistening white. In the Transfiguration, the apostles see the glory

of God present in majesty in the person of Jesus Christ. They see this before the crucifixion so that in the resurrection they might know, Who it is, Who has suffered for them, and what it is that this one, Who is God, has prepared for those who love Him. This is the revelation of God's glory which we will experience in the world to come. When we fully experience that revelation, we will see Him as He is (**1 John 3:2**). The Feast is an invitation to us to behold God's glory, and to be "transfigured" ourselves.



In addition to the theme of the glory of God which is revealed in all of its divine splendor in the face of Jesus Christ, the presence of Moses and Elijah is also of great significance. These two figures actually stand for the Old Testament itself: Moses for the Law and Elijah for the Prophets. And Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (**St. Matthew 5.17**). They also stand for the living and departed, for Moses died and his

burial place is known, while Elijah was taken alive into heaven in order to appear again to announce the time of God's salvation in Christ the Messiah. This is a clear sign that the saints and our departed are fully aware of what is happening in our world. In fact they are deeply aware and concerned about our life on earth. We see Moses who had long departed before Christ, having a conversation with Christ. If Moses, who had fallen asleep could converse with Christ, departed saints continue to converse with Christ. They can and will intercede for us. This awareness is at the center of our intercession to the saints.

Sts John Chrysostom⁸, Cyril of Alexandria⁹, and Ephrem the Syrian¹⁰ expound eloquently in homilies on these events at the Transfiguration. They point out that the appearance of Christ mirrors the garments of glory that clothed Adam and Eve at the Creation before the Fall of Man. But here the garments are not enveloping the person but rather emanating from the person, Jesus Christ. The Church Fathers point out that Jesus Christ partially revealed His glory, which He had, has, and will have in Himself forever. This glory is as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. If the Divine Logos showed all of His glory as it really is, then not only the apostles but the whole Earth, the entire universe would not have been able to endure His radiance. The Promeon-Sedro-Etro of the evening and night prayers of Transfiguration echo this sentiment that Christ reveals Himself and unified all creation, but only as much as His creation was able.

We read as follows from the prayers of the feast of Transfiguration "Thou wast transfigured on the mount, O Christ, our Lord and Savior, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as they could bear it. Let thine everlasting light shine upon us sinners.....Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it; so that when they would behold Thee crucified, they would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary, and would proclaim to the world that Thou art truly, the Radiance of the Father."

Both Moses and Elijah appeared with the Lord on Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration. The Church Fathers tell us about the presence of Moses and Elijah. Both had seen God, but not in the flesh. Now they see God incarnate, and talk with Him about His upcoming Passion, which had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Moses is the first and perhaps greatest among prophets. He is the lawbringer, delivering it to the chosen people from Yahweh. Jesus comes to fulfill the purpose of the Law as He declares in the Sermon on the Mount (**St. Matthew 5**). Moses who died in the flesh 14 centuries earlier, was seen with

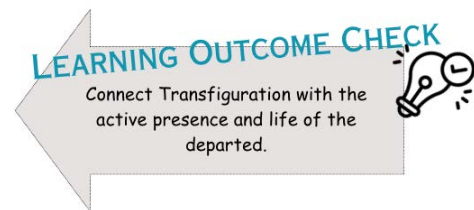
⁸ Homily 56 on Matthew

⁹ Homily 51

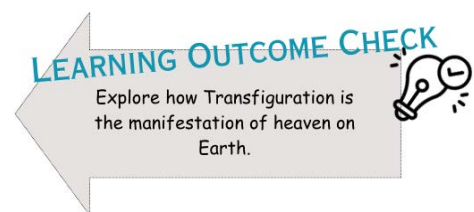
¹⁰ Homily on Transfiguration

the Lord alive, just like Elijah who was taken up to heaven. The spirits of the righteous are immortal, they are in paradise, where they see and know more than we do.

This Feast shows us that the departed are alive in the Lord and with the Lord. Moses is an active presence. This is true of all the departed who surround us as witnesses (**Hebrews 12:1**). As Christ told the Sadducees when they challenged Him, “He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (**St. Mark 12:27**). Christ was quoting God’s response to Moses from the Old Testament. God was showing that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though their souls and bodies separated at the time of their death, they remain an active presence until the bodily resurrection of all in the world to come.



Our church is the Church of the Prophets, who foresaw the Incarnation. Elijah represents the prophets speaking for God throughout the ages in recognizing the sins of God’s chosen people and boldly calling out the needed solution, specifically the coming of the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace (**Isaiah 9:6**) and so recognizes Jesus of Nazareth as the One he prophesied. Elijah’s other peculiarity is that he did not die. The presence of Elijah at the Transfiguration testify to the identity of Jesus as the Mighty God who summons His prophets. Therefore at the Transfiguration, Jesus Christ unites the living with the departed, the unbound with the time and space bound humans, unites the Law and prophets with the believers, unites the Heavenly with the earthly, and reconciles creation to the source of its origin, namely the Father as a voice in the cloud, the Son in the flesh, and the Holy Spirit as a cloud of light. Thus, we see Jesus Christ as the center, the unifying person through whom time and space comes together.

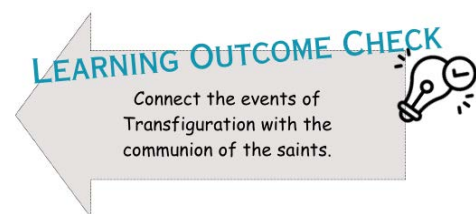


What are the implications of the Transfiguration? Because God is light (**1 St. John 1:5**), the bright cloud, the shining of Jesus’ face like the sun, and the whiteness of His garment (**St. Matthew 17:2, 5**) all demonstrate that Jesus is God. The Father bears witness from heaven concerning His Son “*This is My beloved Son*” (**St. Matthew 17:5**), indicating that this divine glory is Christ’s by nature. He is the Son of God, fully sharing in the essence of the Father: Jesus Christ is the true God of true God. The Transfiguration not only proclaims Christ’s divine sonship, but foreshadows His future glory when He as the Messiah will usher in the long-awaited Kingdom. Knowing that

the Feast of Tabernacles is the feast of the coming Kingdom, Peter asks to build booths (**St. Matthew 17:4**), as was done at that feast, to serve as symbols of God's dwelling among the just in the Kingdom.

Moses represents the Law and all those who have died. Elijah represents the Prophets and since he did not experience death all those who are alive in Christ. Their presence shows that the Law and the Prophets, the living and the dead, all bear witness to Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of the whole Old Testament.

The presence of Moses and Elijah also manifests the communion of the saints (**Hebrews 12:1**). Both men are immediately recognizable, and talk with the Lord. The disciples are able to understand Jesus' words that "*Elijah has come already*" (**St. Matthew 17:12**) referring to John the Baptist. Their eyes have been opened to the fact that Malachi's prophecy (**St. Matthew 4:5-6**) refers to one coming "*in the spirit and power of Elijah*" (**St. Luke 1:17**), rather than to Elijah himself. In this Feast, the Holy Trinity is also manifest, for Christ is transfigured (**St. Matthew 17:2**), the Father speaks from heaven testifying to Jesus' divine sonship (**St. Matthew 17:5**), and the Spirit is present in the form of a dazzling light surrounding Christ's Person, overshadowing the whole mountain (**St. Matthew 17:5**).



In the Gospel, the Transfiguration takes place before the death and resurrection of our Lord. But we celebrate the feast of Transfiguration in the Liturgical calendar after Pentecost. HG Geevarghese Mar Yulios tells us; "transfiguration is possible only through the sacramental life and witness of the Church in Christ. The Church after Pentecost specially represents the sacramental body of Christ as well as it witnesses Him from generations to generations. The transfiguration and transformation of the Church as a community of believers, is happening through this process of witnessing Him in the sacramental life."

"Christian witness is not only to see the glory of God, but also to become glorified. Human beings created in the image of God are transfigured from glory to glory through incessant prayer and worship. Worship is not only the transfiguration of the conscious mind. It transforms the whole being." (Fr Dr Mathew Vaidyan www.mosc.in)

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways does the Transfiguration event highlight the continuous influence of departed saints in the lives of believers?
2. How does the communion of saints, as understood through the Feast of Transfiguration, deepen our connection to the teachings of the Church and the lives of those who have passed?
3. How can the Transfiguration serve as a tangible manifestation of heaven on Earth, and what implications does this have for our understanding of divine presence in our daily lives?



Lesson 12: Gateway to Eternal Life

Lesson Goals

- *I can understand the Biblical Teachings on Death and the Departed.*
- *I can discuss How the Orthodox Church Views Death and Life after Death.*
- *I can become familiar with the Post-Funeral Services and Practices.*

Biblical Understanding of Death

Death is often misunderstood in our world. Some might see death as the ultimate defeat. Some might see it as a tragedy and of no meaning. Some see it as a rite of passage. And some see death as the end of everything. But as Christians, and specifically as Orthodox Christians, we have Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers to help us understand the mystery of death, to understand and to prepare rightly. Death is a mystery, and in the light of everlasting life, in Jesus Christ, death transforms into a joyous and victorious event for the believer.

Death was never a part of God's creation and God takes no pleasure in the destruction of any living thing (**Wisdom of Solomon 1: 13**). *"He created all things that they might exist"* (**Wisdom of Solomon 1:14**). We are created in the image and likeness of God, and created to have communion with God for all eternity. *"For God created man for immortality, and made him an image of His own eternity"* (**Wisdom of Solomon 2:23**). *"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn and live"* (**Ezekiel 18:32**).

Death came into the world by the disobedience of humankind, for as God is the source of all life, turning from God means turning away from life. Death is the final victory of the devil, the result of his destructive activity. All that is evil and corrupt in the world seeks to lead us away from God and into bondage to sin and death. Therefore, death is the result of our own choice and of evil, not a punishment or act of God. *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (**Psalms 51:5**). There is no one who escapes death. Thus, with this understanding, the preparation for death is very much at the center of the Orthodox Christian spiritual life.

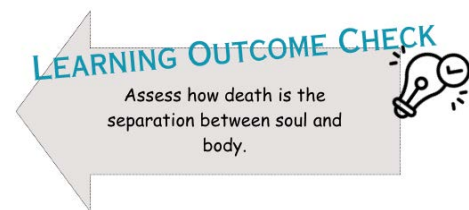
By the power of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians can and must transform their death into life. They must face the tragedy of death with faith in the Lord, and defeat the *"last enemy—death"* (**1 Corinthians 15:26**) by the power of their faith. *"Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal*

life; he does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life" (St. John 5:24). Our Lord has also promised, *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (St. John 11:25-26).*

Biblical Understanding of the Departed

Despite our disobedience and rebellion, God in His eternal love for us, did not abandon us, did not destroy us. Out of His immeasurable love, God gave His only Begotten Son to come among us and live our life, to show us how to live as we were created to live. And then the only- begotten Son of God even took our death upon Himself. The only man who never deserved to die, who never turned away from God in any way - Christ, our God, took our death upon Himself, willingly. As the Fathers teach us, when the fullness of God entered into death, death was too small a thing to contain God, and the bonds of death were burst asunder - the power of death was destroyed. This is what we celebrate in the Resurrection as we experience Christ breaking down the doors of Hell, setting free Adam and Eve and their children. Death no longer has ultimate power over the children of God. As we believe that Christ rose from the dead and now lives for all eternity, so we believe that He desires to share this risen and eternal life with those who love Him.

Death is not the end, but a point of transition, the beginning of the life to come. At the time of death our soul is separated from our mortal and physical body. We believe that the soul continues to live, awaiting the resurrection on the last day. In the Creed we proclaim our belief in *"the resurrection of the dead and the new life in the world to come."* Our bodies will be made new - spiritual, glorified, and incorruptible. At the resurrection we shall be a whole person once more, body and soul, by the grace of God. As citizens of the Kingdom, our bodies will be changed to be like Christ's Body: *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).*



It is the teaching of our Church that at the time of death, each soul undergoes a partial judgment, based on the person's life, their words and deeds, what they have done and what they have left undone. Based on this judgment, the soul will begin to experience a foretaste of his/her eternal state of blessedness or of torment that will follow the final

judgment at the second coming of Christ. Saint Gregory the Theologian says that *"Every good and God-beloved soul... when it has been released by death from the body with which it was united... immediately experiences that joy and pleasures which it shall enjoy in full measure in the future... and though immediately after death the enjoyment is small, after, when it shall again receive its body at the resurrection of the dead, it shall enjoy blessings in perfect measure."*

We speak of the departed as having fallen asleep; their lives have changed, not ended, and they await the final resurrection. This is not a sleep of oblivion, nor does it mean that the souls are unaware of or indifferent to us. The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (**St Luke 16:19-31**), teaches us that the rich man in Hades was concerned about his relatives who were living, although he could not help them. The souls of those who have fallen asleep remember the people with whom they were connected in life, they are concerned about them. Through God, the souls of the saints are aware of our condition, because they have love and are in communion with God. They hear us, they receive our prayers and pray to God for us.

End of Life Practices and Prayers

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of every man, and the living will take it to heart" (**Ecclesiastes 7:2**). The verse from Ecclesiastes makes an observation of how those in a house of mourning are contemplative. They "take it to heart" whatever reflective nature their thoughts take them.

It expresses that this is better than a "house of drinking" or a house of merriment because it's often a place of senseless hearts (Ecclesiastes 7:4). The Orthodox Study Bible titles this section of the Ecclesiastias as teaching 'The Value of Wisdom'. It is not rebuking having celebrations but that of a restless nous prone to being led astray away from God and towards things that don't last. It is also important to set the kind of environment "house of mourning" means.

When someone is passing away, it is recommended they chant a brief version of the Creed, "We believe in One True God who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The relatives or close friends of the gravely ill should invite the priest

LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

Interpret "It is better to go to the house of mourning than of feasting" within the context of the standing with the grieving.

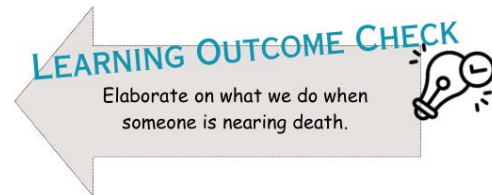


LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

Discuss what to do when someone is passing away.



to his/her bedside so that prayers may be offered for the person as the soul departs from the body. A table with clean cloth will be prepared for the Bible, candles, and Cross to be arranged on it. This all happens when someone is passing away slowly. When the soul passes from the body, the full Nicene Creed should be chanted and immediately after the Hymn of the Angels - "As the angels and archangels on high sing praise...", then "O Lord Jesus Christ, do not close the door of Your mercy", followed by a Quama "Holy art Thou O God", and "Renew Your creatures by the resurrection.." are to be chanted. The prayerful environment allows the soul of the one passing to be focused on God. By surrounding the departing soul in prayer, it is protected on its journey. The soul will stay focused and be strengthened. Giving support for those passing away is also a duty of the Church community. In this atmosphere, everyone in the environment will also be affected. The Ecclesiastes verse points to this environment as one that is more preferable. It is a place where believers both living and departed *in body* are actually *living in the presence of God*.



It is not just the soul of the departed that is being treated respectfully but also the body. It is recommended that the body of the departed be washed and carefully laid, dressed with nice clothes. All of God's creation is 'good' and so even the body is treated with care. We believe that at the second coming, our soul will be reunited with the body. Thus, we prepare the body accordingly. For a Christian, death is not the end because Christ's Resurrection is the victory over death. We look beyond death to a future with God.

Funeral Services and Practices

Death is something that awaits all of us and yet, we often wish to avoid thinking about it. As Christians, we understand earthly death as the gateway to eternal life. Immediately after death, a service, or the *quqliyon* of the departed is offered. After this, the body is washed and clothed for burial. Traditionally, this act of love is performed by the family and friends of the deceased. The funeral service for men, women and children among the laymen, is made up of four parts. Traditionally, in the Malankara Orthodox Church, the first three services are done in the home and the final service along with the burial are done in the church. Since it's not always easy to bring the casket to the home in Western countries, the services may be done in the chapel of a funeral home or all the services done in the church itself. When the casket is brought to the church, the departed person is placed in the middle of the church with their face looking towards the East where the altar is, awaiting the Second Coming of our Lord.

During the time of visitation, while friends and relatives come to bid their farewell to the departed and offer condolences to the family, the book of Psalms is read interspersed with hymns as the people keep vigil over the body. During the final service, the family is given an opportunity to draw near to their beloved departed one and kiss them one last time while a hymn of lamentation is sung. Then the family covers their departed loved one's face with a sosappa, the same cloth used to cover the bread and wine during Holy Qurbana. Once the face is covered, oil is poured in the shape of the cross on the body as we ask God to keep the demon's from being able to grab hold of their soul as they journey towards Paradise. After this, a mixture of incense and dirt is placed on the departed, fulfilling the words of Scripture that "from dust we have come, to dust we shall return, and again be renewed." The casket is then closed and carried from the church to the grave.

When the departed leaves the church for the last time, the bell of the church is rung solemnly. The funeral cortege proceeds to the cemetery where a grave-side service of entombment is offered by the priest. If the cemetery grounds have not been already blessed, the priest will bless the ground receiving the body and the casket will be lowered in. Incense is offered and a quqliyon for the departed is sung. Afterwards a benediction is given and there may be prayers offered at the departed person's house. The grave is often covered in flowers and eventually a stone placed to mark the place for future memorial prayers.

Post Funeral Services and Traditions

It is traditional for Orthodox mourners to fast for 40 days and keep a bed in the house with a white sheet on it, a bible, and a light to remember the presence of their departed ones and to give a place for prayer. This reminds us of the 40 days our Lord Jesus Christ spent with His disciples after He rose from the dead and before He ascended to heaven. On the 40th day, or the Sunday following, the family will gather in the Church for Holy Qurbana and then go to the gravesite and then the home to offer prayers for their beloved departed one. After the completion of the prayers, the white sheet is taken off of the bed and they have a meal to break the fast and end the 40 days of mourning. Like Tobit in the Holy Scriptures, it is our duty as Christians to join the family in burying the dead, mourning, and praying for the departed. In Christ, we are one family, the living and the departed – we all live in Christ. When we worship in the Church, we along with all of our departed and the angelic hosts stand before the throne of God.

Additional Thoughts

One of the most basic decisions in funeral planning is what to do with the body. However, for the Orthodox Christian there is no choice: according to the Holy Canons of the Church, the body of a deceased Christian must be returned to the earth. Cremation is generally discouraged except under certain exceptional circumstances under the discretion of the local diocesan bishop. The body is placed in a casket and set in a grave. It is always good to have a cemetery plot, a grave or vault prepared beforehand. There is nothing in our Church's doctrine that prohibits the donation of needed organs after a person's death.

Conclusion

Because our Lord Jesus has defeated death by his death, it no longer has hold over us. Death has lost its power over us. "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" (**1 Corinthians 15:55**) For us as Orthodox Christians, a promise has been given, "*Whosoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die*" (**St. John 11:26**). Death is indeed our gateway into eternal life. Even though we feel sad when our loved ones pass away, because we cannot hold them, hug them, or talk to them. We rejoice knowing that someday we will do all of those things again and the grief we feel now will be overwhelmed by the joy of being reunited. Our sadness is transformed into joy because of Christ's Resurrection.

Reflection Questions

1. In light of Ecclesiastes 7-8:1, how does the notion that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than of feasting" illustrate the significance of community and empathy in the grieving process?
2. When considering the spiritual duties we have towards the deceased and their families during times of mourning, what practices or rituals might we engage in to support the grieving process and honor the memory of the departed?
3. Reflecting on the duality of grief and comfort as shown in the example of Jesus weeping for His friend, how can we cultivate an environment of compassion and support for ourselves and others when facing the reality of death? What practical steps can we take to embody Christ-like love and understanding during times of loss?

Lesson 13: Christ in Sheol

Lesson Goals

- *I can articulate the consequences of Christ entering the tomb on Holy Saturday*
- *I can infer why the Syriac tradition labels Holy Saturday as the Saturday of Good Tidings or Gospel Saturday*
- *I can understand why the women came to the tomb and then rested on the Sabbath.*

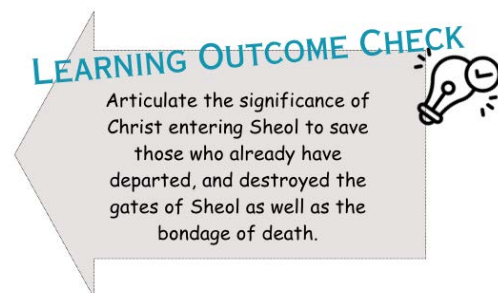
Good Friday and Easter of Holy Week are widely known as two very important days where many faithful Christians attend services at Church. The Crucifixion of our Lord and the Resurrection of our Lord are indeed important. However, there is a disconnection. Christ did not resurrect directly from the Cross. He died on the Cross, descended into Sheol and resurrected from death. We often forget that Christ descended into Sheol which we commemorate on Holy Saturday. We actually remember all our departed loved ones on this day as Christ descended into Sheol to preach the Gospel to all and trampled down death by His death. This is why in the Syriac tradition we call Holy Saturday the Saturday of Good Tidings or Gospel Saturday.



We remember the suffering of Christ from the betrayal kiss of Judas to His last words, “It is finished” (**St. John 19:30**). The sorrow of Christ’s suffering and crucifixion is not replaced by joy with His Resurrection. In fact, sorrow is transformed into joy. We cannot understand this transformation without the integral part of Christ’s descent into Sheol.

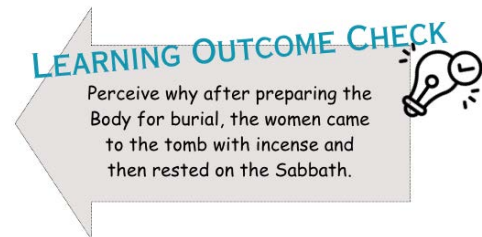
There is much beautiful imagery of Christ’s descent into Sheol that we see in poetry as well as in iconography by the Church Fathers. This icon is also known as the “Harrowing of Hades”. “Sheol” is used in Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the realm of the dead, whereas the New Testament Greek texts used the word “Hades”. Both reference the place where the departed had gone before the Resurrection.

As Jonah was in the belly of the fish, Christ was in the belly of Sheol. As Jonah prayed in the whale, Christ preached the good news of the Gospel in Sheol. As the fish threw up Jonah onto the shore, Christ resurrected from the dead and redeemed Adam and Eve and all of humanity. If you look at the icon above, you can see that Christ is pulling out Adam and Eve while trampling on the doors that were shut out to Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden had shut the doors of Paradise for all of humanity. It was through the trampling of the doors with Christ’s descent into Sheol, defeating death by His death that the doors of Paradise were opened again. It is this meaningful and powerful incident that we miss out on when we do not partake in Holy Saturday. Our spiritual journey is incomplete without our participation and understanding of Holy Saturday.



“For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also, not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.” (1 Peter 3:17-22)

1 Peter 3:17-22 along with Romans 6:3-11 helps us to connect the Death and Burial of Christ with Baptism. Just as St. Paul says in Romans 6:3, we who were “baptized into Christ were baptized into His death”. When we look at Romans 6:3-11, we see that Baptism is the Cross. What the Cross and Burial is to Christ, Baptism has been to us, even if not in the same respects. For Christ died, was buried in the flesh, and raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. We should also be crucified, buried, and “walk in the newness of life” with Him (Rom 6:4). If we have shared in His Death and Burial, then we will be able to share much more in the Resurrection and Life of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We can see that the Myrrh Bearing Women approach the tomb, in three separate Gospels; various women are identified to participate in the burial of Christ. Luke 23:56 tells us that the women prepared spices and fragrant oils and they rested on the Sabbath. On the first day of the week, the women approached the tomb knowing there was a stone barrier that would keep the Body of Christ entombed; as this was proper Jewish practice; yet continue to gather the spices and come sit, for there was no other place they desired to be. The goal of these women continued to be set towards the Kingdom, as they remained watchful for their Lord. The Lord blesses these women as they are the first to the revelation of the Resurrected Christ.



On Holy Saturday, we start with midnight and morning prayers of Holy Saturday as we are still mourning the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, we move into Divine Liturgy. Let me point out some of the differences that we will see in Liturgy on this day. For the Malankara Church, since Christ is buried at the altar, we do not celebrate Divine Liturgy at the tomb of Christ. The Holy Qurbana is the living body and blood of our Lord and since He is dead, while in the tomb, we should not celebrate Holy Qurbana on it. Holy Qurbana is the celebration of our Lord who is alive. Therefore, the priest usually celebrates Qurbana at a side altar, so it is common to see the congregation all gathered to one side of the parish during Qurbana. This enables us to celebrate Qurbana on the Crucified and Resurrected Lord not, only a Crucified Lord.

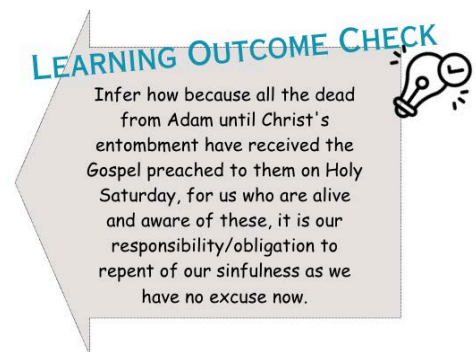
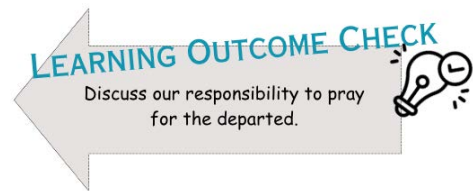
As practiced in the Liturgy for Maundy Thursday, when it is time for the Trisagion (Holy art thou O God...), the specific hymn for Holy Saturday will be sung,

*Christ Who – Effaced our Death by – Thy Death –
Raise to life, the dead and have mercy on us*

followed by the hymn, “Praise to Thee, O Lord” (“Naatha, they sthuthiyum...”). We also do not do the intercessory prayers (Quqiliyon) during Qurbana.

Instead, it is after the Divine Liturgy that the incense is offered in intercessory prayers for the departed faithful. Also, there is no kaimuthu (dismissal blessing), like the rest of Holy Week. These are just a few differences from the regular Divine Liturgy we are all used to.

God if life, and voluntarily tasted death because of His love for us. Through Him we have a taste of resurrection to the dead lying down in the tombs. He slept among the dead and with His voice, awakened all the dead in Sheol. The Mighty and Powerful One killed death and ravaged Sheol and destroyed the evil who killed Adam.



Reflection Questions

1. Defend why it is helpful for the Faithful to use the “Harrowing of Hades” Icon where Christ descended to Sheol on Holy Saturday.
2. On Holy Saturday, why is it important to go to church and participate in Holy Qurbana?
3. What special practice do you see in the Holy Qurbana celebration on Holy Saturday? Identify the differences and discuss them as a class or with your family.

Lesson 14: Beyond the Veil

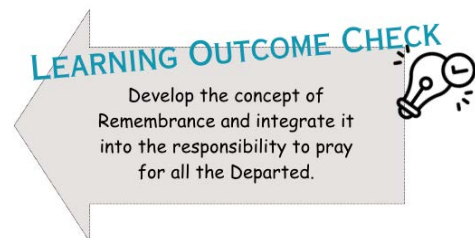
Lesson Goals

- *I can relate remembrance of the departed to being alive in Christ and my duty to pray for the departed.*
- *I can defend the Orthodox faith regarding life after death.*
- *I can recognize the presence and participation of the departed in the life of the Church.*

The words of the faithful thief in **St. Luke 23:39-43** are full of humility and truth. When he asked the Lord to remember him in His Kingdom, it was a beautiful request. When you remember an old friend or someone dear to you who has passed away, you are calling to mind the memory of them. We may even experience the same feelings of love or laughter as we remember them. Or perhaps we feel the pain of separation from them. Sometimes these memories can be as vivid and real as the actual moment originally experienced. To remember someone means to call that memory forward into the present reality. This is what happens when we who are but dust of the earth do the remembering. When the Creator of the whole Universe calls a person to memory, they become an actual present reality. The faithful thief, by asking the Lord of all Creation to remember him in the coming Kingdom, was asking Jesus to not forget him, and to bring him back to reality in the Resurrection.

The concept of remembrance is found in the Qurbana when our Lord tells His disciples to “do this in remembrance of Me.” When we celebrate the Holy Qurbana, we are not merely going backwards in time to reenact something that happened in the past.

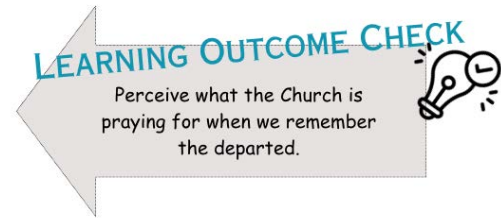
Instead, what happened in the past is becoming part of the present reality so much so that we are entering the Upper Room and experiencing the very act of dining at the table with our Lord and receiving His Body and Blood. The worship at the altar is beyond time, uniting past, present, and future reality.



Tobit's devotion to the burial of the dead

In the Scriptures, Tobit is a righteous man for many reasons, one of which was his practice of burying the dead who had been killed by the wicked King Sennacherib. Tobit even suffered persecution from the King for this practice of burying the dead because the King wanted those bodies thrown outside the wall to be a threat and source of fear for

everyone (Tobit 2: 17-20). Tobit considered it his duty to mourn the departed and give them a proper dignified burial. This was a noble thing that Tobit was doing. In the same way we are called to sit with the grieving and make every effort to give any of the departed from the Church a proper and fitting burial. It is our custom that when anyone passes away from the church, the entire community comes together for the funeral and also to sit with the grieving family and friends. We are asking for God's mercy on the departed and His strength to be upon the bereaving family. When one part of the body of Christ is suffering the pain of separation from their loved ones, we are all sharing in their pain and being present to witness and console their grief.



Judas Maccabeus

In the second book of the Maccabees, Judas Maccabeus was leading a rebellion to take back Jerusalem and the surrounding areas from those who had been oppressing them. After one series of successful battles, Judas and his armies rested on the Sabbath day. On the following day, Judas and his men went to gather the bodies of those killed in battle and bury them in the tombs of their forefathers. As they were doing this, they noticed that “under the tunics of each of the dead, they uncovered sacred tokens of the Jamnian idols, which the Jews are forbidden by law to wear. So the reason these men died in battle became clear to everyone” (2 Maccabees 12:40). Each of these men who had died, had died in the sin of idolatry. Perhaps they had put on the tokens of the Jamnian idols hoping they would protect them, but instead it was the reason for their falling in battle. Following this, the actions of Judas Maccabeus are notable. “They turned to supplication and prayed that the sin they [the fallen soldiers] had committed might be completely blotted out” (2 Maccabees 12:42). He then took up an offering from the soldiers to take to Jerusalem in order to present as a sin offering for the sake of these fallen men. The Scriptures say that “In doing so, he acted properly and with honor, taking note of the resurrection” (2 Maccabees 12:43). This act of intercession for the departed soldiers was a beautiful act of faith and love. Even though these fallen soldiers had died in sin, Judas and his fellow soldiers turned to supplication asking God to blot their sin out. It is our responsibility to do the same for our departed ones as well. It is an act of love to ask for God's mercy upon those who have departed. Ultimately, their salvation is in God's hands, but we can always ask God for His mercy and grace upon both the living and the departed.

St Paul's prayer for the Departed

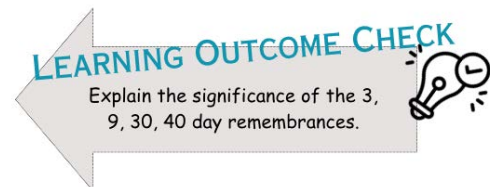
St Paul does this very act of asking for God's mercy in the New Testament. St Paul in his second letter to Timothy writes:

16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. 18 The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus. (2 Timothy 1:16-18)

St Paul's use of the phrase 'household of Onesiphorus' and the past tense of the verbs used in relation to Onesiphorus indicates very clearly that his loyal friend had passed away. This is further confirmed at the end of this letter in chapter 4 when he tells Timothy to "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus" (2 Timothy 4:19). Paul cannot ask Timothy to greet Onesiphorus because he has passed away, therefore he asks him to greet Onesiphorus' family. Understanding that Onesiphorus has passed away, if we look back at Chapter 1 verse 18 "The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day" is a very clear intercession from St Paul for the sake of his departed friend. These are the same petitions we ask of God in the funeral service and in the memorial prayers for the departed.

Memorial Prayers

After someone passes away, a period of mourning is observed for 40 days. During that time, those who are close to the departed will fast and pray for their loved one. There is a tradition of doing a memorial prayer on the 3rd, 9th, 30th, and 40th day of their passing as well as a yearly memorial prayer on the day of their passing. While our departed do not experience time in the same way that we do after the soul and body have been separated, for the living these days are considered to be certain milestones in our departed's journey towards Paradise. The 3rd day is connected with the Resurrection of our Lord on the third day. The 9th day is connected with the nine ranks of angels. The 30th day remembrance is connected to Israel mourning for Moses and Aaron for 30 days after they had departed (Numbers 20: 29 and Deuteronomy 34:8). The 40th day is connected to the Lord spending 40 days with His disciples after His Resurrection before His Ascension. There are some visions from very pious monks that elucidate what these particular



milestones are, but these are not necessarily considered canon. We do not know everything about the soul's journey towards Paradise, but we know that God sends His angels to accompany the faithful departed along that journey. We see this in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. (St. Luke 16:22)

Writings of the Saints on Prayer for the Departed

Throughout the centuries, many writings of the Saints attest to this practice of praying for the departed. Some excerpts of the writings from the early centuries of the church are given here:

"pray that God would be merciful to the sins of all, not only of the living, but also of the departed." (Chrysostom, "On the Priesthood," Book 6.4)

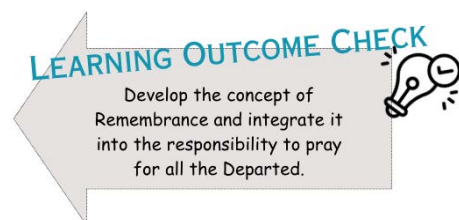
"The whole Church, I mean, observes this tradition received from the Fathers, that prayers should be offered for those who have died in the communion of the body and the blood of Christ, whenever their names are mentioned at the sacrifice in the usual place." (St Augustine, Sermon 172)

Cyril of Jerusalem: "we commemorate . . . those who have fallen asleep before us . . . believing that it will be a very great benefit to the souls, for whom the supplication is put up." (Catechetical Lecture 23)

Cyprian of Carthage: "take note of their days on which they depart, that we may celebrate their commemoration among the memorials of the martyrs." (Cyprian, Epistle 36)

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the act of remembrance is an act of love. When we stand before the Almighty and Infinite God and remember our departed ones, we are asking for God to have mercy on them on the Great Day of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If God remembers them, then their memory is truly an eternal and everlasting one. This is why on the day of a



memorial, many will greet the family members by saying “May their Memory be Eternal” or a shortened form “Memory Eternal.” In some Orthodox traditions, these words are sung during the memorial prayer as well. This concept of remembrance is a beautiful one, and the responsibility to pray for the departed belongs to each of us who are living and offering our humble prayers to God. May God have mercy on us and on them on the great day of His Glorious Second Coming.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the significance of remembering the departed in our prayers or submitting their names to be remembered during the Holy Qurbana?
2. How would you articulate a defense of the practice of praying for the departed if challenged by someone who feels that it is not an appropriate practice?
3. What does it mean for us to remember the departed? What does it mean when God remembers the departed?

Lesson 15: All Things New

Lesson Objectives

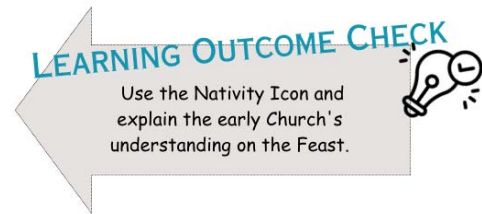
- *I can articulate how Christ accomplished our Salvation by His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection*
- *I can understand that the Resurrection is a central tenet of our belief*
- *I can understand the phrase "reversal of the transgression of the commandment by Adam".*

In the Icon of the Nativity, we see an interesting thing. The surrounding landscape looks desolate, opposite of what the Garden of Eden was.



Creation had fallen and become corrupt. In the Nativity icon, there is a stump nearby representing the stump of Jesse with a small shoot coming up from it. From the tragedy of death and decay comes a tiny glimmer of hope.

That small glimmer of hope is towards the center of the icon, surrounded by His mother, with a star shining above Him, angels looking in awe and expectantly at what is happening. Our Lord Jesus Christ is shown laid in a manger, the feeding trough of the animals. An ox and a donkey stand over him, warming the newborn Child with their breath in fulfillment of the prophecy. The Lord is wrapped in swaddling clothes. But, something looks very odd about those clothes. They are made from strips of cloth and He is wrapped in them as if He had been wrapped for burial and laid in a manger that looks like a coffin. This is intentional because our Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, is the only one who was ever born to die. Everyone else, from Adam and Eve onwards was born to live. But our Lord from the moment of His very birth had already taken on mortality. The Icon is reflecting on the great Truth that our Lord has willingly become Man that He might take on Death, one that He did not deserve. Adam received death as a consequence of his sin.



Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

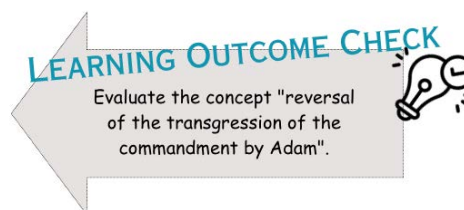
When we die, it is because of sin, because it is through sin that death entered the world. This isn't something that we can blame God for, because fundamentally it is our responsibility

"For God did not make death, neither does He have pleasure over the destruction of the living. For He created all things that they might exist, and the generations of the world so they might be preserved; for there was no poison of death in them, Nor was the reign of Hades on the earth. For righteousness does not die. But the ungodly summoned death by their words and works; Although they thought death would be a friend, they were dissolved. For they made a covenant with death, since they were deserving to share it in common."

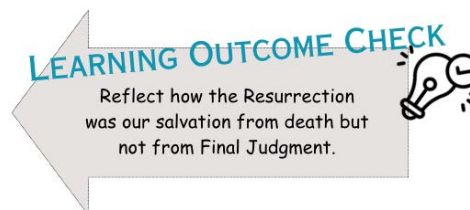
- **Wisdom of Solomon 1:13- 16**

But God knowing that we had brought death upon ourselves still allowed it to happen. But that was not an act of angry punishment, because God the Father knew that at the appointed time He would send His Only-Begotten Son to become Incarnate and take on Death by dying on the Cross for us.

While Adam was disobedient, Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was obedient saying “nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (**St Matthew 26:39**). This is the reversal of the transgression of the commandment by Adam. St Basil the Great writes that “God permitted death in order that man should not remain forever in a living death.” It was an act of mercy and love that God permits death. If Adam and Eve had not been cast out of the Garden of Eden, they would have eaten from the Tree of Life and they would have lived eternally separated from the presence of God. This would have been a living death. But, because Christ destroyed Death by His death once and for all, now we take from the Tree of Life by receiving the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and are eternally united with God.



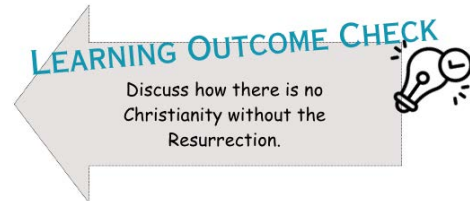
Death was not just destroyed for us but for all mankind. Therefore at the Second Coming of Christ, all of the departed will experience the Resurrection when soul and body will be united again. At that time, there will be a Judgement, when we will all be in need of God’s mercy. None of us are worthy of the Kingdom. The Lord gave us a parable to describe the Judgment in **St. Matthew 25:31-46**. This does not mean that we earn the Kingdom, because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (**Romans 3:23**). But our actions do have consequences. Our actions must be an expression of our faith. James addresses this saying: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (**St. James 2:14**). If a person has been striving to be rid of sin in his/her life, then experiencing the refining fire of the love of God will be a purifying and liberating experience. But for someone who loves sin, who has rejected the presence of God in his/her life, then the experience of that same refining fire of God’s love that burns away impurities will feel as torture because his/her sins of pride, greed, lust, envy, sloth, wrath, despondency, and arrogance will be perishing. It is about the condition of our heart. This is why the repentant thief on the right hand side of Jesus is promised Paradise.



What God has done for our salvation is an ultimate act of love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (**St John 3:16**). From the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, the entire Scriptures reveal to us the breadth and depth of God’s love for us. Christ as the High Priest, willingly offering Himself up as the atoning sacrifice for our sake results in The Glorious Resurrection.

This is why The Resurrection is the Feast of feasts. The Syriac word for Resurrection is Qymtho, but it can be called Pascha or Easter as well. In a smaller way, the Resurrection is celebrated every Sunday as our central act of worship. This is core to our belief. During the Holy Qurbana we worship

saying “We commemorate Your death, O Lord and we confess Your Resurrection, and we await Your second coming. May Your mercy be upon us all.” We confess our faith in the Resurrection of Christ our King and we look forward to the day of His Awesome Second Coming when we too shall be Resurrected from the grave. Without the Resurrection, Jesus would not be truly God and Christianity itself would be false (**1 Corinthians 15:13-15**).



*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (**St. John 11:25-26**).*

Reflection Questions

1. According to St Basil, why did God permit death? What does living death mean?
2. John 3:16 says “For God so loved the world,” what did this love compel God to do for us?
3. Oftentimes, people will say, “as long as I have done more good than bad, then I’ll be ok at Judgement” Why is this perspective flawed? What would be a correct statement on our standing at Judgement?

Lesson 16: Hosanna in the Highest

Lesson Goals

- *I can understand why the Church gives importance to the heavenly hosts.*
- *I can relate to why angels are important for our day-to-day life and our salvation.*
- *I can appreciate the role of angels in our lives and during our worship.*

A core belief of Christianity is that God alone is the Creator. He created all that is “seen” and also all that is “unseen”. And yet despite regularly confessing this truth as we recite the Nicene Creed, many of us avoid thinking of what we cannot see. It’s natural to feel uneasy and perhaps even confused at the thought of an invisible world full of angels and demons.

Angels and demons are referenced throughout Scripture as well as in our Liturgical hymns and prayers. For the ancient Church, this was such a strong belief that St. Irenaeus (130-202 AD) was compelled to refute an early heresy that the world was created by angels and not by God.

Why does the Church give such prominence to these celestial beings, and how should we think about them and their interactions with our personal life? How are angels tied to our salvation?

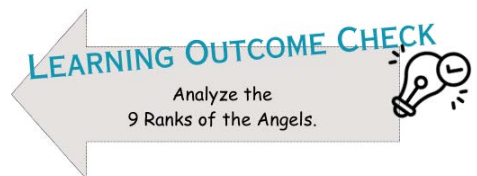
Angels in Scripture

In her monumental work “The Holy Angels”, Mother Alexandria shares “we must recognize that the role of the angels in the Old Testament was an important one, full of significance and unerring directness. They assisted in preparing for the Redemption. From the very outset of man’s religious history, which we call indeed the “history of salvation”, the angels are present; they shepherd man and prepare the way of the Lord.”

What Mother Alexandria reminds us is that in the very first pages of Genesis we see the angels .. as well as the demons! In particular, we see the obedience of the angels to God as well as the disobedience of the demons in Satan, disguised as a serpent and through who’s devious acts, brought about the fall of man. The “cherubim and the fiery sword” (**Genesis 3:24**) obediently guarded Adam and Eve from taking the fruit of the tree of life, doing God’s will to protect them from living forever in a state of sin and death (**Genesis 3:22**). And of course, Satan in the form of a serpent (**Genesis 3:1**) tricked Eve with the

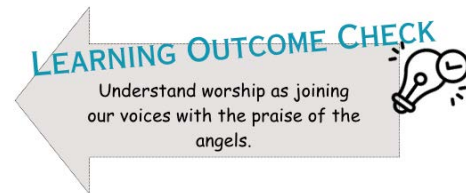
promise of deification (**Genesis 3:5**) which both Adam and Eve had known could only be achieved through obedience to God and yet they succumbed to Satan's rationalization. The Egyptian word for "serpent" is "seraph", which is another link that Satan was indeed an angel that had fallen.

There are known to be at least 3 ranks of angels, each with 3 types for a total of 9. This is not to be misunderstood to mean that there are only 9 types of angels, nor does it mean these are different species of angels. What has been revealed to us about this spiritual realm is only what is necessary for our salvation, and what is important to understand is the hierarchy. The ranks of angels can be considered to be different offices or roles that participate and cooperate to do God's will. St. Dionysius the Areopagite gives us a helpful analogy when he compares the ranks of the celestial hierarchy with that of the church - we are all human, serving God in different ways.



These celestial beings also have free will, and this is how we understand Satan and the demons. Through their jealousy and greed, they chose to not serve God. In their spitefulness, they attack what God loves most ... they attack us!

Paradise therefore can be understood as being in full communion with God side by side with the Holy Angels. The angels tirelessly work as an extension of God's will, and drawing closer to the angels also draws us closer to God.



We see glimpses of this cooperation between the angels, God, and man throughout the Old Testament - in the Book of Genesis alone Abraham welcomes the angels and the Lord (**Genesis 18**), sparing Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:1-17; 21:9-21**), and Jacob (**Genesis 28; 32; 48**). But we also read about interactions of angels with Moses (**Exodus 23:20-21**), Joshua (**Joshua 5:13-16**), Elijah (**3 Kingdoms 19**), Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:1-13**), Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 1:4-2:1**), Zechariah (**Zechariah 1-4**), and so many more!

These direct interactions of man and angels continue in the New Testament. Not only do we read numerous interactions in the Gospels of Christ with the angels, but also later when St. Peter's escape (**Acts 12:3-17**), the martyrdom of St. Stephen (**Acts 6:14-7:53**), and in the Epistles of St. Paul. The Book of Revelation written by St. John is a vision of the end times and full of references to the angels and demons. As Mother Alexandria reflects on the Book of Revelation, "Could we, but project our thoughts into that Holy City and see what John saw! Even if we cannot do this, we can, humbly kneeling here on earth, join in that great overwhelming chorus of angels, saints, and martyrs, crying with them out of the well of our longing and our love: Even so, come Lord Jesus! (**Revelation 22:21**).

Angels in Worship

"The perfect church service would be one, we were almost unaware of. Our attention would have been on God." - C.S. Lewis

With this deeper understanding of angels and man in Scripture, we are able to see patterns throughout the Holy Qurbana that orient ourselves towards proper worship of God. Although it is never correct to say man becomes angels, what we do see fully how we too are to behave especially in the presence of the Almighty.

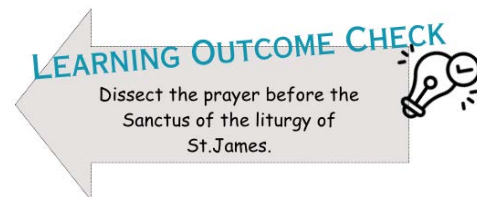
The Trisagion (Thrice Holy) prayer is attributed to Isaiah's vision of the Seraphim as well as St. Ignatius. It has been attributed to the Seraphim who sang, "Holy art Thou, O God! Holy art Thou, Almighty! Holy art Thou Immortal!" after Christ died on the Cross. According to tradition, when St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nicodemus came to take the Body of Christ for burial (**St. John 19:38-42**) they heard the Seraphim's song and then sang what we sing today - "who was crucified for us, have mercy on us!".

But understanding the position of the Seraphim to God makes this story become even more alive! The Seraphim, along with the Cherubim and the Thrones, are the rank of angels that are closest to the Throne of God. For St. Joseph and St. Nicodemus to have heard this song of the Seraphim implies that heaven and earth were so united at the foot of the Cross. This gives us the clearest picture of what happens when we worship at the Holy Altar and celebrate the Divine Liturgy. Our song is sung with the priest at the Altar (which is known as the *thronos*), and we are as close to God as the Seraphim who serve the Almighty in heaven. At Church on Sunday, we also believe heaven and earth intersect in the most sacred and holy manner, and we are joined together with all the angels, and the living, and the departed.

The Holy Qurbana has other references to the angelic realm, and the bells and marabhasa remind us of this closeness with the angels. The pre-Sanctus Prayer is a direct reminder of our proximity with the angels at that most special and sacred moment, and in the Sanctus we sing together:

"Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty by whose glory the Heaven and earth are filled! Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is He who has come and is to come in the name of the Lord God, glory be to Him in the highest!"

In the Anaphora of St. James the prayer before the Sanctus is: "He Whom the heavenly hosts, corporeal and incorporeal, glorify; the sun, the moon and all the stars; the earth, the seas and the first-born inscribed in the heavenly Jerusalem; angels and archangels, celestial virtues, principalities, thrones, dominions, powers, the many-eyed cherubim and the six-winged seraphim who, covering their faces and feet, fly to one another, chanting thrice holy, crying and saying: Holy." Later in the same Anaphora, the prayer before the Lord's Prayer addresses God saying: "O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who are blessed by the cherubim, hallowed by the



seraphim and exalted by thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of the rational hosts.”

Angels in our Lives

The angels are real and interact with us in our lives. They help us today and it is possible to have interactions with angels whether it be protection, intercession, guiding or helping us grow closer to God.

It is also very real that we can interact with demonic influences that can lead us away from God. At the time of our Baptism, the service begins with what is literally called an exorcism i.e., our renouncing of Satan and all his evil forces. In the Sacrament, we turn away from the Altar and say the words, *“I, [NAME], who am being baptized renounce you Satan, all your armies, all your messengers, all fear of you, and all of your deceitfulness!”* We then turn towards the Altar and proclaim to Christ, *“I, [NAME], who am being baptized, confess and believe in You, O Christ my God, and in the whole teaching which You have divinely handed down through the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Holy Fathers.”*

All who are present then recite the Nicene Creed together, which is both a reminder of the spiritual war that occurs even after we are Baptized and is a wonderful moment for us to also remember our vows as a Christian. As a Church, we pray together and make each other stronger against the dark forces.

As Christ Himself shared after telling two parables of the one lost sheep and the mislaid silver piece (**St. Luke 15:1-10**), “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

We have other reminders throughout Scripture that God has sent His angels to help us, one of the most beautiful ones being in the Psalms - “For He shall command His angels concerning you, To keep you in all your ways; In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone;” (**Psalms 90:11-12**)

St John Chrysostom also teaches us about the presence of the angels - “Let us keep our vigil, beloved; we also have those that are eager for our success, if we will. Near each one of us angels are sitting; and yet we snore through the whole night. ”

We are all assigned a guardian angel as well to help us! This assigned angel prays for us and protects us from evil forces. St. Paul mentions them - “Are they not all ministering

spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (**Hebrews 1:14**).

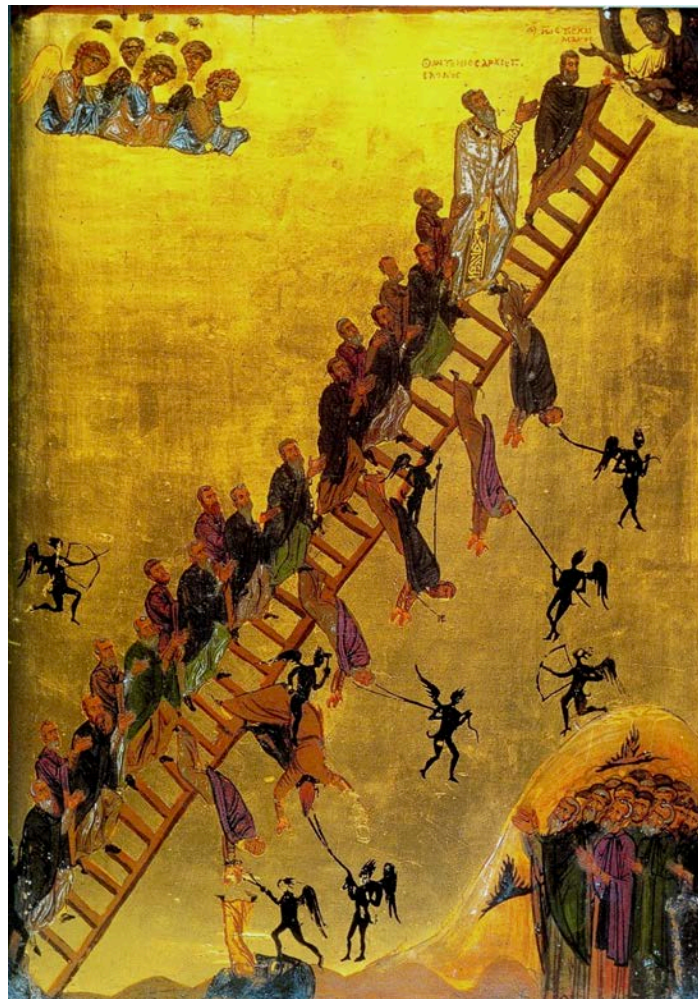
But as St. Basil warns, we can turn away our guardian angel as easily as we can turn away from God - "The [guardian] angel will not retreat from us, unless we drive him away by our evil deeds. As the smoke drives bees away, and stench the doves, even so our stinking sin drives away from us the angel who protects our life." -

LEARNING OUTCOME CHECK

Perceive the presence of a Guardian Angel in one's life protecting, interceding for, guiding and helping.



In conclusion, it's important for our spiritual growth to understand the role of the angels and the demons in our journey to Christ. The angels help us in theosis - our transformation to be like God. And at the same time, the demons out of spite for God and jealous of us, try to turn us away. This is wonderfully depicted in the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent.



God's love for us is the best way to understand the role of the angels throughout history and in our lives. As St. Athanasius summarizes, although we are in a war with Satan and demonic forces and that temptation can lead us astray, God is ready to send all the heavenly hosts to help us.

“Without the Word was made not one thing. But as regards ministrations, there are, not only one, but many out of their whole number whomever the Lord will send. For there are many archangels, many thrones, and authorities, and dominions, thousands of thousands, and myriads of myriads standing before Him, ministering and ready to be sent.”

Reflection Questions

1. There are numerous examples in Scripture where angels interact and help men and women. Why do you think they obeyed God?
2. What insights can we perceive of the eternal life to come as we reflect on angels?
3. In Romans 8:38, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God”. Connect how nothing can separate us from the love of God and the response of the father to the parable