



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa

C A T E G O R Y I M A S T E R Y



Our Identity and Purpose
GRADE 9

ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
OF THE EAST



Our Identity and Purpose
Grade 9

Category
Mastery

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FOREWORD



**MALANKARA ORTHODOX
SYRIAN CHURCH**(INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH)

DIOCESE OF UK·EUROPE·AFRICA·
UK REGISTERED CHARITY : 1139502

+ABRAHAM MAR STEPHANOS METROPOLITAN

MALANKARA HOUSE
35 HENMAN CLOSE
SWINDON SN25 4ZW
UNITED KINGDOM
TEL: +44 1793 921224
MOBILE: +44 7391 210127

E-MAIL:metropolitan@indianorthodoxuk.org
abrahamstephanos@mosc.in

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FOREWORD

As we embrace the dawning of a new era in the Sunday School of our Diocese, it is with profound gratitude and joy that we introduce the newly launched textbooks. This milestone is not merely a culmination of efforts but a new beginning, charting a course for faith-filled learning.

Special recognition is due to the Director and the team of dedicated authors of the Diocese of Southwest America of our Church who have tirelessly woven this tapestry of knowledge and devotion. Their commitment to creating a curriculum that speaks to the heart of our tradition is truly commendable.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos and His Grace Thomas Mar Ivanios, our Metropolitans, whose blessings and guidance have been the bedrock of this endeavor. Their spiritual leadership has been a guiding light throughout this year-long journey of preparation and transition.

Our teachers, those steadfast beacons of knowledge, deserve a resounding acknowledgment for their adaptability and perseverance, ensuring a smooth transition to this new curriculum. Their dedication to the spiritual growth of our youth is a testament to their faith and love for the church.

In line with the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Titus 1:9 (NRSV), "He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it," we recognize the pivotal role of sound teaching in nurturing faith. This verse echoes the mission of our Sunday School to steadfastly impart the truth of the Gospel, fostering a resilient and enlightened community of faith.

To the teachers and students embarking on this sacred educational journey, may you be filled with enthusiasm and wisdom. May your hearts and minds be fertile grounds for the seeds of divine knowledge to flourish.

The significance of the Sunday School in our community cannot be overstated. It is here that the foundations of faith are laid, where the stories and teachings of our church come to life, and where the future guardians of Orthodoxy begin their spiritual journey.

A special word of gratitude is extended to Fr. Anoop M. Abraham, Vice President of the Sunday School for the Diocese. His leadership, along with the director, curriculum coordinator, secretary & joint secretary, reviewers, trainers, and all team members, has been instrumental in bringing this vision to fruition.

As we conclude, let us move forward in the spirit of Orthodox tradition, with hope and prayer that these textbooks serve not only as vessels of knowledge but also as lanterns lighting the path towards spiritual maturity and devotion.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glory to the Triune God!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the development of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook for the new curriculum. It has been a long and challenging journey but with the help and support of many individuals and organizations, we have finally reached this milestone.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Diocesan Metropolitan H G Abraham Mar Stephanos for His Grace's tireless effort to reform our Sunday School to meet the needs of our future generation by implementing the new curriculum and heartfelt gratitude to all the officials and key personalities of Northeast and Southwest American Diocesan Sunday Schools who are the backbone of this new curriculum and Talmido.

Great appreciation to all the curriculum development committee members of our diocese for their selfless efforts in editing a comprehensive and relevant textbook that caters to the spiritual needs of our Sunday School students. Your dedication, expertise, and commitment to the project were crucial in bringing this book to fruition. Special thanks to the clergy members of our diocese who generously shared their knowledge, wisdom, and experiences in shaping the lessons and activities in this book. Your input has helped to create a well-rounded curriculum that reflects the teachings and traditions of our Orthodox Faith.

I am also grateful to the head teachers and teachers who took the time to review and provide valuable feedback on the content and structure of the textbook. Your insights and suggestions have greatly enhanced the quality of the material and have made it more engaging and accessible to our young learners.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of Holy Episcopal Synod and OSSAE officials for their unwavering support and encouragement towards this new curriculum. It is with their guidance and vision that we were able to compile a textbook that aligns with the goals and objectives of our Holy Church and Diocesan Sunday School education.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the students who will be using this textbook. Your enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about our faith is what motivates us to continue improving and developing resources for your spiritual growth.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this journey and has contributed in any way towards the creation of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook. May it serve as a valuable resource for many generations to come and may it inspire and nurture the faith of our young Orthodox students. Thank you all for your support and dedication.

Fr Anoop Abraham Malayil
Vice-President OSSAE – UK Europe and Africa

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A Dead Son Returns

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain that the Orthodox Faith teaches us that all people are capable of doing good*
- *I can explain the connection of the prodigal son's repentance to the experience of the Sacrament of Holy Confession.*
- *I can describe how the father's forgiveness was pre-emptive*



The parable of the prodigal son.

As members of the Church, we must always rejoice and be grateful for all that we have been given and rejoice even more when “someone who is dead and lost returns back”. The Prodigal Son (**St. Luke 15:11-32**) talks about this situation. The parable of the prodigal appears at first as a simple parable but is truly one of the deepest teachings of Orthodox Church’s theology. This parable is read during the fourth week of the Holy and Great Lent when the Church prepares with repentance to participate in Christ’s victory over death. We also echo the words of the prodigal in our prayers before Holy Confession. This familiar parable taught directly by Christ is a profound framing of our salvation.

Our Salvation: From Creation to Communion

The parable begins with an introduction to a father who has two sons. The youngest asks the father to give him his **inheritance**, with which he then leaves and journeys to a distant country (St. Luke 15:11-13). A closer analysis of these few verses brings attention to very important theological points.

“So he divided to them his livelihood ...” (v.12): This highlights a fundamental teaching of the Orthodox Church. What is the inheritance we receive as God’s chosen creation? It is our creation in God’s image and His likeness (**Genesis 1:26-27**). According to St. Basil, the image of God is the beginning and root of goodness, which man possesses im-

mediately after being created, and which was placed in his nature. We are then meant to grow into His perfect likeness (**St. Matthew 5:48**), which is the extent to which we are like God.

The Prodigal Son, however, squanders his inheritance and chooses to travel to a “*far country*” (v.13) and immerses himself in the pleasures of the world. From a theological perspective, the son was living outside of the person that God created man to be. The far country represents those who choose to live a life in exile from God (i.e. away from the Father’s House). This choice demonstrates another essential teaching of the Church.

God has created us with **free-will**. Why did God create us with free will? The gift of free-will grants us the ability to choose to love Him or not, because God is love (**1 John 4:8**), and He created us to be sons and daughters, not slaves or robots without the freedom to choose.

Without freedom, there can never be true love. A relationship of love requires freedom to choose to love the other person. For example, if an adult son or daughter is upset with their parents and decides to leave home before it is the appropriate time, the parents can’t lock them up in their room and force the parent - child relationship. Another more extreme example to illustrate that love cannot be forced is if one uses the threat of violence to force one person to love another ... a tactic that did not work for the prince in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast!



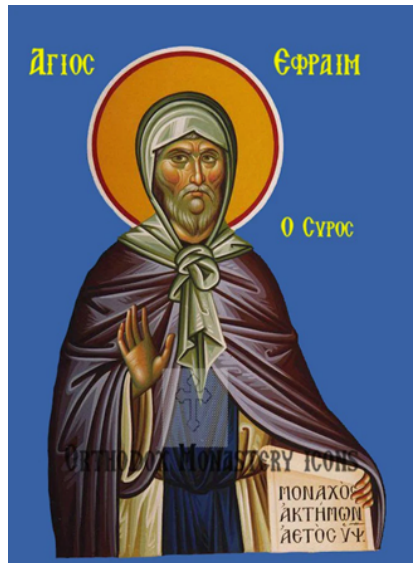
St. John Chrysostom

For love to be real, everyone involved needs the freedom to choose to love. That's why we enter into a relationship with God and why He gave all of us free-will to choose to love Him. Adam and Eve chose to disobey in the Garden of Eden. Rather than punish or force love God chose to defeat death through His Incarnation and Resurrection (St. John 3:16). Love can never be forced or coerced.

The Orthodox understanding of free-will is in direct conflict to the teaching of predestination taught by other Christian denominations, in particular those that align with the teachings of John Calvin (a Protestant theologian who founded

Calvinism). Predestination states that God determines who will be saved and therefore the people have no say in the matter. Our Church simply does not accept this understanding as we see in the parable.

We see this integral teaching in the Scriptures that Christians willingly and freely choose Christ (**Revelation 3:20**). This is seen in the writings of the Church Fathers as well. St. John Chrysostom teaches that “God never draws anyone to Himself by force and violence. He wishes all to be saved, but forces no-one.” From the very beginning, it was so. God gave Adam and Eve the choice to obey His commandment.



St. Ephrem

St. Ephrem teaches that had Adam

and Eve obeyed the commandment, they would have had access to not only the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil but also to the Tree of Life. Out of His love, God *wants* the salvation of all mankind (St. John 6:39-40) but does not force anyone to choose Him. How can there be love when there is no choice?

The Prodigal Son chooses of his own will to squander his inheritance and use it for selfish pleasures. In St. Luke 15:17, - the prodigal “*came to himself*”(repented). At this point in the story, the son has lost everything, but remembers that even the servants of his father had more than enough to eat whereas he had nothing.

We often, through our decisions, fall away from fullness in Christ, but even then we always remain as children of God as we are created in His image - we remain an icon of Christ! It is our thoughts, words, and actions which reflect how close we are to His likeness. This is what we see in the prodigal son at this moment - his past deeds did not negate the fact that he was the son of his father, and he chooses (“came to himself”) to return to the path of holiness. The son knows his sins are only a drop of mud compared to “the ocean of mercy and love of the Father” (Sh’hima Wednesday Compline). In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, he reminds us that “it is no longer [I] who do it, but sin that dwells in [me]” (Romans 7:17). We must understand that sin is something distinct from who we are created to be, and a foreign force that dwells in us to turn us

away from who we are supposed to be. LL Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios interpreting St. Gregory of Nyssa says that sin is going away from the presence of God. Adam and Eve went away from God and sinned. The prodigal in this parable also did the same. Coming back to oneself is repentance. This clearly demonstrates that there is potential for good in everyone, as they are created in God’s image and that image is never lost.

Do You See?

Sin is going away from the presence of God. Adam and Eve went away from God and sinned. The prodigal in this parable also did the same. Coming back to oneself is repentance. The prodigal did come back to himself to return back home to his father.

The Orthodox Church emphatically rejects teachings found in some other denominations that humanity is inherently evil, incapable of doing good, and despised by God. These are found in other doctrines such as “total depravity” that teach in multiple ways that human nature is thoroughly corrupt and sinful as a result of the Fall in Genesis 3. Orthodox theology on the contrary teaches that all men and women are created in God’s image and likeness (**Genesis 1:27**). The image and likeness of God remains in us, although Adam and Eve disobeyed and transgressed God’s commandment

by sinning. The consequence of this disobedience was death (**Genesis 2:16**) and we inherit that consequence (death). In short, the image and likeness of God is the foundation for every bit of goodness in human beings representing a fallen humanity. Because of this we do not accept that human beings are deprived of goodness.

Returning to the parable, the prodigal repents and returns to his father. The father was clearly waiting for his beloved child to return as he saw him even though “*he was still a great way off*” (**St. Luke 15:20**) and the father ran to his child in such a hurry that he “*fell on his neck*” and proceeded to kiss him even before the prodigal son uttered a single word of repentance! The father proceeds to throw a great feast for his son (**St. Luke 15:22-24**) as the son is back in communion with his father in his father’s home. This is the teaching given to us by Christ Himself on the story of Salvation!



Though humanity has squandered its

inheritance and fallen from the path of perfection, God receives us with open arms if we choose to repent and come back to Him again.

The Story of Salvation: Our Role

So what is our role in this story of Salvation? First and foremost, we repent. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, literally means a change (*meta*) of mind (*nous*). Repentance is not merely feeling remorse for our actions, but a full reorientation of ourselves towards Christ. We literally turn away from sin and turn towards Christ. The Prodigal Son exemplifies this as he turned away from the far country and journeyed back towards his father. His repentance, however, was not just the initial thought of returning to his father’s house, but rather his journey back as a whole. Likewise, repentance is not a point of time or a single state of mind, it is a beginning and an ongoing journey with real steps taken towards Christ. As with the prodigal, we start by “coming to ourselves” and remembering our true identity as image-bearers of God. Then we must proceed to actually “image” God through our words, thoughts, and deeds and grow in His likeness.

Having embarked on this journey of repentance, we must then come before God and confess our sins. When the prodigal stands before his father, he immediately confesses, “**Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your**

sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son” (v.21).

Good One...

Repentance is not a point of time or a single state of mind, it is a beginning and an ongoing journey with real steps taken towards Christ.



Partner Talk

Locate and discuss all the elements in the Prodigal Son icon. How does the icon convey the message of Christ’s parable?



In the Sacrament of Holy Confession, we also confess our sins before God in the presence of a Priest. We do this primarily for healing. We, who are sick with sin, approach the hospital (the Church) and receive medicine (God’s grace) through the sacrament. In this act, we also are reconciled and reintegrated into the body of Christ.

However, even before the prodigal confesses, we see that “*when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*” (v.20). The father em-

braced and loved his son even before a single word was uttered!

By now, we can identify the father in the parable as God. In this act of running towards the son, we truly see how great the love of God is for His children and His pre-emptive forgiveness.

One way to understand the mortal sin, the sin unto death is the sin that is not repented. Christ says that there’s only one unforgivable sin - the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Cf. **St. Matthew 12:31**). This blasphemy is nothing other than our refusal to repent, or in other words, our refusal to accept His forgiveness and His mercy. The true failing of Judas was not the betrayal of Christ, but rather that he did not repent. As Fr. Thomas Hopko once explained, “We think that our prodigality, our madness is greater than the mercy of God which is just blasphemy.”

We must also think about where these acts take place. This all happens at the Father’s house, which is the Church! An Orthodox Church is not a mere building but rather a gathering of the people called by God and where God Himself is present and presides. The parable teaches us the importance of the Church in our return to God and our growth as His children and in His likeness. There is deep symbolism in vv. 22-23 that teaches the importance of the Church and the Sacraments.

Robe (Isaiah 61:10)

Righteousness granted by Baptism. After a person is baptised, he or she is often in a white cloth, signifying the robe of incorruptibility.

Ring (Haggai 2:23)

This is the family identity, signifying that the son is no longer a prodigal. In Baptism, we become children of God. Also, it is a sign of authority.

Sandal (Ephesians 6:15)

Our walking according to the Gospel. It tells he is in a new position and new path

Fatted Calf

A wheat-fed calf used in religious sacrifice. This is a reference to the Holy Eucharist (or Holy Qurbana). A symbol of rejoicing.

Finally, at the end of the parable (vv.25-29), we are introduced to the resentful and unhappy older brother. Who does the older brother represent?

One interpretation is that the older brother represents the Pharisees, or the members of Israel (with the prodigal then being the Gentiles). While it can be looked at in that perspective, we can also understand the older brother is to represent those of us who are members of the Church too, who also fail to repent from lack of empathy.

Reflect

When have you felt like the Prodigal Son and when have you felt like the older son?



we can relate more to the prodigal, and at other times we are more like the older son. The older brother was resentful because his younger brother who had taken his inheritance and wasted it away was now being given a feast. He had been faithful and yet had not received even a small feast to have with his friends. The father responds by returning the focus back to the son who was dead and is now alive again. The prodigal son's sin had caused him great pain and left him isolated and dining on the food of pigs. Meanwhile, the older brother always had access to the food of the household and enjoyed the love and presence of his family. So now when the younger son has returned home, it was a cause of rejoicing because what was lost from their family was now found.

As St. John Chrysostom said, "Almost any noble person can weep with

The reality of our life is that at times

those who weep but very few of us can rejoice with those who rejoice.” When we know Christ in fullness, we model pure joy for ourselves and those around us. Even when we feel envious, jealous and unhappy of other people’s life and belonging, we will be able to quickly shift our mentality and focus on pure joy and gratitude for what others have been given.

In v.10, Christ says, **“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”** Our responsibility as Christians is to always realise our identity as image-bearers and chil-

dren of God and seek to grow in His likeness. This parable teaches us of the condition of one who chooses to sin, one who truly repents, and the greatness of God’s compassion. For all who have fallen into great despair over their sins thinking that there is no forgiveness, this parable offers hope.

This parable can perhaps more appropriately be called the parable of the Loving Father for the love of the Father is unending and unconditional; he is always waiting for the lost son to return back home.

Reflection Questions

1. Placing yourselves “in the shoes” of each of the brothers, how would you have responded if you were the prodigal? The older son? Can you find examples in your own life when you may have acted as one or the other?
2. Compare and contrast “the Fall” in the Garden of Eden and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
3. The Sacrament of Holy Confession gives us an opportunity “to return.” What are ways we can prepare ourselves for this sacrament in the future?
4. The older brother felt entitled, and was jealous of the praise and attention the younger brother received. How do we interpret jealousy, and how can that be damaging to our spiritual life? Devise a way to address jealousy in your own life.
5. Reflect on the words of the Prayer before Absolution and Confession with the understanding of the prodigal son who “came to himself” (repented) (**St. Luke 15:17-19**). How would you use this to explain to someone who argues that the words of the prayer are enough for forgiveness of sins?
6. Can you think of ways in which the forgiveness of God is pre-emptive?

In the Beginning

Lesson Goals :

- *I can elaborate on the concept of salvation from the Orthodox perspective.*
- *I can defend the Orthodox understanding that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and have the potential to be holy.*
- *I can differentiate between "Ancestral Sin" vs "Original Sin" and do understand the Orthodox teaching regarding this*



St. Basil

Creation

Let us revisit the story of creation with the intention of looking deeper into the

meaning of the act of salvation. In **Genesis 1:26-27**, we read: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth.’ So God made man; in the image of God He made him; male and female He made them.” Let us take a moment to meditate why God chose to create us in His image? Does God like us? Is God giving us privileges or is God giving us responsibilities? Does this action of God foster growth? What does this mean exactly?

As we explored in the previous lesson, St. Basil expounds that the image of God is the beginning and root of goodness. Thus, we possess the image of God immediately after being created. We are



Creation of Adam

then meant to grow into God's perfect likeness (St. Matthew 5:48), which is the extent to which we are like God. We even see this reflected in the prayers of our Church. In the Sh'himo prayers from Saturday Matins, we sing, *"God created Adam and sat down contemplating him. He saw how fair and like the creature was to the Creator."*

In Genesis 1:31, we read that "God saw everything He had made, and in-

deed, it was very good." This includes the creation of man. Thus, we can assert that human nature is good in itself and that people are fundamentally good. How can we acquire the likeness of God? Acquiring likeness of God is through acts of virtue such as virtue of patience, virtue of kindness, virtue of forgiveness, obedience, respect, and many more. Can you think of any more?

God placed man in the Garden of

Eden (also known as Paradise) to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15). During this time, Adam and Eve were living in a state of communion with God. To understand what Communion with God means, we can take a look at 1 John 4:8 which states, “**God is love**”. Before Adam and Eve made the mistake of following the word of Satan, they lived in complete acceptance of what was around them. They lived in peace, joy and love.

Partner Talk

Think about someone who you want to be like. Based on this, what does the word “likeness” mean to you?



This is what St. John is talking about when he says being in communion with God is love. In the book *Thirty Steps to Heaven*, Archimandrite Vassilios explains: “ [“*God is love*”] means that He is Trinity -- three Persons in an eternal relationship of love, oneness, and unity. Love is relational and everlasting. Its fulfilment is perfect harmony and unity of persons. Thus the only one who truly is love by nature, who is love in His very essence, is God the Trinity.” We see that the Persons of the Holy Trinity live in perfect harmony and unity with one another. This is what Communion looks like. This is what Salvation means! It is truly a perfect relationship with God, with no separation or disharmony of will or action. We are given free will in the creation of humanity, so that we can choose to love

Him as He loves us.

Partner Talk

At a funeral, we sometimes hear from non-Orthodox Christians that it was “God’s plan” for the person to die. In our theology, was this God’s plan?



Let’s take a moment to remember that Adam and Eve were not created perfect or in a state of final completion; rather, they were created as “spiritual children” with the potential to continue to grow in this union with God and into His perfect likeness. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD) writes, “*He [Adam] was a child not yet having his understanding perfected. It was necessary that he should grow and so come to his perfection.*” St. Gregory of Nyssa further expounds on this as he claims that the Christian life is one of never-ending growth. It is a continual process of transformation from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). Thus, even Adam and Eve were meant to grow in their fulfilment of God’s likeness. This is a crucial point in understanding the events to follow.

Reflect

Does the term likeness mean we are to live like God or that God likes us? What does this term suggest to you?



The Fall of Man

After placing Adam and Eve in Paradise, God gave them a commandment, “You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day you eat from it, you shall surely die by death.” (**Genesis 2:16, 17**). This instruction from God was not a test or temptation to prove the loyalty of man towards God. Just as a parent may not give full explanations to an infant child, so too is our understanding that God gave us the warning out of love for Adam but did not explain further as man was like an infant and not ready to understand the reason. God’s warning to Adam was that if he ate of the fruit now when he was not ready, he would die a spiritual death.

St. Ephrem the Syrian explains, *“...had the serpent been rejected, along with the sin, (Adam and Eve) would have eaten of the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge would not have been withheld from them any longer; from the one they would have acquired infallible knowledge, and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity in humanity; and had they thus acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life, they would have done so in this body.”* Let’s take a minute to reflect what would have happened to Adam and Eve and to us had they not disobeyed God. Would we exist today? What in your opinion was God’s plan?

Deceived by the serpent, Adam and

Eve ate from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As God had warned, humankind became subject to mortality. But even in this, we see the depths of God’s love and mercy. St. Gregory the Theologian proclaims, *“Yet here too He provides a benefit — namely death, which cuts off sin, so that evil may not be everlasting. Thus, His punishment is changed into mercy.”* God did not want His creation to eternally be in a state of broken union with Him so He allowed death to cut off sin.

The Fall resulted in far-reaching consequences for mankind. The Orthodox Church understands these consequences through the teaching of **Ancestral Sin**. Ancestral sin is the disobedience of Adam and Eve to God’s command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam willingly disobeyed this commandment and diverted himself, or fell, from God’s path to perfection, thus separating himself from His Creator, the source of life (Orthodox Study Bible). Sin is derived from the Greek word *hamartia*, which literally means “missing the mark”, and it is used to refer to the condition common to all humanity (Romanides, 2002).

Good One..

God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden as an act of love.

This sin has passed on down to humanity. We also have to deal with var-

ious consequences due to the sinful actions of our ancestors. Death is not the only thing that separates us from God but also sickness, trials, conflict, weariness, pride, pain and other sufferings. There are several illnesses in this world, of which some do not even have a cure or treatment. The choices we make are through free will and do not always align with God's will and hence, we are subject to various trials and tribulations

and even conflict amongst one another. For Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, man was forced to toil and labour and woman was to suffer in pain (Genesis 3:16-19, OSB). Humans face all of these issues throughout their life on Earth. All of this is due to ancestral sin. However, we also have the hope in our Savior Jesus Christ to remove the bondage from sin.

Ancestral Sin	Original Sin
Emphasis on inheriting death, divine compassion and separation from God due to sin of Adam and Eve	Emphasis on inheriting guilt and God's wrath due to sin of Adam & Eve
Derived from the Early Church, i.e., the Orthodox Church	Developed by St. Augustine in the 4th Century in the Western Church. View taken by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism
Responsible only for own sin	Responsible for all sin committed in Adam

It is important to understand that we, the descendants of Adam/Eve, are not guilty because of Adam's sin, as listed above under the idea of **Original Sin**. Rather, we are only guilty because of our own sin. However, because all of humankind fell away from the grace of God through Adam's disobedience, man now has a propensity, a disposition, an inclination towards sin. Our root of goodness (image of God) was marred and we were unable to realise the likeness of God

because of our sinfulness. Nevertheless, the divine image is not lost or fully corrupted. We believe humankind is inherently good and capable of doing good.

God's Eternal Plan

The primary consequence of the Fall was a separation from God and a break in the communion Adam and Eve shared with God. They were no longer living in unity with their Creator. Furthermore, there

was nothing that humankind could do to restore this communion, since we cannot remove the effects of our own sinfulness. Thus, if humankind could not ascend to heaven and unite itself with God, then it remained for God to come down to earth and unite Himself with humankind.

Reflection Questions

1. A friend tells you that he believes that the "first commandment" from God in Genesis 2:17 was given as a loyalty test and death was a punishment for the transgression." How would you respond to this?
2. At a funeral, we sometimes hear from non-Orthodox Christians that it was "God's plan" for the person to die. In our theological perspective, death of a faithful is God's plan?
3. We know as fact that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior .. but what is He saving us from? What is the full understanding of "salvation"?
4. Study the responses between the Priest and the faithful during the Blessing of the Censer in Holy Qurbana and evaluate our understanding of the measure of holiness. With this in mind, evaluate and justify our teaching that in the life of the Church we have a path to holiness.

Our Salvation

Lesson Goals :

- *I can differentiate the Orthodox view of salvation compared to the Protestant/Non-denominational view of salvation.*
- *I can justify that the Love of Christ compelled Him to come for our salvation, and explain "begotten of the Father, born of the Virgin" (St. Cyril) and "from two natures" (St. Severus)*
- *I can identify and analyse the occurrence of the Holy Trinity in both the Old Testament and New Testament, and explain how God fulfilled his work of Salvation.*

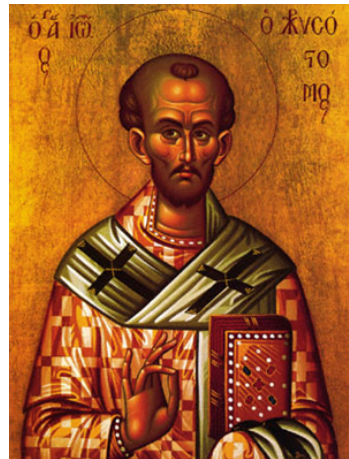


If mankind could not ascend to heaven and unite itself with God, then it remained for God to come down to earth and unite Himself with mankind. This leads us into God's eternal plan of Salvation: The Incarnation.

of Christ in the human form.

God's Eternal Plan

Beyond its literal definition ("embodied in flesh" or "taking on flesh"), the term "Incarnation" refers to more than just the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary and His birth. The term also is a reminder of all events in the life, teachings, sufferings, and glorification of the Lord. Thus, these events are to be considered as the earthly activities



St. John Chrysostom

In his homily on the Nativity, St. John Chrysostom says, “He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit that He may save me.” Here St. John tells us that Jesus Christ willingly took on our fallen flesh in order to save us. What does it mean to “save us”?

God sent His own Son, “the very image of His person” (**Hebrews 1:3**), into the world to take human nature upon Himself and restore it to its original glory in the image of God. This image was marred in the Fall of Man, but is restored in Christ. The Incarnation restores our capability to acquire His likeness, and restores our ability to commune and be united with God. As St. Gregory of Naziansus teaches, though we broke our original communion with God in Paradise, this second communion that is realised in the person of Christ can no longer be broken. In Christ, our humanity joined without change, mingling, confusion, or alteration with His divinity, irrevocably uniting the two forever.

This is also professed during the Holy Qurbana when the priest does the fraction (see the prayer).

Since Christ ascended and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, our human nature is also enthroned in the bosom of the Holy Trinity. So no matter whether we sinned or have turned away from God, we have now the ability through repentance to unite again with God.

Fraction Prayer of St. Dionysius Bar Salibi

“One is Emmanuel, and cannot be divided into two natures after the indivisible unity. Thus we believe and thus we confess and thus we confirm that this Flesh is of this Blood and that this Blood is of this Flesh.”

(Service Book of the Holy Qurbana pg 194)

Furthermore, the Orthodox view of the Incarnation is always to be understood in light of the Passion of Christ. The Incarnation of the Word is one entire event. It starts from the virgin birth, and continues to His passion, exaltation, resurrection, and ascension. Mystery of the ‘Incarnation of the Word’ as one event is understandable only through reading Scriptures and meditating on Christ in the light of the cross. Thus, the passion, the crucifixion, and exaltation, become meaningful for contemplating on who Christ is. (Paraphrased from Fr. John Behr, a distinguished Theologian of the Eastern Orthodox Church). The Orthodox Church has always understood and proclaimed that Christ became man to die and save man through His resurrection.



In the Icon of the Nativity, Christ is wrapped up in swaddling clothes. But looking closer, the actual manner of how He is wrapped is a traditional burial shroud, again indicating that Christ was born to die for us. We also see Christ lying in a manger that is shaped to resemble a tomb.

Think about how much love God has for us, that He sent His only begotten Son to die for us!

Think

In the Icon of Nativity why is Christ wrapped up in a traditional burial shroud?



The Old Testament foreshadows the

Word of God, the Christ. It positively expected the Gospel with assurance. Anyone who does not read the Old Testament in this angle sees only myths and fables there. The cross, the passion of Christ, the death and His resurrection give meaning to the Old Testament reader, revealing what they in fact mean and how they declare the Christ event. The crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ existed as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, since eternity and He wasn't fully revealed in the Old Testament. That partial revelation has become the full revelation in Christ is what the Christian Church proclaims as the Gospel for the salvation of the world.

Thus, it becomes the life giving message and the evangelist becomes the preacher or proclaimer of life and salvation to the world. When the priest reads the Gospel in the Church, he proclaims this fact emphatically: "Now in the dispensation of our Lord, our God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who took flesh from St. Mary, the Mother of God, these things have come to pass in this manner..." and the congregation says: "We believe and confess."

According to the Fathers

In each Holy Qurbana, we remember St. Cyril of Alexandria as *"the exalted and true tower, who clearly expounded and declared the Incarnation of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who took flesh."*



St. Cyril was a leading figure in the early church who spoke about the Incarnation of Christ. In the fifth century AD, the heresy of Nestorianism taught that St. Mary gave birth only to a man, Jesus, who was later indwelt by God the Son as a temple to make Him Christ. Thus, Nestorius referred to St. Mary as Christotokos or the mother of Christ. Nestorius overemphasised Christ's humanity at the expense of His divinity. In response to this growing heresy, St. Cyril proclaimed that Christ was both *begotten of the Father in eternity* and *born of the Virgin at these end times*. Thus he properly emphasises both His humanity and divinity in the acclamation "one incarnate nature of God the Word".

This means that the nature of the Incarnate Word is one-united, i.e., the complete union of both divinity and humanity. This united/incarnate is whom Mary gave birth to. This is why the Church refers to Mary as Theotokos, or

the 'God-bearer,' because it points to Christ as God and human, which is necessary for our salvation. If Christ was not fully human, then our humanity would not have been saved. As St. Gregory of Naziansus states, "For that which He has not assumed, He has not healed". Likewise, if Christ was not fully divine, then there was no one to save our humanity as our humanity would not be joined to His divinity. St. Gregory further states, "but that which is united to His Godhead is saved." Thus Christ must be both fully human and fully divine for our salvation to have meaning. Furthermore, we must emphasise that the "one incarnate nature of God the Word" was without mingling, confusion, division, or alteration between his humanity and divinity.



We also remember St. Severus of Antioch in each Holy Qurbana as "the crown of the Syrians, the meadow abounding in

blossom, who preached all the time that Mary was undoubtedly the God-Bearer.” St. Severus very clearly and zealously declared the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Church.

Building on the foundation laid by St. Cyril, St. Severus further expounded that Christ is “from two natures”, divinity and humanity, that are united without mixing or confusion. He says “Those therefore who confess one incarnate nature of God the Word, do not confuse between the divinity and humanity of which He consists ... they recognise the difference between them only in contemplation, not admitting a division: for the principle of union does not admit division.”

We see the Christology of St. Severus expressed beautifully in his Ma'nitho, or doctrinal hymn, which we sing at the start of every Divine Liturgy.

In this hymn, we proclaim that Christ is the “Only-Begotten Son, Word of the Father, Immortal in His nature”, showing clearly His divinity. We then go on to say, “Who did become incarnate of the pure Virgin, the holy and glorious Theotokos., He became man without change”, fully expressing His humanity. This prayer is foundational in its meaning and its position at the start of the Liturgy is of no small significance. As the Service Book of the Holy Qurbana states, “the prayers of the Liturgy are a reflection of doctrinal uniformity, which is the basis of unity for worshippers and protects the Church from distortions of the Truth. A defective vision of God prevents us

from properly worshipping and experiencing God.” Thus, this hymn serves to bring the church together with a common proclamation and understanding of who it is we are worshipping: our Lord Jesus Christ, “worshipped and praised equally with His Father and Spirit. Have mercy upon us all!”

Scavenger Hunt!

Find the Ma'nitho of St. Severus using the Divine Liturgy book.

The Story of Salvation

When discussing every part of our Faith, we must ultimately understand how it relates to our salvation. As we touched on earlier, the Incarnation restores our ability to commune and be united with God. In order to see how this is key to our salvation, we must understand the Orthodox perspective of salvation as a relationship with God.

Fr. Andrew Louth uses an illustration of two arches to compare the Orthodox understanding of salvation to that of Western theology. He explains how Western theology focuses on an arch extending from the Fall to Redemption. In this school of thought, sin is seen as breaking of a contract, as primarily a debt that needed to be paid. Thus, salvation then would consist primarily of paying that debt for the redemption from sin. So being saved from sin becomes the end goal.

	Western Theology	Orthodox Theology
Views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking of a contract • Debt that needs to be paid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we sin we become less than human • Our goal is to become fully human again to become like God • Christ is the model for us
End Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being saved or being free of the debt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become like God; Deification/Theosis

However, the Orthodox Church held to a larger arch extending from Creation to Deification. Our creation in the image of God is the foundation of our very being and determines the purpose of our existence. So for man to be truly human – to be what he was created to be - he must attain unto the likeness of the Holy Trinity. As St. Basil the Great says, “Man is a creature with orders to become god”. Even after the Fall, the Orthodox Church teaches that God saved us not just from sin, but He saved us for sonship. To be divinely adopted sons and daughters of the King! We want to progress beyond being saved from sin and continue on the journey whose sole goal is union with God. This journey is the journey of deification or theosis. It is the process of becoming more and more God-like. Since God never ends, this process never ends, even in eternity. As St. Athanasius states, “we become by grace, what God is by nature.”

In **St. John 15:1-17**, we read, “*I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in Him, will bear much fruit.*” The branches receive life from the Vine, and a branch that is broken off cannot live. We must be united to Christ,

grafted into the Vine, for us to truly have life. This is the understanding of salvation as a relationship or communion with God.

The Church

We often tend to limit our perception of the Incarnation to the visible presence of Christ in the flesh while on earth.

However, even after His Ascension and enthronement at the right hand of God the Father, Christ’s presence remains. The Body and Blood of Christ one receives in Holy Qurbana is truly Christ’s continuing presence here on earth and mankind’s participation in His work of salvation. In other words, the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation. By sharing in the life of the Church, we participate in the life of Christ (**Galatians 2:20**). Without participating in His life, we have no hope of eternal life/communion; for it is only through Him that we are united with God the Holy Trinity (**St. John 6:51, 53, 56-57**).

Thus the way in which we progress towards Sonship and communion with God is through participation in the Life



The Ladder of Divine Ascent

of the Church, especially the sacraments. Through Baptism and Chrismation, we put off sin and Satan and put on Christ, being sealed and filled with the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete*, our comforter and helper. Through partaking of the Divine nature in the Holy Qurbana, we become like Him and unite ourselves to Him.

Though we sin and fall away from Christ, through a life of repentance and fasting and participation in Holy Con-Grade IX

fession, we renew our baptismal robe of incorruptibility and turn towards Christ again. This is our daily work in the process of communion with God. This is our work in ascending the Ladder of Divine Ascent. This is Theosis, attaining the likeness of God. And as we have seen, it is all made possible through the Incarnation of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe how we should understand and view the Incarnation of Christ? Similarly, how are we to understand all of Scripture?
2. Explain the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Church as understood by the teachings of St. Cyril and St. Severus.
3. Compare and contrast the understanding of Salvation in the Protestant and Orthodox Church.
4. Describe how the Life of the Church plays a role in the process of Theosis.
5. Go over the Ma'nitho of St. Severus and reflect on how it explains the foundational faith of the Church regarding Christ.

A Traveler Saved

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that there are different ways to grow closer to Christ and that the Church provides resources and prescriptions to help me control the passions of the flesh so that I can make choices directed by the Spirit.*
- *I can understand the nuance and important details in the non-variable prefatory prayer of MOSC (Hoosoyo).*
- *I can understand and can explain to my peers how the Sacrament of Confession is like a “healing ointment”.*
- *I can understand that mental health is complex and that seeking professional counselling is acceptable and essential for anyone struggling with their mental health well-being.*



In modern times, Christians and non-Christians alike have a passive understanding of “the Good Samaritan”. When considering the parable, we often compare ourselves to the Good Samaritan, valuing his selflessness and care as admirable traits for us to emulate. In fact, we even have laws (protecting those acting to assist others in distress) named after the key figure in Christ’s parable. While this lesson is essential, the Orthodox Church reminds us to identify even more so as the *Wounded Traveler*, who was left to die on the roadside, had it not been for the compassion, love and saving Grace of Christ (the Good Samaritan).



The icon of the Good Samaritan (Christ himself) carrying the wounded traveler to the Inn (the Church). Note how Jesus places the traveler on his own animal to save us while the Priest and Levite travel on. This demonstrates Christ’s love for us to give of himself to save us.

The road where the wounded traveller lay poignantly illustrates the ruinous path we as Christians could fall to if we fail to orient our lives away from carnal and worldly desires. Rather, we should focus our life choices on those that save and strengthen our spiritual life: choices that inspire and connect us to God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

The act of being removed from the roadside did not assure the traveller was saved from death. The Samaritan charged the innkeeper (or the Church, in Orthodox interpretation) to continually treat the injuries of the traveller until the Samaritan was to return. Thus, the constant call of Theosis remains in our midst. Our souls need to be healed of the effects of sin, and we do this by applying the cures that our Holy Church provides us so that the healing of our souls may take place.

Remember

The road where the wounded traveller lay poignantly illustrates the ruinous path we as Christians could fall to if we fail to orient our lives away from carnal and worldly desires. Rather, we should focus our life choices on those that save and strengthen our spiritual life: choices that inspire and connect us to God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.



Holy Confession

This Sacrament of self reflection of our personal orientation to that of Christ and the Church allows the priest to assess and diagnose how sin, whether intentional or not, may have damaged and injured our physical and spiritual body. We continually recommit ourselves on a path to healing, rather than to let the wounds sink in and consume us. Many people do not appear for confession thinking that they can spell their sins directly to Christ. The Orthodox Church never contests this claim. However, it is very important that the sins committed against another human being or nature, creation of God, seek verbal validation of repentance as well as consolation from a trustworthy individual. There is no one beyond Christ to provide this validation and consolation. The priest, who is the representative of Christ, does it at the end of a Confession. On the other hand, a person speaking about personal confession to Christ may be hiding the feelings of shame and guilt. Unless one recognizes and owns the feelings of guilt and shame, one does not have much room to receive healing. Here the basic human need of validation of feelings comes in. St. Peter denied Jesus three times, and when the rooster crowed and Jesus personally acknowledged the denial (St. Luke 22:61), he went out and cried bitterly (St. Matthew 26:33–35, St. Mark 14:29–31, St. Luke 22:33–34 and St. John 18:15–27). Many people saw it and recognized why St. Pe-

ter cried bitterly and that is how we have this event recounted in all four Gospels. Jesus later reinstated St. Peter through accepting his penance and giving absolution (St. John 21:15–17). Compare this event with the case of Judas. Judas never confessed to the rightful people, nor accepted his mistakes in the right way. He may have told about his sins to Jesus spiritually. That however, didn't help. He was consumed by his guilt (St. Matthew 27:3-5). Confession in front of a priest saves us from the burden of

not being able to unload our guilt and shame, most grievous outcomes of sinfulness. We are not dismissed by our priests like Judas was dismissed by the Jewish High Priests. Instead, our priests comfort and reinstate us like Jesus did to St. Peter. Holy Confession is not a once-a-year event. It can happen as often as possible. The need for confession comes from the heart of the sinner and the Church does not impose it on anyone in any circumstances.

Prayer of Absolution After Confession

May God have mercy upon you, and may He guide you to everlasting life. Through the authority of priesthood which was entrusted by our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples who, in turn, entrusted it to their successors until it was given to me; I who am weak and sinful, absolve you, my brother (sister) of all the sins that you have confessed and are repentant of them, as well as of all the transgressions which have escaped your memory. in the Name of the Father +, amen, and of the Son +, amen and of the Holy Spirit + for everlasting life. Amen.

May the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be for the remission of debts and forgiveness of sins. May the intercessions of the Holy Virgin Mary the Theotokos and all the saints be for the remission of debts and the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Key takeaway of this Lesson

Holy Confession is a healing ointment for our spiritual wounds - we must trust in this Sacrament in full faith to heal ourselves. The Church, through the Priest, prescribes absolving and nurturing guidance for us to maintain a healthy spiritual life

Holy Qurbana

This Sacrament of “mercy, peace, sacrifice, and thanksgiving” is not only a way for us to give glory and thanks to Christ, the Good Samaritan and Great Physician, but to allow us to fully partake in the continual salvation we have been granted by Christ, who saved us through His precious Body and Blood. After confession, it is of paramount importance to receive Holy Qurbana. This is how Jesus completed the process of welcoming back St. Peter into the Church. We read in St. John 21:15–17 that Jesus’ dialogue with Peter and the commission to feed, tend, and feed His sheep happened only after they ate together. This eating is the consumption of Holy Qurbana.

Fasting and Prayer

These two powerful spiritual tools provide Orthodox Christians the tools to refocus our journey to be Christ-like (Theosis). As medicine and bedrest allow our bodies the refocusing to fight off infection, so too are these two spiritual tools allowing our spiritual bodies in fighting off the natural temptation to fall into the desires of the flesh and focusing on repentance for that infection of sin that may have already taken hold in our body, through thought and deed.¹ One gets ready for confession through fasting and prayer. Our church has a strong tradition of going for confession

during the Holy Lent. Fasting and prayer can be prescribed after a confession too. These are all part of the process of spiritual healing.

The Teachings and Readings of the Church

Church tradition becomes vitally important, similar to medication or immunizations, to provide us the resistance to the disease that is sin. Recall in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the Priest, in an effort to keep himself from ritual defilement, passed by on the other side. The Priest was following what he thought was law. According to Christ, he was not administering the love and compassion for his neighbour. The Orthodox Church has built a rich tradition around how we as Christians are to minister to one another and those in need.²

Hoosoyo

The **Hoosoyo Prayer** (a prayer of absolution offered for all living and departed souls during the Holy Qurbana and other times of prayer; not to be confused with the prayer of absolution we receive from the priest during Holy Confession) is a distinct demonstration of how we as Orthodox Christians seek the healing and absolving Grace of God, and allow that divine Grace and Mercy to cleanse us of the sin we have. One shall note that the Hoosoyo prayer starts

¹<https://www.goarch.org/-/on-fasting>

²<https://suscopts.org/resources/literature/992/who-is-the-good-samaritan/>

like "... O' You Absolver, Purifier, For-giver, wipe, blot out and remember not our wickedness!" Jesus Christ absolves, purifies, forgives and most importantly, **does not remember our wickedness**, which we have confessed to the priest, whose ears are that of Christ during the event of confession. If Christ is not to remember what you confessed, the priest shall not be remembering your sins. If he ever does, there are spiritual consequences and therefore, he will never break the trust you placed upon him while confessing and will always honour the sanctity of your confessions in front of the Holy Altar. That sanctity is the covenant he enters with you, and Christ is the witness for that covenant. The Hamnikha which the priest wears during confession is the symbol of this sanctity.

See below for the three characteristics of the Hoosoyo Prayer, and how it allows us healing of our wounds, much like the traveller.³

Note!

Hallmarks of the Hoosoyo (Absolution) Prayer

The Priest asks God...

1. to give purity to himself and his people
2. to shed mercy upon the living and the dead
3. to give all a good and holy end

The Early Church Fathers, as well as those current theologians of the Orthodox Church, prescribe the beauty and meaning of this parable in the Orthodox tradition and understanding (see Figure 4.1)

The Church as a Hospital: Recall that the Parable of the Good Samaritan is in response to a question posed by a lawyer asking Jesus to clarify "who is my neighbour?" Jesus responds with the parable and emphasises that those who had shown compassion on the wounded traveller were demonstrating true love for their neighbour. It starts with the Samaritan (Christ himself) showing love so great for the wounded man that He put the man on His colt to take him to the Inn. No greater illustration than this can show the depth of Christ's love for us and His true passion to deliver us from the wages of sin, which is death.

Additionally, the wounded man is not immediately brought to health until he is anointed with ointment, treated with bandages, and given vital nourishment to reverse the bodily wounds that left him near death on the road. This Parable teaches how much spiritual healing is capable within the Holy Church through the various healing tools mentioned above. We are all part of this healing ministry - hence we are all members of the Holy Church, which is a hospital for spiritual healing and strengthening of ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

³https://indianorthodoxireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Holy_Qurbana_Notes.pdf

The Teachings of our Holy Fathers on the Church as a Hospital	
St. John Chrysostom	Do not say to yourself: 'I am no priest or monk; I have a wife and children. This is a work for the priests; this is work for the monks.' The Samaritan did not say: 'Where are the priests now? Where are the Pharisees now? Where are the teachers of the Jews?' But the Samaritan is like a man who found some great store of booty and got the profit. "Therefore, when you see someone in need of treatment for some ailment of the body or soul, do not say to yourself: 'Why did so-and-so or so-and-so not take care of him?' You free him from his sickness <i>Eighth Homily against the Judaizers 4: 1-3</i>
St. Cyril of Alexandria	Very skillfully therefore does the Savior of all weave the parable of him who fell into the hands of thieves, saying, that when he was lying half dead, and in the last extremity of evil, a priest passed by, and in like manner a Levite, without feeling towards him any sentiment of humanity, or dropping upon him the oil of compassionate love; but rather, their mind was un-sympathizing and cruel towards him. But one of another race, a Samaritan, fulfilled the law of love. Justly therefore He asked, which of these three he thinks was the sufferer's neighbor. And he said, "He that wrought mercy with him." And to this Christ added, "Go you also, and act in like manner." <i>Sermon 68 of St. Cyril of Alexandria</i>

Figure 4.1^{4 5}


Mental Health & Healing: It's imperative to highlight that the healing ministry of the Church does not exclusively reside in our physical church walls. As Christians, we should be willing to seek counselling and advice through whatever forms improve us. The Church holds in prime importance the role of Holy Confession as a way to regularly cleanse our wounds and gashes from the detrimental impacts of sin. However, there may be areas of your life where **professional counselling** (i.e., a professional relationship with a licensed professional to accomplish mental health, wellness and psychological developmental goals) may be the answer. If there are areas of your life where this type of help could benefit you greatly, the Church encourages and supports seeking out such help. One must overcome the stigma related to professional help in mental health requirements. A wounded and broken mind is equally important as a

wounded and broken hand and both require professional help. Your church's vicar can serve as a valuable resource to guide you on the path to healing via professional counselling. One shall always be assured that your priest will be continuously praying for you during his personal prayers and Holy Qurbana when he has encouraged you for professional help.

By identifying as the wounded traveller we can seek different ways to grow closer to Christ and see that the Church provides various resources and prescriptions to help control the passions of the flesh so that we can make choices directed by the Spirit.

Think

Why does the Orthodox Church remind us to identify with the wounded traveller?



Reflection Questions

1. Describe and reflect what would have happened to the traveller had the Good Samaritan not arrived? How does this relate to our path towards Salvation, and away from secular focus?
2. How does Holy Confession provide a diagnosis and path of healing in relation to what sin does to us spiritually? Do you recognize the importance Confession and other Church traditions have on our lives?
3. The only thing in this world we own are our sins. What do you understand this statement to mean?

The Liturgy of Baptism

Lesson Goals :

- *I can go through the service of Holy Baptism and explain what happens during each of the 5 parts.*
- *I can understand that the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is not merely a symbol but the physical presence of a spiritual reality.*
- *I can explain why baptism is dying to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life.*



The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

Sacraments are the visible actions of the invisible grace. All sacraments are God given and they get accomplished by God through the prayers of the Priest and the faithful. They disclose and reveal God to us, but also serve to make us receptive to God. All the Sacraments affect our personal relationship to God and to one another. The Holy Spirit works through the Sacraments. He leads us to Christ who unites us with the Father. By participating in the Sacraments, we grow closer to God and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Although the Sacraments are addressed to each of us by name, they are experiences which involve the entire Church.

Baptism means “starting anew” or dy-

ing to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life. Baptism was always connected with repentance which means a moral conversion. In the Gospel, we find John the Baptist baptizing people as a sign of repentance to prepare for the kingdom of God which was coming to men with the arrival of Christ the Messiah.

Baptism is our death, burial and resurrection in union with Jesus Christ. It is a rite of passage, given by Christ to the Church as an entrance into the kingdom of God and eternal life. The Sacrament of Baptism incorporates us into the Church, the Body of Christ, and is our introduction to the life of the Holy Trinity. Water is a natural symbol of cleansing and newness of life.

From Baptism English Liturgy

Oh Thou giver of light who enlightens the bodies and souls, who said, "From darkness light shall shine forth. You gave purification by the water of salvation, and granted divine consecration through the holy oil; and unity with our Lord Jesus Christ by participation in His Holy Body and Blood. O merciful Lord, you have called this your servant, by divine invitation, from the darkness of deception to the way of life-giving teachings; we beseech You Lord, to inscribe his/her name in the Book of Life. Count him/her among the Congregation of your worshippers, and may the light of Your countenance be imprinted on him/her. May the victorious cross of Jesus Christ be sealed in his/her heart and mind that he/she flee from the vanities of this world and escape from all the wickedness of the adversary by keeping your divine commandments.

Through the three-fold immersion in the waters of Baptism in the Name of the Holy Trinity, one dies to the old ways of sin and is born to a new life in Christ. Baptism is one's public identification with Christ's Death and victorious Resurrection. Following the custom of the early Church, Orthodoxy encourages the baptism of infants. The Church believes that the sacrament of baptism bears witness to the action of God who chooses a child to be an important member of His people. From the day of their baptism, children are expected to mature in the life of the Spirit, through their family and the Church.

The prayer from Baptism English Liturgy (see box) said by the Priest encapsulates the purpose of the sacrament of Baptism.

Remember

By participating in the Sacraments, we grow closer to God and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.



Words of Church Fathers

St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructed his new converts as follows: "You were led by the hand to the holy pool of divine Baptism.....and each of you was asked if he believed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And you made that saving confession, you descended into the water and came up again three times. In the very same moment you died and were born."(Orthodox Study Bible, Holy Baptism, page

1532)

”Through baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in His own baptism anticipates His death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with Him, be re-born of water and Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved Son and walk in the newness of life.” *St. Gregory of Nazianzus*

Steps of the Holy Baptism

In the Malankara Orthodox tradition there are five parts to the Baptism service.

1. The ministry of the Word followed by Exorcism

This is the initial preparatory part which is followed by introductory prayers and reading from the Epistles and the Gospel. During this rite, the Priest makes the sign of cross on the forehead of the child or adult and invokes God to remove any bondage of demonic or evil forces. This symbolises the condemnation of the devil and the acceptance of Jesus Christ, which is the beginning of Christian life. Usually the Godfather/-Godmother (the mediator) does that on behalf of the child. They also proclaim the symbol of Christian Faith the “Creed”.

The following prayer is from the Sacrament of Holy Baptism:

We call upon Thee, O Lord our God, creator of all things visible and invisible, while we lay our hand upon Thy creature whom we seal in Thy Name which is most holy and exalted, so that all demons, devils and unclean spirits may be driven away from Thy creature and image, who is Thy creation and handiwork.

2. Anointing with the Baptismal Oil and Blessing of Water

Next is the anointing with the Oil of Gladness (which is different from Holy Chrism). The Priest makes the sign of the cross three times on the forehead of the child. The child is prayed over, blessed and anointed with the oil, through which the candidate becomes a member of the church.

After the proclamation of Faith, the Baptismal water is prayed over and blessed as the sign of God's goodness of creation. The invocation of the Holy Spirit recalls the descent of the Holy Spirit in the river Jordan. A series of petitions and prayers for the consecration of the waters is conducted.

The bathing of the child symbolises the baptism of Jesus Christ in the river Jordan. To symbolise this a baptismal font with both hot and cold water is used.

3. Washing with water

The child is then immersed in the water three times. Baptism includes three full submersions (or immersions) into a **baptismal font** filled with holy water – first submersion is in the name of the Father, second in the name of the Son, and the third in the name of the Holy Spirit. Threefold submersion also symbolises participation of the candidate in the death and resurrection of Christ. When the candidate goes down into the baptismal water, he/she dies to the world and receives rebirth when comes out of the water (Romans 6:3,4 and Colossians 2:12).

Prayer during this part of the service

Have mercy on us, O God Father Almighty; and send Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon this water which is being sanctified, from Thy prepared dwelling place and from Thy boundless bosom. He is personal (qnumoyo), and pre-eminent, the Lord and life-giver. He spoke through the Law and the Prophets and the Apostles. He is present in all places, fills all space, and perfects in holiness those who obey Thy perfect will, not as a servant but as Lord, pure in nature, working in myriad ways, and is the wellspring of spiritual gifts. He is consubstantial with Thee, proceeds from Thee and takes from Thy Son. He is equal on the throne of Thy Kingdom to Thee and to Thine only begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

4. Sacrament of Holy Chrismation

This is followed by the whole body being anointed with “Holy Chrism” which is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the child. At this point the mystery of the Holy Chrism (Myron) is administered. The candidate is anointed with the consecrated oil. Chrism is applied on the body in the pattern of the Cross, signifying the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

What does Holy Chrism depict?

In his letter, Saint Severios said that the Myron signifies the Holy Spirit, the giver of gifts. Others also say that the Chrism depicts the Spirit, (basing themselves) on what David says: ' Like the oil that descends upon the head and upon the beard' of Aaron (Psalms 133:2), calling the Holy Spirit 'the oil that descends upon the head', that is upon Christ in (His) baptism.

The liturgy says:

“O Lord God, crown this Your servant with splendour and glory. Grant that his/her life be pleasing to Your majesty and be for the glory of Your Holy Name, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit now and always forever and ever.”

Like a king or queen is given responsibility, or a calling about their kingdom, like Adam was entrusted responsibility over creation, the newly baptised is entrusted with a purpose, a responsibility, and a calling to be stewards of the faith.



Did You Know?

Did you know that the Holy Chrism (Myron) is only used a few times? It is used during the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of Chrismation and the Consecration of the Church which includes the sanctification of the Tablets.



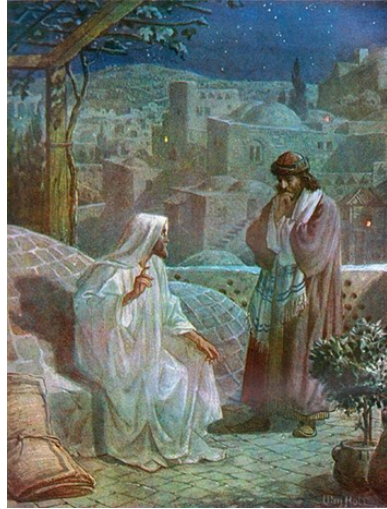
5. Participation in the Holy Eucharist

Immediately thereafter (or at the earliest possible opportunity), the candidate receives Holy Communion. The continuous presence of the Holy Spirit makes constant, progressive and personal growth of the Christian into the likeness of God possible.

Baptism: An Intimate and Continual Communion with God

We are raised to a new life for a purpose, union, and communion with God as Baptism is the beginning of eternal life. Peter writes that Baptism now saves us. We can see this in **1 Peter 3:21**

"It is not the mere removal of dirt from our bodies, but provides us with "a good conscience toward God." Baptism is not the removal of filth from the flesh by washing with water, but for participation in the Resurrection of Christ through a cleanly washed conscience.



Conversation of Nicodemus and Christ - John 3:5 *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"*

Why do we receive baptism? Because baptism is a new covenant by which we enter into the kingdom of God, and we are joined to Christ. We are given the sonship of the Father and brotherhood with Christ. We are granted the remission of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism opens the doors of the abundance of the Lord from which we receive the mysterious spiritual grace for

eternal life. We become worthy to receive the Holy seal and sign of Our Lord. Through Chrismation, we are filled with the sweet fragrance which enables us to become free from the rule of the hostile powers and the rulers of darkness.

Gift of the Holy Spirit

The newly baptised receives the Holy Spirit through the anointing of the Holy Chrism by the Bishop or the Priest. For us the Holy Spirit is the Life-giver, Sanctifier and Perfecter. We do think in terms of sin and grace, but the central element in our understanding of salvation is the life-giving Spirit. It is He who gives life, makes people more holy and God-like, and draws us to perfection. He works in the Church, through His special gifts, to build up the body of Christ and to make its members holy. He also works in Creation, bringing all things to their fullness and perfection.

Salvation for us means more than escaping hell and going to heaven. It means separation from evil and growth in the good. It means eternal life with true holiness and righteousness. It means also being united with Christ in His divine-human nature, in His sonship and rule over the universe. It means

becoming more and more God-like in love, power and wisdom. This is what the Holy Spirit makes possible. What is humanly impossible becomes reality through the grace and power of God. The participation in Christ's body, His blood, His being, and His nature becomes possible, by the grace of God, by the Holy Spirit, through the "mysteries of the Church" (roze-d-idtho in Syriac), which are called Sacraments in the West. These mysteries, mainly Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, are acts in the community of faith by which the eternal and eschatological (i.e. pertaining to the last times) reality of our oneness with Christ becomes experienced by faith in the Church, in time, in the here and now.

Remember

Salvation for us means more than escaping hell and going to heaven. It means separation from evil and growth in the good. It means eternal life with true holiness and righteousness. It means also being united with Christ in His divine-human nature, in His sonship and rule over the universe. It means becoming more and more God-like in love, power and wisdom.



Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean that “Baptism is starting anew - dying to an old way of life and being born again into a new way of life”?
2. The baptismal font is also referred to as the mother’s womb. How would you explain the correlation ?
3. Explain how Baptism begins our Journey to Salvation and inheritance as Children of God.
4. During the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, what is the role of the God-parent?

Temple of Spirit

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain how Pentecost established the Mission of the Church for the Life of the World.*
- *I can explain how St. Paul, St. Thomas and St. Peter embraced the mission.*
- *I can explain our link to the mission through Eucharist, Liturgy, Works and Service to others.*



We believe in the one God – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Scripture there are three who are recognized as God and these three are described as distinct persons. This is not tritheism (Belief in three persons of the Trinity as three distinct Gods); for while there are three persons, there is but one essence. There is but one God. The energies of the trinitarian God are always personal, “from the Father through the Son in the Spirit”. This trinitarian (belief in the Trinity) faith is to be found in the depth of the thoughts and actions of Orthodox Christians. In this chapter, we will learn more about the third person in the Trinity – The Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is introduced to us in the very first two verses in the Holy Bible.

Genesis 1:1-2 describes the “Spirit of God” hovering over the face of the waters when the earth was without form and void, when darkness was upon the face of the deep. In the Old Testament, there are several other references to the Holy Spirit (**Genesis 1.26, 18.1-16**). In **Joel 2:28**, God promised prophet Joel that He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh; and that sons and daughters shall prophesy, old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions.

Partner Research

Go through the Bible and find other examples of references to the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, St. John, the Baptist said that “I indeed baptise you

with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (St. Matthew 3 :11)

We then get to see the Holy Spirit during the baptism of Jesus Christ (St. Matthew 3: 13 – 17). In this incident we see the revelation of the Holy Trinity together when the voice of the Father says, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” and when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove coming to rest upon the Incarnate Son - Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ at various places in the Bible speaks about the relationship between Him and the Father. Jesus says that He and Father are one (cf. St. John 10:30). This statement of Christ is the paradigm and foundation for us to understand God the Father. When Christ teaches His disciples to pray (St. Matthew 6:9-13; St. Luke 11:2-4, He starts like “Our Father, who art in heaven...”. This strong relation is made known to us by the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit teaches us the Father and the Son will always stay as strangers to us. That is why we are taught to have a strong relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. Early in His public Ministry He said, “If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of Living Water. But this he spoke concerning the spirit”

(St. John 7:37-39).

Later He spoke to us about the Holy Spirit in St. John 14:16 and called the Holy Spirit our “helper”. In this verse, Jesus tells us that He will pray to the Father that He sends us another “helper” who will remain with us “forever”. Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, but He could not remain with us forever. He had to die on the cross for our sins and resurrect to defeat death and go back to heaven. But He made sure that we will not be left alone without support. The Holy Spirit, also sent by the Father, will remain with us forever as a helper giving us strength and guidance to take His mission forward.

The Nicene Creed further elaborates about the Holy Spirit. In the third paragraph of the Nicene creed, we get to know that the Holy Spirit is “*Living*” and is the “*life-giving Lord of all*”. The Holy Spirit “*proceeds from the Father*” and is “*worshipped*” and “*glorified*” together with the Father and the Son. We also come to know that the Holy Spirit “*spoke through*” the prophets and the apostles.

In the text of Holy Qurbana by St. Mathai Royo, the silent prayer at the time of epiclesis says that the Comforter Holy Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father, and takes His essence from the Son. This prayer defines clearly the relationship between the three persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father begets, the Son is begotten, the Holy Spirit is worshipped and glorified along with the Father and the Son and He takes His essence from the Son.

Why do we need the Holy Spirit?

As the Gospel of John was written in Greek, the original word used to describe the Holy Spirit was “paráklētos” which means helper or counsellor or advocate. A counsellor is someone who will advise us. An advocate is someone who will represent us and intercede on behalf of us. In St. John 16, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of everything that Jesus has taught us. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is the teacher, whom Christ has promised to us continues the teachings of Christ through our own current language and context.

Think

If God knows what we are going through, even without us communicating with Him, why is prayer so important?



St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:26 that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. When we are weighed down by life’s heavy burdens and we don’t know how to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on behalf of us with sighs and groans that cannot be expressed with words. It is so comforting to us to know that the very Spirit of God prays on our behalf during times of crisis. When we run out of words, our God understands our wordless sighs because He loves us abundantly.

The coming of the Holy Spirit

Jesus came to us on a mission to spread the Gospel and to show us the way. He was the light through which we can reach God. But once Jesus was crucified, the apostles and other Christians were persecuted by the Jews. Left on their own, they lacked the courage to continue the mission of Christ to spread the Gospel to the four corners of the world. They were confused, afraid, leaderless, and lost with no hope. After His resurrection, Jesus spent the next 40 days with His apostles, and He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for what the Father had promised. Jesus said to them, “I’ve told you what the Father promises: John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1: 4,5).

On the day of Pentecost, which was the fiftieth day after Easter, the apostles and believers were assembled in a house, praying, and waiting for the fulfilment of the promise when the Holy Spirit came from the sky and filled the whole house with a sound like a violently blowing wind. Tongues that looked like fire appeared to them and arranged themselves so that one came to rest on each believer. All the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. People from other countries were able to hear the apostles speak in their own language about the good news of the Gospel (Acts 2).

The Holy Spirit gave the apostles the newfound courage to fearlessly go,



Descent of the Holy Spirit

spread the word and continue the mission started by Jesus Christ. They were fearless even to the point of death. Soon St. Stephen who was a man “filled with God’s favour and power” was arrested and stoned to death becoming the first Christian martyr. Before he was killed, St. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and he said, “*Look, I see heaven opened and the Son of Man in the honoured position—the one next to God the Father on the throne!*” (Acts 7: 56). This is how the Holy Spirit equipped the apostles to continue the mission of the Church for the life of the world.

Fulfilling Our Mission

After Pentecost, the apostles like St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Thomas set out to different parts of the world with courage and conviction to fulfil the mission and spread the Gospel both to the Jews and the Gentiles alike. God showed no partiality between Jews and Gentiles as the Gentiles also received the Holy Spirit. St. Peter’s Jewish companions were amazed that the Holy Spirit would be poured out even on the Gentiles (Acts 10).

According to St. Paul, the Holy Spirit equips us with different gifts to fulfil His mission in the world(1 Corinthians 12). To some is given the gift of the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowl-

edge, to others; faith, the gift of healing, working of miracles, ability to prophesy, discerning of spirits, ability to speak different languages or to understand different languages. The Spirit is the same, but the gift given is different as per the needs of the ministry for the benefit of all. St. Paul further says that by the Holy Spirit, we are all baptised into One Body. But just like a body has different organs fulfilling different responsibilities, the Holy Spirit provides different gifts to each member of the One Body in Christ.

St. Paul further says that those who are led by the Holy Spirit of God are children of God. He calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of adoption through which we become joint heirs of God with Jesus Christ by whom we can cry out “Abba, Father” (Romans 8: 12 – 16). The Holy Spirit works in each believer making them more like Jesus which is called the process of deification or theosis.

The primary means by which The Holy Spirit works to give grace and deify the people are through (1) the Church’s sacraments and (2) human effort of good works.

1. *Through the Sacraments (mysteries):* The sacrament of Baptism is the process by which God begins the process of theosis in a person. Through the mystery of Holy Chrismation, we receive the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the supreme means of theosis since it is the sacrament through which people become one with the body of Christ. During the Eucharist, there are two complementary

movements – the movement of ascension and the movement of return. During ascension we move to the Kingdom of God which we can then witness to others and fulfil our mission. Now having once more become ‘His people and His inheritance’, we can do what Christ wants us to do: ‘you are witnesses of these things’ (St. Luke 24:8). During the return, we move back to the world, when the celebrant says ‘Let depart in peace’ as he leaves the altar and leads the congregation outside the church.

Think

Go through the other Sacraments of the Church. How do we see the role of the Holy Spirit in the other Sacraments?



2. *Through Works:* Prayer, fasting, and other works are not the purpose of life, but they are necessary to achieve the purpose. Good works alone do not merit deification. As Christians, we rely on the grace of God. It is the Holy Spirit who deifies people by the means of works. The Holy Spirit enables us to participate with Jesus Christ in the search for the oppressed and marginalised to spread the love of God and the Gospel of peace.

Summary

During the Sedro of the third service of the Feast of Pentecost, the prayer defines the Holy Spirit as the comforter, the

sanctifier of Churches, the perfecter of all divine ministries, the Spirit of grace, the fountain of goodness, the upright Spirit, the majestic Spirit, the Spirit who is the Lord, the Spirit of sonship, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of knowledge, the Spirit of piety, the Spirit who prepares temples for Himself, the Spirit who guides, the Spirit who operates as He wills and wills as it is meet, the Spirit who distributes gifts to everyone, the Spirit of consolation, the Spirit of royalty, the Spirit of mighty deeds, and

the Spirit of perfection. The Spirit that fulfils the prophets, the Spirit who perfected the apostles, the Spirit who fortifies the martyrs and the Spirit that loves mankind. In the Emmaus experience, the disciples received the Body of Christ from Christ Himself and immediately their eyes were opened (St. Luke 24:31). It is the Spirit of God, who opens their eyes to see God and even today the same Spirit of God opens our eyes in the right and appropriate way, namely, the Orthodox way because He is the promised Spirit by Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe the ways and means how we can carry forward the work of mission that the Church entrusts upon its members.
2. Review the feast of Pentecost service and try to briefly explain the role that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives.
3. This lesson ends off with the Sedro of the third service of the Feast of Pentecost. Pick 2 roles of the Holy Spirit and explain how the Holy Spirit fulfils those roles.

Sacrament of Sacraments

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that through the Holy Qurbana, we glimpse life in Heaven in communion with Christ and the fulfilment of His commands and directions for us.*
- *I can understand the significance of the Liturgy in the life of the Church, faithful, and world at large.*
- *I can understand that there is a pattern to the Lectionary which draws us into a deeper understanding of Salvation and the Christian purpose.*
- *I can explain why the Church has optional/ supplemental fasts which people observe for piety or specific intercessions*



The Return of the Prodigal Son

The young man cringed...It was humiliating...of all animals...pigs...these filthy, noisy, pigs were eating better than him. Growing up, he wasn't even allowed to touch a pig, and now here he was feeding them and wishing he was one of them. At least they have food. Oh, how he missed the food from his childhood. He regretted leaving crumbs on the plate, because he'd even settle for that now. Even the servants at his father's house ate well. And here he was... his stomach twisting. He had eaten well with his friends, but where were they now? They were there when he was buy-

ing, but now, they all had an excuse. All that money, it took his father a lifetime to earn it, but it was gone so fast. How was that even possible? He could still remember the look on his father's face when he asked for it. It was his inheritance after all, it didn't seem like an unreasonable request at the time. But, when he asked, he saw the look on his father's face, as he realised that his own son wished... that he was dead. How could he face his father again? There was nothing left. There's no way out, no way to fix this. He looked at the pigs. Even they had each other. There was no way he could go on like this.

He got up and walked. It was a long



Parable of the prodigal son.

way home, and he rehearsed every word he would say to his father over and over. ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ It was hard to get out. The word sinned was hard, but the words ‘against heaven’ were even harder, and ‘against you’ were the hardest. He got to a familiar street. He remembered walking it as a child. In those days, he would hit this street and start running because home was almost in sight, but this time, his steps became shorter. His stomach tightened up, he began to sweat profusely. What if his father didn’t even want to see him? He looked up and in the distance he could see the light from the lamps in the house. He saw a man

running. It was hard to see.

Suddenly, he was in the air, twirling, held by arms that lifted him up as a boy. He felt the embrace, the kiss on his cheek. He started to recite his line, but it was interrupted by his father’s shout , “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him.” The robe was glistening, it was clean, it was as white as snow. His dirty rags seemed to dissolve underneath. They put the ring on his finger. It had the stamp of his family. With new sandals under his feet, he stepped over the threshold into his house again. They brought him to the table and gave him food. Nothing had ever smelled or tasted so good. How long he had longed for home! And here he was communing

at the table with his family. His relief melted into unutterable joy. He mouthed the words thank you, but nothing could express what he was feeling inside. He was home!

“

The Eucharist is the state of the perfect man. When man stands before the throne of God, when he has fulfilled all that God has given him to fulfil, when all sins are forgiven, all joy restored, then there is nothing else for him to do, but to give thanks.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

”

None of us are worthy of the Kingdom. We have received generously from the Lord, and in many ways, we have squandered these blessings due to our own vanity. It's easy to judge the prodigal son until we come to the realisation that we too have sinned against heaven and against the Lord and chosen darkness over the light. That sin has always led to destruction and isolation. When we come to the realisation that we are better off in the light, that act of turning back towards home is repentance. But, having squandered everything, we have nothing to stand on, we don't deserve a place at the table. And yet, the Lord is willing to receive us back.

Mercy is when the Lord in His compassion has taken away our punishment. Grace is when He put the robe and ring back on the prodigal child and made him a son and heir again. That experience of

grace is what we encounter when we approach the sacraments. We do not deserve what the Lord has given, and yet, in His love and concern for us, He generously gives us restoration. When we fast, we recognize our sins and begin the journey home. When we confess, we receive back our baptismal robe. When we partake in absolution, the seal of our christmation is renewed. Approaching the table, we enter into communion with the Lord and our family - the Church, and partake of the Holy Qurbana. Standing before the throne of God, as we contemplate what we have received by grace, our hearts naturally overflow with thanksgiving. This sacramental experience is the taste of the heavenly reality that is the banquet of the Kingdom.

“

Liturgy is the source and the expression of the entire spiritual experience. In prayers, the Church articulates its vision of God and the destiny of humanity and the entire creation

Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese

”

Our act of worship is offering up to God our thanksgiving for sending His only begotten Son for our salvation. It is ascribing glory to the Lord who offered Himself up and took on death for our sake that we might have life. The Holy Spirit opens our heart to worship in spirit and in truth, revealing to us this great mystery.

Definition

Eucharist - from the Greek *eucharistia* for "thanksgiving") is the central act of Christian worship, The Lord's Supper

“

The Eucharist is our secret joy and certitude, the source of inspiration and growth, the victory that overcomes evil, the presence that makes our whole life, life in Christ.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

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Optional Fasting

During the morning prayers we pray the Psalm, "My soul thirsts for You and my flesh seeks for You like the thirsty earth, which is parched and begging for water." (**Psalm 62:1**) There is a thirst in our souls that cannot be quenched except by communing with the Lord. Our bodies and souls long to be in union with our Creator, the source of our life. When we partake in the canonical fasts of the Church, we become more attuned to the thirst and longing of our souls as well. There are also times in life where we may fast for personal reasons. Before Esther went before the King, she called for a fast to prepare. In the same way, some may fast before major moments or decisions in their life or in the life of those they care about. A person preparing to be ordained or a bishop, preparing

to ordain, may fast. Sometimes, people seeking the intercession of St Mary may choose to fast for 8 days before the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. Though it is not a canonical fast of the Church, many have experienced revelation, guidance, and miracles during such fasting, including those who had children after years of barrenness in a similar manner to Saints Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Theotokos. Those who have entered monastic life live in a moderate state of fasting for the rest of their lives. They may observe a more strict rule of fasting during the fasting periods of the year.

Bible Verse

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

St Matthew 9:14-15



When the prodigal son returned home, it was a time of feasting and rejoicing. In our lives, there are times for fasting and times for feasting. We journey through the Great Lent with 40 days of fasting followed by another 10 days of intense prayer and fasting during the Holy Week. After the Feast of the Res-

urrection (Holy Easter), we feast and rejoice in worship for one week (Here or Bright days) and do not fast or kneel during prayer until Pentecost. After Pentecost, having been renewed in the Holy Spirit, we turn outwards to the ministry inspired by the Holy Apostles, whose lives we reflect on during the fast dedicated to them. The lectionary prescribes readings from the Old Testament (Pentateuch, historical books, minor prophets, and wisdom books) and the New Testament (Epistles and Gospels) for each Sunday that take us through the year in cycles. The readings correspond to the season of the liturgical year. For example, the readings from Koodosh Etho (Sanctification of the Church) onwards prepare us for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

The liturgical year takes us through all the significant moments of our Lord's Incarnation. During this journey, we too are able to reflect on different aspects of our lives. There are times of hope amidst our dark periods and trials (Nativity Season). There are times when we reflect inwards and journey to the cross (Great Lent), times of ministry and going forth with the message of the Gospel to the nations (Pentecost and Fast of the Apostles), and then times when we reflect on our own death (Dormition of the Theotokos) and the victory of the Cross (Feast of the Cross). We experience each season every year, but we are in differ-

ent phases of our lives from year to year. Our experience of Nativity as a child is different from our experience of Nativity as an adult and may be even more different as a parent. Sometimes we approach our Lord in the spirit of the shepherds, sometimes in the spirit of the wise men.

Conclusion

Opening words of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's last sermon¹

“

Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.”

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann ”

Every time we approach the Holy Eucharist, we who have made mistakes, who are not worthy to dine at the table, receive by grace a gift that we do not deserve, the Bread of Life. We, who were stuck in our sins, have been rescued from the depths of the grave we have dug for ourselves, by our Lord who has of His own will taken on death for our sake by His sacrifice on the Cross. If we open our minds and our souls to the magnificence of that moment, we will feel what the prodigal felt, having been welcomed home. This feeling is beautifully expressed in a prayer² after having received Holy Qurbana in the Anaphora of St John:

What shall we reward to Your grace, our pleasant God, on account of this salvation that

¹<https://ancientanswers.org/2014/11/27/everyone-capable-of-thanksgiving/>

²<https://syriacorthodoxresources.org/Liturgy/Anaphora/John.html>

You have granted us? Who can offer glory that befits You? Yet, as little as it is and as much as possible, we worship You, thank You and glorify You and Your Only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit, now, always and forever.

This thanksgiving in our life arises out of our experience of the perfect love of God. The liturgical worship is an expression of this spiritual experience. It is a taste of the joy of the Heavenly Kingdom. And yet, it is not a static experience of the grace of God but one that is ongoing and dynamic throughout our entire lives. The liturgical seasons provide us

throughout the year with times for introspection and reflection as well as times of feasting and rejoicing. This cycle is not repetitive because we as individuals are in a different state each year as we approach the fasts and feasts. This is our journey to the Kingdom. As we journey through, we understand more fully the depth of God's love for us and what He has done for our salvation. And from this understanding, out of the depths of our soul we join our voices with the angelic hosts crying out:

“Holy Holy Holy, Lord God Almighty, by whose glory the heaven and the 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.”

Reflection Questions

1. When Theologians like Fr. Schmemmann and Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese describe Holy Eucharist as the perfection of man when standing before God, what does this mean? Particularly, relate the term “perfection of man” when it comes to our relationship with God?
2. What does the Liturgy, especially as it relates to Bible readings, festivals, and seasons of the Church, provide for us as Christians?
3. Why do we fast prior to the Eucharist? What does it allow us to do as Christians? How does fasting shape our participation in the Eucharist?

The Body of Christ

Lesson Goals :

- *I can relate that the choices I make guide me closer to God or turn me away from His will.*
- *I understand that the Church provides prescriptions and guidance on how I can have better discernment to follow God in Spirit and Truth rather than the desires of the flesh.*
- *I can apply an understanding of “Anamnesis” to appreciate why Liturgy and the time we spent at Church is important for spiritual growth.*



Receiving the Literal Body of Christ

When you are a member of the Malankara Orthodox Church, one of the first acts of your membership is to receive the Holy Mysteries - the actual, living and life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is a sacred mystery, or sacrament of the Church, something that we understand differently than reformed churches who understand it as con-substantiation - the elements are body and blood of Christ if one wants to see it that way, or the Roman Catholic church who understand it as transubstantiation - a physical conversion of bread and wine to Jesus' Body and Blood, but a mystery in which the true, divine presence of Jesus Christ envelops the

elements upon the altar where they become His Body and His Blood, for our salvation, for our sake, through the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Through God's divine Grace, He descends upon the bread and wine, and they are becoming His Body and Blood.

... And Becoming the Body of Christ

Remember that when we are in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we don't just witness the becoming of the elements of bread and wine into the Holy Body and Life-giving Blood of Jesus Christ, we accept Him into our whole selves: body, spirit, mind. The Church

teaches us that we are an inheritor of Christ from the time of our baptism: We are with Christ, in Christ, and He is with and in us. When we commune with Him during the Holy Eucharist, we remain in Him; His Body and Blood, which are His gifts to us, remain with us and in us.¹

Metanoia - *A path of repentance.* Metanoia in its literal sense means making a U-turn, namely, one is making a U-turn from sin to holiness. Repentance doesn't just include remorse, but a self-dedication to recalibrate ourselves to becoming Christ-like. As is done in baptism, we rebuke sin and the evil one, and embrace the victorious sign of Christ. We rekindle the efficacious anointing of the Holy Myron on our body and soul to escape the grasp of sin through metanoia. Repentance is not an overnight event, but a journey to which we must commit ourselves, and continually recommit ourselves to, when we are led astray by the sin of a frail and impermanent world that fails to fill our cup, but rather drains it and leaves us as empty vessels. Repentance is the process of refilling our cup to the brim with Christ, as we return our lives to the path of Christ.

Preparation/Rites - the Holy Qurbana is where we receive the Holy Mysteries- Christ's Body and Blood. From the period of our repentant self-examination of sin, confession of sin, and receiving absolution for sin, we pre-

pare ourselves in the prayers and hours that lead up to the celebration of Holy Qurbana. One important part of the Qurbana is the *Anamnesis*. All preparation is important to reorient ourselves to God - although we are imperfect beings susceptible to sin, we are made clean through our humility and repentance, allowing the Mercy and Grace of God to cleanse us and prepare us for receiving Him. Anamnesis is not retelling an event, but actually partaking of that event

If we are to truly experience and immerse ourselves in the gift of being Christ's Body, His Holy Church, we must also partake of the reception of His Body and Blood. In many ways, the Church teaches us how we can place ourselves in an active participant role with relation to the Holy Eucharist. **Anamnesis** literally means "remembrance". The true meaning of anamnesis is partaking in the original enactment while being at a later time. Thus, we can reflect on how we chose to live our life at that moment, and every moment afterwards. In other words, time spent in Liturgy blends past, present and future all together. Anamnesis ensures that we are in a perpetual presence with the incarnation of Christ through participating in the Holy Liturgy.

*Important Aspects of the Anamnesis in our Spiritual Lives*²

¹Fr. John Breck, "Eucharistic Offering," Orthodox Church in America, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-john-breck/eucharistic-offering>

²Fr. John Breck, "Eucharistic Offering," Orthodox Church in America, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-john-breck/eucharistic-offering>

THE ANAMNESIS: Not Just Commemorating, but Immersing Ones' Self in Eucharist	
Why do we Place Emphasis on the Anamnesis?	As the heart of Orthodox Liturgy, along with the Institution [Blessing of the Bread and Wine], and Epiclesis [Invoking the Holy Spirit to Transform Holy Mysteries, Christ's Body and Blood], the Anamnesis is the memorial of Christ's words that carry on beyond the Mystical Supper, that we do this and remember Christ when we do it → the ultimate realization that Christ is the Celebrant of the Divine Eucharist, and we should unite ourselves with Him, through a <u>Life in Christ</u>
How do we actively remember Christ?	Already, by placing the offering of bread and wine upon the altar, we as Children of God collectively offer something physically (bread made from wheat, wine made from grapes), a sacrifice of the bountiful gifts God provides us, to God upon the altar. <i>But is that what God is looking for?</i> We should offer ourselves upon that same altar, our hearts, minds, and bodies, to execute the will of Christ in our Lives, and live in Christ
Why does this get done in the Church? And when we leave?	Remember, the command of our Lord is to Love Him, and Love one another unconditionally. By placing ourselves in the midst of the church, we show our love by offering ourselves not just to Christ, but to the service of those around us. By praying for others, we live a Life in Christ; by ministering and encouraging others, we live a Life in Christ. A Christ-like Life means we should go out of the walls of the Church and share the Love of God with others in all that we do

‘Anamnesis means to remember or commemorate. This Greek word does not imply a simple retelling or symbolic reenactment, but rather the actualisation of past events (Crucifixion) and looking forward to future realities (the Judgement). It fulfils Christ’s command to participate in the Eucharist in remembrance of Him.’ (Page 182, MOSC Service Book of Holy Qurbana)

Holy Baptism Opens the Door to Christ's Holy Body and Blood

As we develop from our birth and infancy, we are nourished as children with the best possible nutrients. Doing so is vital to our physical growth and development as human beings. The same must be said for our spiritual bodies. Without holy nourishment and nutrients, we cannot expect to achieve our purpose of uniting in oneness with Christ (Theosis).

As Orthodox Christians, Holy Baptism grants us an inheritance as children of God's Kingdom, with all the joy and blessings it provides us. As Orthodox Christians, Holy Qurbana grants us the ability to participate in full body, mind and spirit in the Eucharistic Liturgy, partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ, and participating in all other mysteries and inheriting His promise of Eternal Life in the Heavenly Kingdom.

- We can always *fall out of favour with that elder family member* who wrote us into their Will and Testament, and be written out of the Will, losing out on the earthly and generational inheritance we once thought we had.
- Remember, our God is a loving God, we should not think of Him in the same manner as an unforgiving and unyielding elderly family member who would write an heir out of their Will. Recall in *Lesson 1, A Dead Son Returns*, how the parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us of our loving heavenly Father who is always waiting for us. *HOWEVER*, are *we as Orthodox Christians* doing what we can to live a life akin to being inheritors of God's Kingdom, and the promise of Eternal Life? Are we on a journey of **theosis**, becoming like our Heavenly Father, and immersing ourselves in repentant **metanoia** when we fall short, as a way to rejoin Him who awaits for us with open arms?

- We should build our spiritual life around the Holy Church and what it offers us to stay in **communion** with Christ, such that we do not lose out or risk squandering this ever-precious inheritance we receive as Children of God via Holy Baptism. As emphasised in *Lesson 1*, we could just as quickly divert ourselves from the Divine Inheritance through a path focused solely on worldly desires, alienating ourselves from God and His Gift to us. Even in the Church, our jealousy or pride could keep us away from true Christ-like humility. He will always be awaiting us, arms open. A life in the Holy Church will always orient us to run towards those arms at all times, seasons and hours, *never away from God*, as the distracting worldly desires would want of us.

The path of sin and destruction can be battled with the spiritual gifts and tools we obtain from the Holy Church. As we are called to not only partake in Christ's Body and Blood, but in doing so, *BE-COME LIKE HIM*, we should also be grateful and in awe of the transformative mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and how it firmly takes us on a path to **theosis** - our journey to the oneness with Christ. The Body of Christ is not something we merely consume, but a calling and journey for us to be joined in Christ, as one Body.

Communion in the context of this lesson reference may have multiple meanings
→ the Holy Communion, receiving of the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ
→ the communion and intercession of the saints and the living faithful, both members of the Holy Church, where we experience a Life in Christ
→ Communion as a spiritual joining between us and the Holy Trinity, through prayer, fasting and Life in the Church

Reflection Questions

1. How do you view the mystery of the Holy Eucharist? Is it something that the Priest does? Is it something more? Where do we as congregants come into this mystery?
2. How does what takes place on the Holy Altar - the mystery of transforming the elements into Christ's Body and Blood, mirror the journey we have in the Church? Are we allowing a transformation of ourselves through this journey?
3. Evaluate the following statement "When we sin, we will always remain in the love of God, but it is to us to turn back to Him with full repentance and humility" Is it true, or are there things we do that would forever shun us from God's love?
4. Contemplate on the following phrase - "Everything we do in the Life of the Church brings us back to the Eucharist." How does this correlate with the process of metanoia, and what we've learned from the Parable of the Prodigal Son? How do we "come back" to the Eucharist?

The Holy Trinity

Lesson Goals :

- *I can relate to the importance of the true understanding of the Holy Trinity to our salvation and relationship with God.*
- *I can defend why the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be altered or changed by being able to articulate consequences of incomplete or incorrect understandings.*
- *I can perceive how the Orthodox teaching that God is Love permeates through all our Sacraments, prayers, and our purpose in life.*



Introduction

“The basis of our Christian theology is in the Holy Trinity” - this bold statement by His Grace Geevarghese Mar Osthathios is foundational to understand the fullness of the Christian Faith given to us from the ancient days of Moses and illumined by God Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ to the Apostles.

Although we can never fully explain the Mystery of how the One True God is also Three Distinct Persons, it is important for us to appreciate this truth and apply the teaching as it opens our eyes to our life and our purpose. In the Holy Trinity we see God as Love and how our very being or existence is towards this perfect and complete relation-

ship and communion between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

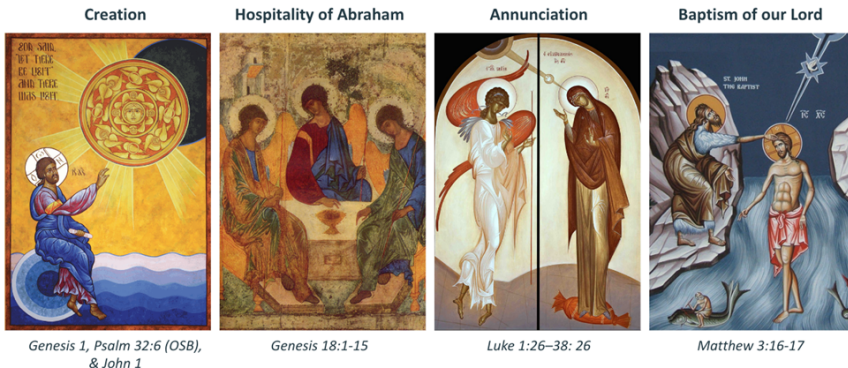
Group Talk

What does His Grace Geevarghese Mar Osthathios mean by the statement, “The basis of our Christian theology is in the Holy Trinity”?



The Holy Trinity in Scripture and Worship

The teaching of the Trinity is not a theological development. His Grace Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios reflects that “unfortunately too many Christians look for the concept of the Holy Trinity in



the New Testament, and not finding it directly expounded there, relegate it to a “later addition” by the Christian Church.”

Rather, we can see the Trinity in action literally in the first verses of Genesis! God the Father and God the Spirit are easily distinguished to the novice reader, but it is through the mind of the Church that we can distinguish that God the Word (Greek λόγος or logos, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ) is He Who “spoke” all things into being. This was more clearly stated by St. John the Evangelist in the opening verses of his Gospel (**St. John 1:1-3**) - *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made.”*

Explore

Read the Hospitality of Abraham (Genesis 18:1-15), the Annunciation (St. Luke 1:26- 38: 26), and the Baptism of our Lord (St. Matthew 3:16-17). How do we see the Holy Trinity working together and possessing a single will and energy in each of these stories?

This is not the only time we see the Holy Trinity working together and possessing a single will and energy. These include the Hospitality of Abraham (Genesis 18:1-15), the Annunciation (St. Luke 1:26-38: 26), and the Baptism of our Lord (St. Matthew 3:16-17). The Three Persons of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal. None of the three ever act separately, apart from the other two. The Holy Trinity has only one will. They are not three gods but one God.

We see Scripture come alive in the

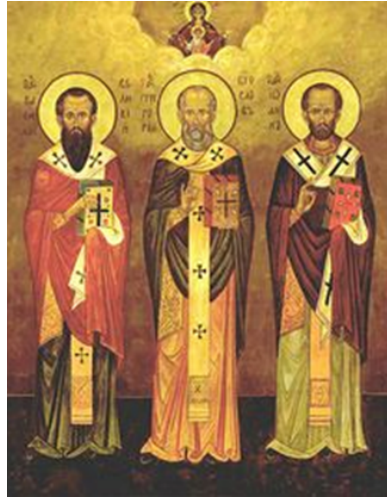
Liturgical Feasts of the Church as well. The Feast of Pentecost is a literal textbook of the Holy Trinity, whereas other Feasts at first glance may seem to focus more on a single Person (e.g., Nativity of our Lord, Good Friday) but when we listen carefully, we understand that the Feasts are a glorification of the doctrine of the Trinity and shines on God. All worship is Trinitarian and it is in the worship of our Church that the Trinity is most fully revealed.

All the Sacraments are a manifestation of the Holy Trinity. There are many direct references to the Father, Son, and Holy Trinity during the Holy Qurbana - the “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:1-3), the Epiclesis, etc. We are reminded constantly that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are real and present. Each distinct, but all one God.

Explore

There are many direct references to the Father, Son, and Holy Trinity during the Holy Qurbana. What are some examples that you can find?

were critical to the final formation of the Nicene Creed.



The Cappadocian Fathers

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three divine persons (or in more formal language three hypostases). At the same time, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one God. They are One God because They are one in essence and nature (or in more formal language homoousios).

As summarised in the Orthodox Study Bible - “These Persons are distinct, but not separate, and are not three gods. They are One God because They are one in essence and nature. The Father is the unbegotten Fountainhead of Deity. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the Life-giver and the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, and speaks through the prophets

Trinitarian Theology

The Cappadocian Fathers are St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. These three great Church fathers greatly clarified the misunderstandings of the Holy Trinity and

and the apostles”.

The Nicene Faith is our confession of Faith, and it captures the core belief of all Christians. The Church confirmed this during the First and Second Ecumenical Councils. This Symbol of Faith is the foundation of all teaching, and used regularly from the moment of our Baptism. We begin the Creed by proclaiming our belief in the “One True God”, and thereafter we proclaim the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

There are other ancient creeds such as the Athanasius Creed, and Apostles Creed that we agree to be true but are incomplete proclamations of faith. Because of the heresies and misunderstandings, the ancient Church needed to clarify this at the Great Ecumenical Councils of Nicea and Constantinople in order to protect the faithful of the One True Church and therefore we should understand the Nicene Creed to build on these other creeds. They are not contradictory, but rather the Nicene Creed is more complete.

The Roman Catholic Church later added the Filioque (Latin term for “and from the Son”) to the Nicene Creed which incorrectly states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son. Only God the Father can be considered as the Begetter (Generator), Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible. The Holy Spirit does not take His generation from the Son but rather only from the Father and it is clearly spoken in **St. John 15:26** ‘the Spirit of truth proceeds from the Father’.

Therefore, we reject the Catholic addition and hold fast to the ancient Truth as true and faithful to the Apostolic teaching given to us.

For Orthodox Christians, we neither take away or add to the ancient understanding of the Trinity given to us by God. To rationalise and modify based on human thoughts and ideas not only changes the Persons of God but changes the perfect relationship that they have with each other.

The Nicene Creed begins with the phrase, “We believe in One True God” and thereafter illuminates our faith about each Person of God, and finally closes with the confession of the Church. Our life and worship is centred on God as Trinity, and throughout our most intimate Communion with God at the Holy Qurbana we offer praise and thanksgiving to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Remember

The Nicene Faith is our confession of Faith, and captures the core belief of all Christians and which the Church clarified during the First and Second Ecumenical Councils.

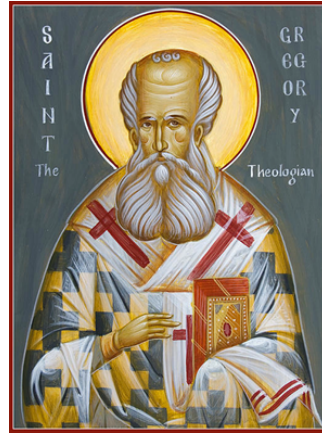


Importance of the Trinity

St. Gregory of Nazianzus (St Gregory the Theologian) emphasised the importance of the Trinity as such - "This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the one Godhead and power, found in the three in unity, and comprising the three separately; not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities nor inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of three infinite ones, each God when considered in Himself; as the Father, so the Son; as the Son, so the Holy Spirit; the three one God when contemplated together; each God because consubstantial; one God because of the monarchia. No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of anyone of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light."

What our great Church father is encouraging in this and in several other orations is for all Christians and is to think and meditate on the revelation of the Mystery of the Trinity. He also educates us on how God communicates to us

(Greek: *oikonomia*) so that we can better understand ourselves and joyfully follow the sacramental transformation in our path towards salvation.



St. Gregory of Nazianzus

There is only one teaching of the Church when it comes to the doctrine and theology of the Holy Trinity and this needs to be fully understood or accepted. Any misunderstanding of the Trinity skews our understanding of all other Church teachings given the entire Christian Faith is rooted and grounded on the communion and relationship that exists between the Father Almighty, the One Lord Jesus Christ, and the One Living Holy Spirit. For our Church, theology is our faith and our faith is our theology. Thus, our faith is expressed in our prayers. In short, our prayers repeatedly confess the Holy Trinity and we believe so.

Theosis: Partaking of the Divine Nature Heaven and Hell

God is with us always and is everywhere. God the Father is above us and all things as the ever flowing source of love. God the Son gave us His promise that He is with us always (**St. Matthew 28:18-20**), and God the Holy Spirit is in us as we were baptised as Christians and sealed. God is in all places and fills all things.

We also know that we are created in God's image and likeness (**Genesis 1:27**) and gave us a unique position in His creation (**Genesis 1:28**). Jesus taught us as well how to "to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (**St. Matthew 5:48**) with a profound command: "love one another as I have loved you" (**St. John 15:12**).

To carry out this love means to be like the relationship that exists in the Holy Trinity which may seem impossible. However, through the Resurrection we have been restored and given a path to a new life in union with God. Theosis is the teaching of transformation to become like Christ, doing the things that He did and becoming sons of God in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The essence of Orthodox Christianity is the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" and the "deification" of man by the grace of God, or theosis. The Fathers of the Church unanimously claim that Christian life is the participation in the life of the blessed Trinity in the most genuine and realistic way. The Orthodox Christian life is about becoming divine in union with God.

This relationship and union with God underscores the Orthodox understanding of heaven and hell. In the Nicene Creed, we confirm that God is the "maker of heaven and earth" but there is no mention of a place called hell. The Creed summarises all that we need to understand for our salvation, so why this omission? Although there is no question that hell is real, there is no place called hell. Hell becomes real when our relationship with God becomes non-existent. In other words, our closeness with God is the cause of our own eternal joy or suffering based on our actions and decisions in our life.

Hell is commonly taught to be a place created by God for the express purpose of banishing the wicked for everlasting punishment. The damned are spatially cut off from God, His Kingdom, His people, and His love. But in the Orthodox Christian understanding, both heaven and hell are not spatial, but relational.

The goal of the Christian is not to "get to heaven" as to a locale, but rather to grow into deepening communion with God by receiving sonship through the Holy Spirit, beginning in this life and continuing forever. Similarly, the Church does not see herself as sending people to heaven or hell, any more than God sends people there. Rather, the Church is the hospital for sinners, preparing people for the experience that all will have in the presence of God. The only real question is what effect seeing

God will have on us.

The Orthodox understanding is that heaven and hell are primarily states of the human soul. What makes them what they are is our individual response to God's love, whereby God is either included or excluded from our being. In this present life, we can experience a foretaste of heaven as we live in communion with God, regardless of our physical circumstances. Jesus says, "For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (St. Luke 17:21).

Remember

Theosis is the teaching of transformation to become like Christ, doing the things that he did and becoming sons of God in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. The essence of Orthodox Christianity is the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" and the "deification" of man by the grace of God, or theosis.

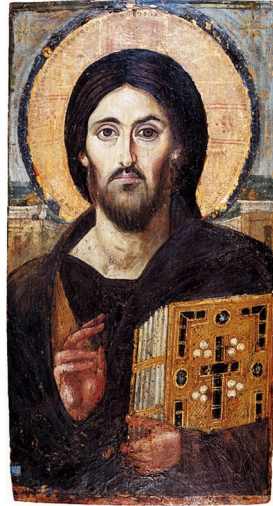


We can also experience a foretaste of hell by excluding Him from our lives: "but he who does not believe is condemned already" (St. John 3:18). In either case, it is neither a change in our physical location nor a change in God's attitude that determines our soul's state; it is our own choice (free-will).

Theosis is the process that brings a deepening communion with God, and the perfect model of unity and love is seen in the Holy Trinity. As we can see,

the entire basis of our life in this world and in the world to come is founded in the Holy Trinity.

Summary



Everything in the Orthodox Faith is centred on Christ, who is fully man and fully God. And it is through Christ that we also centre our Faith and our life on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

As LL HG Yuhanon Mar Severios of Kochi Diocese in his article titled *Reksha* states: "Salvation is the life in Christ. Salvation has to be experienced in life in this world... Even if a sinner is placed in heaven, he can't stay there and he will run away. A sinner has no room in front of the holiness and luminance of God. The one without wedding dress will be cast out from the banquet." (San-

charikkunna Choondupalaka, Compiled by HG Dr. Yakob Mar Ireaneos, page 395). When one is fully aligned with the Holy Trinity, salvation becomes real and the Holy Trinity feels the happiness over him.

With this understanding of the Trinity, even the basic questions such as “what does it mean that God is love?” takes on a Trinitarian meaning. We say that God is love because God is three Persons in an eternal relationship of love, oneness, and unity. Love is relational and everlasting. Its fulfilment is perfect harmony and unity of persons. Thus the only One

who truly is love by nature, who is love in His very essence, is God the Trinity.

For us as Christians, we must be like God the Father as this was the new commandment of Christian life “to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” or theosis (**St. Matthew 5:48**). We need to be like God and to love God and our neighbour as Christ Himself has loved (**St. Mark 12:28–34**) and to bear the Cross (**St. Matthew 16:24–26**). And we need to be like God the Holy Spirit and bring forth the fruit (**Galatians 5:22–23**).

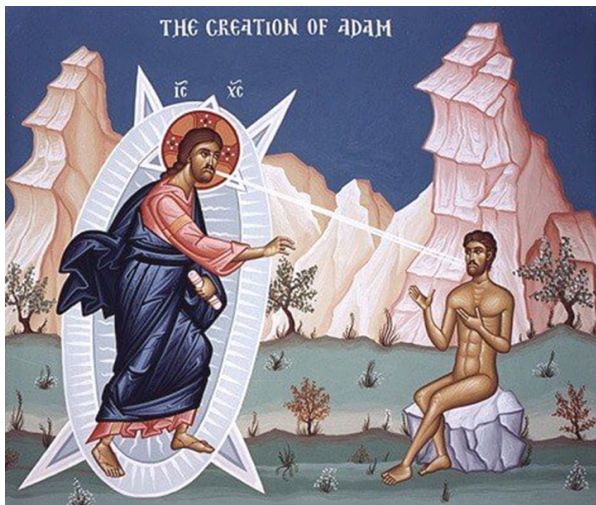
Reflection Questions

1. Arian theology holds that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten by God the Father with the difference that the Son of God did not always exist but was begotten made before “time” by God the Father. Explain how this heresy incorrectly teaches that Jesus was not coeternal with God the Father and therefore would not be “fully God. In your explanation, defend that the Holy Trinity is uncreated, self-existent, eternal, adorable and of one substance.
2. Reflecting on how St. Gregory of Nazianzus expressed that he “No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one.” How does this help us in our daily life think about the love of God? How important is making the Sign of the Cross with this in mind?
3. How can we model our life on the Trinity? Reflect on the following verses for the Father (**St. Matthew 5:48**), the Son (**St. John 15.12, St. Matthew 16:24**), and the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**)

Our Sacramental Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can relate to how the Church practices of fasting and prayer help us grow in God's image and likeness.*
- *I can defend against the negative influences of the world with a clearer understanding of the role of the Church in our salvation.*
- *I can appreciate the Liturgical calendar and how the Church provides these tools to help us in our spiritual growth.*



Creation of Adam

A Priestly Vocation

The Syriac tradition teaches us about the beautiful connection between God's love for His creation and our true calling as His children. Renowned scholar on Holy Liturgy Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese, in his book "West Syrian Liturgical Theology," elaborates on this by stating that liturgi-

cal worship is our vocation.

"For the West Syrians, worship is the vocation of man, the very purpose for which he was created. He was created to live in communion with God as a liturgical being".

This is summarised wonderfully In the evening prayers (Ramsho) on Friday-

Friday Vespers : Second Qolo

*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 prais-es
Hallelu-iah w'Ha-lleluiah, to his - creator .. Barekmor*

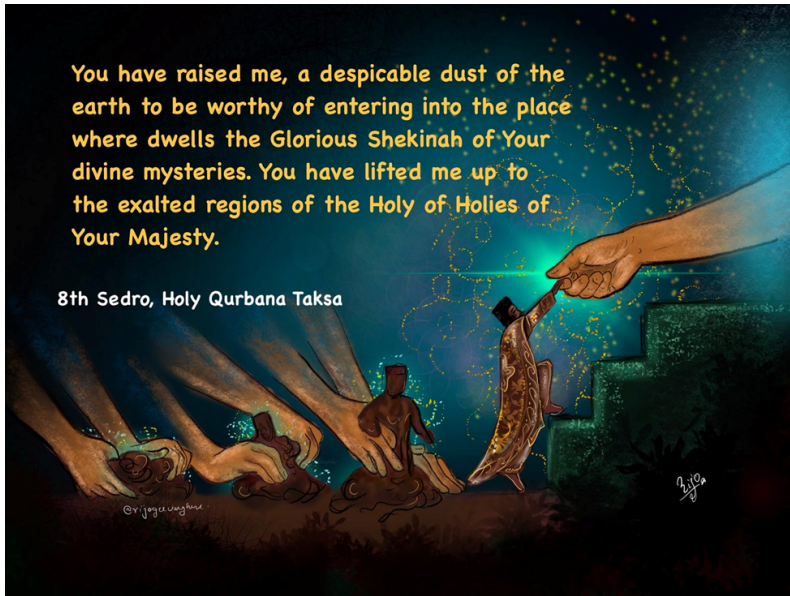
(Shrushtichenmel..)

Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese explains further that the Syriac tradition has a beautiful interpretation of "You created me and placed Your hands upon me" as meaning ordination. This is also reflected in Scripture - **"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** (1 Peter 2:9)

Adam (and in turn, all men and women) were created as priests to care for all of creation. A careful reading of Genesis clearly shows that we were created in God's image and likeness (**Genesis 1:26-27**) by taking dust and

breathing life (**Genesis 2:7**). God created a special paradise called Eden and placed man there for a purpose (**Genesis 2:8**) which was summarised in **Genesis 1:28-30**. The Syriac tradition illuminates that this purpose extends beyond just caring for the world. He created us to stand before God, representing the creation and be in communion with Him.

From Fr. Baby Varghese, "Adam was created as a priest, with a vocation to stand before God on behalf of the whole creation. Adam's vocation was to offer praise to the creator as a representative, as a 'priest' of the creation. Thus, Adam's life in Paradise was a liturgical life, which consisted of 'watching, fasting, prayer,



and sacrifices of righteousness.’ Paradise was a ‘sanctuary’ where God was present, and Adam was led to the ‘sanctuary’ as a priestly guardian.”

The Fall of Man brought sin and death into the world (**Genesis 3**), but one thing that never faltered was God’s Love. God’s plan for us also did not change, and our vocation remains. Our vocation is to be with God and worship Him so that God can grant us salvation, which is healing. Thus, we grow in holiness and progress towards theosis. The other reason for God to call us is that we can extend healing to the broken world. Jesus called the twelve also for the same reason. **St. Mark 3: 14-15** reads:

Bible Verse

“Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.”

St. Mark 3: 14-15

Worshipping God includes prayers and other spiritual disciplines. The Church continues to teach us these spiritual disciplines and leads us through the Sacraments as tools to help us grow in Christ, even in this fallen world. He heals us and uses the ministry of the Church to heal the broken world. This is our commission and vocation. The Church constantly reminds us that we

are created in God's image, and by following her teachings, we will grow in God's likeness (theosis). This understanding brings a positive and negative way of traversing the world.

Positive Mental Influence: All spiritual disciplines have a positive mental influence. Spiritual disciplines are twofold. The physical disciplines and mental disciplines. The Church teaches that mental disciplines are difficult to master. Therefore, one has to start with physical disciplines, which is mastering our body. This is the way for us to grow and master our mind. If we consider eating healthy and engaging in physical fitness activities to keep our bodies and minds sharp, and to fight against the negative impacts of gluttony, then it is a positive worldly influence that is supported through Holy Scripture:

Bible Verse

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

1 Corinthians 6:19

A healthy body encompasses a healthy mind, and such a mind will carry the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) and gifts of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 7-11**).

Negative Mental Influence: An obsession for body image focuses on the external and on what others may think or presume about oneself. These lead to unhealthy outcomes, including envy or jealousy of those depicted to have the desirable physiques. On the contrary, chasing the goals rooted in the Church and scripture could save us from a spiralling quest that may have harmful effects on our mental state and well-being.

Think

Adam (and in turn, all men and women) were created as priests to care for all of creation. What are some things we can actively do to care for creation?



The Meaning of the Ordo or Order

The more we connect our purpose with a liturgical understanding, we see God's plan in everything. Understanding the term 'ordo' or an order is helpful in this context. In Liturgy, the ordo is how we celebrate. While those outside the Church may see this as rigid or meaningless rules and repetition, what the Church teaches us is Divine patterns and purpose.

Fr. Baby Varghese explains, "Ordo is an ordering of a vision; it expresses the mind of the community. It orders and orients the community, by assigning each member his/her role and function in the celebration. In the Syrian Or-

thodox liturgy, there is no place for passive participation. Each member ‘celebrates’ with a prayer, hymn, gesture, or movement. Ordo implies the presence and participation of the people. Thus the meaning of the ordo is inseparable from that of the Church. The ordo enacts the vocation of the Church as ‘a royal priesthood’ which offers “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:9).

The goal of the ordo is to make worship the expression of the faith of the Church or to actualize the Church as the people of God, the worshipping community. Different elements have been arranged as a consistent whole precisely for the self-realisation of the Church. Ordo is a theologically inspired ‘language’ by which the Church expresses itself. It actualizes as the fulfilment of the ‘mystery of God,’ which was hidden and is finally revealed in Christ. Each element, whether it is time, texts, gestures, or symbols, is rooted in and reflects the mystery of God.”

Remember

The more we connect our purpose with a liturgical understanding, we see God’s plan in everything.



These are the Divine patterns in all that we do in the Church. This includes the Liturgical calendar that we use in Holy Qurbana, which is chosen to help us in our worship and bring us closer to God

and His Purpose for us.

Fasting is another tool that is given to us by the Church. During the liturgical year, there are several periods of fasting. Fasting also provides us with periods of respite and mental/spiritual preparation for our ultimate purpose, salvation. The Church uses fasting as both a sharp spiritual weapon and armour to protect against what could spiritually weaken us. St. Paul exhorts us to put on the armour of God (**Ephesians 6:10-18**). Fasting is the armour of God and it helps us prepare ourselves for self-examination for a cure from all sinful infections. Confession and reconciliation with God through Holy Qurbana is the ultimate means and medicine for this healing. In short, fasting is liberation from our enslavement to all damaging desires and passions.

There are multiple avenues of fasting: For example, fasting from social media, fasting from all kinds of talking for a period of time, which is the fasting of silence; fasting from sleep for a period of time, which is the vigil; fasting to read more from the Holy Bible, to pray from the silent personal prayers from Pampakuda Namaskaaram, fasting to do more charity, which is the kindness of servant hood towards the creation etc. Once we fast from spiritual distractions and fast for more virtues, we come closer to God and God comes closer to us (cf. **James 4:7-10**)

The following fasting guidelines are prescribed for Orthodox Christians, especially during Lenten periods:

- abstaining from food altogether for periods of the day, typically mornings
- abstaining from luxurious foods, such as meats and dairy, throughout a fasting season
- also abstaining from conjugal behaviour for married couples, alcohol, not going to the movies or certain avoidable celebrations. This is why the Church does not permit weddings

during Holy Lent.

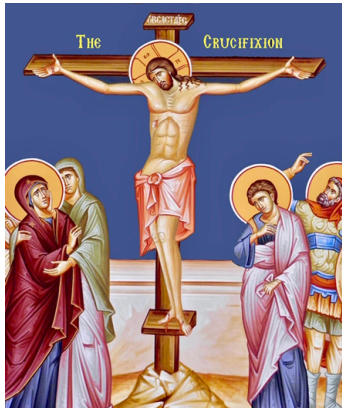
Our Return to Paradise

As mentioned earlier, God's love for us never faltered, even with the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man.

We hear this in the Friday Ramsho prayers as well:

*On Friday, the Lord - of creation stretched His hands
On the Cross - and of His own will
Tasted death and not the fruit Adam - ate
Halleleu-iah w'Ha-lleluiah, He re-stored Adam*

(Kani bakshichaadaam..)



Crucifixion

To quote Fr. Baby Varghese, “The Fall consisted in his failure to fulfil his ‘priestly’ vocation. Instead of ‘ministering’ to God, that is, to stand before God

in an attitude of trust and thanksgiving - the content of communion - he did not believe in God's promise. Thus the Fall was also a failure to fulfil his liturgical vocation. According to the West Syrians, the purpose of the Incarnation was to ‘teach man true worship’ and thus to restore the broken relationship.”

As mentioned earlier, our life in Paradise was a Sacramental life where we would grow and transform through close communion with God and true worship, i.e., the “watching, fasting, prayer, and sacrifices of righteousness”.

The Tuesday Sapro of the Sh'himo illustrates this beautifully by reflecting on the Good Thief (Luke 23: 39-43), who was promised by Christ, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (v43).

Tuesday Matins : Second Qolo

*O thief, speak of the beauty
Of paradise for our sakes -
And show us the tree of life
That we may pluck its first-fruits
Of watching, fasting, and pray'r -
And righteous sacrifices*

(Moshtave nee..)



The penitent thief

As Fr. Baby Varghese reflects further, “Liturgy gives us ‘the first fruits’ of Paradise, a foretaste of the joyful life in the presence of God. Paradise was a ‘sanctuary’ where God was present, and Adam was led to the ‘sanctuary’ as a priestly guardian. When he failed to fulfil his vocation, he was expelled from Paradise. Worship is the expression of our longing (‘nostalgia’) to live in communion with

God and to regain our former inheritance and dwelling place.”

Conclusion

We often think of Sacraments as events in our life - our Baptism, when we partake in the Holy Qurbana, when we go to our Achen for Confession, etc. In this context, it is very often heard that there are only seven Sacraments in the Orthodox Church.

However, this is different from the ancient understanding of the Orthodox Faith as a sacrament being a mystery where a transformation happens because of God. As Fr. Thomas Hopko explains, “The more ancient and traditional practice of the Orthodox Church is to consider everything which is in and of the Church as sacramental or mystical. The Church as the gift of eternal life is by its very nature, in its fullness and entirety, a mystical and sacramental reality. It is the life of the Kingdom of God given already to those who believe. And thus, within the Church, everything we do—our prayers, blessings, good works, thoughts, actions—everything participates in the life which has no end. In this sense everything which is in the Church and of the Church is a sacrament of the Kingdom of God.”

Liturgy or Holy Qurbana is the basis of our life as it is the reflection of our eternal life. The Sacraments provide us the means through which we can transform and grow to be like God (theosis), and the tools of the Church that include fasting, prayer, Scripture reading (including the Liturgical readings), and stewardship all point towards this intimate Communion with God. Once we see these patterns, we understand our life is indeed Sacramental, and our goal is to be One in Christ.

Reflect

“Fasting is liberation from our enslavement to all damaging desires and passions.” What are some desires and passions that may be enslaving you?

Reflection Questions

1. Examine how fasts of Wednesday, Friday, Nineveh and Great Lent are penitential fasts while the others are intercessory, commemorative of those events, and in spiritual preparation. What are some ways each fast changes our bodies and minds in ways beyond the physical?
2. Defend how obeying the teachings and instructions of the Church should not be thought in legalistic terms where punishment occurs if we do not follow, but rather in an eternal manner with Communion with God as our goal.
3. How can the world entangle us? Are there things we deem innocent, but upon further inspection, could ensnare or trap us from our true purpose and vocation?

The Liturgical Calendar

Lesson Goals :

- *I can develop a deeper understanding of our Salvation and Purpose as Christians through the Scripture Readings of the Festal/Sunday Liturgies.*
- *I can understand the Relevance of Scripture in the Festal/Sunday Liturgies of the Church.*
- *I can see the Liturgical Calendar allows for better understanding of the Tones, and their Deeper Relationship to the Liturgical Life of the Church.*
- *I can illustrate the purpose and goal of the fasting seasons of the Church.*



Our Liturgical Calendar

The Liturgical Calendar in the Malankara Orthodox Church was created to guide the faithful in their spiritual life throughout the year. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the calendar was established during the early days of Christianity. We have adopted the calendar from the Syrian Orthodox Church but there are changes made for local and national convenience over time.

The calendar in its basic state follows the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, with special commemorations of Fasts and Feasts throughout the year. Major Feasts are typically associated with major historic events, especially in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Malankara

Orthodox Church's liturgical year is divided into seven cycles based on the six major Feasts: Nativity of our Lord (Yeldo) on December 25; Baptism of our Lord (Denaha) on January 6; Resurrection (Qyamtha) on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, variable; Transfiguration (Mtale) on August 6; Dormition of the Theotokos (Shoonoyo) on August 15, and Feast of the Holy Cross (Sleeba) on September 14.

The Calendar does not start on January 1, but typically at the end of October or early November with the Feast of the Consecration of the Church, or **Koodosh 'Edtho**, and the Feast of the Dedication of the Church, or **Hudoth 'Idtho**. The Fathers of the Church were

particular in starting the calendar with these Feasts. As Saint Paul writes to the Corinthians, “the Church is the Body of Christ or the Temple of God.” Saint Paul makes it clear that we, as followers of Christ, are members of Christ’s Body. We give high reverence to places of prayer and worship; to do this, the place must be clean. Likewise, we must also be clean as well as dedicated. The Sanctification of the Church reminds us to look within ourselves and be clean, not only physically, but spiritually as well. The Church gives us the opportunity to re-examine ourselves and see if we are still on the Christian path. Are there aspects of our lives that need to be cleaned up? Are we continually working towards salvation? Are we truly reflecting the image of God in our lives? The Life of the Church gives us that opportunity every year. These two Sundays can be considered as preparation for the entry into the liturgical year.

The Calendar progresses into the Advent Season with various events in the Nativity narrative like the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and Birth of John the Baptist, leading up to the great mystery of the Nativity or the Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ on December 25. The specific Gospel passages throughout these days remind us of the Old Testament prophecies, as well as recall different historical events leading up to the birth of our Saviour, which are essential to the salvation history of humankind.

As we progress through the Advent

Season and celebrate the Feast of Nativity, the Calendar looks at events through Christ’s infancy and His pre-ministry days. Notable Feasts are the Slaughter of the Infants (December 27), the Circumcision of our Lord (January 1), the Epiphany/Theophany of the Lord (January 6) and the Presentation of our Lord into the Temple (February 2). The Feast of *Denaha*, or the Baptism of Christ, is a major Feast in the life of the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to John at the Jordan to be baptised. At the time of the Baptism of Christ, the Holy Trinity was manifested. “*He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*” (St. Matthew 3: 16-17, St. Luke 3:22) This gave testament that Jesus Christ, in flesh, truly is the Son of God. All four Gospels recall this, and they are read in the Theophany/*Denaha* Liturgy. St. Paul teaches us that the baptism of Jesus Christ is a foreshadowing of His death. Symbolically, Christ’s descent into the River Jordan foreshadowed His descent into Sheol upon His death. St. Athanasius (*On the Incarnation*) writes, “Christ came in His own person to do away with death and corruption so that men might be renewed according to the image of God. Man was created in the likeness and image of God, and through Christ, Man is returned back to that state.”

The festival of Annunciation to St. Mary by Angel Gabriel on March 25 is an extremely important festival in the

Church Calendar. Even if the day falls on Great Friday, Holy Qurbana must be celebrated.

The next major events in the Liturgical Calendar are the Nineveh Fast and the Great Lent. These fasting times prepare us for the greatest feast, the Feast of the Resurrection. The period of the Great Lent has specific scripture reading for every day which allows for more time in prayer. Fasting, without prayer is useless and it is important to practise both diligently. The Church gives us both during the Lenten Season. The purpose of the Great Lent is for the faithful to prepare and participate in the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. The increased time spent in prayer and meditation to re-examine ourselves, striving for purification of heart, spiritual perfection, repentance and finding the love between God and Man. This time is used to accept the calling of our Saviour and establish the path towards our salvation.

On Sundays specifically, during Great Lent, the lectionary focuses on the mercy of Christ, through His miracles. Miracles include the Wedding at Cana, the Healing of the Leper, the Healing of the Paralytic, the Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman, the Healing of the Crippled Woman, and the Healing of the man born Blind. And through these life-changing encounters in which Christ's power is in full evidence, we are presented with the opportunity to grow to a fuller understanding of our own healing and salvation. As we continue our journey towards the Holy Cross, we

are reminded of Christ's compassionate mercy towards us. Through His Resurrection, we are reunited with God and receive the gospel of salvation for humankind as we participate in Christ's victory over death.

After the glorious Feast of the Resurrection, the two major Feasts in the Church Calendar are Ascension and Pentecost. The Feast of Ascension is celebrated on the fortieth day after the Great and Holy Feast of the Resurrection. Christ made His last appearance on earth, forty days after His Resurrection. Our Lord Jesus led His disciples to the Mount of Olives, and after blessing them and asking them to wait for the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, He ascended into heaven. Since the date of Resurrection changes each year, the date of the Feast of the Ascension changes. The Feast is always celebrated on a Thursday.

The Feast of Holy Pentecost is celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Great and Holy Feast of Resurrection and ten days after the Feast of the Ascension of Christ. The Feast is always celebrated on a Sunday. The Feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on each and every one of us. It also celebrates the establishment of the Church in the world through the preaching of the Apostles and the baptism of the thousands who on that day believed in the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apos-

tles assembled in the upper room and their subsequent address to those who had gathered outside began the spread of Christianity. The apostles travelled to various places to preach the Good News of the Resurrection of Christ. The Apostle Thomas brought the Gospel to India, founded the Holy Church, which paved the way for the establishment of Malankara Orthodox Church in India.

After the Feast of Pentecost, the Church enters the period which includes the Fast of the Holy Apostles (June 16-29) and ends with the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29. During this time, the Church calls us to keep this fast according to the example of the holy Apostles, celebrate their work, and their lives so that we can grow closer to Christ and carry out His Great Commission in the world.

After the Season of the Apostles, the Church celebrates the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 15) and her nativity (September 8). During this time, the Church celebrates another major Feast, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, where Christ's glory is revealed to the Apostles Peter, James, and John. In addition, we are reminded of how Christ's glory is beyond our comprehension and only possible through His sacrifice on the Cross.

Finally, the Church celebrates and enters the Season of the Cross on September 14, when the Church celebrates The Feast of the Exaltation of the Life-Giving Cross. This Feast commemorates the discovery of the true cross of our Lord Je-

sus Christ by Saint Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. It is not simply about how the True Cross of Christ was discovered, but also that the Cross of Christ is central to our faith. This Feast also gives the Church an opportunity to relish the full glory of the Cross as a source of light, hope and victory for God's people.

There is a traditional bifurcation of the Liturgical Year into Qyamtha period starting from Resurrection to Sleeba Perunnal and the Sleeba period the rest of the year. This is pertinent to Malankara Tradition, which we uphold seriously.

Holy Scripture in Liturgy

A common criticism of the Orthodox Church is that we are not a "Bible based" Church, but the reality is the Holy Bible is used extensively in the Liturgy of our Church. The early Christians adopted the practice of Scripture reading from the Jewish custom of reading extracts from the Old Testament on the Sabbath. The early Christians soon added extracts from the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists to the Liturgy. The readings for the entire liturgical calendar is found in the lectionary - which is a cycle of biblical readings for the church year. Our Holy Fathers of the Church were very meticulous about the verses selected and the placement of the verses in the services.

For example, Psalm 51, the Psalm of repentance, is recited at the beginning of every evening prayer (Ramsho) and

morning prayer (Sapro). Every service in the Malankara Orthodox Church usually begins with Psalm 51, where we begin by acknowledging that we have sinned and ask God for mercy. There are also Old Testament readings, which we can see referenced in hymns and specific Promeon/Sedre of the Church. Just before the start of the Holy Qurbana, the Old Testament passages are read. The first passage read is from the books of Moses (Torah); the second book is taken from either a historical book or one of the books of wisdom. The third and final reading is taken from the prophets. Once the Holy Qurbana commences, after the procession and Trisagion, the acolyte stands one step above from where the faithful stand and reads. Standing one step above from the faithful is to denote the ministry of teaching from the writings of the Church. There are two readings - one reading taken from the Acts of the Holy Apostles or the General Epistles (gospel to the Jews) that is read from the left side of the altar (north-west corner), followed by the reading from the Pauline epistles (gospel to the gentiles) from the right side of the altar (south-west corner). Then, the celebrant reads the Gospel from the middle of the altar (universal reach of Christ's teaching).

Lectionary

Now with the calendar established, the Church Fathers also put together a **lectionary**. The lectionary guides the faith-

ful through the rhythm of seasons providing relevant readings from the scripture that provide spiritual nourishment for the soul. Lectionary has specific Bible passages that correspond to the theme of the day and tell the historical event that occurred, through the epistle readings and the Gospel read on the day. The Old Testament readings of each feast have some connection to the New Testament readings. The link between the Old Testament and New Testament readings usually represent a **typology**. Typology in biblical exegesis is a doctrine concerning the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament. Events, persons, or statements in the Old Testament are seen as types prefiguring or superseded by antitypes, events or aspects of Christ or His revelation described in the New Testament. These Scripture passages are selected based on the feast day.

The lectionary is another tool that the Church has for us to grow spiritually and grow towards perfection. Every Church has an official lectionary containing Scripture readings that are read in the services according to the cycles of the liturgical year. The beauty of being part of the Church is the organisation of the calendar, especially through the lectionary. The Church follows this strict order and bases the entire set of services around this order. Even the homily is based on the event of the particular Sunday or the Feast of the day. Every parish follows the same calendar, which has been handed down to us through the Church Fathers who were inspired

by the Holy Spirit. This allows for unity amongst the members even though they do not attend the same parish but belong to the Orthodox Church.

Along with the Liturgical Calendar, there are tones that are set for every day. The Orthodox Church is unique, having a completely sung liturgy. Everything is sung from the very beginning to the end. The Octoechos (The Hymns of the Cycle of the Eight Tones for Sundays and Weekdays) covers each of the eight tones, or melodic patterns, together with its accompanying hymns, sung throughout all the services for the seven days of the week and Feasts, beginning on Saturday evening. Two complementary melodies are used for chanting of hymns in a week, then another, rotating through the set of four according to an established system through the liturgical calendar. Music for a feast is set to a fixed melody appropriate to the occasion. Traditionally, the use of musical instruments is avoided in liturgical services. Variation helps reduce the repetitive nature in the hymns but are still organised in a way that is deliberate and calculated. Themes can even be seen in the hymns due to the varying musical key structures of each specific tone. Some tones bring feelings of happiness and joy during feasts while others help to bring sombre feelings, especially during times of fasting. By utilising a structured system, the entire worshipping congregation can participate in the hymns of the Festal services and Holy Qurbana. This safeguards the sanctity and purpose

of liturgical music - teaching the theology of the church to the faithful.

In the Malankara Church, we have eight tones. Every Sunday, the tone of the day changes to the next in sequential order until there is a reset when a new season in the liturgical calendar begins. Typically Tone One is used for feasts such as the Nativity and Resurrection. This reset of our tonal structure according to these great feasts also allows us to see the importance of these feasts. Following the reset, the tones follow in sequential order as normal. Other patterns can be seen with the tonal structure as well. One major pattern is seen at the beginning of the liturgical calendar, from *Qoodosh 'Idtho*, the first day of the liturgical calendar. Being the first day, the Church starts with Tone One and continues this pattern for Eight Sundays, which leads to the week of Nativity. Every Sunday is assigned a different tone leading to a tone reset at the feast of the Nativity. Great Lent also follows a similar pattern leading to the Resurrection, the First Sunday of Lent is assigned Tone One and every Sunday from there changes in a sequential pattern to a tone reset at Resurrection Sunday. Church music and tones require in us a longing to know God and to possess a desire to behold Him portrayed in our song. It requires that we be true to Christ, for in singing and chanting we become witnesses to the Truth.

What is the aim of the Calendar, the lectionary, and the tonal structure in the Church? We cannot understand

the mystery of Christ through just intellect. A person must experience Christ through prayers, liturgy, tradition that have been handed down, and experiences, to be truly united with God. The church shows us various ways to encounter God. The calendar takes a year to complete a full cycle and then is repeated. The repeated experiences help us to gradually improve our growth towards salvation. As we continue on the path of salvation, we must always keep in mind that we are continually walking towards God, experiencing the life of His Son in our life, and that through His Spirit we will finally return to paradise.

Fasting

The Church observes multiple fasts for the faithful as fasting redirects our lives toward God and reminds us of our dependence on Him. Fasting also aids us in attaining salvation. One of the Lenten hymns illustrates this beautifully when it tells us to begin the fast with joy. It tells us that if we only fast from food and not from our passions, we fast in vain. The true fast, it says, rejects evil, silences the tongue, lays aside anger, and cuts off all malice. Traditionally, the Orthodox Church fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, except the eighteen days prior to the Great Lent and during the seven week period from Resurrection to Pentecost. We also fast daily during the five Fasting Seasons, and from midnight whenever planning to receive Holy Communion. We fast on Wednes-

days because it is the day Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, betrayed Jesus Christ. We fast on Fridays, because it is the day when our Lord Jesus Jesus was crucified.. The only occasion when the Fast is not observed is when the Feast of the Lord falls on a Wednesday or a Friday.

There are five Canonical fasts observed in the Church - the Nineveh Fast, the Great Lent, the Apostles' Fast, the Dormition Fast, and the Nativity Fast.

Nineveh Fast The three day fast of Nineveh commemorates the three days that Prophet Jonah spent inside the belly of the Great Fish and the subsequent fast and repentance of the Ninevites at the warning message of the prophet Jonah. This fast takes place three weeks before the Great and Holy Fast.

Great Lent A fifty day fasting period is the time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. During these fasts, the faithful refrain from non-vegetarian foods and dairy, and spend more time in prayer and almsgiving. The goal of the Fast is not just dietary restrictions, but the aim is to subjugate our will to God through chastity and practice of virtues, especially the virtue of obedience to God's commandments. It is also a time of prayer, a real renewal of our minds, hearts and deeds in conformity with Christ and his teachings.

Apostles' Fast Though the duration of the Apostles' fast differs in length based on the eastern Calendar of Easter, the Malankara Orthodox Church observes the Apostles' Fast for thirteen days. Originally starting the day after Pentecost and ending with the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Apostles' Fast in the Malankara Orthodox Church is now fixed for thirteen days starting on June 16 and takes leave on June 29, with the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Dormition Fast Dormition or *Shunoyo* Fast was established as preceding the great feasts of the Transfiguration of the Lord and of the Dormition of the Mother of God. It lasts two weeks—from August 1-15.

Nativity Fast A joyous fast in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. Though the Fast was originally observed for forty days, in the Malankara Orthodox Church, we now observe the Nativity Fast for twenty-five days beginning from December 1 and take leave from the Fast on December 25, when the Church celebrates the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary

The Church developed the Liturgical Calendar to help us remember the Life of Christ every hour, day and week of the year. This helps us to grow to be more and more like Christ every moment of our lives.

Reflection Questions

1. Why does the liturgical calendar start with the Feast of Qoodosh Idtho?
2. How are the Bible Readings for each Sunday or Feast Day selected?
3. What are the Canonical Fasts of the Malankara Orthodox Church? What is the purpose of these Fasting Seasons?
4. What are the tones in the Orthodox Church? Why do we use tones? What purpose does the tones serve in liturgical music?

The Importance of Christian Symbolism

Lesson Goals :

- *I can appreciate liturgical life as a taste of heavenly reality.*
- *I can analyse various symbols in the Church.*
- *I can defend how the Holy Cross symbolises Christ.*
- *I can relate how symbols are not merely representations but tie to our life.*



Symbols are objects that convey a message that transcend the limits of language. Symbols also help to point us to a reality or message that is greater than the symbol itself. Symbols have come from different cultures, regions, and times. As Christianity grew, symbols became understood to represent significant teachings of the Faith. Symbols are ways in which we can perceive God's redemptive acts through His Creation. Through this perception, understanding, and participation we enter into communion with God.

The reason why symbols have such a significant place in our worship is explained by St. John of Damascus. He states, "Since not everybody is literate or has the leisure for reading, the fathers acknowledged that these should be depicted in images as memorials to serve as

a concise reminder" (St. John of Damascus, *On Images*). We utilise both the written word and symbolism in sacraments, iconography and Church architecture. This is done to convey the faith to people so that we will always have God in our hearts and minds.

Our Church is full of symbols that improve the quality of our experience in prayer and liturgy. Symbols enhance our participation in the life of Christ and His Church. Some symbols or images we see in the church are the Holy Cross, the dove, a lamb, etc.. By entering into a church, one can observe symbols in the architecture, colours, icons, and vestments. These symbols and images are not about that object itself, but points to a larger, spiritual reality. For example, when we see an image of a dove in the church on the wall or on the priest's vest-

ments, it should point us to the truth of the descent of the Holy Spirit who dwells in all of us.

The Holy Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is not just a symbol. During the Holy Qurbana, the bread and wine are mystically transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. To outsiders this is seen as a mere symbol, but to the faithful, this is the actual body and blood of the Lord. The act of receiving Holy Commu-

nion commemorates the Mystical Supper, when our Lord commanded His disciples, "...do this in remembrance of me" (St. Luke 22:19). In addition, the Holy Eucharist is the participation for the faithful to enter into heavenly worship. Throughout all of Scripture, prophets and Apostles have shared visions they have seen of the worship that takes place before God. One prominent example can be seen in the book of Isaiah which states,

“

"...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. The house was full of His glory. Around Him stood seraphim each one had six wings with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.' The lintel was lifted up by the voice of those who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said, 'Woe is me, because I am pierced to the heart, for being a man and having unclean lips, I dwell in the midst of people with unclean lips; for I saw the King, the Lord of hosts, with my eyes!' Then one of the seraphim was sent to me. He had a live coal in his hand, which he took with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth, and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips. Your lawlessness is taken away, and your sin is cleansed' "

Isaiah 6:1-7

”

The vision shows a clear connection that the heavenly worship that the prophet witnessed and partook in is the same worship that is witnessed during the Holy Eucharist.

A prominent symbol of Christianity is the Holy Cross. The imagery of the cross had been foreshadowed since the time of Moses. In the Book of Numbers, the Israelites spoke against God and Moses as they were travelling through

the desert. God punished them by having venomous snakes bite them. Moses was commanded by God to make a copper serpent and put it on a pole. The people admitted their wrongdoing and once they looked at the copper serpent they were healed (**Numbers 21:4-9**). In the Gospel of St. John, Christ explains to Nicodemus the imagery of the copper serpent, "...as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son

of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (St. John 3:14-16).

The cross during the rule of the Roman Empire was a symbol of death. The purpose of this public display was to dissuade others from committing crimes. The condemned would be stripped naked and left to hang on the cross. The design of the cross was to bind people with their arms spread out. This method of execution was meant to be slow, gruelling, embarrassing, humiliating, and excruciating. The crucifixion of Christ was meant to deter his followers, but after His Resurrection, it stopped being a symbol of death and despair. Once seen as a symbol of crime, humiliation, and fear, the symbol of the Cross was changed through Christ to be a sign of victory. Now when we look at the Cross

of Jesus Christ in the Church, we are reminded of his Passion and the salvation the Cross offers us through our Lord who hung on it.

As seen in a hymn from the *She'himo* prayers for Friday morning, the Cross became a symbol that represents Christ.

Friday Matins : Eniyono

*The Cross is the sign of
peace
And the sign of victory
By the Cross we have
been saved
And in it we all glory.*

(Shuba chinnam..)

St. Ephrem the Syrian, shows the close relationship between the Cross and the Lord Jesus Christ in the following hymns:

Hymns on Faith, Hymn 84:1

*The thief possessed faith that faith which possessed him
and it raised him up and placed him in paradise.
He saw in the cross the Tree of Life*

Hymns on Faith, Hymn 6

*His Son sowed and planted.
In the one Tree of Life,
the planter depicted his likeness*

The planter that the Syrian saint refers to is Christ Himself, and the Tree of Life is a symbol of the Cross of Christ.

In addition, St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius (Vattasseril Thirumeni), a saint of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, stated that, “When we adore before the cross, it amounts to adoring the Lord who was crucified, and His death on the cross” (Basic Doctrines, 2006, pg. 62). We adore the Cross because it is the Cross of our Lord, and by adoring it, we adore Him.

The experience of Christianity is enhanced by symbols. These symbols can be seen not only physically in the Church but also in our prayers and worship as shown above.. Through symbols, we are able to experience Christ on a deeper level. This allows us to have a glimpse of the heavenly reality, while we are on Earth. Symbols help us enter into heavenly worship helping our spiritual eyes to be opened to the realities of Christ’s salvation and His Holy Church.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some other symbols in the Church that were not specifically mentioned in this lesson?
2. How have symbols brought you closer to God? How have symbols deepened your faith in God?
3. What are some symbols you can use to help people who do not know about the Orthodox Church understand our faith?

The Sanctity of Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can appreciate the complexities involved in dealing with ethical issues*
- *I can empathise with those who have to make decisions in these difficult situations like death penalty, suicide, stem cell research, embryonic stem cell research, cloning, etc., while applying the intrinsic value of sanctity of life.*



“For You possess my heart, O Lord; You took hold of me from my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, For I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and my soul knows this very well. My bone You made in secret was not hidden from You. And my substance was in the lowest parts of the earth; Your eyes saw me when I was unformed” (Psalm **138:13-16**). We can paraphrase these verses like; “The Lord is Lord of everything and I am His handiwork. I can’t be hidden from Him anywhere. ‘Anyone who holds the conviction of King David that God is the Lord of human life knows the depth of sanctity of life.

The society we live in has advanced in ways that may have not been imagined

by King David and the early Christians. It is as if we hear about new scientific advancements and related ethical dilemmas every day. Today we may ask questions like, “what does the Church teach about this subject and why?” While the Church does not have explicitly new teachings, there are different expressions of age-old teachings and specific questions related thereto with new characteristics.

The Church has always maintained a consistent life ethic. Fr. John Breck writes in his book ‘God with us’, “Orthodoxy holds that every human being, without exception, is created in the image of God and bears the Divine image from conception to the grave.”¹

Secular systems also try to be involved

¹Breck, John. “A Consistent Life Ethic.” Essay. In *God with Us: Critical Issues in Christian Life and Faith*, 27. Crestwood, N.Y, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003.

in the sanctity of human life. Therefore, questions like the following gain importance in the context of the life of a faithful: “Does the secular society I live in help me become a better Orthodox Christian in the context of the sanctity of life or is there a secular society that allows the flourishing of Orthodox Christian life and morality?” With these questions in mind, we look into the three different modes of ethical thinking: *teleological*, where the ends justify the means; *deontological*, where there is a lack of trust in human beings so we need rules and commands, and lastly, *virtue*, where we trust human beings to find the right way. The Church is a combination of these three modes of ethical thinking. The Church has commandments and canons but ultimately it is virtue-teleological. St. Paul tells us, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” (**Ephesians 5:1**). Along with this exhortation, the Church has a set of commandments and canons which can be applied at different levels and in different situations.

Our goal as Orthodox Christians is to inaugurate the Kingdom of God to the present world. To do this, we start with an ethos that affirms life. The Scriptures consistently emphasise that living a Godly life is life itself while living an ungodly life is death. Christ says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (**St. John 14:6**) and, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (**St. John 14:15**). We can't just claim that we choose life; we have to choose to follow the way of Christ

and in doing so, we receive the gift of life. God's commandments and way of life come from a time when the Israelites only had the ten commandments, but we are given the divine commandments by Christ during His Sermon on the Mount (**St. Matthew 5-7**). Though Christ gives us the divine commandments, the root commandment comes from the Old Testament times. “...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life...” (**Deuteronomy 30:19**). This is the way of life in which we are called to walk. We are called to live a Christ-centred lifestyle that allows us to uphold the sanctity of life in all aspects of life.

The Church upholds that human life is a sacred gift from God which we are to care for in every manner. St. Paul clearly states “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (**1 Corinthians 6:15**) and “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Implications of knowing about the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit ranges from the effects of lust or anger in our life to specific issues such as the death penalty. When it comes to some ethical issues, there are a lot of grey areas in which one consults with their spiritual father. In other ethical issues such as the death penalty, the Church holds certain clear perspectives. The ending of

one's life is an absolute no but given the complex fallen world we live in, we try to comprehend all available angles.

These are extremely complex issues that the modern man is confronted with. The Church does not pretend to have ready-made solutions, but the Church relies on Christ and on the living Holy Spirit, who broods over the Church to lead her into new dimensions of Truth as we are able to in our era. In the trust in God and humility we attempt to look for answers for these extremely important and difficult issues before us.

Capital Punishment

The death penalty or capital punishment is “the process of sentencing one to death for the most serious crimes (capital crimes) and carrying out that sentence.”² Someone committing a capital crime is the reflection of a broken world. The root of capital punishment is founded on justice and revenge. Thus, through capital punishment a person or society wants to establish justice through revenge against the perpetrator of a capital crime. We can see from the Gospels that this is not what Christ teaches us. Christ says to us, “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (**St. Matthew 5:39**) and “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your

enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (**St. Matthew 5:43-44**). We are called to echo the words of Christ when He was sent for capital punishment, “Father, forgive them...” (**St. Luke 23:34**).

At the same time, the law and order system in the fallen world is a necessity in a civil society. “*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God*” (**Romans 13:1**). Capital punishment is part of the system in a broken and fallen world. May Christ heal us all from the brokenness in this world.

Suicide

Suicide refers to the act of ending one's life in an attempt to escape the prolonged, intense, and persistent experiences of hopelessness and psychological pain. Prior to an attempt, a person in this situation often struggles with frequent thoughts of death, unbearable pain, despair, and hopelessness. Our faith is one of hope. The God we worship is a God who has given us hope in the midst of suffering. In the Quqilion for the departed we sing, “The Life-Giving King” because God is the source of life and hope and it is only in Him that we have life and hope. The topic of suicide is a

²“Capital Punishment.” Bureau of Justice Statistics, bjs.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/capital-punishment.

heavy topic in which there are many factors to consider when trying to understand a person's reason to act on suicidal ideation. The person may not necessarily want to die but because the pain is so prolonged and intense, the idea of acting on the suicidal thoughts provides an apparent escape from the pain. What appears like a solution at that moment, is separate from Christ, who is the source of all life and hope. The Church has compassion for anyone who struggles with thoughts of suicide and supports them in seeking clinical mental health care services. It is important to know that anyone struggling with these thoughts is **not alone**. There are many resources for anyone struggling with these thoughts, including the clergy or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available in our country (Teacher, please find the details in your country and share with children). The Church fully supports clinical mental health care for anyone seeking it. Our Lord is a merciful Lord who loves each person without exception. The Church prays for God's compassion on anyone who is struggling with suicidal thoughts so that their despair may not lead them to act on these thoughts. If the tragedy of suicide occurs, the Church will continue to intercede for God's mercy on them. As the Psalmist said, "Because he has cried to me", says the Lord, "I will deliver him and strengthen him. Because he has

known my name, He shall call upon me and I will answer him, I will be with him in distress (**Psalm 91:14-15**).

The person acting on suicide loses hope in the mercy of Christ. However the Church teaches that whatever great our sin is or however grave our situation is, the mercy of Christ is able to overcome and help us is the teaching of the Church. LL His Grace Metropolitan Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, one of the greatest Church Fathers of our times, towards the end of his earthly life was unable to do many things on his own as he was paralysed and physically handicapped. It was a great source of frustration and anger to the man who was fiercely independent all his life. However his words even in those days provide us with a great source of encouragement - "Even in this situation of mine, in my utter helplessness, my God is able to bring good out of me and so I praise my God".

Stem Cell Research

Stem cell research involves the use of "cells from which all other cells with specialised functions are generated."³ There are two types of stem cells that are used, embryonic and adult. The embryonic stem cells come from embryos that are a few days old and adult stem cells come from a limited number of useful cells found in most adult tissues. The Scriptures clearly tell us that human life be-

³"Frequently Asked Questions about Stem Cell Research." Mayo Clinic. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, June 8, 2019. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/bone-marrow-transplant/in-depth/stem-cells/art-20048117>.

gins in the womb. The best example of this is when St. Mary visits St. Elizabeth. “And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (**St. Luke 1:44**). It is also seen in Isaiah, “Thus says the Lord God who made you, and formed you from the womb” (**Isaiah 44:2**). From the time of conception, one bears the image of God and this person created is one that is unique and personal to God. Fr. John Breck writes, “Genetic uniqueness is merely the physical or physiological counterpart to a deeper and more significant reality, which is the creation of a spiritual being in which soul and body are thoroughly integrated, one with the other...That created being qualifies as “personal”...because at every stage of human existence it bears and manifests the very image of the *personal* God.”⁴ Because the Church emphasises and fully believes that human life begins at conception, it does not condone the use of embryonic stem cells for research. The Synod of the Orthodox Church of America has reiterated St. Paul’s writing which says, “And why not say, “Let us do evil that good may come?”” (**Romans 3:8**). The act of destroying embryos

is evil and we should not try to profit from that evil act. The Church however does not condemn the use of adult stem cells particularly for therapeutic developments because it is not at the cost of human life.

Cloning

Cloning is the “deliberate production of genetically identical individuals.”⁵ As mentioned throughout this lesson, human life is a sacred gift given by God that begins at the moment of conception. Fr. John Breck poses a question for all of us to consider, “What is God’s role in the process of human procreation?”⁶ Everything we do in our lives is known by God, from the beginning of conception to the end of our lives. God is involved in the process of procreation and when we try to take procreation into our own hands, we begin to assume the role of God. Every single one of us is a unique and personal creation by God. As Christ says, “I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep” (**St. John 10:14**) and “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered: (**St. Luke 12:7**). God wants us to be who we are since we are all unique and distinctive

⁴Breck, John. “A Consistent Life Ethic.” Essay. In *God with Us: Critical Issues in Christian Life and Faith*, 24. Crestwood, N.Y, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003.

⁵(US), National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering (US), Institute of Medicine (US) and National Research Council (US) Committee on Science, Engineering, and and Public Policy. “Cloning: Definitions and Applications.” Scientific and Medical Aspects of Human Reproductive Cloning. U.S. National Library of Medicine, January 1, 1970. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK223960/>.

⁶Breck, John. “A Consistent Life Ethic.” Essay. In *God with Us: Critical Issues in Christian Life and Faith*, 48. Crestwood, N.Y, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003.

creations of God. When we look at the lives of the holy Apostles, Christ did not select the same “cookie-cutter” personality rather each Apostle was unique in his own way. Similarly, when humans try to make a more perfect person through the use of cloning embryos, that clone would lose the unique personality that God intended us to have. As mentioned above, just because the embryos were already harvested, does not mean we should profit from them.

Now when it comes to some ethical

issues, there are a lot of grey areas in which one consults with their spiritual fathers, bishops and priests. Our life as Orthodox Christians is to be committed, and the only way to achieve that is by faithfully following the teachings of Christ. When we live a committed life in Christ, then we have ethics in all aspects of life, not just the highly debatable ones. We have life when we live in Christ, but death when we live apart from Christ, as St. Paul says, “For to me, to live is Christ...” (**Philippians 1:12**).

Reflection Questions

1. Why is suicide not condoned by the Church?
2. What are some of the dilemmas in capital punishment?
3. Why is cloning not in line with the Church’s teaching?
4. What is the issue with embryonic stem cell research for Christians?

Discernment and Decision

Lesson Goals :

- *I can learn to grow in the image and likeness of God, walk along His path, and forsake the world and its empty promises.*
- *I can build a trustworthy relationship within the Orthodox Church, and use it to help us to make good life choices.*
- *I can understand that Holy Confession frees us from the mental anguish of the world and helps us on the journey toward divine joy and grace.*



How do you define your Life, your Humanity? **Theosis!**

You, the living, share the common identity that we experience this world as a visible, tangible (obvious) and sensory reality. But if you call out to that world for the answers to your life's purpose - **will you ever receive the answer on how to be human?** Fr. John Behr comments on this using the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch in his *Letter to the Romans*, 6¹

6:1 *The pangs of a new birth are upon me.*

6:2 *Bear with me, brethren. Do not*

hinder me from living; do not desire my death. Bestow not on the world one who desires to be God's, neither allure him with material things. Suffer me to receive the pure light. When I am come thither, then shall I be a man.

What is meant by this phrase? Does it mean a desire to be with God? Not necessarily! As Fr. John Behr describes, you are in a similar position to Christ, who revealed Himself not only as the Son of Man [another way of describing his Humanity] , but also as the Son of God. If your quest is to be with God - **what does Christ tell us on how to choose the way He would choose?**²

¹<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-romans-lightfoot.html> (Chapter 6:1 - 6:2)

²<https://www.christianflourishing.com/blog/2018/8/8/john-behr-dying-to-live-or-how-to-become-a-human-being>

A “HUMAN BEING” MEANS LIVING IN THE WORLD

You aren’t born able to walk and talk. But you learn, and you’ll misspeak and misstep in the process. Ultimately what does that get you:

You have tools to just prolong your earthly life, that has an expiration date

A “HUMAN BEING” MEANS LIVING THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

You start living the example Christ showed us: laying down our life (**being selfless**), living for others (**love**), grow our virtuousness which gets us the following:

We start to build an eternal life in Christ, which cannot be touched by death

Figure 14.1: Two Examples of Living as a Human Being by Fr. John Behr:

How do you correct your life choices to stay on the path to Theosis?

Remember from Lesson 1, you are always in control of your decisions - whatever they may be. The Prodigal Son learned the hard way that bad decisions have bad consequences. For the first part of his journey, he chose the path of the world - hoping wealth would satisfy him. It left him with nothing. You have a choice in what you do - but do you DISCERN, then DECIDE in the path Christ teaches us through your parents, your Church, your priest.



DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Here’s an example of a situation where you are faced with a decision: either succumb to peer pressure, or engage in DISCERNMENT + DECISION-MAKING based on the teachings of your parents, Church, and priests to guide your actions.

Real Life Scenario: You are on your way back from school. You’re being kind and providing a ride home for your friends. And you’re driving your parents’ car - and it’s a powerful one! Your friends know you don’t get a chance to drive this car that often, and want you to take advantage of it!

You hear a voice from the back-seat: “Hey, why don’t you floor it on this straight road? No one’s around, I know you’ve always wanted to, and we wanna see it too!” **WHAT DO YOU DO?**

Option 1: Yes, you can step on it. The exhilaration would be great, but in the end, how does the decision you make benefit you? It actually ends up being quite selfish:

- (a) You're really only doing this to gain the acceptance of those around you
- (b) You're risking property and safety for a momentary, fleeting selfish feeling of speeding
- (c) You're feeding your ego: The momentary feeling of your own self worth and greatness in that particular point in time.

As soon as you get home and hand the keys over, something eats at you knowing that if your parents knew what you were up to, what would they have thought? Also what would have happened if something went wrong?

Option 2: You can DISCERN and DECIDE: **The Church** teaches against pride and self-centeredness, as it may ultimately leave you both emotionally and mentally empty. Using the following framework, with strong consideration for what the Church instructs, can help us make sound decisions:

- (a) Discern: What is the right path where my Savior Christ Jesus, my parents, my priest, and my church community would support me?

- (b) Decide: Make the choice. If it requires convincing others, present your case to others. If it doesn't change their minds, stay confident in yours, and go forward.

In this case, you consider not only yourself but also that you've been entrusted with the safety of your friends. You can show a better path for your friends by leading an example of **safely driving everyone home**, and ultimately you can live confidently in a choice discerned by the influence of your parents and your Church - one which the Holy Spirit guides you to.

FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION

Holy Confession³

Even if you succumb to peer pressure, and slip up on a decision, you still have the path to remedy your situation, as did the Prodigal Son in Lesson 1. You have the sacramental gift of Holy Confession - a chance to repent of your missteps, reflect and recommit to a better, Christ-like path, and keep us on the straight and narrow way!

The role of the Parish Priest as your Spiritual Father: A Divinely-Appointed Sherpa to the Divine Climb

In the Orthodox tradition, the Parish Priest has immense responsibility to care for, pray for, and minister to the well be-

³Rev. Fr. Tenny Thomas, "Holy Confession," Northeast American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, accessed January 28, 2021, <http://www.neamericandiocese.org/orthodoxy/holy-confession.aspx>

Hallmarks of Holy Confession – Our Treatment to Heal the Wounds of Sin

Examination Step 1 ► Acknowledgement of the sin, with awareness and a sense of his unfaithfulness to God

Examination Step 2 ► Have a contrition of heart, and full remorse for the sins of commission (acting against our faith) and omission (failure to act toward our faith)

Examination Step 3 ► Resolution and determination to amend one’s ways after a self examination

Confession Step 1 ► Follow self-examination immediately through confession of sins before the authorized clergy of the Church

Confession Step 2 ► Repentance within one’s self, plus the verbal acknowledgement of that repentance to the witness and representative of God, ensures the path to God’s true forgiveness and reconciliation, sealed through the reception of Holy Qurbono

Figure 14.2: A Review of Holy Confession: Recalibrating your Theosis

ing of his flock. He shall and will take this responsibility seriously.

Question 1: Why my Parish Priest? Why not any Priest? Or more important, why not anyone?

The Holy Church has placed on the Parish Priest the responsibility of shepherding the spiritual growth and developing a spiritual path towards a Christ-like end for the parish. The Parish Priest will work with the parishioners, be able to understand the upbringing, and challenges faced in every situation. It is something one should take full advantage of. If you decide another priest should be your Spiritual father, it should be after consulting with your Parish Priest.

The Holy Church has provided the Priest the authority to forgive those sins

which weighs one down and impair one’s discernment. As Jesus commanded:

“

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you.”
When He had said this, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.”

St. John 20:21-23

”

Question 2: Why do I need to build a Spiritual relationship with my Priest? Isn’t that the job of my parents?

It’s definitely the job of your parents to instil in you a love of the Church, of God and His Commandments. But

where your parents don't have all the answers, *THAT* is where your Spiritual father, your Parish Priest, can enhance your ability to discern what is the right and fruitful path. The Priest has spent years of his life studying God's Word, the Canon and teachings of the Holy Church, and thus, he can help you make good decisions. Your relationship with your Achen, who responds to you as your spiritual father, is of a covenantal nature. It is similar to the relation between God and humanity. God is the loving Father. When God entered into a relationship with humanity, it was a covenant. Therefore, Noah trusted God and thus, he became obedient to God through the covenant (**Genesis 9:1-17**). Abraham honoured the covenant with God (**Genesis 17:1-22**), which led to his obedience. Similarly, a covenantal rela-

tionship with your Achen on the basis of mutual love and respect will guide you to consider, discern and decide the right path.

In Summary:

You have a decision to make on how you ultimately live your lives. What drives your decision? Is it the quest for fame, riches, and other worldly tokens that may so easily slip out of your fingers? Or is your decision based on the quest for **theosis** - your journey to be like Christ. The Church, its sacred institution of Holy Confession, the parish priest, and your Orthodox elders at large, can all be resources to help us formulate decisions leading to the Heavenly Kingdom. Ultimately, isn't that where you want your lives to lead us?

Further Reading Resources

- Fr. John Behr "Dying to Live? Or How to Become a Human Being?" [<https://www.christianflourishing.com/blog/2018/8/8/john-behr-dying-to-live-or-how-to-become-a-human-being>]
- St. Ignatius to the Romans. [<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-romans-lightfoot.html>]

Reflection Questions

1. What goes through your mind when you make decisions today? Do you make time to stop and think, discern the paths in front of you, and choose the path that leads to the Kingdom?
2. Are there issues of trust or mistrust between you and the Orthodox Church? The Parish Priest? Even the decisions or lessons in discernment from your own parents? Have you asked who is sowing the seeds of distrust, and whether they originate from the world, which will ultimately fall away?
3. What are the things you can implement to strengthen your trust in the Priest, the Community, and the parish of which you are a member? Do they require the actions of others, or are there things you can do to correct and bridge that trust?

Stressed? Pray and Seek Help!

Lesson Goals :

- *I can reach out to individuals older and more experienced than us.*
- *I can differentiate between society's definition of success vs. Christ's definition of success.*
- *I can reach out to my parents, my bishop, priests, family members, and friends when it is important to seek help with mental health matters.*



“Life is hard.” This is a phrase many of us may have already said, or will eventually say at some point. No matter how much we think that life will get easier as we grow older, we all have had, or will have, a point in life where we say “life is difficult” or “I thought life was supposed to get easier as I got older.” We all live in a society that says success is the most important thing in the world. A simple dictionary search tells us that success is “the status of having achieved and accomplished an aim or objective.” Now the question is, “what is our aim or objective?”

In the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus Christ tells us the parable of the Rich Fool (**St. Luke 12:13-21**). Prefacing this parable, Christ says, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist of the abundance of the things he

possesses”(**St. Luke 12:15**). He tells about a rich man who decided to tear down his barns so he could build even bigger barns that held even more crops. He told himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (**St. Luke 12:19**). This rich man thought he had nothing to worry about. Then the man died and all of his wealth went to others. Christ says “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (**St. Luke 12:21**). From this parable it is clear that we must be rich towards God instead of rich towards ourselves. Man is made in God's image. Jesus said if we give a cup of water to a little one, it is like giving it to Christ. So to be rich towards God is to be generous and sharing with each other, like Abraham’s hospitality to the three visitors (**Genesis 18:1-15**) or

like Jesus to the people who were either hungry, thirsty, sick, scared or lonely (**St. Matthew 15:32**). So to be rich towards God is to grow in holiness. The more we read about God, talk to God, spend time with God, the more we can be like Him, and the more peaceful we will be. On the other hand, if we try to get away from God, we will have spiritual and mental problems. This leads to stress. Christ teaches us how to cope with stress.

St. Irenaeus said, “man is body, soul, and Holy Spirit.” The term for soul that is used in the original Greek quote of Irenaeus is *psyche*. This is a secular understanding too and therefore, the mental health studies are called psychology. In Christian understanding, human is a union between *pneuma* (soul), *nous* (mind), and body. When one has an illness with their physical body they go to the physician. When one has a spiritual illness of *pneuma*, they go to their spiritual fathers. So then what do we do if we have an illness with our *nous*? It can be much more difficult to understand the health of our mind, also known as our *mental health*. Just as a physician studies and understands the health of the body, there are various mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, counsellors, therapists, and social workers, who specialise on the mental challenges that humans face.

As defined by the World Health Organization, “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work produc-

tively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” In other words, mental health is a state where one can live their life and love others. Our whole being (body, mind, and soul) works together like gears on a bicycle, just as St. Paul says, “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (**1 Corinthians 12:16**). This is why it is just as important to take care of our mental health in addition to our physical body and our spiritual life. As mentioned before, the worldly definition of success can make life stressful. We are told to be the best in everything we do, but what is not said so much is how important it is to take care of our mental well-being.

There are periods in life where we can feel our mental health being tested such as finals week, the loss of a friendship/relationship, the funeral of a loved one, and even times when we or ones we love are sick. These are all stressors in our life that can cause us to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and even depressed. When we struggle through these, our state of well-being is negatively affected. The symptoms of stress may appear when one is looking for instant gratification or becomes impatient to be successful and is not willing to wait for the results. The largest mental health organisation of the US, namely the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI «<https://www.nami.org/Home>») talks about some signs to see if we are stressed such as: headaches, lack of sleep, feeling overwhelmed, change of appetite,

and difficulty concentrating. While all of these, on their own, may not be symptoms of stress, many experience a number of these symptoms at the same time. When we are going through stress, we may not get enough sleep and or nutrition. This can lead to low energy, which can make it difficult to concentrate, resulting in more mistakes increasing the stress more. This can become a vicious cycle.

A simple example is that some people try to work 24/7. This leaves no time for rest which creates stress. How do we break the cycle of stress? Thankfully, there are many things we can do. The Church teaches us to set aside time every day and every week to rest, and thank God for everything we do. This helps us rest and recharge and refocus on what's important. Another example is reading **Psalms 51, 91, 121**, which gives us great comfort. Even better, memorise them and then you can recite them in your mind whenever you are stressed. Reciting the Creed is another option. Once you have settled a little bit, take a step back from everything and acknowledge that we are stressed and need a break. NAMI gives us different methods to deal with stress such as: time management, eating, sleeping, setting aside time for ourselves, exercise and meditation. After trying all this, we may still come to realise that it is not enough, so what? The simple answer is to **reach out**. Reach out to your spiritual fathers like bishops or priests, parents, mentors, family members, or even a friend. It is impor-

tant to recognise that when reaching out to someone, it should be someone more mature than we are. There are times when we may need to reach out to a mental health professional as well. Someone who can hear us, help us, and most importantly, be objective to what we tell them. When we have someone who is objective with us, then we can pinpoint more directly the things that are causing us to stress out or are causing other mental illnesses we may struggle with.

Just like there is no shame in seeking out help from a physician when our bodies are sick, there is **no shame** in seeking help from a mental health professional. The most important thing is that no matter what the struggle is, we are not alone. There is always help. While it is important to go to our parents, spiritual fathers like our bishops, and priests, family, or friends during times of struggle, let us remember that some may not be equipped fully to help us and may recommend seeking help from a trained mental health professional.

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to seek total dependence on God, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (**Proverbs 3:5**) and "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (**1 Peter 5:7**). While this is true, just because we trust in the Lord and cast our cares upon Him does not mean the mental illness will go away. In the same manner, just because we are Malankara Orthodox Christians does not mean we are immune from mental illnesses. One in five

adults and one in six adolescents experience some kind of mental illness. It is very prevalent and sometimes we will struggle with it too, but that is okay.

Struggling with mental illness is not a stigma and we should not be ashamed of seeking help from the right people. They are there to help those who are struggling. Even if one is not struggling with a mental illness, one may seek out a counsellor or therapist to simply have someone who is there for us to help with an objective outlook. There are many resources in society for all of us to find the right professional to help us. Do we want an Orthodox therapist? We have those resources. Want someone who is South Asian? We have those resources too. The key is to just start looking when you want, need, and can.

Unlike the rich fool, wealth does not define our success. Our sole dependence on God is our measure of success. Our Lord cares for us, sees us, and hears us. He loves us. We can still understand this and have love for God although we do see a mental health professional. The Lord tells us, “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (**Isaiah 41:10**). Many times the Lord works through other people to help us. When we are struggling with mental illness, our Lord will work through the mental health professionals to help us and uphold us. No matter what one is going through, know that **we are not alone**.

Reflection Questions

1. What was your understanding of mental health before this lesson, and how has it changed (if so)?
2. How can we talk with our parents and friends about the importance of seeing a mental health professional when the need arises?
3. Discuss: What are the different types of mental health professionals, do you know the differences between them? What are they?

Becoming Human

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that all people are fundamentally good.*
- *I can teach that humans are a work of art by God.*
- *I can illustrate that becoming God is by becoming a human.*
- *I can demonstrate that the creation of God started in the Garden of Eden and is transforming in the resurrection of Christ.*



The Purpose of Creating the Human Being

The uniqueness of the human being is the purpose of its creation. We were created by God differently from all the rest of Creation with the intent to become like Him, in order to be in communion with Him. In the Book of Genesis, it is observed that God brought all of creation into existence by speaking (**Genesis 1:1-25**). However, when the moment came to make the human being, the process was more elaborate. As stated,

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth. So God made man; in

*the image of God He made him; male and female He made them” (**Genesis 1:26-27**).*

Furthermore, God took great care in creating the human being. As stated in Genesis, “*Then God formed man out of the dust from the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul*” (**Genesis 2:7**). The reason for our creation is elaborated by a Syrian saint named St. Jacob of Serugh. He says, “God wished to create Adam as a fitting image, a beloved icon, a likeness of his Lord, the head spring, the source of species, the father of races, the ruler of the world, a god of flesh, the anointed of the Father, the image of His Son, the bond of the worlds, a haven for rest from His task of making [everything], the new Lord who was set there to inherit the entire world.” (Mathews Jr., 2020, p. 46)

The creation of human beings was special when compared to the rest of creation. A human being's existence is to be with God in a unique communion that no other created being can partake in.

The Uniqueness of the Human Being

God placed human beings in a special rank in creation. As stated, "By his Creator, he was a god of flesh to creation, but by his free will he aligned himself with a beast and became like it. The Good One who formed him placed and set him in the heights of Eden, but the evil one who hated him cast him down into the depths of a grave" (Mathews Jr., 2014, p. 14). God created us in His image and likeness. By being created in His image and likeness, we are fundamentally created to be good. However, we are called to be more than just good. As seen in Scripture, when God instructed His people, "*You shall be to Me a royal priesthood and a holy nation,*" (**Exodus 19:6**) and "*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*" (**Leviticus 19:2**). The Apostle, St. Peter, echoes this command by reminding us that, "...as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, '*Be holy, for I am holy*'" (**1 Peter 1:15-16**). Holiness is the characteristic that human beings are commanded to strive for. It is through the pursuit of holiness that we can become like God. In his work, *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus of Lyons elaborates on the need for us to align ourselves with God's will, in order to become like Him.

Fr. John Behr wrote about it in his book, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, which is paraphrased as follows. Man is called to become like God and achieve perfection. It begins by questioning how one can be a god when they are not yet fully human or perfect. It emphasises the need to first attain the status of being human before one can hope to participate in the glory of God. Humans do not create a god, but rather let God create them. To reach perfection, one must await the timing of God and offer a flexible heart to retain the shape given by the Creator. By doing so, the mud within oneself can be concealed by God's art, and the individual will be adorned with gold and silver, appealing to God, the King. However, rejecting God's art or being ungrateful towards Him results in the loss of both His art and life. The document emphasises that belief in God and submission to His Hands is necessary to receive His art and become a perfect work of God. Conversely, not believing in Him and fleeing from His Hands leads to imperfection and deprivation. In short, faith, obedience, and gratitude in the pursuit of godliness and perfection will lead us to theosis. (Behr, 2017, p. 117).

Becoming a Human Being

The way to become like God is to first become a human being. In order to achieve this, we are to follow the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is both God and man. It is by follow-

ing Christ that we can we fully realise our potential as a human being. To follow Christ means to follow Him to the Cross. To follow Him through pain, suffering, death, and ultimately, resurrection.

According to St. Irenaeus, “The work of God is the fashioning of the human being” (Behr, 2013, p.31). When God began the creation of human beings, and finished it with His death on the Cross, He said, “It is finished” (**St. John 19:30**). Through Christ’s resurrection, death was transformed as the way to enter eternal life. To become a human being requires us to become the children of God. In order to become a child of God a person is required to be baptised. Through baptism we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection. As explained by St. Paul, *Or do you not know that as many of us were baptised into Christ Jesus were bap-*

tised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection... (Romans 6:3-5).

We continue to die each day through the act of martyrdom when we dedicate ourselves to Christ. Although we are no longer being killed or persecuted for our faith, we face many challenges and obstacles that can prevent us from seeking God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is by overcoming these obstacles that we face our martyrdom, and transform ourselves daily into becoming a fully realised human being: the image and likeness of God.

Reflection Questions

1. According to this lesson, how does one become a human being?
2. What makes you think everyone is fundamentally good?
3. Why do you think the human being is unique among all creation?
4. During the Holy Qurbana we stand before God and pray for the entire Creation. Reflect on this and try to think of reasons why we do this?

Gratitude

Reviewers : Grade 9

Mrs. Rosamma Jacob	St. Stephens IOC WOKING
Mrs. Dolly Jacob	St. Stephen's IOC BIRMINGHAM
Ms. Jean Jose	St. John the Baptist IOC STOKE ON TRENT
Dr. Ritzy Kallumpuram	St. Thomas IOC HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
Mrs. Viji Syra Varghese	St. Thomas IOC HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
Dr. Febe Francis	St. Gregorios IOC WATERFORD



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