

Next Services

**Saturday
November 4th**

Great Vespers at 5:00 pm

**Sunday
November 5th**

Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am

both at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

Join us for prayer and fellowship.

**Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday and are primarily in English.
Fr. Luke Majoros is our presbyter.**

Law and (Spiritual Dis)order

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

21st Sunday after Pentecost Epistle (Gal.2:16-20)

In Sunday's Epistle, from Galatians 2:16-20, St. Paul says something each and every one of us needs to hear and to heed with all our heart. He says in verse 16, "Knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the Law [meaning, the Law of Moses], but by faith in Jesus Christ, we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; for by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified." Now at first glance, that doesn't seem particularly relevant to us. As far as I know, none of us keeps a kosher kitchen; we'll eat pork and shellfish, sometimes together; we'll wear clothing of mixed fabric; and none of you has lately brought me a lamb, a young goat, or two pigeons to sacrifice. We "get" the Apostle's point in Hebrews 7:12 that "the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law;" that because Christ our High Priest has fulfilled the purpose of the Law of Moses, it's no longer in effect.

OK, fine. So if the Law of Moses is dead and gone, why do we keep trying to resurrect it? It couldn't get any clearer than it is in Ephesians 2:8-9, that "by grace [we] are saved, through faith, and that not of [ourselves]; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Yet you and I keep trying to turn the Good News of God's Grace into a new set of laws, rules, and regulations. In North America our Orthodox Christian seminaries offer courses in canon "law," despite the fact that the Sacred Canons are not laws at all, but the practical measuring stick (which is what the word "canon" means) of what it means to be a Christian and live as a Christian in this or that specific circumstance. Or we either get into raucous debates about the "fasting rules" for Great Lent and the other Lenten days, or we keep them with mindless rigidity, or we look for loopholes...all instead of recognizing that the fasting discipline of the Orthodox Church represents the collective wisdom and experience of the Body of Christ, and that like all wisdom and experience it has to be applied in and with godly love. Or we get drawn into arguments about how frequently we're "supposed to" (or, God help us, "have to") receive Holy Communion (citing canons in the process), while missing entirely the point that receiving Holy Communion is a grace and a privilege and blessing in which not even the angels can share; that only we humans, weak and sinful as we are, can receive the very Body and Blood of the Lord into ourselves; and that if our hearts were right before God, we'd be not just eager but almost stampeding to get to the chalice, all the while experiencing within ourselves joy at such a privilege, sorrow over our unworthiness of it, and gratitude that God gives it to us anyway. No, about this and so much else, we keep trying to escape grace and return to law.

Why? Because it seems safer. The legalist, the person insisting upon and living according to laws and rules is always looking for a paradigm into which everyone's life can be squeezed, guidelines by which everyone's actions can be regulated. And yeah, that makes life a whole lot more predictable; no surprises, no questions, no uncertainties. It's life on auto-pilot: apply rule B to situation R, and Bob's your uncle. But a person living by Christ's grace has to live more intentionally in the now, looking to the Spirit and the written Word of God for guidance. No, living under grace doesn't mean we have to re-invent the wheel; we do well to read and learn from the Councils, the fathers, and the Canons, what our ancestors in the Faith have already learned. And yes, in 1 Corinthians 14:40 we receive very explicit direction: "Let all things be done decently and in order," not in make-it-up-as-you-go-along chaos. But living under grace does demand a spontaneity and an openness that avoids trying to regulate our own lives and/or other peoples' lives by more rules, regulations and procedural guidelines. To live under grace demands listening to and trusting the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to guide us through His mercy, grace and truth.

And that's crucial to understanding and living the Gospel, because legalism distorts God's graciousness. That's part of what Paul is driving at in verse 16: "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Paul lived the rules of the Law of Moses; back in chapter 1, verse 14, he recalls, "I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." He was a Pharisee, indeed a super-Pharisee who, in Philippians 3:5-6, can legitimately claim to have been "concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

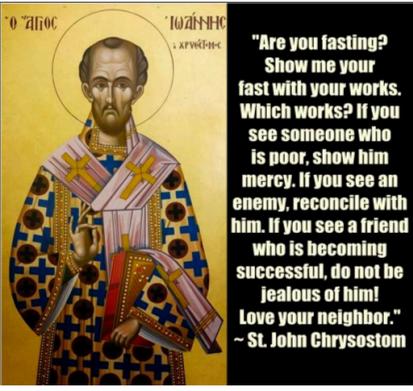
But in the end, he realized that it wasn't keeping all the laws, rules, small-"t" traditions and/or anything else a person can do, that led to forgiveness of his sins and being put into right relationship with God. Rather he discovered that what makes the difference, as he explains in Colossians 2:13-14, is what God has done: "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, [God] has made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." And again and again and again, as he shares in Ephesians 2:8-9, it's "by grace [God's undeserved, unearnable, unrepayable love in action] you have been saved through faith [through trusting Christ and hanging on to Him for dear life], and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Why such a strong emphasis? Simple: trying to live by law rather than under grace is just another way of committing the exact same sin our first parents did. What did they find so tempting that they would blatantly disobey their Father-Creator? "You shall be like God. You can be God's equal." No? Well think about: if I live by the law and keep that law strictly and perfectly, don't I think that somehow God owes me? Don't people often think that if they're somehow "a good person" and/or build up a pile of good deeds, God has to forgive them, accept them, admit them to heaven? Living by law is a business deal between equals. But we know deep down in our gut that we are not God's equals; that once we strip away the thin veneer of our self-delusion about our own merits, we're left with the ugly truth that we're sinners and sinning, imperfect and failing, spiritually not just sick but dead. And what then?

Either we despair, or we discover the wonder of God's grace: that God sees and knows us through and through for what we are, but loves us anyway, and acts in that love to reach out a saving hand to pull us up and out of the sewer of sin in which we're drowning and by His might lift us to new life as a new person. You see, living by law blinds us to just how much God loves us and just how far God has been willing to go to make us His once again. All the legalist can see is law, violations of the law, and judgment for breaking the law, and sees up quick to judge others by rigid standards for their moral failures. All the person living under grace sees is divine love acting in tender mercy and compassion, and therefore finds the courage to leave real judgment up to the Lord and the courage to do what Galatians 6:1 tells us to do with a person "overtaken in any trespass, anybody who screws up big-time:" to "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Legalism blinds the soul; living under grace gives us eyes at last to see the wonder and glory of God's love.

And there's more. Legalism turns us into ugly, finger-pointing Pharisees, whose lack of love for our neighbor wrecks our fellowship with God. Legalism also fosters feelings of self-righteousness, a dangerous thing, considering how 1 Peter 5:5 insists that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Legalism has to justify its own existence by continuing to create more laws and more rules, while Galatians 5:1 bids us "stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage," the slavery of engaging in the hopelessly unachievable task of putting ourselves right with God, the slavery of becoming judgmental Pharisees who turn their backs on anyone who doesn't fit within our narrow rules, the slavery to that haunting fear that if my performance isn't perfect God's won't love me anymore.

Let's be honest: all of us tend to want to live by laws and rules because it seems simpler and safer. But our call is to live under grace, in spontaneity and sensitivity to the Spirit, trusting that, as we're assured in Philippians 2:13, "it is God Who works in [us] both to will and to do for His good pleasure."



**"Are you fasting?
Show me your
fast with your works.
Which works? If you
see someone who
is poor, show him
mercy. If you see an
enemy, reconcile with
him. If you see a friend
who is becoming
successful, do not be
jealous of him!
Love your neighbor."
~ St. John Chrysostom**

Potsdam Interfaith Thanksgiving Program

Help us help those in need!

Please plan to bring non-perishable goods such as cranberry sauce, stuffing mix, canned vegetables, canned fruit, etc. to church this coming Sunday, Nov. 5th, or on Sunday, Nov. 12th. Our parish is one of the contributing churches to the Potsdam Interfaith Thanksgiving Program, an annual project that provides boxed-to-go Thanksgiving meals for people who would be without. Our help is needed!

Volunteers for sorting, boxing and deliver will also be needed during the week of Nov. 19th. We will be able to include the exact days and times in next week's bulletin.

St. John Chrysostom on Music

*Most of these quotations are taken from St. John Chrysostom's commentary, **Im Psalmum (On the Psalms)**. Sayings of the Desert Fathers will return next week.*

When God saw that the majority of men were slothful, and that they approached spiritual reading with reluctance and submitted to the effort involved without pleasure--wishing to make the task more agreeable and to relieve the sense of laboriousness--he mixed melody with prophecy, so that enticed by the rhythm and melody, all might raise sacred hymns to him with great eagerness. For nothing so arouses the soul, gives it wing, sets it free from the earth, releases it from the prison of the body, teaches it to love wisdom, and to condemns all the things of this life, as concordant melody and sacred song...

* * *

Since this sort of pleasure is natural to our soul, and lest the demons introduce licentious songs and upset everything, God erected the barrier of the psalms, so that they would be a mater of both pleasure and profit. For from strange sounds, harm and destruction enter in along with many a dread thing, since what is wanton and contrary to the law in these songs settles in various parts of the soul, rendering it weak and soft. But from the spiritual psalms can come considerable pleasure, much that is useful, much that is holy, and the foundation of all philosophy, as these texts cleanse the soul and the Holy Spirit flies swiftly to the soul who sings such songs."

* * *

"And even if you do not understand the meaning of the words, for the time being teach your mouth to say them, for the tongue is sanctified by the words alone whenever it says them with good will. Once we have become confirmed in this custom, we will not neglect this congenial duty either deliberately or through indifference, as custom will compel us to fulfill this grateful service every day, even if unwilling. Nor will any complain concerning this singing arise, even if one has grown old, is still a child, has a rough voice, or is altogether ignorant of rhythm. This is because what is sought here is a sober soul, an alert mind, a contrite heart, sound reason and a clear conscience. If having these, you enter into the holy choir of god, you will be able to stand beside David yourself.

* * *

[In liturgical worship] there is no need of the cithara, not taut strings, not the plectrum and technique, nor any sort of instrument; but if you wish, make of yourself a cithara, by mortifying the limbs of the flesh and creating full harmony between body and soul."

* * *

Some also take the meaning of these instruments allegorically and say that the tympanum calls for the death of the flesh and that the psalter looks to heaven... But I would say this: that in ancient times, [the Jews] were thus led by these instruments due to the slowness of their understanding, and were gradually drawn away from idolatry. Accordingly, just as [God] allowed sacrifices, so too did he permit instruments, making concession to their weakness."