



# 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.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.  
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.  
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

## Next Services

**Friday, September 14th  
Feast of the Holy Cross**

**Matins  
9:00 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Saturday, September 15th  
Great Vespers**

**5:00 pm**

**Fr. Peter is available to hear  
confessions before Vespers by  
appointment.**

**Sunday, September 16th**

**Matins  
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow**

**at**

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



*Ss. Joachim and Anna embracing in love and joy after receiving the news that they would have a child in their old age. This child would be the Theotokos, lit. "God-bearer"--Mary, the mother of our Lord.*

## 15th Sunday after Pentecost

**Matthew 22:35-46**

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

Over the past couple of weeks we've met, in the Parables of the Vine dressers of the Wedding Feast, Somebody Who's not the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" we thought we knew. In contradiction to our usual picture of Jesus as an innocuous nice guy, chapters 21 through 25 of Matthew's Gospel show a Jesus passionate to the point going "into the temple of God and [driving] out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and [overturning] the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves." He was stubbornly insistent on His authority to teach and act in radical ways, when in response to the chief priests and elders questioning His authority to teach at all, Jesus bites back with a challenging trick question of His own: "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John---where was it from: from heaven or from men?" He openly subverted the authority of the religious establishment in the parables of the Vine dressers and the Wedding Feast. And He was blunt in exposing openly the hypocrisy of the religious leaders; again and again in Matthew 23 He thunders "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

These five chapters record the escalating conflict and direct verbal duels between Jesus and various religious authorities in Jerusalem. Jesus passes with flying colors their three test questions concerning taxes ("Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"); concerning the reality of the resurrection of the dead ("God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him"); and in today's Gospel, Matthew 22:35-46, the question of "Which is the great commandment in the law?" Then Jesus poses a question of His own and gives an answer that leaves His adversaries speechless: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?" Clearly, for Jesus, the gloves have come off.

Now understand: we're not dealing here with some sort of "Christians versus Jews" scenario. What we're seeing is the fierce internal battle within Judaism at the end of the first century, particularly the battle between the Sadducees, the priestly faction, who accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament as authoritative and who rejected the notions of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels, and the Pharisees, educated lay teachers now called rabbis, who accepted the rest of the Old Testament as equally authoritative, and who did accept the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels. But the point is that both sides perceived Jesus as a threat to their power, position, doctrine and authority; both sides attacked Him; and both sides were silenced by Him, to the point where they felt they had only one option left: to kill Him.

And surely that's a lesson to us, especially as Orthodox Christians, as those who claim to be inheritors of the fullness of the true Faith. Yes, as we're told point blank in 1 John 4:1 and 6, we must "not believe every spirit, whether they are of God" and must distinguish between "the spirit of truth and the spirit of error," because as our Lord tells us plainly in John 8:31-32, real objective truth actually matters: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Lies and error always produce only one result: slavery to something or someone other than God. Only knowing the actual, objective, factual truth, and living that actual, objective, factual truth make us truly free to be fully ourselves, the full, healthy human beings God created us to be in the first place. But when truth becomes a club with which to beat somebody else over the head and/or something to massage my own ego; or when I start figuring I know all there is to know, and that only my understanding is "truly Orthodox," I'm making myself Pharisee and enemy of Christ by rejecting, in my attitudes and actions, if not my words, that second commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Still, there's a balance here. It's all too easy to remake Jesus in our own image, picking and choosing from the biblical testimony in order to depict Him as a friendly, harmless country pastor with boundary issues; that He's what one author calls a "quivering mass of availability" some sort of cheerful sacred social worker rather than the Proclaimer and Embodiment of the Gospel, the Reconciler of sinners to God, and the no-nonsense Lord Who bluntly lays it on the line: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." If we take Matthew's testimony seriously, we must confront the reality our Lord models for us: that sometimes in this life there are things worth getting worked up about, things worth arguing about, things that call for those who are able to be both loving and formidable in the cause of righteousness.

And that is part of what it means to "love the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind." In 1 John 5:3, we read, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." St. Leo the Great explains that to love God means we "unite [our] wills entirely with the divine will" and thereby love what God loves. A good start in that is trusting God enough to simply do what He says. Now think about it: according to Matthew's testimony, none of the things Jesus is seen saying and doing in this context---from physically trashing the display booths of the moneychangers, to trash-talking the biblical literacy of the Sadducees, to giving scary warnings in the parables, to calling out the Pharisees on their hypocrisy, to silencing His critics with a single question, such that "no one was able to answer Him a word nor from that day did anyone dare question Him anymore"---none of it violates the law of love.

The fact that right in the midst of all this conflict Jesus patiently explains that the most important thing of all is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and the other most important thing that grows out of and goes along with that first thing is to "love your neighbor as [in the same way you love] yourself," makes it clear that Jesus sees no contradiction between His formidable actions and the love He preaches. Why? Because that love is a single-minded seeking after the highest good of the other. "Love" is not an emotion, but a determination to put one's whole self into service to another by giving that other, not necessarily what they want, and not necessarily what they like, but definitely what they need to be saved and to be healthy and whole human beings. If Jesus comes down hard on the Sadducees, the scribes, and the Pharisees (and He does), it's because He's desperate to break through their hardened hearts and bring them to conversion, before it's too late.

And that should cause us to reconsider what Christian love actually looks like in daily life. Too often in the church, "love" is used as an excuse to take the path of least resistance instead of the path of truth and the path to excellence. When telling the truth would be uncomfortable, especially when it would be uncomfortable for us, we practice equivocation and call it "love." And yes, that does leave us with uncertainties rather than a clear formula that fits all occasions. I honestly don't know the right answer to those damning questions: "Honey, do these jeans make me look fat?" or "Mom, Dad, don't you think my boyfriend is just great?!" when he's every parent's nightmare; or "So what did you think of my sermon today?" when it was a snooze-fest. But, if "love" is code for smiling at biblical illiteracy, winking at theological incompetence, and/or turning a deliberately blind eye to sin, then our definition of "love" is at best faulty, unscriptural, and suspiciously easy on and for us. That's certainly not the definition of love that Jesus is working with. The Jesus we see in the Gospels thinks that to love God with the whole self, with is demanding and risky. Following the path of love leads Him to jump into debates and conflicts with His whole self. Love leads Jesus into all kinds of situations that are not just uncomfortable, but dangerous. Eventually, it's love that gets Him killed.

Of course, we are none of us Jesus. For us, charity always demands humility. But there is much to learn by seeing the love of Jesus in action. Yes, it was love that inspired Jesus to eat with the outcast, reach out to the untouchable, and embrace the powerless. But it was that exactly that same love which also drove Him to confront the demonic, outmaneuver the manipulative, and correct the clueless. Jesus was no pushover; that's what makes the story of His ultimate decision to relinquish power for the sake of the Father's will and to become "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" for my sake, for your sake, so amazing and so convicting. Jesus is a lot more complicated than we sometimes pretend, and the love He taught demands that we expend our whole selves for God and neighbor, striving for excellence in all we think, say, and do.

**Save the dates...**

Vladyka Michael will visit our parish on the weekend of Nov. 17th - 18th

**...plan ahead!**

**Our Parish Council's monthly meeting will be this Tuesday, September 11th, at 6:30 pm.**