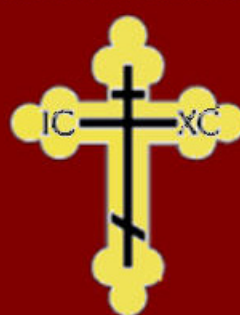




ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

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 at 10 am
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm
Services are primarily in English.**

Next Services

Saturday, June 23rd

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

Sunday, June 24th

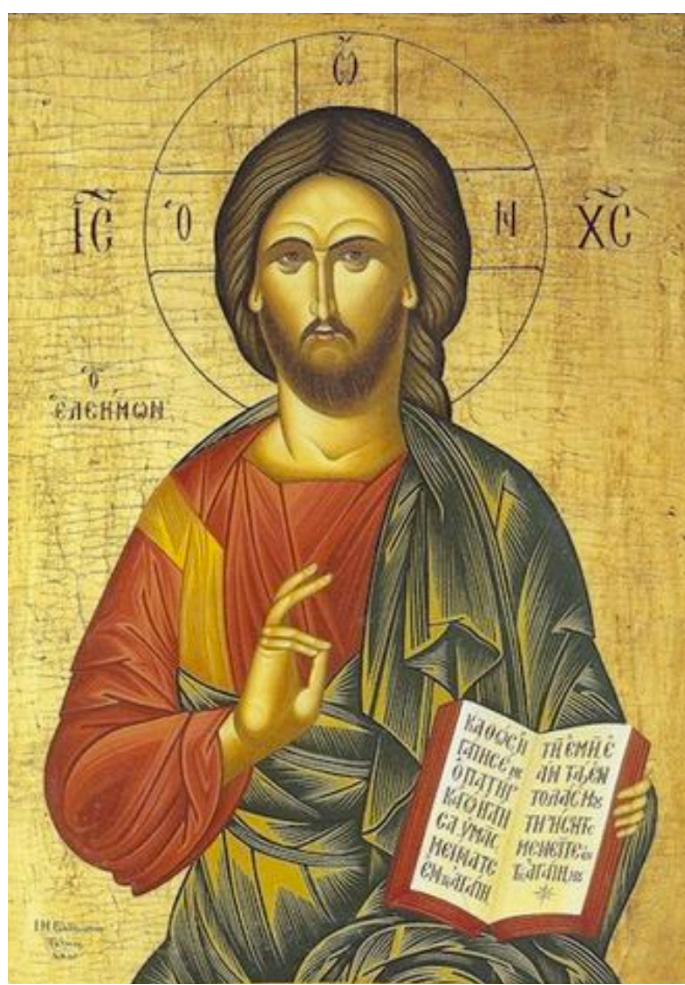
**Matins
9:30 am
(summer hours)**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

at

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

All welcome!



This icon is of Christ the Merciful, in Greek, ὁ Ἐλεήμων. You can see the shared root from the second word of Κύριε, ἐλέησον = Lord, have mercy. Christ holds a Gospel book open to reveal John 15:9-10, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you: abide in My love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love." His right hand blesses with the well-known hand position of two fingers raised and placed together for the two natures of Christ: fully God and fully human, while the other three fingers form a circle for the eternal Trinity.

Third Sunday of Pentecost

Epistle: Romans 5:1-10

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

It's the middle of the night. You're sound asleep. Suddenly the sound of breaking glass pierces through your consciousness, and you realize an intruder's in the house. What do you do? The obvious thing is to grab the phone and dial 911. The police—no matter what you thought of them before—have just become your best buds. But suppose no one answers your 911 call? Or suppose you get through, only to be asked why anyone at the police department should risk his or her life to protect you? Or you're told, "Not interested, but thanks for calling!" followed by a dial tone. You'd be outraged, right? As a taxpaying citizen, you're entitled to protection from the police!

Well that's too often how we think about God. He, our most powerful Source of protection and rescue, is always there, right? He's always on call, always tuned to our frequency to hear and answer our prayer, yes? No, actually. Effective prayer is not a universal right or entitlement. Now let's be clear: God's providential care for His creatures is constant. Whether saint or sinner, the farmer's crops grow; the student learns; the worker earns; love happens. In Matthew 5:45 our Lord insists that our heavenly Father "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." But the fact of God's providential care can blind us to the uncomfortable truth in today's Epistle, Romans 5:1-10, that access to God is NOT an entitlement, but a privilege of grace. That's part of what St. Paul is getting at in verses 1-2: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

We live in what future historians may call "The Age of Entitlement." We North Americans have come to believe that we're entitled to and, indeed, deserve whatever we desire. I'm entitled to health care, housing, food and clothing, whether I want to work for them or not. Interestingly, my parents (and, I suspect, your parents) certainly harbored no such feelings of entitlement. Christian or not, they took seriously the principle the Apostle articulates in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat;" so they worked hard, taught us to work hard, and received with thanksgiving whatever the Lord's blessing provided. But now we North Americans tend to regard, everything, including a wide variety of spiritual benefits—such as access to God, forgiveness of sins, even access to heaven itself—as entitlements. Somehow, we think, God owes us His ear, owes us His forgiveness, owes us His heaven, regardless of our relationship with Him. We may use God's name in vain a dozen times each day, but still expect Him to stand at attention when finally we do use His name in some sort of prayer and then promptly deliver what we ask.

But what if God just isn't accessible any and every time a human being thinks He ought to be? The Scripture's pretty clear that God's ear is closed to those who are closed to Him. Citing Psalm 34:15-16, 1 Peter 3:12 tells us clearly that "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Psalm 66:18 warns, "If I regard [cling to] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." And again, Isaiah 59:2 warns "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." We humans need to come to terms with the full consequences of our sin. Sin separates us from our God, creating a chasm which simply cannot be bridged without God's intervention. Our sin creates a barrier between us and God; and, on account of our sins, God no longer hears the words we imagine are being spoken directly to Him.

And that, says Ephesians 2:12 leaves us "having no hope and without God in the world." If we've lost the ability even to communicate with God, what can we possibly do to save ourselves? We can neither persuade nor appease a God who blocks us from His sight, Who is closed to all communication, and Who simply refuses to hear us. That's why thinking we can save ourselves by "being a good person" or doing good works is such a literally damning idea. Even if we do something the world regards to be "good," God doesn't regard it as good. Hebrews 11:6 says plainly that "without faith it is impossible to please God;" only faith makes any work truly good and God-pleasing. But even if we assume for the sake of argument that an unbeliever could perform a truly good work apart from faith, God would still take no notice of it, since He has no regard for "the fool who says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" That's exactly why the only solution to our sin and lack-of-access problem is a Saviour, a Source of rescue that lies outside of ourselves with the power provided by Another. No human being could provide such a rescue, says Romans 3:23, because all human beings need that rescue, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That rescue has to come from God Himself.

And that's exactly the Good News the Holy Spirit is conveying to us in verses 1-2: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Our access to God was and is not an entitlement, not something God owes us; it's a gift given to us on the basis of the suffering, death, and Resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. He is the One Who provided what our race could not provide. That's why verse 1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification, being declared "Not Guilty" and being put back into right relationship with God, is worked in us as Holy Spirit brings us to the trust and confidence that Jesus Christ has indeed made the full payment for all our countless sins, and that because of what He accomplished on our behalf in His atoning death and Resurrection victory, we're no longer in a state of war against God, but now have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And it's because of this peace that the lines of communication are again open: "through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand."

Clearly, then, access to God is not an entitlement. It's not something we've earned or deserved simply by virtue of our humanity; further, it's not something we've earned or deserved even by virtue of our faith. We don't come to faith, itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, and then have some supposed "right" to demand access to God. This access is first, last, and always a gift and a privilege extended to us by grace as an expression of God's love. That's why, in verses 6-8, St. Paul stresses that "when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous person will one die; yet perhaps for a good person someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Our forgiveness, our salvation, our adoption as God's own children in Holy Baptism, and our subsequent access to God are all a completely undeserved gift from God given to us on the basis of what God's Son has done for us as our Saviour. But the wonder of it is that in love God does extend these gifts to us. Because by His grace we have "received the Spirit of adoption" as His own children, we can always "cry out, 'Abba, Father,'"

But mark you: the reality that all is a gift of grace also blows apart all our other notions of entitlement. Even as Christians, who should know better, we somehow manage to develop the notion that a relationship of faith with God through Christ is some sort of an economic, medical, and/or social guarantee of goodies and an exemption from suffering. Jesus, of course, told us to expect just the opposite when, in John 16:33 He warns bluntly, "In the world you will have tribulation." And today's Epistle doesn't say that we're exempt from tribulations, but rather that "we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." There are no shortcuts to things like a godly character. We don't receive it automatically through Baptism as another entitlement. Rather, it's painstakingly constructed through perseverance in the face of ongoing tribulation. But the basic point that our conversion, our faith, our salvation, our access to God in prayer, even our day-to-day lives and all that fills them, are precious gifts we have in no way deserved but have been given anyway, purely out of love.

So unless both our heads and our hearts are impenetrable stone, let's recognize just how blessed we truly are in all these undeserved gifts from God, Who owes us nothing but has in truth given us everything. And then, poor and ragged and starving beggars that we were, let us love our neighbor as ourselves by telling the other poor and ragged and starving beggars around us where they too can find the Bread of Life... because it is that sharing which is our true thanksgiving.



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