



## 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

**Saturday, February 23rd**

**Great Vespers  
5:00 pm**

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

**Sunday, February 24th**

**Matins  
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow  
at**

**St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY, 13676**

### Exploring Christian Faith

St. Olympia Orthodox Church is hosting a series of events on selected Saturdays at 6 pm (following Vespers at 5 pm). Our next feature, **Where God Walked on Earth**, will be shown on March 3rd. The film explores one of the oldest monasteries (6th century) which contains the oldest continually working library in the world. It was built on the site of the Burning Bush and has some of the oldest extant icons on wood.

#### Daily Vespers at St. Olympia Hermitage

Beginning tomorrow, the first week of the Lenten Triodion, the Service of Vespers will be held daily at 5 pm at the Hermitage of St. Olympia in Edwards, NY. Father Peter will serve on Wednesdays and there will be a Reader's Service (basically the same service but without a priest) on the evenings. The hymns of Vespers on Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent are deeply profound. Visitors are welcome to attend. E-mail mothersophronia@gmail.com to confirm and for directions.

#### First Fruits

The latest edition of **First Fruits**, our Diocese's publication on stewardship is available at [https://nynjoca.org/files/publications/Newsletters/First\\_Fruits\\_MARCH\\_2018.pdf](https://nynjoca.org/files/publications/Newsletters/First_Fruits_MARCH_2018.pdf) *Reminder: links in this newsletter are not live and you will need to type this into your browser.*

## Romans 6:18-23

*Note: the following article was written by Fr. Philip Speranza, a.k.a. Fr. Guido, in June 2017*

*It is included here by permission.*

Today's Epistle, Romans 6:18-23, comes on the heels of Paul's discussion of Holy Baptism in Romans 6:1-11. And what we hear today, and what comes immediately before it, are really crucial to understanding and avoiding a misunderstanding of Holy Baptism and its effect in our lives. In Romans 6:5 St. Paul says that "if we have been united together in the likeness of [Christ's] death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection." That refers to the way being baptized by immersion resembles dying and being "buried" under the water, while coming up out of the water depicts our being raised to new life. So? So in verse 6 he says that "our old man [our fallen human nature] was crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin;" and in verse 11 the Apostle tells us, "you also, reckon yourselves [count or consider yourselves] to be dead to sin." By God's grace the power of sin in our lives is broken; and by the power of the Holy Spirit we can now choose to treat the temptations and desires of our fallen nature as if they were dead and powerless over us. But is that your experience, or mine, as baptized persons? Has sin now been done away with in your life or in mine? The answer is an obvious and painful "No." So was Paul daydreaming, or what? No. Verses 1-11 are the already, while verses 12-23 are the not yet. To put it another way, verses 1-11 describe the seed God has planted within us in Holy Baptism, while verses 12-23 describe what that seed produces when it's watered and nurtured and weeded and fully-grown.

Clear as mud? Look: let's jump to verse 15, where St. Paul poses a question, and then provides his own answer. Paul asks, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Given that God's response to our sin is not wrath and destruction, but opportunity for repentance and the gift of His grace, some folks figured, "Hey, the more we sin, the more grace we receive. So if God loves to forgive, why not give Him more to forgive?" Paul's answer? "Certainly not!" Why? To answer, Paul develops an analogy from slavery. In verse 16 he asks, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether or sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" The notion that we humans are perfectly and totally free in our moral choices may be interesting in pure theory, but as a lived reality it's pure rubbish. The hard fact of our lives is that we are either slaves serving, controlled by, and owned by sin, which leads to death, or we are slaves obedient to God, which leads to righteousness, with no middle ground in between. And mark that word "obedient." In both Greek and Latin, the word "obey" is composed of the preposition "under" and the verb "to hear." So to "obey" means to make the deliberate effort to hear, to listen carefully to, what is said and then to place one's self under the authority of what is heard because one trusts the knowledge and wisdom of the one speaking.

Biblically, obedience is never blind and/or mindless, but is always the result of both discernment and faith. Indeed, it is obedience which is the demonstration of faith. Can I really say I trust my doctor if I never even try to do what she tells me to do to improve my physical health? I can listen; I can see the truth and the wisdom of what she recommends; I can grasp that it makes sense. But if I don't even try to implement the lifestyle changes she talks about, what real faith do I have in her knowledge and competence? We're not talking here about perfect performance. There are going to be days when I don't drink all the water I'm supposed to and/or when diet and exercise are for "tomorrow." But despite my failures, am I honestly listening and trying to obey? Well, the same applies to our relationship with God. For example: do I even want to and am I even trying to cooperate with divine grace in becoming genuinely poor in spirit, in mourning my sins, in letting God be in full control of my passions and desires and actions and life, and all the rest that our Lord urges upon us in the very Beatitudes we sing week after week? And again, nobody's talking here about perfect performance. But am I listening and am I trying? The answer to that displays the quality of my faith, my real trust, in Him.

But more fundamentally, the outcome of my obedience depends on whom or what I'm listening to and then implementing. And so, in verses 17-18, Paul thanks God that "though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine[teaching] to which you were delivered [entrusted]. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Because we've listened to and trusted the Gospel, we've been released from our former slavery to sin, alright; but that results, not in total "freedom" to do whatever we like, but in its exact opposite. Believers have now become "slaves of righteousness." Confusing? Think of it this way. In professional sports, back in ancient times, before "free agency" developed, professional athletes were in effect owned by the team that first signed them; they were "slaves" of that team. Owners could offer contracts, not offer contracts, or trade players. But players, for their part, had few options. They could sign a contract and play, or they could retire. They were not free to move to another team or to offer their services to the highest bidder. If people wanted to "play ball," they had to be owned by one team or another. So for the Christian, who is a slave of Christ Jesus, there are only two possible teams to be playing for: "team sin" or "team righteousness;" and we're gonna be owned by one or the other.

And this is not as abstract or theoretical or (God help us) "theological" as it might first seem. In verse 19, after admitting that this whole slavery thing is to try to help us understand, Paul reminds believers then and now that formerly we "presented" [handed over, offered up] our "members as slaves of uncleanness [impurity], and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness." That word "members" refers to the parts of the human body and our faculties in general; and it's a clear reminder of how in the past we have misused our bodies, our minds, our emotions, against the will of God. Just think about how each of us has misused the faculty of speech in anger, in lying, in gossip, and so on; and that's only one of our faculties! And in each of us there's at least one sin with which we've gotten so comfortable over the years that we have gone from bad to worse: temper, greed, gluttony, lust, whatever. But now Paul reminds us to present those same members in slavery to God's righteousness, because only that leads to "holiness," to sanctification, to that growth in grace and in the grace-directed life, that "life more abundant," Christ came to give us and which God wants us to enjoy.

And in verses 20-23, Paul gets down to the nitty-gritty on where slavery to sin has led very real people. Verse 20 says that there was a time we were "free in regard to righteousness," meaning that we were free from living righteously and as a result were also free from a redeemed and positive relationship with God. But then Paul asks bluntly, "What fruit did you then have in the things of which you are now ashamed? What was the result? What did you and I get out of living in ways that now make us ashamed?" Rude but good question! Are you and I proud of our sins and pleased with the result of those sins? Or do we have trouble naming them honestly in Confession? We're not proud; we're ashamed. And so we should be. "For the end of those things is death." And we're not just talking about the spiritual death of eternal separation from God. Just with our tongues, how much hope, how much self-respect, have we killed off in other people? How many marriages, how many families, and how much love has been done to death by lust of power, adultery, alcohol, greed, materialism, and the like? And we could go on in listing how many of our behaviors--both individual and collective--lead to death, even when we know they are wrong.

Ah, but then, in verse 22, Paul interjects his pet phrase, "But now." But now we've been freed from sin, and have also "become slaves to God," from which the "fruit," the outcome, is "holiness," wholeness for the whole person, and "the end," the final outcome, is "eternal life," sharing in God's own kind and quality of life. And so, Paul concludes in verse 23, "the wages of sin is death." And Paul uses a military term for wages; it refers to the soldier's daily pay, what he gets for killing the enemy. In our fallen nature, too much of what we do--and what is done to us--is death-dealing. In contrast to those wages, "the gift, the free gift, of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Living in God's grace is not only life-affirming but life-creating.

The bottom line? Even though we're baptized, we're still vulnerable to sin and death. So the issue is not "Am I perfect?" but "Whom or what will I serve?" Which slavery do I want: slavery to sin that leads to death or slavery to Christ that leads to life? Which reality is going to determine and shape my life and my eternity? The good news is that in Christ God has freed us from sin as the determining reality of our lives and has given us His free gift of eternal life in Christ. But will we accept that liberty and that gift? It's your choice...and mine too.