

St. George Newsletter

October 2011

On the reading of Scripture

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim 3:16

St. John Chrysostom writes:

“The reading of Scripture is a great defense against sin, and ignorance of the Scripture is a dangerous rapids, a deep pit. To know nothing of the divine laws is a great danger to salvation. This ignorance begat heresies, it has lead to debaucherous life, it has turned everything upside-down. For as a person deprived of his natural sight can not follow the road before him, thus, he who is not enlightened by the rays of the Divine Scriptures is constantly failing in many things, for he casts about in deep darkness. On the other hand, it is impossible that one who constantly studies the Scriptures with effort should not bear fruit.

“Thus I beg you: come here [to church] more often; listen attentively to the words of Divine Scripture, and not only when you are here, but also at home take the holy books into your hands, and with effort draw benefit for yourself from them. For great benefit comes from them: first, the tongue begins to learn, then the soul flies up and is elevated, being enlightened by the light of the Sun of righteousness, being freed at the time of reading from the impurity of sinful thoughts, and enjoying great peace and quiet.”

In our days, many strive to learn all of the rules of the church. They want to know: whom should I pray to if I am lonely, when and how should I fast, where should I light candles in church, and so on. Less often are people striving to learn about the earthly life of the Savior, which is found in the New Testament.

It is unfortunate, that such books as “The Toll-Houses of Blessed Theodora” are more often discussed than the New Testament. How are we to begin reading the Bible?

1. Where should I start?

The Gospels. The Gospels are the easiest parts of the Bible to understand. In the Gospel, we read directly of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are difficult passages, difficult parables, but there are fewer than in the epistles or the Old Testament. The apostle Peter himself warns: “[O]ur beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” After the Gospels, read the Acts of the Apostles, which, according to St. Justin of Chelije, is a continuation of the life of Christ lived through His apostles. The General Epistles (James, Peter, John, and Jude) are somewhat easier to read than the epistles of St. Paul.

The Old Testament is especially difficult to read without commentary. The Fathers of the Church themselves did not all agree on how to understand it. The Antiochian School stressed a historical interpretation. The Alexandrian School stressed an allegorical interpretation. The consensus of the Fathers reads the Old Testament typologically: seeing the shadow of the Church in the Old Testament.

2. What if I don't understand?

Fortunately, there are many useful commentaries in our time. Many can be found in part on the internet. There are ancient commentaries, for example, those of St. John

Chrysostom or St. Theophylact of Bulgaria, and newer commentaries that make use of the old ones.

3. How much should I read?

There are appointed epistle and Gospel readings for every day. When we read these daily, we read with the whole Orthodox world. They can be found easily on the web site <http://www.holytrinityorthodox.com/calendar/>

If we want to study the Gospel more deeply, the rule we should follow is not to read more than we can read with attention. There is a pious custom of reading a chapter of the epistles and a chapter of the Gospel every day. This is a good custom if it is not done simply mechanically. We should read not just to fill the air with the words of the Gospel, but to fill our hearts, taking notes if needed.

Reading Scripture reminds us of why we first came to Christ, and uplifts us spiritually. May God grant us all desire to read the Scriptures and wisdom to understand them.

From the pages of the Trebnik

On the birth of children

The Trebnik is the book that contains the order of private services (“needs”). In this section, we will go through the table of contents of the book, and familiarize ourselves with the contents.

The first services are those dedicated to mothers and their newborn children.

Prayers on the first day

After the birth, the parents invite the priest either into their home or to the hospital. There the priest reads prayers for the mother and child.

Prayers on the eighth day

Christ was circumcised on the eighth day, fulfilling the covenant of circumcision for all. Christians mark the eighth day in prayerfully naming their child. This service takes place at

the doors of the church, and consists of a prayer and the troparion for the Meeting of the Lord.

Some say that it is not permissible to baptize a child before the fortieth day after birth. This is not the case. After the child is baptized, he or she may commune of the Body and Blood of Christ, the spiritual food as necessary for the spiritual development of the child and physical food for the body. Also, a baptized child may be prayed for by name at the Liturgy. If a child is born sick, he or she should be baptized immediately. Such instructions we find at the end of the eighth day service.

Prayers for the woman on the 40th day

On the fortieth day after birth, the mother is met at the door of the church, where the priest prays again for her health and the health of the child.

Prayers at the making of a catechumen *The Order of Baptism* *The Order of Chrismation*

The next three services are served together. The priest reads prayers over the child, and the godparents answer to questions about the faith, and confess the Symbol of Faith. A child is baptized according to the faith of its parents, and the godparents testify to this faith. Thus, godparents must not only be formally baptized Christians, but those who know and practice their faith. In this way, they will be able to participate in the spiritual upbringing of the child.

The catechumen is then ready for baptism, as he has confessed his faith. Baptism cleanses him of his past sins (in the case of an infant, of the effects of the ancestral sin of Adam). A baptized person who has confessed his faith is then ready to be received into the Church. Through chrismation, the baptized receives the Holy Spirit and becomes a member of the Orthodox Church.

St. Jonah of Manchuria



The path of Bishop Jonah's earthly life was short. Born in 1888, the boy Volodya Pokrovsky was only eight years old when he became an orphan. A kind village deacon took him in and helped him to acquire an education, first at a seminary in his native Kaluga and then at the Kazan Theological Academy. In his third year he received the monastic tonsure with the name Jonah and became a member of the Optina brotherhood. He was a brilliant student, and upon graduating he was elected to teach New Testament scriptures at the Academy, a position he reluctantly accepted in obedience to his spiritual father, the righteous Elder Gabriel.

In 1918 the Revolution forced the young hieromonk to leave Kazan. He was arrested by the communists and suffered beatings to the point of loss of consciousness, and imprisonment. Thus, sharing the fate of the New Confessors of Russia, by God's providence Hieromonk Jonah was freed by the White Army, which was situated beyond the Ural Mountains. Having been quickly raised to the rank of Igumen, he was assigned as the senior priest of the southern volunteer troops. With the army of Ataman Dutov, Fr. Jonah withdrew to the borders of Western China, being subjected to all kinds of hardships while crossing the Pamir cliffs, often forced to grab on to jagged ledges and the sparse shrubbery of the ice covered cliffs with wounded hands. After crossing the Gobi Desert, they finally reached Beijing, where

Fr. Jonah was received into the Ecclesiastical Mission there and soon consecrated bishop for Manchuria.

At the time of his arrival in the fall of 1922, the border town of Manchuria (present day Manzhouli, which is in the region of Manchuria) was bursting with Russian refugees who had barely any more than the clothes on their backs. The native populace helped as much as it could, but its resources were inadequate to meet the needs at hand; there was not even enough bread for the children. Existing charities were poorly organized, and the spiritual structure of the community was too weak to offer much support. Suddenly, the town was electrified. The transformation - both spiritual and physical - which Bishop Jonah effected in three short years with his flock, revealed his tremendous stature as a man of action, a man of prayer and an apostle of love. In that short time he established the following:

1. An orphanage that held up to 30 children ranging from the ages of five to fourteen
2. A children's school accommodating up to 500 students
3. A dining hall for the poor, feeding up to 200 people daily
4. Free ambulatory care and medicine for the poor of Manchuria
5. A library spiritually feeding the citizens of Manchuria

He was a true archpastor.

The extraordinary dimensions of his field of activity and spiritual personality are described in memoirs written by his spiritual children and persons close to him. Alexey Ivanovitch Budeyev writes: "What impressed me most were his broad horizon of interests, his tremendous intelligence, and his boundless love for people in general, with no distinction between classes or nationality. His special love was the children. In all my life I never met a man like him. He was indulgent toward all, even his enemies."

In the words of I. Borosov, Bishop Jonah was "the ideal pastor":

"Bishop Jonah arrived and immediately galvanized all that was withered and dying. There was a cafeteria, an orphanage and school, but they were in a poor state. He gave new life to the endeavors and they blossomed in the light of his massive energy, will power, ingenuity and intelligence. And he did it so seemingly effortlessly, as if he were playing divine music on the most ordinary instruments."

Death's arrival was unexpected. Bishop Jonah had been caring for a priest who died of typhoid fever. He himself contracted chronic tonsillitis just days before the scheduled fall collection for the orphanage. Suggestions to postpone it were of no use. Feverish, barely able to stand, Vladyka blessed the carts from the window of his study and remained there as the carts returned, calling each driver for a report on the result of his expedition.

Due to complications, Bishop Jonah developed blood poisoning. His doctor suggested he avail himself of the archbishop's presence to have confession and partake of the Holy Mysteries. Bishop Jonah understood that his hours were numbered. After having communed himself, he went into his study and typed out his final testament:

"...I began here with the words of the Apostle of Love: Children, love one another... And I am ending with these same words: Love one another. This is your archpastor's commandment.

"Do not abandon the children... Forgive me for the sake of Christ. Do not forget me in your holy prayers... And so until eternity when we shall all stand at the Dread Judgment."

Meanwhile, a moleben for the health of the Bishop was being served in the church. There one could hear the insistent cries of the children: "Dear God, please, do not take away our Vladyka!"

Returning to his room, Bishop Jonah individually blessed those tearfully crowded in his quarters. He then put on the epitrichion and cuffs which had belonged to Elder Ambrose of Optina and

began loudly and with prostrations, to read the canon for the departure of the soul. He asked to be buried in his white, embroidered vestments, simply, without pomp. Then, overcome with weakness, he lay down on his bed: "God's will be done. Now I shall die." He then was given a cross and candle to hold and died within minutes, surrounded by many of his close friends. His soul was transported to that other world, which knows neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting in the joy of the Lord

Leaving this world did not keep him from being with his spiritual children. A ten year old boy, Nicholas Dergachev, who was crippled, had been suffering from an inflammation of the knee joints. Efforts to straighten his legs caused unbearable pain. It was impossible for him to stand, much less walk. Early one morning he had a dream. A hierarch vested in white appeared to him and said, "Here, take my legs. I don't need them anymore. And give me yours." The boy woke up, miraculously healed. From a photograph he identified the hierarch in his dream as Bishop Jonah, who had died that very night, October 7/20, 1925. The convening Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, on August 20/31, 1996, blessed his glorification.

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