

SIXTH SUNDAY OF PASCHA

Sunday of the Blind Man

27 May / 9 June 2024

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen!

Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа! Аминь!

Христос воскрес! - Воистину воскрес!

Khristós anésti! – Alethós anésti!

Christ is risen! – He is risen indeed!

Alleluia!

Epistle: Acts 16: 16-34 This morning's reading from the Acts of the Apostles takes us to the city of Philippi in Macedonia where St Paul and his companions have been welcomed by a woman and her family whom Paul baptizes into the Christian faith. Later, when Paul and his companions go to pray, they are followed by a slave girl described as "possessed with a spirit of divination" who is being exploited by her owners for profit as a fortune-teller. She follows Paul and his companions, crying out that "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." This seems curious until we realize that demon-possessed, she follows Paul and his companions "for many days", perhaps mocking them and distracting them. Disturbed by her constant interruptions, Paul loses his temper and curses the evil spirit inside her, demanding its departure. "I command you", Paul says, "in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." The evil spirit departs, and the slave girl is free of its power. With the departure of the evil spirit which formerly controlled her, the slave girl is no longer able to serve her owners as a fortune-teller. Having lost their source of revenue, the slave-owners grab hold of Paul and Silas, one of his companions, and have them taken by force to a marketplace to be handed over to the local authorities. Paul and his companions are then turned over to the local magistrates who are told by the owners of the woman who has just been released from the evil power inside her that Paul and his companions are troublemakers – jews who "teach customs which are not lawful" for the Roman citizens of the city of Philippi. A crowd has gathered, and presumably to pacify it, the magistrates have Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison. Legally, this was a terrible miscarriage of justice! Paul was a Roman citizen, and Roman law forbade the mistreatment to which he and Silas were subjected by the magistrates of Philippi, who demand that the jailer of the prison keep close watch over Paul and Silas. Shut up in the inner part of the prison, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God and to the prisoners around them at midnight when the prison is shaken by "a great earthquake", so severe that "the foundations of the prison" are "shaken" and all the prison doors are opened and the prisoner's chains are broken! The jailer awakes! Seeing the open doors, and assuming that all the prisoners have fled, and that he will suffer greatly because of their escape, the jailer prepares to kill himself with a sword. Paul, however, calls out to him, assuring him that everyone is safe and accounted for! The jailer calls for a light, and falls down trembling in front of Paul and Silas. Realizing that what has happened is of divine origin, the jailer releases them and asks eagerly "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas tell him! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved", they say, adding "you and your household." Salvation and the love of Christ are offered not only to the jailer but to his whole family. We end this morning's Epistle with these words of its writer, St Luke: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household". Glory to God!

Gospel: John 9: 1-38. And now we turn our attention to this morning's reading from the Gospel of St John. This is the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, the Sunday of the Blind Man. Before we approach

St John's account of the healing of the man who had been born blind, however, we need to hear the opening words of St John's Gospel. Here John writes that in Jesus "was life...And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." *The Orthodox Study Bible* however tells us that the darkness of ignorance "can never overpower the light of Christ, nor can it understand the way of love." It also tells us that while "Christ offers light to every person", the world and even some of His followers reject Him. Psalm 146, verse 8 tells us that "The Lord gives wisdom to the blind", and that concept is central to this morning's Gospel reading. Jesus is in Jerusalem and He sees a man "who was blind from birth". His disciples ask Him "...who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind". Jesus rejects this assumption. He knows it is false and He corrects His disciples, saying "Neither this man nor his parents sinned..." and He continues, saying that in this blind man the works of God will be revealed. Jesus adds these words: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me..." (By this He means God the Father). He will do this as the light of the world for as long as He is in it. This is not vain boasting! It is a statement of fact, which He proves by healing the blind man! Anointing the blind man with clay, symbolic of the creation of the first humans, Jesus tells the man to wash his eyes in Jerusalem's Pool of Siloam. What is the result? The man is no longer blind! He has been healed! He can see! What happens next is remarkably ironic! Neighbours are astonished that the man who was blind from birth can now see! Some assume that he is merely someone who looks like the blind man, but he tells them that he is indeed the same person who once was blind but who now can see! This is a miracle, and it is also a contrast between ignorance and faith, and a contrast between darkness and light, which soon takes place! The man who has been given the gift of sight is besieged by those who ask him how his eyes were opened! He answers that "A Man called Jesus" had anointed his eyes and had sent him to the Pool of Siloam where he washed them and received the gift of sight! Where was this Jesus? The man who was healed of his infirmity does not know! Members of the crowd that had gathered around him take him to the Pharisees some of whom are outraged that this man has been healed on the Sabbath! They discuss the matter, arguing over it. Some of them are disturbed further when the former blind man tells them that the Man who had healed him had said that He was a prophet! The man who was blind was given the gift of sight! Although those questioning him had eyes to see, spiritually they were blind! Completely missing the reality of what had happened they summon the parents of the former blind man! The parents confirm that their son had been born blind, but fear drives them to say that their son should answer for himself. Their son tells the truth but those interrogating him again and again do not believe him. While they can see optically, spiritually they are blind. When they say that they do not know this man, Jesus, the man who now can see, says "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes!..." and he says of Jesus "If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." For saying this, the man whose sight has been restored is rejected. His interrogators believe that they are doing the right thing, but in spirit they are blind. They believe themselves to be righteous but they are hard hearted, cold, unfeeling, blind to love, blind to compassion, blind to forgiveness. They adhere to rules instead of forgiveness. In the Gospel of St Mark (Mk 2:27), Jesus tells us that "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath", and in the Gospel of St Luke (Lk 6:9), Jesus asks "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" In the Gospel of St John (9:34-38) the blind man receives the gift not only of eyesight but of wisdom. Asked by Jesus if he believes in the Son of God, the man proclaims "Lord, I believe."

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