

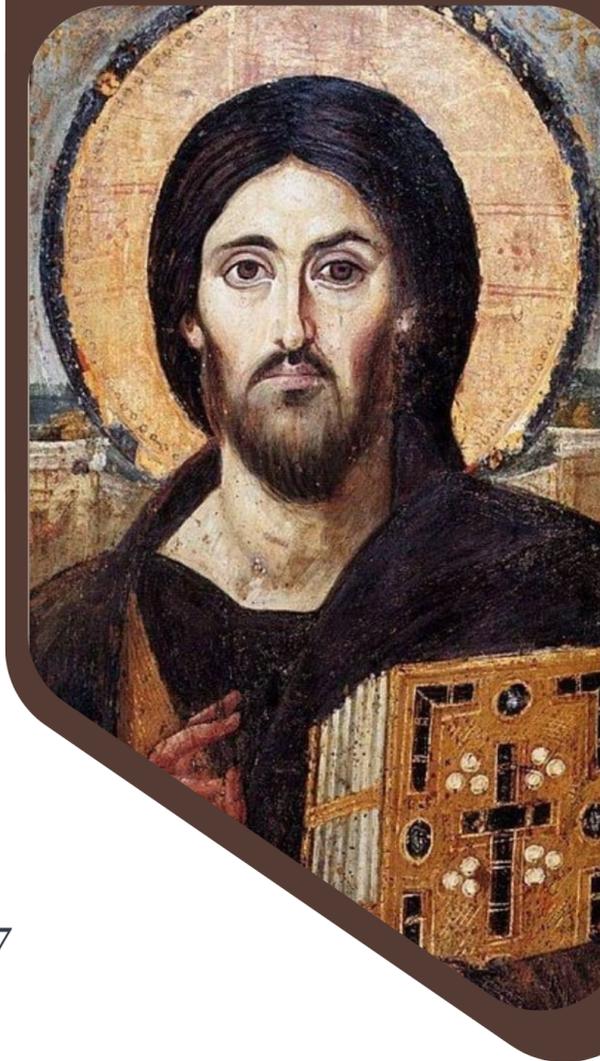


ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa

C A T E G O R Y I D E V E L O P I N G

Reflecting Christ
GRADE 7



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
OF THE EAST



Reflecting Christ
Grade 7

Category
Developing

2024

OSSAE : DIOCESE OF UK, EUROPE & AFRICA

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON SERIES - 7

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The Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church

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First Edition : January 2024

Printed in the United Kingdom
For Private Circulation only

FOREWORD



**MALANKARA ORTHODOX
SYRIAN CHURCH**(INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH)

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No. E-015/AMS/2024

11 January 2024

FOREWORD

As we embrace the dawning of a new era in the Sunday School of our Diocese, it is with profound gratitude and joy that we introduce the newly launched textbooks. This milestone is not merely a culmination of efforts but a new beginning, charting a course for faith-filled learning.

Special recognition is due to the Director and the team of dedicated authors of the Diocese of Southwest America of our Church who have tirelessly woven this tapestry of knowledge and devotion. Their commitment to creating a curriculum that speaks to the heart of our tradition is truly commendable.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos and His Grace Thomas Mar Ivanios, our Metropolitans, whose blessings and guidance have been the bedrock of this endeavor. Their spiritual leadership has been a guiding light throughout this year-long journey of preparation and transition.

Our teachers, those steadfast beacons of knowledge, deserve a resounding acknowledgment for their adaptability and perseverance, ensuring a smooth transition to this new curriculum. Their dedication to the spiritual growth of our youth is a testament to their faith and love for the church.

In line with the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Titus 1:9 (NRSV), "He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it," we recognize the pivotal role of sound teaching in nurturing faith. This verse echoes the mission of our Sunday School to steadfastly impart the truth of the Gospel, fostering a resilient and enlightened community of faith.

To the teachers and students embarking on this sacred educational journey, may you be filled with enthusiasm and wisdom. May your hearts and minds be fertile grounds for the seeds of divine knowledge to flourish.

The significance of the Sunday School in our community cannot be overstated. It is here that the foundations of faith are laid, where the stories and teachings of our church come to life, and where the future guardians of Orthodoxy begin their spiritual journey.

A special word of gratitude is extended to Fr. Anoop M. Abraham, Vice President of the Sunday School for the Diocese. His leadership, along with the director, curriculum coordinator, secretary & joint secretary, reviewers, trainers, and all team members, has been instrumental in bringing this vision to fruition.

As we conclude, let us move forward in the spirit of Orthodox tradition, with hope and prayer that these textbooks serve not only as vessels of knowledge but also as lanterns lighting the path towards spiritual maturity and devotion.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glory to the Triune God!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the development of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook for the new curriculum. It has been a long and challenging journey but with the help and support of many individuals and organizations, we have finally reached this milestone.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Diocesan Metropolitan H G Abraham Mar Stephanos for His Grace's tireless effort to reform our Sunday School to meet the needs of our future generation by implementing the new curriculum and heartfelt gratitude to all the officials and key personalities of Northeast and Southwest American Diocesan Sunday Schools who are the backbone of this new curriculum and Talmido.

Great appreciation to all the curriculum development committee members of our diocese for their selfless efforts in editing a comprehensive and relevant textbook that caters to the spiritual needs of our Sunday School students. Your dedication, expertise, and commitment to the project were crucial in bringing this book to fruition. Special thanks to the clergy members of our diocese who generously shared their knowledge, wisdom, and experiences in shaping the lessons and activities in this book. Your input has helped to create a well-rounded curriculum that reflects the teachings and traditions of our Orthodox Faith.

I am also grateful to the head teachers and teachers who took the time to review and provide valuable feedback on the content and structure of the textbook. Your insights and suggestions have greatly enhanced the quality of the material and have made it more engaging and accessible to our young learners.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of Holy Episcopal Synod and OSSAE officials for their unwavering support and encouragement towards this new curriculum. It is with their guidance and vision that we were able to compile a textbook that aligns with the goals and objectives of our Holy Church and Diocesan Sunday School education.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the students who will be using this textbook. Your enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about our faith is what motivates us to continue improving and developing resources for your spiritual growth.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this journey and has contributed in any way towards the creation of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook. May it serve as a valuable resource for many generations to come and may it inspire and nurture the faith of our young Orthodox students. Thank you all for your support and dedication.

Fr Anoop Abraham Malayil
Vice-President OSSAE – UK Europe and Africa

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Made in His Image

Lesson Goals :

- *I can recognise that every person is uniquely made in God's Image and the importance of how that creation shall be kept holy.*
- *I can understand that our calling is to grow in His Likeness to be healthy.*
- *I can understand the true meaning of being called to subdue and have loving dominion over all the earth, and I can care for as well as care about it.*



God's Image

The Book of Genesis begins with the story of creation. Similarly, the Nicene Creed also starts with a clear summary of creation, for God is the creator of everything, spiritual and non-spiritual.

Scripture (**Genesis 1:27**) clearly states that we are created special! All of us (males and females) are created in God's image and God's likeness .

Just like us, God had imagination too, for He created each of us in His image. He always had in mind certain features, such as how you would look, think, and act. So, He uniquely created your individual body, mind and spirit. No two people look, sound, or behave alike, and we all have our own likes and dislikes. This is what, altogether, makes the human race so beautiful and special.

The world, especially through the media, wants us to look or act in a certain way to be accepted. However, God says the opposite. The way He uniquely created you to look, think and act is exactly how you were meant to fulfil God's purpose in this world! You are to be the best that you were made to be, and He will always accept you unconditionally. This is our understanding of being made in the image of God. In this sense, we are all living icons of God!

But what do we understand about being made in His Likeness?

Remember

We are living icons of God!



Called to His Likeness

Our bodies represent temples of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes, *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Learning Outcome Check

Examine how the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Through Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit fills us and dwells within us, giving us guidance as we make our daily choices and always aim to become more like Him.

Just as the Church members gather together to worship at the temple, we must also worship God in how we take care of our bodies. This includes praying and reading the Bible daily, but also bathing, brushing our teeth, eating healthy meals, enjoying time spent with our loved ones, getting a good night’s sleep, etc.

Learning Outcome Check

Construct a healthy perspective on the body is made in the image and likeness of God.

Since the purpose of worship is to grow in the likeness of God, that should always reflect in our body, mind and soul.

In the Litany during the 2nd Service of the Holy Pentecost, we hear the renewal of our life’s purpose: *“Make us worthy by our worship today, on which you perfected your holy Apostles by the gift of Your Holy Spirit, to be enriched with the same divine gifts and to conquer our spiritual as well as our sensual enemies.”*

Think

Our bodies represent temples of the Holy Spirit. What should we do to take care of our body and preserve it?



In Genesis, we read that we were made in God’s image and are called to always grow in His Likeness. For us, the Holy Spirit is the perfecter, helper, teacher, and the One who helps us figure out what is good and bad. By understanding and following God’s teachings, we grow to be more perfect like Him (St. Matthew 5:48). This process of growing to be more like God is called **theosis**.

In theosis, the Holy Spirit empowers believers to serve God (worship), serve each other (love), and serve His creation (stewardship). With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Christians can participate in God’s work in the world and, so, do the good works that He has especially prepared for each of



Christ Pantokrator

us. (**Ephesians 2:10**). Our participation brings about our growth towards God's image (**Philippians 2:12-13**). We become restored and healed from the effects of sin, and we are ever more transformed into His likeness.

Christ: Fully Man and Fully God

Christ was the ultimate example of how man was created in His image and like-

ness. God welcomes us to become more Christ-like.

Christ showed that life is more than praying and doing God's will to get blessings. We are to live a life with God in mind in everything we do. God Created us to be like Him and to take on His character traits. Jesus Christ is the perfect role model of God's intention for creating us.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse our responsibility as caretakers and stewards of all creation.

Our Responsibility

Not only are we responsible for taking care of our bodies as part of God's creation, but we are also responsible for taking care of the rest of God's creation.

God created us to "*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*" (**Genesis 1:28**).

This means we are to give proper care to everything God created around us. We are to show the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) in all of our actions. We are to care for our families, for our Church, and for our environment. We are called to serve the poor

and needy through community service, without any expectations.

Even in the rooms in your home, you are expected to keep them clean because God wants you to be a caretaker of everything around you. When we do all of these things in a selfless manner, God will repay us with blessings.

We do all of this with the Great Commandment (**St. Matthew 22:36-40**) in mind: to love God and to love one another.

Partner Talk

What are some ways we can take care of the rest of creation?



Summary So why were we formed in this world? We were formed to look like God imagined us to be and to care for His creation. We are to use our God-given talents to care for our community and the world God lovingly created for us. Therefore, we will grow to be like Him.

Reflection Questions

1. Why should we care for our bodies?
2. If all men are created in God's image, why do some people still commit terrible crimes?
3. As Orthodox Christians, what responsibilities do we have towards the environment?
4. You may choose to answer this question in a journal. Reflect on your life and think about the following:
 - What are some qualities/characteristics/actions that you have that may not be reflective of Christ's image?
 - What is prompting you to continue with these qualities/characteristics/actions?
 - What are some actions you can take to overcome these qualities/characteristics/actions and lead a life that is more reflective of Christ's image?
5. During communion, one of the stanzas we sing is as follows:

*I will dwell in them
Who receive as food
My Holy Body
And my Blood as drink*

(pg. 214 of the 2017 edition of the Holy Qurbana Service Book)

How are we becoming more like Him by receiving His Body and Blood?

Cultivating Courage

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the Church's views on ethical issues like abuse, bullying, etc.*
- *I can understand how my faith shapes my behaviour and the choices I make.*
- *I can understand that, as I relate to people of varied backgrounds, views, and experiences, I must continue to reflect the light of Christ.*
- *I can understand how Christians should respond to bullying and that we are not to bully others.*
- *I can understand signs of bullying and what to do in those situations.*



Have you ever heard the phrase “When the going gets tough, the tough get going”? Have you ever thought about what it means?

Some people might interpret it to mean that when things get difficult, “smart” people figure out how to avoid the problem. Others may interpret it as saying that when life gets difficult, “strong” people attack the problem head on and fight through for success.

Remember

Sometimes, the experience of being delivered through tough times may hurt or be uncomfortable, but we have to trust God, our Eternal Guide



However, there is a third way to consider it: Life becoming difficult means there lies an opportunity for God to start a new work in and through us. Situations that seem impossible for us alone are meant to be a journey for us with God. If you let Him take charge over you, it becomes an opportunity for you to be under His light.

With God's grace, you will be able to face life's difficulties. Always remember St. Paul's words:

“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13).

We remember Joshua, who had to lead the Jews to Canaan after Moses' death. He was worried, had no idea what to do, and was convinced he could never fill the shoes of the great prophet.

Yet the Lord reminded Joshua:

“The book of this law shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may have the understanding to do all the things written therein. Then you will both prosper, make your ways prosperous, and have understanding. Behold, I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be cowardly or fearful, for the Lord your God is with you in all things. wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:8-9)

Joshua stayed strong in his faith and trusted in God. Then he was given the promise of God’s continued presence with him. Whenever we place our trust in God, we too are given that same promise of God’s presence and support to face all of our problems. That does not mean that things will always be easy or comfortable, but rather that God will be with us through it all.

The rod and the staff are a shepherd’s tools and sources of comfort. A shepherd uses his tools to guide his flock safely through pastures and back to rest. A staff guides the sheep in the right direction, while a rod is used to defend them against other animals or to tame wandering sheep. Left alone, the sheep will wander and may get caught in dangerous places, or predators may eat them. The shepherd’s rod and staff are tools of control, protection and security for the beloved flock. Safety and comfort come from the painful discomfort of

those very tools. Remember **Psalm 23:4**

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”.

This verse reminds us that no matter how difficult life gets, we do not need to fear because our Shepherd is always standing by us.

Whenever life becomes difficult, you may want to give in to your negative emotions (frustration, fear, pain, anger, etc.). Instead, we are to hold firmly on to Christ, our Eternal Guide. We can easily fall into despair or even hurt others with our anger. Understanding this, we must constantly ask ourselves:

Where is the Lord’s rod? How am I trusting in Him now? How can I see both Christ’s presence and my life’s purpose, especially in difficult times?

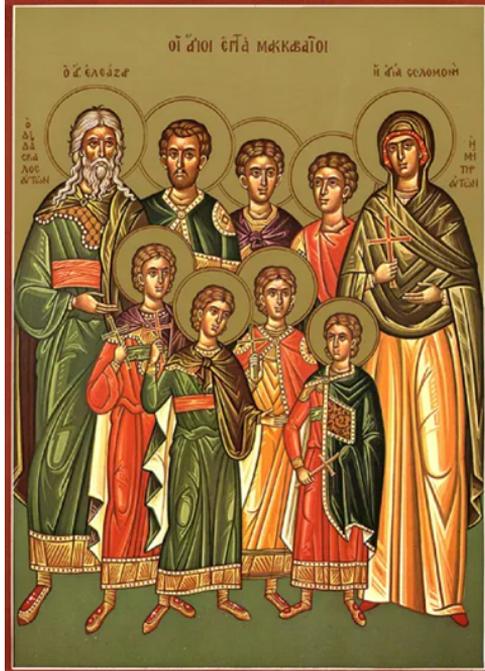
Remember

It takes faith to obediently listen to His instruction and to pray with an attitude of thanksgiving in difficult circumstances. This step moves our problems and burdens from our shoulders to Christ’s.



The Holy Maccabean Martyrs

In chapters 6 and 7 of the 2nd Maccabees, we see the stories of the Holy



Maccabean Martyrs

Maccabean Martyrs: Eleazar, the teacher, along with Shmouni and her seven sons. They faced persecution at the hands of King Antiochus, who wanted to destroy the Jews. They were brought before an idol and ordered to eat the sacrificial pork or to face immediate death. Eating pork has always been forbidden for the Jews (**Leviticus 11:7-8**). Despite the horrible torture and pain they faced, they refused to give in to despair or become angry. Rather, they courageously upheld their faith and trusted God even when it led them

through unimaginable suffering.

Do our sufferings match the sufferings of Eleazar, Shmouni and her seven sons? How did they keep their faith and not give up on God? We shall take a deeper look.

Eleazar, the Teacher

Eleazar was a very old scribe and teacher among the Jews. When King Antiochus' guards saw him, they forced the sacrificial pork into his mouth. As a faithful Jew, he spit the unlawful sacrifice out of his mouth. The guards in charge of the

sacrifice had known Eleazar for a very long time and wanted to help him as a sign of respect for his age. So, they told him to go back to his house and bring some other suitable meat to eat instead. This way, the king's representatives would think that Eleazar had followed the King's order, but he would technically not have broken any Jewish Law either.

Eleazar did not want to set a poor life example for his students, including the seven brothers and their mother, Shmouni. Instead, he chose immediate death over just pretending to abandon his lifelong faith in the one true God.

Shmouni and her seven Sons

Then Shmouni and her sons were dragged into the Temple and told to eat the unclean and improper pork offering. They, too, refused to eat the forbidden offerings. One by one, each of the sons was offered an opportunity to abandon their faith and join the Greeks. They all refused. As punishment, their tongues, hands, and feet were cut off, and they were thrown into pots of boiling oil while still alive!

When it came time for the youngest son to make his choice, the leaders called Shmouni and told her to advise her son to save his life so that she might not lose all of her sons. However, she told her youngest son to follow his elder brothers in honouring God so that she might see him again, with them, in glory.

The youngest son accepted martyrdom after rebuking the king and prophesying his destruction at the hand of God. After witnessing the torture and death of her beloved sons, Shmouni was also martyred.

Though they were humbled before society, God elevated the memory of the Maccabean martyrs. We still honour and remember them as heroes who upheld the faith, celebrating their feast day every August 1st. Furthermore, we remember Shmouni's courage in the 2nd watch of Tuesday Midnight Prayer and the 2nd Qolo of every Thursday Morning Prayer when we chant:

*In the morning Shamouni
Offered up her prayr's to God:
"O God give judgment for me before
King Antiochus
He slays my sons like sheep and
Charges me like a lion*

*Shamouni said to the king
"Of my seven noble sons,
I will not give even one to you to serve
as a slave
I will give them to the Lord
Because they are His servants*

Like sheep led to their predator's grasp, Shmouni and her 7 sons faced persecution. Yet their courage in the face of trials came from their deep faith in God's truth. They believed that God would strengthen them through the Holy Spirit and that they would, one day, certainly, join the heavenly saints.

They encouraged each other to stay strong in their faith and to face death saying:

“The Lord God is taking notice of us and in truth is encouraging us, as Moses proclaimed in his song, which he sang, bearing witness against the people to their faces: ‘And God will have compassion on His servants.’” (2nd Maccabees 7:6).

In the face of the pain and suffering of martyrdom, this holy family increased their courage through prayer and continually supported one another in faith.

For them, the truth of God was always unchangeable. They were not willing to change their behaviour and lie just to be physically safe. The truth is that our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain unchangeable even at the time of death, for They are always with us.

Learning Outcome Check

Point out that Truth is not relative, it is found in the Holy Trinity and we are rooted in it.

Be the Good Soil

Whenever we see our car’s low fuel warning light, we stop and refuel. Then the car will not stop mid-way through our journey. Similarly, worry is a warning light, a reminder that it is time to pray. It takes faith to obediently listen to His instruction and to pray with an attitude of

thanksgiving, especially in difficult circumstances.

Prayer moves our problems and burdens onto Christ’s shoulders. Prayer allows us to experience God’s presence.

In our toughest times, when we feel too weak to even pray for anything, the Church has blessed us with the **Jesus prayer: *Kurielaison. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.*** Through this simple prayer, We bring our troubles before God and humbly request His guidance. Through prayer, we can hear the Words of God. How do you use His Words?



Parable of the Seeds

In **St. Matthew 13:1-23**, Jesus talks to His disciples about the Parable of the

Sower. While the sower was sowing the seeds, some fell on the wayside, some on rocky ground among thorns, and some on good soil. The seeds that fell on the good soil grew well and healthy. God wants us to be the Good Soil and to let the Seed (Word of God) grow and be fruitful within us, unlike the seeds that fell elsewhere.

Remember

Life becoming difficult means there lies an opportunity for God to start a new work in and through us. Situations that seem impossible for us being alone turn out to be a journey for us and God together. They become an occasion for us to be under His light, if we let Him to take charge over us. With God's grace, we are able to overcome all difficulties in life.



St. Shmouni, a Jewish scribe, was like the good soil. She allowed the seeds to grow within her and planted little saplings around her (her seven sons). When we are well informed about our faith, we start to behave well in society too. We should not allow anyone to bully us, nor should we bully others. We should speak up for ourselves and stand up for others too.

We often wonder why God does not warn us in advance about the hard, difficult days in our future. But God has never claimed that there will not be dif-

ficult days either. St. Peter, in his first letter, says:

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

He does not want you to focus on what has not happened. He wants you to build your faith so that you are ready to face anything that might happen. Above all, we must learn that He is in control and will always be beside you to hold you and guide you, even through your life's difficult times. Remember: *God's grip on you is far stronger than your grip on Him.*

Learning Outcome Check

Identify our views on current ethical issues.

Should you Bully or Watch Someone Being Bullied?

The Holy Spirit dwells in all of us and guides us to do God's will. Even though our minds may be set on what the Holy Spirit desires, it may still be difficult for us to always act right. So, pay attention to all that is around you.

Learning Outcome Check

Relate with the love of Christ the ways in which individuals & groups have unequal experiences, access to opportunity, or life outcomes

You can learn to relate to people with different life experiences and opportunities than you. This includes different races, genders, social classes, citizenship, ability/disability, sexual orientation, religion or other differences.

When we face challenges and setbacks, we must remember to lean on Christ and resist allowing our emotions to lead us to frustration or anger. If we are afraid, we must trust that God is always there to help us through. He has blessed us with a community of people that we can trust and rely on like our priest, parents, spiritual elders, teachers, and siblings.

Research

Read St. John 8. How did Jesus respond to the crowd that was bullying the woman?

If our anger or pain tempts us to act in a way that might hurt ourselves or others, we must remember that all creation

is God's and that we are responsible to protect, not destroy.

There are many resources available through our Diocese, parish, school, and other organisations for counselling and therapy that can help us navigate our emotions safely and effectively. Thus, we can uphold our faith and protect the well-being of ourselves and others. It is important to pay attention to our friends and families. Then we can be sources of help and support in their times of need. We have to pay attention to signs that people may be suffering.

Learning Outcome Check

Recognize signs of bullying and elaborate what to do in those situations.

This table below shows some common signs that may require you to take action by offering care, speaking up, and confiding in a trusted adult. Since everyone is God's beautiful creation, we cannot let any harm happen to anyone.

Remember

We do not allow anyone to bully us, nor do we bully others. We shall speak up for ourselves and stand for others.

Signs of 'The Bully'	Signs of 'The Bullied'
Aggressive to people	Unexplainable injuries
Has bully friends	Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewellery
Tries to control others	Controlled by others
Inflexible	Too flexible
Tries to be a powerful leader	Always being teased
Always the teaser	Feels helpless
Blame others for their problems	Always accepts responsibility
Excludes others	Tries to fit in
Confrontational	Always avoid confrontations
Selfish	Selfless
Self-centered	People pleaser
Tries to be the centre of attention	Isolated/lonely inside
Always concerned about their reputation/looks	Feels invisible to others

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the Christian response to bullying and how we are not to bully others.

Learning Outcome Check

Discuss how our faith informs our behaviour and the choices we make.

towards yourself or others, seek help from a trustworthy adult.

Summary

Remember that our Christian faith is not just a label but rather guides us in our behaviour and the choices we make.

We must see, respect, and love the image of God in others and in ourselves.

We understand that we are to always practice the love of Christ. We are called to be the guardians and not the bullies because we are the good soil, not the rocky soil.

“

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

St. James 1:2-3

”

Reflection Questions

1. Consider how Eleazar upheld the virtues of faith that he taught during his life. How can we uphold our Christian values when faced with challenges and trials?
2. St. Shmouni raised her sons with wisdom and the fear of God. As she watched her children face martyrdom for their faith, she encouraged them to stay strong and trust in God. What practical steps can we take to strengthen our faith? How does building up our faith help us face challenges ?
3. What are some signs of bullying others? How can we uphold our faith without insulting or hurting others? Why is it important for us to do so?
4. Reflecting on your own life, have there been instances where you felt ashamed or denied your faith? Find stories of martyrs of our Church, such as St. Thomas and St. George, and research how they held firm to their Faith even when faced with certain death.
5. Think about individuals and groups who have had a different upbringing or experience than your own. They may be different from you in race, gender, social class, citizenship, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religion or other dimensions. How can you relate to their experience with the same love that Christ would? Discuss ways you could identify signs that they may be struggling with some of the signs from this lesson. What can you do as an Orthodox Christian to help?

Hurt People

Hurt Other People

Lesson Goals :

- I can better understand what bullying is.
- I can recognise bullying behaviours and understand the cycle of bullying.
- I can understand the effects of bullying and know resources that can help me through these situations.
- I can understand the importance of bringing an end to bullying by standing up to it.



What is Bullying?

Bible Verse

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fasting; by purity, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love

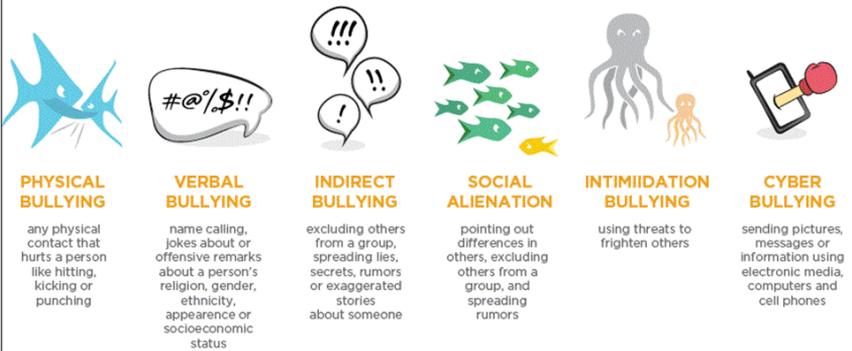
2 Corinthians 6:4-6



Have you ever felt hurt by something others have said or done? Have you ever felt like you were continuously picked

on? You may have just brushed it off and hoped it was just a one-time event. You may have also been in disbelief, believing this is not actually happening to you or someone you know. **Bullying** is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived **power imbalance**. Kids who bully use their power (for example, physical strength) to obtain embarrassing information or to gain popularity in order to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people. It is possible that the person who was bullied can later end up becoming a bully to others in order to feel like they have regained control. Bullying behaviours include making threats, spread-

THE 6 TYPES OF BULLYING



ing rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. **Cyberbullying** includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information/photos about others, causing them embarrassment or humiliation. As part of God's beautiful creation, people should never be humiliated or bullied. Sadly, sometimes we are unaware of our own behaviours and how we make others feel. Bullies can also be unaware that they are hurting others.

The Effects of Bullying

Bullying can happen anywhere: schools, churches, homes or within various communities.

Repetitive actions, power imbalances, and intentional acts are the three main things that cause verbal, physical and

relational types of harmful behaviour among children. Some people dismiss bullying among children as normal and part of the growing up process. However, bullying is harmful and can lead to long lasting tension and fear in individuals. It may cause someone to avoid school. In severe cases, those who are bullied may take drastic measures, react violently, or even consider causing harm to themselves or to others. If not effectively managed right away, the effects of bullying may last a lifetime. Children who are bullied may experience negative physical, social, emotional, academic, and mental health issues.

If you feel hurt or affected by bullying, please talk to a trusted adult. Mental health professionals (therapists, social worker or guidance counsellors) can help you talk openly about what you are going through. The professional will make sure that this unfortunate situation

does not continue to harm your physical and mental well-being. Remember, you can always talk to a spiritual elder who can guide your spiritual health through this struggle.

Standing up to Bullying

The Parable of the Good Samaritan gives us an excellent way to respond to bullies, from **St. Luke 10:25-37**:

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now, by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’” So which of these three do you think was his neighbour who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

In the Holy Icon, Christ is clearly seen as the Good Samaritan. We are to see

Christ in others and ourselves, as we are all made in His image and likeness. When we treat others as God’s creation, they are reminded of the Creator and of their own value. This will help them live up to their life potential and set better standards for the way they behave. We are expected to spread the love of Christ in all that we think, say, and do.

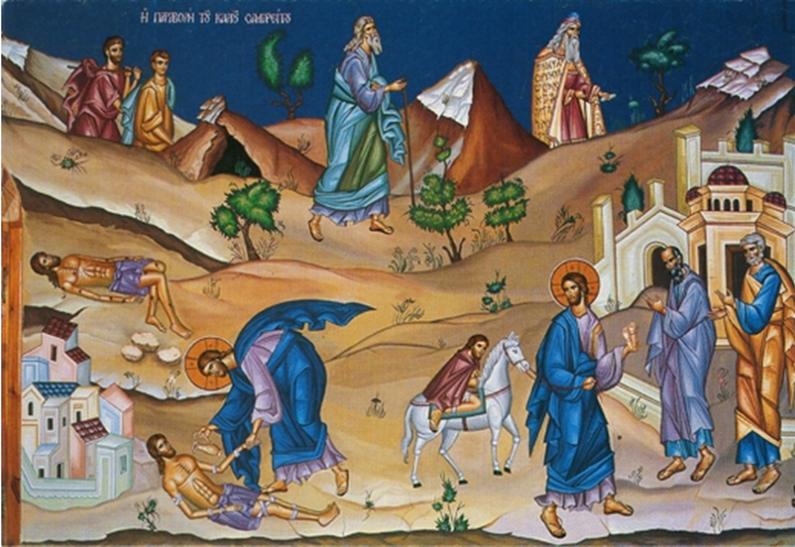
Bible Verse

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7



When we see inappropriate situations, we have to recognise how they affect us, specifically how our body and mind want to react. We have to be aware of our own behaviours and not encourage the inappropriate behaviours of other people. Commenting on this parable, St. Gregory the Dialogist said, *“Godly love cannot be perfect unless a man loves his neighbour also. Under which name must be included not only those who are connected with us by friendship or neighbourhood, but absolutely all men with whom we have a common nature, whether they be foes or allies, slaves or free.”* All children (both the bullies and the bullied) must be taught that they are to always be Good Samaritans.



Parable of the good Samaritan

Remember

We are all made in His image and likeness, when we treat others as if they are God's creation, they are often reminded of their Creator and of their own value.



Stop Bullying on the Spot

It sounds scary, but we must stop bullying from the start. When you observe bullying, you must immediately bring it to the attention of a trusted adult. When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behaviours, they send the message that bullying is not acceptable.

Research shows that a timely intervention by an adult can stop bullying behaviour over time. Here are some benefits of always involving an adult to stop bullying and keep kids safe:

- Adults can intervene immediately and can also bring in another adult to help.
- Adults will be able to separate the kids involved.
- Adults can make sure everyone is safe.
- Adults can address any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Adults can reassure the children involved, including bystanders.
- Children can learn from the respectful behaviour modelled by the adult who intervenes.

Standing up to the bully is important. This technique is called assertiveness. Being assertive means that you are neither passive nor aggressive. Assertiveness is a skill that is used to effectively communicate a necessary opinion or feeling while also respecting the feelings of others. For Christians, assertiveness occurs in the love of Christ, which includes patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5: 22-23**).

Remember

Assertiveness is a skill that is used to effectively communicate a necessary view or feeling, while also respecting the feelings of others. For Christians, assertiveness must be done in the love of Christ, which includes patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5: 22-23).



Christ was assertive with His disciples. Christ counselled them not to be passive but to take measured action steps when confronting people committing sinful acts. Jesus said,

“Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more so that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to

the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (St. Matthew 18: 15-17).

When you observe bullying, the National Institute of Health (NIH) guidelines recommend that you shout out loud: “Stop it.” This draws attention to the bullying act and makes it a more public event. Anyone who hears this cry for help will know that the person being bullied is saying, “I will not take it any more.”

After that, you can walk away to give the impression that you do not care, even if that is not how you actually feel. It is important to continue being yourself and not change as a result of the bullying. If you like reading books, working on the computer, studying, the clothes you wear, etc., do not change any of them because of the bully. If you change your behaviour, the bully thinks he or she has won, which just reinforces the bully’s bad behaviour. On the other hand, walking away from the bully is an example of asserting the power of meekness, as Christ did. If this is done consistently and effectively, it can repel bullying behaviour in the future.

The Cycle of Bullying - Hurt People, Hurt Other People

Bullies are often individuals who have been hurt or bullied before. To take back control, they often hurt others in return. You see, often hurt people hurt other people. However, what they expe-

rience is a pseudo (fake) feeling of control, which is not in any way Christ-like. Our emotions play a big role in how we react with our words and actions. Being aware of our emotions helps us control them and how they affect us. As human beings, we are meant to express a wide range of emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, fear, etc. In the Psalms, we see David's expression of a wide range of emotions. For example, in **Psalm 95**, we see David expressing joy. We also see him expressing anger in both **Psalm 10:12-15 and 22:1**, and we see his sadness in **Psalm 22:11-15**. We, too, have to be aware of our own emotions and how different things, words, and people make us feel.

Remember

Walking away from the bully is an example of asserting the power of meekness as Christ did.



We need to express our emotions in a healthy and appropriate way. When we put down or attack others in thought, word or action, we are not behaving in love. Such behaviours are not examples of honouring God's creation made in His image and likeness. Anyone who feels hurt in their heart and wants revenge should reach out to their priest and seek confession. We read in **1 John 2:9**:

“He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now.”

From **1 John 3:15**: *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know*

that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Whenever we do not see Christ in others or do not love others as Christ loves us, we are living in darkness.

This can be a difficult task, especially if we feel we are being bullied. We can hold others responsible for their behaviours by getting an adult involved. We should not repeat the bullying behaviour, nor should we hurt others because we have been hurt. From the Church's fasting prayers, we know that fasting from food is useless if we speak ill and hate our brother. When we use the word 'brother,' it represents not just those related to us but all human beings, including those who hurt us.

Remember

When we do not see Christ in others, when we do not love others as Christ loves us, we are living in darkness.



Summary

We are supposed to always treat others with the love of God. Even though it may be difficult, we are expected to grow to become like Christ, and that includes growing in the way we treat others. This means treating others with kindness, no matter how we are treated. Christ still loved all His enemies, even the ones who mocked and brutally crucified Him on the Cross. We follow His shining example!

Reflection Questions

1. After reviewing this lesson, do you recall seeing behaviour that you now realise was bullying? Why did you not recognise it as bullying?
2. Why is it sometimes difficult to stand up to bullies? Are you willing to ask an adult for help?
3. How do you think others would feel if they witnessed or heard that you were bullied?
4. Bullying leads to hurt, which requires healing. Would you seek out emotional and spiritual healing from professionals?
5. Can you think of any situations where you have bullied others or continue to bully others?
6. What are some positive ways we can express our emotions?

The Belief of St. Thomas

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand how to overcome challenges and doubts especially when it comes to my Faith.*
- *I can relate to St. Thomas and be inspired by his courage and discernment of God's plan.*
- *I can appreciate that questions about our Faith can strengthen my love for Christ.*
- *I can understand that when I struggle or face doubts, the Church offers me support and guidance.*
- *I can explain the Great Commission and how it is not a responsibility but an expression of our joy to share the Gospel to those within and those outside the Church.*



We remember St. Thomas as the Apostle to India in our prayers and hymns. It is a powerful testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit that the Gospel was brought directly to our ancestors in 52 AD, by one of the twelve Apostles. The Church continued to grow despite centuries of conflict and hardships.

As we study the work of St. Thomas -from his time as a disciple of Christ to spreading the Gospel in the modern day state of Kerala and beyond- we can learn to become better Christians. The transformation of St. Thomas from a zealous young man, of weak faith to an

evangelist and martyr, was so remarkable that St. John Chrysostom observed: *“Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles, toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to nations.”*

St. Thomas in Scripture: A Teenager

The description of St. Thomas as a “doubting Thomas” is an incorrect and incomplete reading of the Scripture. Historical data and Scripture records do



(a) Byzantine Icon (b) Traditional Icon

not mention much about the early life of St. Thomas. However, it is generally accepted that St. Thomas was just a teenager (almost like you!) when Christ purposefully chose him as an Apostle.

Traditional paintings and icons of St. Thomas from India reflected an older, bearded Apostle in comparison to a younger, beardless man, as seen in icons from the Byzantine Orthodox Churches of Europe. Travel in ancient days was difficult and took a long time. Traveling from the Middle East to India would have taken years, which is why an older,

bearded man would be how St. Thomas likely preached in India.

Remember

Thomas, being once weaker in faith than the other apostles, toiled through the grace of God more bravely, more zealously and tirelessly than them all, so that he went preaching over nearly all the earth, not fearing to proclaim the Word of God to nations.



Courage Amidst Challenges

We often refer to him as “doubting Thomas” because of one Scriptural scene (**St. John 20:25**) which unfairly ignores the other good qualities of the young Apostle. From Scripture, we can see that St. Thomas was **courageous** and stood by Jesus in dangerous times. He, too, always sought the Truth, by constantly asking questions like an inquisitive child would. St. Thomas’ memorable confession, “My Lord and my God,” is the Bible’s first and clearest declaration of Jesus’ divinity!

When returning to Judea after Lazarus’ death, Jesus’ life was at risk because the Jewish leaders now wanted to stone him. St. Thomas bravely insisted that the Apostles should accompany Jesus and protect him. This disciple was not bothered by the dangers that he would likely face (**St. John 11:16**). This illustrates his courage and loyalty to Christ. Let us remember that God always grants us courage to face struggles and to support our friends in their times of need.

Questioning, not Suspecting

Often times, when we think of questioning, we think of a court case (like a scene from the television show- *Law and Order*), where the guilty party is questioned until they slip and the truth comes out. This type of questioning suspects that the one being questioned is guilty or foolish and that the question is a trap to get them

to reveal their dishonesty. If we wrongly think about St. Thomas’ questions like this, it limits our understanding of his faith and the purpose of his questioning.

Whenever faced with doubts, St. Thomas brought them to Christ immediately. His questions were not traps to trip up or disprove Christ. Instead, St. Thomas’ love for Christ was very strong, but that still did not make everything easy for him to understand. When things were unclear, St. Thomas always had the courage to ask questions. For instance, in the Gospel of St. John, Christ foretold His departure from earth to prepare the way to heaven for the disciples and all people. In **St. John 14:1-4** Christ says,

“Let not your heart be troubled; if you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

St. Thomas was not embarrassed to say to the Lord that he did not know where Jesus was going, and so, how can we know the way? Meanwhile, all the other Apostles silently listened to Jesus. Remember: His open doubts and public courage to find answers were always relatable and are still good role models for us today. So, Christ answers Thomas’ question in **St. John 14:6&7**:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on, you know Him and have seen Him.”

St. Thomas’ courageous question gave us Christ’s clear promise, guidance and answer on how to know God. Had he never asked his question out loud, we might still have unanswered questions and doubts. Like St. Thomas, we wonder... Is it right to question our teachers and elders? Of course it is! It is always right to find the exact reasoning. Courage and curiosity are good, but humility is essential too. You can definitely ask a question to clarify something, but not with the purpose of making yourself seem important/smart or to make someone else feel less so.

Uncertainty Leads to Deeper Faith

In **Revelation 3:15-16**, we read which at first glance may be confusing and even startling:

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

Deep faith makes us question and challenge ourselves to truly understand and believe what is being shared. A “lukewarm” faith is one where the person says they believe, but their words, actions, and thoughts show that their faith has not changed their life at all. A “cold” response means rejection, whereas a “hot” response is one that shows pas-

sion. To better understand why rejecting a truth is better than a lukewarm response, we must remember that God is Love, and what He deeply desires in us is love. Well, is the opposite of love, indifference or hatred? Hatred means the person cared enough to take a position, whereas indifference (or an I-don’t-care-attitude) means to them the truth was not even worthy of any kind of response or change in behaviour.

Remember

St. Thomas’ question encourages us to ask, “Is it right to question our teachers and elders?” Of course it is! It is right to find the exact reasoning behind an action. Courage and curiosity are good but humility is essential too. You can definitely ask a question to clarify something, but not with the purpose of making yourself seem important/smart or to make someone else feel less so.



Now we can see that St. Thomas was not being indifferent when he responded to being told that the risen Jesus had appeared to the disciples when he was not present. His response actually shows that he was full of love and passion for God (**St. John 20:19-29**). When the other disciples said, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas replied that he would not believe it unless he could actually touch Jesus’ wounds. Jesus later presented Himself to the Apostles and in-

vited Thomas to touch his wounds.

Crucified and risen? St. Thomas could not understand how such an impossible thing could be true. Yet he certainly did not take his doubts to the Jews or the Romans, who would have been happy to witness the doubts of any of Christ's disciples. Instead, St. Thomas realised that he needed to share his doubts with those who knew Christ intimately, like he did. He confided in others who had faith and love for Christ. In presenting his doubts and working through his confusion, St. Thomas did not separate himself from his brothers, nor did he seek guidance from those who were enemies of Christ. Rather, he took his doubts to the other Apostles, lovers of Christ. This shows great faith, even in the midst of his doubts. Thomas was seeking proof, not validation, for his doubts. Christ realised Thomas' faithfulness, even in the midst of his doubt. So, the Lord mercifully clarified Thomas' concerns.

Jesus was not upset that St. Thomas questioned the resurrection, but instead Jesus showed compassion and understood St. Thomas' desire for more explanation. Questions and even doubts are not to be discouraged, especially when one is seeking the truth. Often, uncertainty is the foundation upon which faith is born and strengthened. The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty of falsehood (belief in lies).

Jesus understood St. Thomas' questions. The other Apostles and disciples were not upset with him for asking questions either. They responded to St.

Thomas' initial questions with a witness to what they saw. This led to the opportunity for Christ Himself to personally interact with St. Thomas. As explained in the *Orthodox Study Bible*, the conversion of Thomas' doubt into faith led him to the clearest confession of Christ's Divinity, addressing Jesus as "*my Lord and my God.*" (St. John 20:28)

Remember

Questions and even doubts are not to be discouraged, especially when one is seeking truth. Often, uncertainty is the foundation upon which faith is born and strengthened. Opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty of falsehood (belief in lies).



The closer we study St. Thomas in the Scripture, we see that he is just like us in so many ways!

1. **He was a loyal disciple and a compassionate leader**, as seen when he told the others, "*Let us also go, that we may die with Him*" (St. John 11:16).
2. **Smart and courageous** to encourage Christ to avoid the dangerous return to Jerusalem. Thomas' courage and bravery are also given as the reason why he was not with the other disciples and Apostles when Christ first appeared in the closed room (St. John 20:19). When the other disciples "were assembled, for fear of the Jews" in the locked room, we know

from Scripture that St. Thomas was not there.

3. **Curious & attentive**, as seen in **St. John 14:1-5** when he responded to Christ's reassurance that He was to "go to prepare a place" for them. This must have been very confusing to all who were there. However, it was only St. Thomas who spoke to his Teacher and Lord so that he could understand more.

Through all these Scripture stories and Church traditions, the faith of St. Thomas grew to such a strong conviction that he would travel farther away than any of the Apostles (including St. Paul)! He spread the Word and made disciples of all (**St. Matthew 28:16-20**), thereby dedicating his whole life to telling others about Christ. As we remember in our hymns,

Concluding hymn on the Feast of St Thomas

*The Church honours your mem'ry
For you proclaimed before Christ
In faith, "My Lord and my God!"
Thomas, how great was your faith
Which the tempests could not shake!
Bless'ed is your memory;
May your pray'r be our refuge*

Summary

We are always wrestling within ourselves for clear answers. We are not always sure if what we are doing is right or wrong. We often carry the baggage of overthinking and the stress it causes.

Our role as Christians is to be in union with God. Everyone has life struggles, and these struggles often test our faith. Just as St. Thomas pressed forward, so too must we, with the understanding that, as Christians, we are never alone.

Talking with your friends at church, your family, priests, deacons, bishops, or seeking professional help through the resources of our Church are all ways we can not only find answers but also grow in that same zeal, passion, and joy that helped St. Thomas share the Gospel of our ancestors. When your faith is tested: reflect on how God has helped you in the past, confess His power over the situation, and trust Him for the resources you need. In the Orthodox understanding, the Great Commission to preach the

Gospel of Christ is not a responsibility but an expression of joy. St. Thomas demonstrated that perfect joy in preaching the Gospel in India and elsewhere. Similarly, we can also witness Christ through our lives. Praise Him through the trial and ask your priest, teachers, and elders to pray for you. Ask the Lord to increase your faith through constant prayer. Importantly, ask St. Thomas to be an intercessor on behalf of you.

Remember

Talking with your friends at church, your family, our priests, deacons, and bishops, or seeking professional help through the resources from our Church are all ways we can not only find answers but also grow in that same zeal, passion, and joy that helped St. Thomas share the Gospel to our ancestors.



Reflection Questions

1. What are some resources available through our Church when you have questions?
2. We often hear outside of our Church that St. Thomas is described as the “doubter.” How can you use essential details of his life and Scriptural evidence to show that this is an incomplete description of him?
3. Find a story of St. Thomas after he arrived in India and compare this with one of the accounts in Scripture of when he was younger. What do you feel may have changed, or what might he have learned that helped him with his ministry in India?

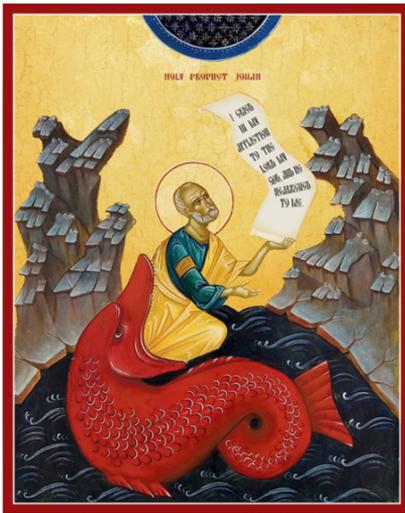
In Three Days

Lesson Goals :

- *I can identify what separates mankind from God and what reunites us.*
- *I can explain my Christian identity, and whom we are called to support.*
- *I can state how my faith guides me to utilize my talents to support God's will.*



Jonah: A Type of Christ



Holy prophet Jonah

Jesus mentions Jonah's story as a sign of His own Death and resurrection (**St. Matthew 12: 38-42**). In the story of Jonah, God asked him to go to Nin-

veh to preach for the people's repentance. However, in his disobedience Jonah, instead, decided to go to Tarshish via ship but a dangerous storm arose. To save their own lives, the men in the boat threw the disobedient Jonah into the ocean. A whale swallowed Jonah, and he remained within its belly for 3 days and 3 nights in prayer until God saved him. Once on the shore, Jonah travelled to Nineveh where he preached to them for repentance, just as God had first instructed him to do.

Do you see some similarities between Jonah and Jesus? This foreshadowing is known as typology. A "type" in Scripture is not an exact duplicate of a person or event, but rather it is a similarity from the Old Testament that resembles a fulfillment in the New Testament. Jonah and the whale prefigures Christ's burial, the stomach of the fish being Christ's tomb: as Jonah was freed from the whale after three days, so did Christ rise from His



Jonah and the whale.

tomb after three days.

Three Long Days

Jonah remained in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights. Could this be a miracle? Indeed! God prepared the “great fish” to swallow up Jonah from the moment he was thrown overboard. God always has a plan. The terrified Jonah prayed for three days and three nights, **Jonah 2:3:**

“I cried out in my affliction to the

Lord, my God. And he heard my voice”

Jonah was certain that God would save him;

If Jonah was not swallowed by the fish, would he have still believed in God and prayed? The three days and nights might have been the longest in Jonah’s life, but that is when he actually found his renewed faith.

Whenever we face life challenges or stress, that is when we need to realize that God is giving us a gentle warning

to actually pay more attention to our behaviour and our spiritual life. This is when we are to give everything unto God and believe completely in Him, just like Jonah eventually did.

When we have faith in God, He will mould our behaviour and guide us to our next steps, just as He did for Jonah. God guided and gave courage to Jonah on how to reach Nineveh, and briefed exactly what to tell the cruel and wicked people of Nineveh. The Ninevites put on sackcloth, fasted and repented. The people listened to Jonah who was a stranger in Nineveh because they heard God's warning and completely believed in Him.

Christian Identity formed by Christ and the Holy Spirit

At first, Jonah could not identify with God's mercy and compassion. He repeatedly questioned and only half-heartedly carried out God's commandments. His intellectual pride, feelings of narrow-nationalism, and supposed moral superiority over the people of Nineveh prevented him from practising the fruit of the Spirit that God put before him.

We often have a Jonah hidden within ourselves, where we let our intellect and false superiority rule over the fruit of the Spirit that God has for us. We forget to see our **neighbour** as someone who, like us, was created in God's own image and likeness. We need to connect with and care for others, rather than find their

faults and ridicule them.

When God showed mercy to the people of Nineveh, Jonah assumed that God was wrong and that the Ninevites should have been punished, as they had been warned. However in His infinite love, God completely forgave the Ninevites when they repented. If God, Himself, can forgive, then who are we to judge our neighbours? We must open the doors of our heart and love others, just as God loves us. We shall not forget that the image and likeness of God is found in our neighbours too.

Remember

We often have a Jonah hidden within ourselves, where we let our intellect and false superiority rule over the fruits of the Spirit that God has for us. We forget to see our neighbour as someone who, like us, was created in God's own image and likeness. We need to connect with and care for others, rather than find their faults and ridicule them.



Sinful Separation Reconciled by the Holy Spirit

The Orthodox Study Bible highlights that Jonah's calling is unique because he is not called to preach to his own people, but to a group of cruel and wicked pagans. The people of Nineveh had sinned, and God wanted them to turn back from their sin. Turning back from sin means

being reconciled by the Holy Spirit. Sin separates us from God.

In **2 Thessalonian 1: 9**: “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

Remember

Just like the Ninevites were forgiven, our sins are also forgiven through the sacrament of Holy Confession. We need to seek forgiveness and be reconciled with the Holy Spirit through complete humility and faith.



Does this mean that God will never give you a second chance? God always takes care of you and does not do anything that will intentionally make you sad. God is loving and is always ready to give you a second chance. Just like the Ninevites were forgiven, our sins are also forgiven through the sacrament of Holy Confession. We need to seek forgiveness and be reconciled with the Holy Spirit through complete humility and faith.

We Evangelize by the Way We Live Our Lives

We are alive and present here because it is God’s will. Our acts define us in the communities we live in. To fulfill God’s will we need to grow the **talents** that He has provided us with. Then only will we inherit the fruit of the Holy Spirit- love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

Just as Jesus fulfilled the Lord’s plan, we each have our own individual plan, a calling to serve our Lord. We are made in the image and likeness of God and through our actions, we reach **theosis**. Jesus came to this world so that we may have life as found in St. John 10:10, “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*”

Jesus sacrificed His life and showed us how to live in God’s likeness. Naturally, we think differently but with slight changes we can live an abundant life, not full of worldly pleasures, but full in fellowship with God and people. God gave us eternal life through His Son. So, through Christian evangelism, let us accept God’s offer of eternal life.

In the story of Jonah, God did not punish the Ninevites as He had planned. The Ninevites showed the power of repentance and seeking forgiveness. As a community, they fasted, wore sackcloth, and sought forgiveness. In this story, they show their obedience to God and all were united together as one.

All of us have our God-given talents which we can use to glorify the Lord through our lives. If you are a writer, you can write praises of His Glory; if you draw, you can draw the wonderful world He has created around us; if you are a teacher, you can teach everyone God’s ways and so on. Let us together help people in need and sing praises to His name.

Why do we observe the Nineveh Fast?

As a **canonical fast**, the Nineveh fast or Three-days Fast, gives us an opportunity to reflect on Christ's mission just before the Great Lent on our liturgical calendar. At only three days long, this is the shortest fast. It honours the transformation of the Ninevites when Jonah preached and informed them of God's plan for them. It is a time for penance and prayer. Just as

Jonah spent his time repenting and praying in the belly of the fish, the fast calls us to repent, pray, and prepare ourselves for the 40-days of Great Lent.

Think

What is Christian evangelism?
What are some ways in which we can evangelize?



Comparison Between Jonah and Jesus:

Jonah (Old Testament)	Jesus (New Testament)
Jonah was called to preach repentance Nineveh	Jesus delivered repentance to all of us
Jonah came down from Joppa	Jesus came down from heaven
Jonah stayed in the belly of the fish for 3 days until the fish spat him to the shore	Jesus stayed in the belly of the earth for 3 days until He resurrected
Jonah half-heartedly obeyed God	Jesus wholeheartedly obeyed God
Jonah was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of the shipmates	Jesus sacrificed His life for everyone's salvation
Jonah calmed the storm by throwing himself into the sea	Jesus calms the storm through His words
Jonah ran away from God's will	Jesus obeyed God's will
Jonah despised God for showing mercy on the repentant sinners	Jesus is always happy to receive repentant sinners
Jonah went astray from his commission, God's commandment to go to Nineveh, by going to Tarshish	Jesus did not go astray from His commission

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Jonah (Old Testament)	Jesus (New Testament)
Jonah's repentance within the belly of the big fish was his own as well as of a representative nature for the entire humanity. The ship represents the world and people on the ship confessing different gods represent the whole of humanity.	Jesus while He was laid to rest inside the tomb preached the Gospel to the dead, so that they would repent from their sins. Jesus as a human represented Jonah also in His repentance, and as God, gave pardon to Jonah, accepting his repentance. Thus Jesus extended pardon to the entire humanity too.

Summary

A lot can happen in three days. We read that Jonah repented, prayed, made up his mind to go and preach to Ninevites, praised God, and saw the wonders of God.

In your life, there will often be a ship near the harbor that wants to take you in a different direction than where God wants you to sail. It will be up to you to decide if you want to become a Jonah and climb the wrong ship or become like Jesus and sail the ship that God has in place

for you.

Reflect

In your life, there will often be a ship near the harbour that wants to take you in a different direction than where God wants you to sail. It will be up to you to decide if you want to become a Jonah and climb the wrong ship or become like Jesus and sail the ship that God has in place for you.

Reflection Questions

1. How can we be better as disciples of Christ?
2. What can we learn from the people of Nineveh?
3. How can we use the Nineveh Lent to reflect on our Christian identity, our need to reconcile, and prepare for the Great Lent?

Prescription for Prayer

Lesson Goals :

- I can understand the importance of prayer.
- I can learn how to pray on a daily basis and implement daily prayer in my life.
- I can understand the meaning of making the Sign of the Cross.
- I can explain the types of prayer.



Bible Verse

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened

St. Matthew 7:7-8



to His will, He hears us.” (1 John 5:14)

God always listens to our prayers. It is our responsibility to make time to talk with Him. Prayer should not be used to just ask, but to reflect on His wonderful Glory, in everything that He has done for us. It is very important to remember that prayer is not a one-way conversation where we just talk to God. Prayer is a dialogue as God talks to us as well.

We need to be open to listening to God. God speaks to us through the words of the Holy Bible. We can also listen to His instruction through the words of the Divine Liturgy and our Sh'hima prayers, which are inspired by God's Holy Spirit. The Church also encourages us to have a spiritual Father (a priest or bishop) whom we can confess to and receive teachings from on how to rightly interpret what we hear. We can also go to

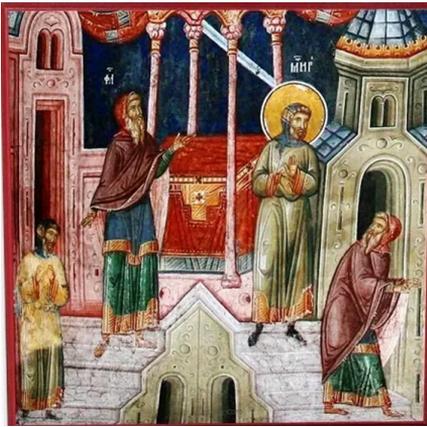
What is Prayer?

Prayer is our direct line of communication with God! Similar to having conversations with our friends and family, prayer is our conversation with God, Our Father. St. John tells us,

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according

elders or parents who can help us. This reduces the risk of misinterpreting the Word of God and being misguided in thinking as if “God is speaking”. With true spiritual judgment, you will blessedly come to know the right path or choice that God wants you to follow.

How do we Pray?



The tax collector and the Pharisee

Once a disciple asked Jesus how to pray. His answer was to teach the Lord's Prayer (St. Luke 11:1-4). He clearly showed us that prayer is not just asking God to fulfil our needs. The Lord's Prayer is actually about praising and thanking God for everything He has already done for us. We remind ourselves that God's plan for us is always a loving blessing. While we ask for our **sins** to be forgiven, we also ask God to give us the strength to resist temptations that take us

away from Him. The Lord's Prayer reminds us to pray for ourselves and for others and to forgive too. Our prayers should be a true conversation with God, not a scene for everyone to see. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (St. Luke 18:9-14) is a reminder that God hears and responds to prayers that are pure and humble. When it comes to prayer, the biggest challenge for many of us is “*how to pray*”. The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray.

Discussion

Read St. Luke 18: 9-14 and discuss what made the prayer depicted in this story so special.

Jesus Christ not only taught us how to pray verbally but He also showed us many examples of how to pray through the actions in His own life. In the garden of Gethsemane, He showed us how to submit to God's Authority. He not only asked His Father to take this cup of suffering from Him but also confessed God's will and asked for His all-knowing will to be done. It shows His ultimate submission to God's authority. Even while suffering on the Cross, Christ forgave His oppressors and prayed for them. He asked God to forgive everyone who caused Him suffering.

Why do we Pray?

People often resist praying not due to lack of time, but due to their lack of understanding on “why” we pray and how it helps us in our lives. We pray for many reasons:

- ✿ to reflect upon God’s love for us and our love for Him.
- ✿ to praise and thank God for everything He has done for us.
- ✿ to ask God for His help and guidance in all our troubles.
- ✿ to receive strength to face life’s challenges.

St. Paul said: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).*

Prayer is very powerful, as it brings about healing which is the power to resist all types of temptations, for inner strength to fight evil, and for comfort in our individual troubles. Everyone, and especially all Christians, will face temptations! Often like quicksand, for the more you fight it, the more you may get drawn towards the danger. Praying to God will give you the power and strength to defeat these temptations.

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (St. Matthew 26:41). Through prayer we repent, receive forgiveness for our sins and are strengthened in Him.

True Fasting

Fasting is not ‘giving up’ something for God as He has no use for the food that we do not eat. As we are reminded in **Psalm 50 (51)**:

“You will not be pleased with whole burnt offerings. A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit, A broken and humbled heart God will not despise”.

True fasting is a reminder that God gives us everything. By sacrifice, we strengthen ourselves spiritually and physically to overcome all temptations. We are, also, reminded how great an event and sacrifice it was that God took flesh and became man. He not only suffered the same hunger we do, but He also offered his life as the greatest sacrifice ever. Any sacrifice of ours is small in comparison.

Remember

True fasting is a reminder that God gives us everything and by sacrifice we strengthen our spiritual and physical resolve to overcome all temptations.



But fasting without prayer is just a diet change. Prayer is the most important part of fasting. Together, fasting and prayer are a powerful spiritual weapon against temptation that increases our spiritual growth towards God. Queen Esther fasted and prayed for three days and nights (**Esther 4**) for the strength

and confidence to speak to the king. She even asked her people to fast for her too. God answered her prayers by softening the king's heart, as he helped save her people. Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit transforms and strengthens us. It cleanses us spiritually and brings us closer to God.

Personal fasting is prayerfully giving up our favourites, such as chocolate or television. We, also, fast together as a Church especially during special feast days. When we fast together, we help each other not only through common prayers and acts of charity, but also by uplifting each other and helping through whatever temptations may come our way. Our priest and spiritual elders teach us all about proper fasting.

St. John Chrysostom compared fasting to medicine. Both must be properly and regularly taken, just as prescribed. For fasting, God is our all-knowing Physician and Healer. So, fasting is a medicine for our soul which works wondrously, if carefully followed, just as God intended it.

There are five canonical fasts that the Holy Church observes as required:

1. **Nativity Fast:** December 1-25, the 25 days in preparation for the festival of the birth of Christ.
2. **The Three-Day or Nineveh Fast:** A three-day fast (Monday through Wednesday) beginning three weeks before the start of the Great Fast. In this fast, we remember Prophet

Jonah, who fasted in the belly of the big fish for three days and three nights. This reminds us of the three days Jesus spent inside the tomb. Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites also made them repent of their sins and fast.

3. **The Great & Holy Fast:** Forty days of fasting plus the days of Holy Week, which lead us to the festival of the Resurrection of our Lord.
4. **The Apostles Fast:** Thirteen days from June 16-29 to remember and meditate upon the life and witness of the Holy Apostles.
5. **The Dormition or Assumption Fast:** Fifteen days from August 1-15 in remembrance of the death of St. Mary and the direct assumption by God of her soul and body into the heavenly kingdom.

Throughout these canonical fasts, as Orthodox Christians we relate with these important figures of remembrance. We try to imitate them and achieve their holiness. During these fasts, Orthodox Christians do not eat any animal products. . We choose to spend more time in prayer, and acts of charity. We read the Holy Bible and about the Holy Saints to be inspired to become more like the divine men and women.

The Shortest Prayer

The sign of the Cross is the shortest form of prayer and symbolizes the Crucifixion

and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This simple sign reminds us of God's presence and protection over us. With the simple sign of the Cross, He gives us strength in our battle against evil. It is important that we at least make a sign of the Cross before everything: before we eat, go out, take a test etc. A sign of the Cross should always be made purposefully and never casually. St John Chrysostom said "When you sign yourself, think of all the mysteries contained in the Cross. It is not enough to form it with the finger. You must first make it with faith and good will".

“

Let us not then be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything; over the bread we eat, and the cups we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we rise up; when we are in the way, and when we are still

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

”

Praying is an Essential Part of Leading Spiritual Orthodox Christian Life

Every day we have to find time to pray and reflect on our day. The ancient Church prayed seven times a day which is still followed in monasteries. Prayer should not be considered as a rule or

command but rather an expression of love for God. It is important to try and pray to God as often as we can, as prayer brings us closer to Him. As the world grows busier, one suggestion is to pray in the morning to gladden our hearts to get us through the day and in the evening to give thanks and praise God for all the blessings received throughout the day. The Church also provides fixed prayers that bring us together in body, spirit, and mind.

Types of prayers

✙ **Personal Prayers** – It is important to find time daily to openly talk to God about our problems and to personally thank Him for everything He has done for us. This helps us improve our relationship with God.

✙ **Family Prayers** – Families should always try to find time to pray and praise God together. God should be the centre of every family. A family that prays together stays together. Helping each other in their spiritual growth helps bring families together and strengthen their spiritual lives.

✙ **Intercessory Prayers** – Intercessory prayers are an important part of our worship. The Bible gives us many examples of intercession, such as Moses, Elijah and other prophets praying for their people and seeking God's mercy. Jesus Christ was the ultimate example of intercession. He intercedes for us

and offers His own life as the true sacrifice. We, as Christians, should always pray for others, as it is part of our Christian identity.

✠ **Liturgical Prayers** – Liturgical prayers are prayers that are set by our Church for use during our Liturgy. These are the prayers that we pray with our Church family, as we are all part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Prayer needs to become a natural part of our daily life. In order to achieve the full likeness of God (**theosis**) we have to be in constant communion with Him and always, seeking His guidance in every action, thought and activity that we do. If daily prayer is not part of your life, take some time to reflect on how you can make some time in your schedule to spend with our Creator.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think there is a hesitancy to say a prayer out loud in public?
2. Why do you think people find it difficult to make prayer a part of their daily routine?
3. Why do you think there is the misunderstanding that prayer is only to ask God for something?
4. What is the significance of prayer and why do we pray?
5. Dissect the Lord's Prayer and identify the different parts of the prayer. After having done so, discuss why the Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer.

True Fasting Transforms Us

Lesson Goals :

- *I can identify Biblical/spiritual figures who fasted and explain why they did so.*
- *I can explain that fasting is not merely about abstaining from food.*
- *I can explain how the Church functions as a hospital for sinners, and the Church's instructions for fasting are a prescription for healing.*



What is fasting?

Is it only about giving up certain foods for a specific amount of time? St. John Chrysostom beautifully described fasting as a medicine. However, medicine works only when taken appropriately: at the correct time, in the right dosage, for the matching illness, etc. If any such conditions are overlooked, the medicine may do more harm than good.

Fasting affects every part of our lives because we are not just giving up food but rather distancing ourselves from sin too. So, if your fasting is only limited to Not eating certain foods, your fast, in reality, ridicules genuine fasting. Fasting should be shown through our work. Which works? If you see someone who is poor, show him mercy. If you have an enemy, make peace with him. If you see

a friend who is becoming successful, do not be jealous of him!

Think

How is one ridiculing the fast, as said by St. John Chrysostom, if they are only abstaining from food?



In other words, not only should the mouth fast, but the eyes, the legs, the arms and all the other body parts should fast as well. Let the hands fast, remaining clean from stealing and greed. Let the legs fast, avoiding roads that lead to sinful activities. Let the eyes fast by not looking badly at others. Let the ears fast by not listening to gossip, etc. .

Our tongue fasts by not talking badly about others or saying mean or disgrace-

ful words. After all, there is no blessing in simply not eating chicken and fish, all while hurting or disturbing other people.

True fasting is about bringing ourselves closer to God through our thoughts, words, actions, and habits. It is not a commandment for weakening the body but rather a commandment to exercise/control the body and refresh the soul. Fasting allows us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God.

Discussion

Discuss what is meant by the sentence, “what gain is there when, on the one hand we avoid eating chicken and fish and, on the other, we chew-up and consume our brothers?” What are some ways in which “we chew-up and consume our brother”?

The Role of Fasting in the Spiritual Life

Fasting is an important part of spiritual life. There are many examples in the Old Testament of the men of God who fasted and did great works. Moses fasted for forty days before he spoke to God. Daniel was fasting when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Nehemiah fasted when he heard of the sad news about Jerusalem. David was a man of fasting. He said, “I afflicted myself with fasting”. Isaiah spoke about fasting (**Isaiah 58:3-12**) and King Jehoshaphat

called all the people to fast (**2 Chronicles 20:3**). The people of Nineveh fasted with great commitment (**Jonah 3:7-9**). In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself fasted till He felt hungry. The Lord spoke about fasting in His Sermon on the Mount (**St. Matthew 6:16-18**). He also spoke about the importance of fasting when He spoke about the Devil “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (**St. Mark 9:29**). We read about fasting in the Church of the Apostles (**Acts of the Apostles 13:3-4** and **1 Corinthians 7:5**). The Church fathers spoke about fasting in their writings and speeches. The history of the Orthodox Church shows us that the faithful observed public fasting (Lent) and fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays.

During the Monday Southara Prayers for the Fast of Nineveh, we remember some of those who fasted in the B'outho of St. Ephrem. We sing:

B'outho of St. Ephrem

*Observe the forty-days' fast
And give bread to the hungry
As as you learned from David
Pray seven time every day*

(Naalpathunaal upavasikka..)

*Both Moses and Elijah
Fasted forty days and nights
As our Lord also fasted
And conquered the evil one*

(Moshayum eliyaavum..)



This icon illustrates the various temptations Jesus faced while fasting in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. What are the 3 temptations? Read St. Luke 4:1-13.

Activity

Every child in the class should pick one of the stories outlined in this section. Read the Bible portion on the individual who fasted and have a discussion on the following:

- Why was this individual fasting?
- How long did they fast for?
- How did this individual fast?



True fasting leads to internal spiritual growth, godliness of the heart, and purity of the flesh. However, physical fasting does not include prayer and meditation. So, it is just skipping food/meals. Then, the most precious part of us (our hearts) remains unclean, as we are still bound to sin. As the outer (physical) body fasts, the inner self must also be controlled. Genuine inner fasting is without any evil, fakeness, grudge, hatred or impurity of the body and soul.

How to Fast Correctly

Fasting and spiritual growth go hand in hand. Fasting does not weaken the body but rather humbles our worldly desires. The fall of Adam and Eve brought a tendency to sin within us. St. Paul clearly summarised this:

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5: 17).



Every struggle against sin and its lusts must begin with fasting, especially when the struggle is because of an internal sin.

St. Isaac the Syrian ”

Summary

Fasting and prayer are inseparable, and together they are a strengthening weapon within us. The saints saw fasting as a fortress and prayer as a weapon, together with which man securely fights.

As we fast, we must continually be thinking: is our fasting solely from food, or are we actually distancing ourselves from sins by fasting through the use of our whole body.



“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Joel 2:12 ”

Reflection Questions

1. Often times, people believe that fasting is a form of dieting. How would you explain this misconception about the true purpose of fasting? Prior to receiving Holy Qurbana, we are required to fast. Why do you think this is so?
2. How is fasting a form of healing?
3. Why do you think fasting goes hand in hand with prayer and charity?

Fullness of the Faith

Lesson Goals :

- *I can defend how Orthodoxy is different from other denominations but speaks the truth in love.*
- *I can explain Orthodoxy as the fullness of the Faith when compared to other Christian denominations.*
- *I can compare and contrast the Orthodox understanding of sin with the legalistic emphasis on sin found in Western Christianity.*



Have you ever been to a dinner where two people at the table were having a fight? Sometimes the children are fighting, sometimes the adults, or a combination of the two. Regardless, it usually goes one of two ways. Either they are arguing out loud and the rest of the people at the table are looking at each other, trying to escape, or there is just an awkward silence at the table. The tension in the room is felt by everyone. It is as if time slows down. Even casual words like ‘please pass the water’ seem out of place and forbidden. Either way, the whole dinner becomes just uncomfortable. We have this feeling in the pit of our stomach that things are just not as they should be.

The same goes for God’s dining table, as He invites us to a meal at His house. We have the amazing privilege of that prayerful connection with God at His ta-

ble. The only problem is that we cannot simultaneously talk with God while also fighting with someone else in the world. In fact, fights mess up the entire dinner for everyone. In those moments, we wish for a day when everyone can just sit down for a peaceful, loving, and lively meal together.

Bible Verse

Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

St Matthew 18:19–20



This defines Holy Communion, as we

gather together and fully participate in the Holy Qurbana. In Christ's name, we join together for the Heavenly meal, as He promises to always be in our midst.

Ever wonder, why not just dinner for two, God and me? Why do I have to go every Sunday to Church to experience God? It is because God did not design humans to live alone and completely separate from other people. He even says so in **Genesis 2:18**:

"It is not good for a man to be alone."

Not being alone means to be a part of a community in harmony and agreement with one another. Just as the Trinity exists in harmony, we, too, enter into communion with God. God, as three distinct Persons in the Holy Trinity, models for us a perfect community of love. In that communion, Jesus promises that anything we ask, "It will be done." Peter immediately notices the difficulty in what Jesus has said:

Bible Verse

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

St Matthew 18:21-22



Peter asks how long he should keep forgiving a brother at the table. Jesus' answer is not 490 (seven times 70 times), for he is not testing Peter's maths skills.

God has forgiven us many more times than that. So, Christ expects us to forgive our brothers and sisters an infinite number of times, too.

If we have a disagreement with another person, we have to do the hard work of reunion and repentance before we can truly be in communion with them. We cannot gloss over the issues between us and pretend they do not exist. That would not be a real relationship. This is why, at the start of the Anaphora, we begin by giving the Kiss of Peace to one another. We first make peace with each other, and then we approach the heavenly table and offer our gifts at the altar. (**St. Matthew 5:23-24**). If we have wronged anyone, let us learn to say sorry and reconcile.

Remember

If we have a disagreement with another person, we have to do the hard work of reconciliation and repentance before we can truly be in communion with them.



This applies to families, parishes, and the global church as well. Throughout history, there have been groups of people who have left communion of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and formed other denominations. Most of these divisions were caused because the group that was separating out began to teach something different than what had been taught for centuries since the

time of the Apostles. One example of this is the rallying cry in the 16th century by Martin Luther and other Reformists.

Bible Verse

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

St. James 2:14



Bible Verse

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

St. James 2:18–19



Most verses quoted by the Reformists were taken out of context. One example is **Ephesians 2:8–9**

Bible Verse

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”



But this verse is immediately followed by **verse 10**:

Bible Verse

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”



We certainly believe that we are saved by grace through faith. But faith and works are not separable. When we look at what St. Paul is saying, it clearly has to do with the Law and how it relates to accepting the Gentiles into the Church. He is saying that since it is not the observance of the Law that saves, therefore the Gentiles do not need to follow Jewish laws like circumcision and eating only kosher foods.

Remember

This is why at the very onset of the Anaphora, we begin by giving the Kiss of Peace to one another. We first reconcile with each other and then we approach the heavenly table and offer our gifts at the altar. (St. Matthew 5:23-24).



After the Reformation happened, it was like a single crack in a glass that spread like a web, and the reformationists then split into numerous groups. Today, there are almost 40,000 different denominations of people who call themselves Christians. This is the sin of

denominationalism and is not how the Apostle Paul taught us to behave.

Bible Verse

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Ephesians 4:1-6



Bible Verse

"Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself."

Philippians 2:1-3



Sadly, the model of the Church found in the Acts of the Apostles should have continued. Back then, when a disagree-

ment arose, they called all the leaders of the Church together. Then, in a spirit of humility, the Holy Spirit would guide them forward.

This has been how the Orthodox Church has historically functioned and still does so today. The Bishops, as the leaders of each Diocese, gather together to talk about different issues in the Church and to come to an agreement, as guided by the Holy Spirit. In making the decisions, the Bishops remain consistent with the faith that has been practiced by the Church through the centuries. The advice of the prayerful Saints who lived throughout different eras of the Church is a constant source of guidance for the decisions made in current times.

Bible Verse

"Those for whom there is no leadership fall like leaves, But there is salvation in much counsel."

Proverbs 11:12



Unity in Diversity

Bible Verse

*"Behold now, what is so good or so pleasant
As for brothers to dwell together in unity?"*

Psalms 133:1



Unity does not mean a lack of diversity. One beautiful aspect of the Orthodox tradition is its variety of expression. The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic faith is fully expressed in different cultures and at different times. This is reflected in the Incarnation itself. Though our Lord was incarnate at a specific time and within a particular culture, He remained Divine in all His fullness. Our Lord remains incarnate at any time, in every place and among all people. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Sacraments must be translated into the language of the worshipping congregation. The Church buildings, iconography, and traditions should take on the shape of the culture it exist in.



Holy Trinity

And so, whether one goes to an Or-

thodox Church in Addis Abba, Ethiopia, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, or Devalokam, India, we will find the same Orthodox and Apostolic faith expressed, but in different cultures. The most beautiful expression of this unity of faith is in the mutual communion of these Churches. This communion is very similar to the communion in the Holy Trinity. Although there are three persons in the Holy Trinity, they are one united essence, one Godhead. We can understand it more from the Icon of the Holy Trinity by St. Andrei Rublev.

Since the Malankara Orthodox Church is a part of the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches, we can receive communion from any of those churches. However, before visiting another parish, we should respectfully contact the vicar to inform him that we are Orthodox.

The Orthodox Church recognises and respects the ancient sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. Due to specific teaching disagreements, we have not been in communion with each other since the 5th century.

One of these disagreements is about the authority of the leader of the Roman Church, the Pope (Patriarch of Rome). The Catholic Church believes that when seated on the episcopal throne, the Pope is infallible, meaning he is incapable of making mistakes and cannot be wrong. In the Orthodox tradition, we do not believe that any person is infallible. As we discussed earlier, in the Orthodox Church, decisions are not made by one person at the top of an administra-

tive structure but by the synodal agreement of all the leaders gathered together, which is consistent with the Holy Traditions of the Church. The position of the Patriarch or Catholicos in the Orthodox Churches is considered first among equals of all the bishops in the local Church. This means that they are responsible for calling the synodal meetings together and presiding over those meetings. The Patriarch of Rome is considered by the Catholic Church to be the bishop of all bishops. This means that he is overseeing all of the bishops in a way that is not equal. This is not consistent with what we see in the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. In that Council, St. Peter is not acting in a position over the rest of the Apostles. In fact, it is St. James, the bishop of Jerusalem, who presides over the Council and answers the questions for them.

The Roman Pope wrote letters that wrongly authorised absolving a person from certain sins if they donated money towards the building of a Church. This unethical practice was a major cause of the unrest that eventually led to the Reformation in the West.

Remember

Unity does not mean a lack of diversity. One beautiful aspect of the Orthodox tradition is its diversity of expression.



Another difference in teaching be-

tween the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is the concept of Original Sin. The Catholic Church teaches that all people inherit the guilt of Adam and Eve's original sin. The Orthodox Church teaches that although we have to live with the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, we are not guilty of their sins. Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not endorse the term Original Sin. Instead, we use the term the Sin of Adam or the Ancestral Sin. This doctrine caused problems in the Catholic Church regarding St. Mary, the Theotokos, inheriting Adam's sin as well. In order to solve this problem, they came up with another doctrine called the Immaculate Conception of St. Mary that prevented her from inheriting the guilt of Adam's sin. For the Orthodox Church, this was an unnecessary solution to a non-existent problem.

There is a family of Orthodox Churches called Byzantine or Eastern Orthodox, which includes the Greek, Russian, Romanian, Antiochene, Serbian Orthodox Churches, the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), etc. Oriental Orthodox Churches are not in communion with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, though these two Orthodox Church families are the closest in faith. A few differences about the Nature of Christ and the will of Christ are yet to be resolved at the Synodal level. Once that occurs, these two Orthodox Traditions can once again enjoy Holy Communion between themselves.

Orthodoxy: Fullness of the Faith

St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, spoke about the importance not only of doctrine but also of speaking in love:

Bible Verse

“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:14-16



Orthodox theology is built on the foundation that God is love. Our Faith teaches us that God, Himself, revealed who He was first through Moses and all the prophets. Then, through God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate. Christ, in person, taught the truth about Himself to the Apostles. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we believe this teaching was passed onto us. In the Fifth Thubden, we say the fathers, bishops and teachers of the Church are “those who have kept the one, Apostolic, and uncorrupted Faith and entrusted it

and delivered it to us.” This is the Apostolic Succession.

God taught us the Truth: that the fullness of the Christian Faith is what God revealed through the prophets, Christ and the Apostles. The Nicene Creed and other Church teachings clearly centre on the Person of Christ. Since our Salvation is in Christ, it is of utmost importance that we do not change any ancient teachings.

This teaching was given to us about the fullness of the Faith. However, over the years, the Roman Catholic Church has added doctrinal changes to their Faith (Filloque, Immaculate Conception, and Papal Infallibility) This eventually contributed to a growing centralization of their Church power and more immoral monetary payments. This soon led to the Reformation Church movement and the birth of the Protestant Churches, who sadly no longer agree with the Apostolic Teachings (praying for the departed, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the Liturgical worship, etc.).

This historical framework is helpful in understanding our clear doctrinal differences, but we should never take part in demeaning talk, arguments, or any other forms of discussion that may become non-loving communication. Such talks would likely just turn people away from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We are called to always be humble in our interactions with others while standing firm in our faith and Church teachings. Whenever in doubt, it is important for all of us to seek the

advice of our priests, bishops, Sunday School teachers, or Church elders.

Summary In any relationship, there will be disagreements. Those disagreements cannot be ignored or glossed over. Instead, the hard work of coming to the table, discussing and seeking the truth with humility has to happen. These moments are opportunities for us to learn patience, respect, humility, and faithfulness and are a part of our individual journeys towards the Kingdom. To be in harmony with one another as families, parishes, and the global Church, requires a great deal of effort in building those relationships. As we reunite with

each other, we come before God in unity and are transformed to be the body of Christ, the Church. This is communion with one another and communion with God Himself.

Remember

In any relationship there will be disagreements. Those disagreements cannot be ignored or glossed over. Instead, the hard work of coming to the table, discussing and seeking the truth in humility has to be done. These moments are opportunities to learn patience, respect, humility, and faithfulness.



Reflection Questions

1. What are the differences between Original Sin and the sin of Adam, or Ancestral Sin? Which can be viewed as more of a legalistic impression?
2. The Orthodox Church is considered to be "pre-denominational. How can we defend this in a manner that does not diminish other denominations?
3. What is a teaching that the Orthodox Church has in common with the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches?
4. What is a teaching that the Orthodox Church has that is different from the Roman Catholic Church?
5. What is a teaching that the Orthodox Church has that is different from the Protestant Church?

Monastic Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand asceticism and how we are all called to live an ascetic life.*
- *I can understand the three pillars of spiritual life - fasting, prayer and charity.*
- *I can investigate the lives of St. Anthony the Great, Father of Monasticism, and St. Pachomius.*
- *I can learn from the spirituality of the Desert Fathers, Mothers and monastic life.*



Asceticism

Asceticism is a lifestyle that is focused on spiritual goals and ignores all worldly pleasures. In the Orthodox Church, both married and unmarried individuals are called to the ascetic lifestyle.

Asceticism is not unique to Christianity. It has been observed in many religious traditions, like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism.

In Orthodoxy, asceticism is a lifestyle that prepares people for the Kingdom of God. The goal is to lead a godly life by exercising good spiritual characteristics. This is achieved through the training and conditioning of the whole human person, body and soul.. Good spiritual characteristics are practised to battle against Satan, bad habits and immoral desires with lots of discipline, preparation and self-sacrifice.

Monasticism

Monasticism is a form of communal living separated from the world (as in a monastery for men or for women) for the purpose of ascetic dedication to prayer, spiritual discipline, and living by the Gospel. Monasticism is at the very heart of early Eastern Christian life. Monks choose to follow the call of Christ with complete obedience and devotion. As a community of souls wholly living their lives in Christ, they become radiant models for the entire Church.

The Syriac word for a monastery is ***Dayara***: (*definition*) a special place where monks live, practising asceticism and withdrawing from the world for their spiritual practices. They typically adopt a simple lifestyle, giving up all material possessions and worldly pleasures. They spend their time praying, fasting,

and working devotedly for the monastic community. Through a life of spiritual discipline, they seek a closeness to God free from all worldly distractions and temptations.

Asceticism is a characteristic of all Christians who follow the Gospel, including monks who also live separately in their own community. The word monk comes from the Greek word **monos**, which means “solitary” or “isolated.” Early monastic life required three vows of complete obedience, poverty, and celibacy, all with a life of manual labour.

In early times, there were two classic forms of monasticism:

- The Anchorite: hermit in the wilderness or Church solitary monk (ex. The Desert Fathers).
- The Cenobite is a life within a structured and often secluded Church community.

Anchorites : St. Anthony, Father of Monks (AD. 251 - 356)

St. Anthony came from a wealthy Christian family in Egypt. At the age of 19, both of his parents died. Anthony and his only sister inherited large amounts of wealth and continued to live at home.

At age 20, Anthony heard (at Church) the Gospel passage of Jesus talking to a rich man:

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will

have treasure in Heaven; and come, follow Me,” (Matthew. 19:21).

Remember

Asceticism is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from sensual pleasures, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual goals. Both married and unmarried individuals are called to the ascetic lifestyle.



Anthony felt that Christ was directly talking to him and decided to obey His words. After first securing a stable existence for his sister, Anthony then distributed all his wealth to the poor and oppressed. He entrusted his sister to a Christian community of virgins. This was evidence that a community of Christian women existed in Alexandria in his day.

Anthony followed Christ’s calling into the desert. His withdrawal was gradual, but he kept moving further and further away from human society. In 285 AD, Anthony reached the deep desert by the Red Sea. At this outer mountain, he struggled day and night to free his true self from his evil thoughts, passions and demons. While living as a monk, he renounced all worldly interests and led a life of prayer and meditation. He recited Psalms, sang hymns, and prayed all while planting and working for the community.

In about 305 AD, Anthony came out of the desert to counsel his many fol-



The Cave of St. Anthony

lowers in their struggles, who were inspired by his discipline and holiness. St. Anthony visited his parents' town only twice. Once, it was to encourage martyrs and argue their cases in the courts of justice. The second was at the age of 90, to fight against the heresy of Arius and to strongly affirm the Nicene Creed. Towards the end of his life, he came to be known all over the world and earned great praise.

His desert followers increased in number. Thus, in the Christian Church, St. Anthony came to be known as the 'Father of Monks'. He is often wrongly considered the first Christian monk. However, there were many ascetics before him. Anthony was among the first known monks to go into the wilderness (about AD 270), which seems to have contributed to his popularity.

The biography of Anthony's life was recorded by St. Athanasius, Bishop of

Alexandria, in the classic text, "Life of St. Anthony of Egypt." The book helped to spread the concept of Christian monasticism, as did Western writings and art about Anthony's survival against supernatural temptations in the Eastern Desert of Egypt.

St. Anthony promoted a solitary (eremitic) life, while St. Pachomius advanced the communal (Cenobitic) monastic life. They were two symbolic founders of a lifestyle that soon spread throughout the Christian world. Within their lifetimes, many followers began fleeing the cities for the peace of the desert. Hence, Christian monastic life was born.

Cenobitic: Pachomius of Egypt

Cenobitism is another type of monasticism where communal life is under the guidance of an elder or chief monas-

tic leader known as *hegumen* or abbot (*abba*– father). Here a group of monks lives together under common rule, sharing a common house, table and Church, and mutually supporting and encouraging one another.

There are two great founding fathers of this form of monastic life in the Orthodox world: St. Pachomius of Egypt (AD 292-346) and St. Basil the Great (AD 330-379). Pachomius was born to idol-worshipping parents. During his youth, he was a soldier in the Roman Army who was sent to Ethiopia along with others. During this journey, they met many Christians in the rural areas who invited the soldiers to their houses, washed their feet and fed them. Pachomius was attracted to the hospitality of these Christians and was excited about their good deeds. After the war, Pachomius was baptised and became a Christian. He met a well-known hermit of that time, Palaemon, and followed him.

Explain

Explain what is meant by monasticism is ascetic, but all asceticism is not monastic.

In AD 320, he set up a monastery on the banks of the River Nile. He instituted certain common rules and regulations for monastic life. Pachomius examined the sincerity, purpose and commitment of the new followers. He lovingly tested his disciples' ability to

stand strong against worldly desires and temptations. Pachomius taught that true monks possess obedience, love of God, celibacy, and piety. He emphasised the importance of studying Scripture and memorising Psalms and other Bible verses. He also taught the monks to read and write the Christian Creed of Faith. Therefore, the monasteries grew into spiritual power houses of the Church. We observe May 17th as the day of St. Pachomius' remembrance.

Some sayings of the Desert Fathers:

- An old man was asked, "How can I find God?" He said, "In fasting, in watching (i.e., vigils), in labours, in devotion, and above all in discernment. I tell you; many have injured their bodies without discernment and have gone away from us having achieved nothing. Our mouths smell bad through fasting; we know the Scriptures by heart, we recite all the Psalms of David, but we have not that which God seeks: charity and humility."
- An old man said, "In all trials, do not blame others but only yourself, saying, 'It is because of my sins that this has happened.'"
- An old man was asked, "What is the straight and narrow way?" He replied, "The straight way is this: to do violence to one's thoughts and to cut off one's own will. This relates to the early words of the disciples, 'See, we have left all and followed You.'" (**Mark 10:28**)

St. Macrina

St. Macrina was the sister of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa. Her mother, St. Emilia, taught her how to pray, read Scriptures, and attend Church services. She was brought up to lead a life that was well pleasing to God.



St. Macrina

When she grew up, she was betrothed to a pious man; however, soon after their engagement, her fiancée passed away. Afterwards, many people sought

her hand in marriage, but not wanting to be unfaithful to her deceased fiancée, she chose the life of a virgin. She chose to stay at home to help her parents with household tasks.

After the death of her father, she became the chief support for her family. Once her siblings grew up and left, St. Macrina convinced her mother to leave the world, set the servants free, and went to settle in a woman's monastery. Several of their servants followed her example, took monastic vows, and lived together as a family in prayer and work. St. Macrina was deeply respected for her self-discipline and temperance. She slept on boards and had no worldly possessions.

Some of the sisters in her monastery reflected on stories of her ability to heal a girl of an eye illness and to ensure there was no shortage of wheat at her monastery, even in times of famine. We remember St. Macrina on July 19th.

Summary

Let us uphold the 'romantic' lives of these monastic Fathers and Mothers as an example of how to lead an ascetic Christian life.

Reflection Questions

1. How can we practice asceticism in our everyday lives?
2. What things get in the way of living according to the three pillars of spiritual life? How can we combat such distractions?
3. How do St. Anthony, St. Pachomius and St. Macrina portray the true life of monks?

Our Church History

Lesson Goals :

- I can examine the arrival of St. Thomas in India and identify the significance of his works.
- I can explain the significance of the Synod of Diamper and the Coonan Cross Oath.
- I can understand the establishment of the Catholicate.
- I can provide a brief history of the Malankara Orthodox Church in the diocese of UK-Europe and Africa.



Bible Verse

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved."

St. Mark 16:15-16



Apostolic Origin - St. Thomas: The Apostle of India

In about 52 AD, St. Thomas the Apostle of Christ landed just north of the modern-day city of Kochi (Kerala). He preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the already existing Jewish colonies there and established eight Christian com-

munities at Maliankara (Kodungallur), Palayur, Paravur (Kottakavu), Gokamangalam (Kokamangalam), Niranam, Chayal (Nilackal), Kollam (Quilon), and Thiruthancode.

Almost all of these original locations still have a strong St. Thomas Christian community with ancient traditions in place.

From Kerala, St. Thomas proceeded to the eastern parts of south India, where many other people heard him and accepted Christianity. He then preached as far away as China. Returning to India in AD 72, St. Thomas was martyred at Mylapore (near Chennai).

There is historical evidence of St. Thomas in India and of the representation of the Church in India at the



Seven and a half churches established by St. Thomas

First Ecumenical Council in Nicea. A Bishop named John, representing Persia and India, attended the Council. Similarly, St. Ephrem also has spoken of the missionary work of St Thomas in India. He even composed hymns about St Thomas on his mission to India, martyrdom and the fourth century removal of St Thomas's bones to Edessa. When the Portuguese reached India in AD 1498, they found Christians who strongly believed that the Apostle St Thomas had suffered martyrdom and was buried at Mylapore. Many non-Christian resi-

dents in that area also testified to the Portuguese that St Thomas had indeed been buried there and that Christian settlements existed in the vicinity. St Eusebius of Caesarea, fourth century church historian, also has written about St Thomas in India.

The general agreement among researchers is that St Thomas, the Apostle, was the first to introduce and establish Christianity in India. Jewish settlements already existed in South India long before St Thomas's arrival. South India has had strong trade connections

with the Mediterranean and West Asian worlds since ancient times. There are records of an active trade relationship between Jews in both Israel and South India. Cranganore, Palur and Paravoor were growing Jewish settlements and great trading centres. Thus, the Jewish locals eagerly invited St Thomas, a Jew himself, and so began his calling to establish Christianity in India. The existence of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church itself is the most conclusive proof that St Thomas came to India and brought us Christianity.

It was because of the well-established spice trade route that the early Church (especially in Persia) already knew of the Christian communities established by St Thomas. Whenever persecuted in the Persian Empire, many Christians fled to the Southwestern coast of India and found a welcoming ancient Christian community.

There is no specific documentation about the way the Indian Church was governed during the early centuries. According to tradition, after St Thomas, the Church was likely shepherded by the leaders of the Christian Churches in the Persian regions.

The Persian Connection

A Synod of the Persian Church (AD 410) affirmed the faith of Nicaea and acknowledged the Metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as the Catholicos of the East. However, soon controversies and Empire disputes arose. The Per-

sian Church declared itself Nestorian, and its head was the Patriarch of the East (Babylon). Nestorian missionaries began moving to India, Central Asia, China, and Ethiopia to teach their doctrines to the Churches St Thomas had established.

Remember

Ultimately, the most conclusive evidence to prove St. Thomas' presence in India is us, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.



The Colonial Era

The Church in India has always maintained its local character despite the arrival of many Europeans. In 1498, Vasco da Gama (the Portuguese General) arrived in Calicut, Kerala. By the 16th century, the Portuguese had established themselves as colonial rulers. Although they found a Christian community on arrival, the Portuguese brought missionaries to carry on evangelistic work to establish Churches in communion with Rome under Portuguese patronage. These missionaries were also eager to bring the already existing Indian Church under the Pope of Rome as a separate wing. The new converts in the coastal areas were completely Latinized. In AD 1599, with the 'Synod of Diamper', the representatives of various Indian parishes who attended the assembly



Depiction of Coonen Cross Pledge

were forced by Portuguese Authorities to accept the authority of the Pope of Rome.

Following the Synod, the Indian Church was governed by Portuguese Bishops who were mostly unwilling to respect the integrity of the Indian Church. The majority of people were very unhappy. This led to the historical revolt on January 3rd, 1653, known as the Koonan Kurishu Satyam, or Coonen Cross Pledge. As pictured above, this was a powerful public vow by members of the Saint Thomas Christian community of Kerala that they would not submit to Portuguese/Roman Church leadership or lifestyle. The swearing of the oath is a major event in the history of the Saint Thomas Christian community and a major turning point in its relations with the Portuguese colonial forces. The Christians totally rejected 54 years of Roman dominance. The sovereignty of the Malankara Church was established in AD 1665. However, with no bishop to guide them spiritually, the faithful

had to face many serious difficulties but were still determined to keep the independence of the Indian Church. Soon Archdeacon Thomas was consecrated to become the first bishop with the title of Mar Thoma, the first in the long lineup to Mar Thoma IX.

At the request of the St. Thomas Christians, a bishop from the Syrian Orthodox Church, Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorios, came to India in 1664 and confirmed the episcopal consecration of Mar Thoma I as the head of the Orthodox Church in India. This began the formal but autonomous relationship with the Syrian Orthodox Church, which is also called the Jacobite Church.

By 1836, the British were attempting reformation within the Orthodox Church, partly through their Anglican leadership takeover at the Kottayam theological seminary. Some members were drawn into the Anglican faith. Eventually, the reformist group broke away to form the Mar Thoma Church. The

Patriarch Peter III of Antioch visited India in 1875-77. The unique identity of the Orthodox Church under its own Metropolitan was a well known fact. However, this Antiochan Patriarch continued to interfere in the Indian Church leadership. He suppressed the authority of the Malankara Metropolitan, resulting in legal fights. In 1889, the final judgement of the Travancore Royal Court declared that the Patriarch had spiritual supervisory powers over the Malankara Church but no administrative leadership in the Church. The Patriarch was not satisfied with this decision.



Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril popularly known as Vattasseril Thirumeni

During the Malankara Association Meeting held in March 1908, Vattasseril Thirumeni was chosen as the Metropoli-

tan and was sent to the Patriarch of Antioch for consecration. On 31 May 1908, the Patriarch of Antioch consecrated Vattasseril Thirumeni with the name Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. Unlike other new bishops, His Grace was not given an official “kalpana” to establish his authority as the newly consecrated spiritual leader. His Holiness Mar Abdulla, the reigning Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, wrongly stated that the office of the Metropolitan of Malankara was not necessary for the Indian Church. To further his plan, a Syrian Bishop named Sleeba Mar Osthathios was sent to India even though the Patriarch had previously agreed to confirm the appointment of Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius as the next leader. During his meeting with leaders of the Malankara Association, the Patriarch carefully suggested that they write a statement agreeing to the administrative and spiritual authority of the Patriarch over the Church in India. It was because the Patriarch felt he had full and divine authority over the Indian Church, whether they admitted it or not. The Royal Court’s decision gave only spiritual authority to the Patriarch of Antioch, which Vattasseril Mar Dionysius and his supporters were in agreement with. Spiritual authority referred to faith interpretations, sacramental life, and ecclesiastical discipline. However, the Patriarch wrongly claimed that he also had temporal authority over the Indian Church’s internal administration, management of its finances, schools, parishes

and other institutions. All the Bishops consecrated by the Patriarch after 1875 (except Mar Dionysius V) had admitted this illegitimate claim and given the Patriarch of Antioch the legally registered deeds that he had demanded.

Next, with the support of some locals, the Patriarch, HH Abdulla, sent a letter of excommunication to Metropolitan Vattasseril Mar Dionysius. Then Mar Dionysius convened a Managing Committee meeting of the Church at the M.D. Seminary Chapel, where they agreed to ignore His Grace's excommunication and instead called upon the Malankara Association to handle the situation. Meanwhile, the Senior Patriarch of Antioch (HH Mar Abded Messiah) rightly declared (17 August 1911) that the excommunication of Vattasseril Mar Dionysius by the Patriarch HH Abdulla was not legally true and that the Church of Malankara should ignore it. At the request of Vattasseril Mar Dionysius' supporters, Senior Patriarch HH Mar Abded Mshiho visited India in June 1912 to repair the damage done by Patriarch HH Abdulla. The Patriarch HH Mar Abded Mshiho elevated and consecrated His Grace Paulose Mar Ivanios as the first Catholicos of the East in 1912. With the establishment of the Catholicate of the East in India, the Malankara Orthodox Church became autocephalous (completely self-governing). The Catholicos supervises the Malankara Church, and the Patriarch leads the Syriac Orthodox Church. Two other Bishops were consecrated: Geevarghese Mar Philoxenos

(who became the second Catholicos in 1925) and Euachim Mar Ivanios.

Before his death in 1915 (Antioch), HH Mar Abded Mshiho issued two Kalpanas dated 17 September 1912 and 24 February 1913, stating that the Catholicos had been installed and that the Bishops of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church had the right to raise a successor to the Catholicos. Now, the Malankara Church, in coordination with the Malankara Association, has been given the authority over the Church, as led by the Holy Spirit. The Catholicos' authority included ordaining Metropolitans-Bishops, consecrating Holy Chrism, and performing other necessary Church functions.

About a year before his death, Vattasseril Mar Dionysius prepared his 'will' through which all the properties of the Church that were administered by him would be handed over to the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Church. Soon after his glorious death (23 February, 1934), the Patriarchal side raised a court objection to this adoption, but the case was dismissed. The 'will' was then registered and formally executed.

For twenty-five years, HG Vattasseril Mar Dionysius served as the Malankara Metropolitan of the Church. Being a person full of prayer, determination and action with his unwavering faith, sincere devotion and strong encouragement, he led the Church in troubled times. Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius is popularly known as Malankara Sabha Bhasuran (the Great Luminary of the

Malankara Orthodox Church) because of his rich contribution to the Malankara Orthodox Church. Mar Dionysius was canonised as a saint of the Church in 2003.

Establishment of the Catholicate - 1912

1912 was a significant year in the history of our Church's independence and self-governance. The Indian Church wanted to preserve its independence and be self-governing. In September 1912, with the assistance of His Holiness Patriarch Abdul Mshiho, His Holiness Baselios Paulos I was installed on the Apostolic Throne of St Thomas as the Catholicos of the East.

Some people chose to stay under the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch, resulting in two major Church divisions. One became the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church under the leadership of HH the Catholicos. The other faction became the Jacobite Syrian Church, which remained under the leadership of HH the Patriarch of Antioch. Even though both factions briefly united during the reign of Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan HH Baselios Geevarghese II from 1958 to 1975, they have been separated ever since. However, most importantly, because of the Supreme Court ruling of 3 July 2017, there is still hope that these two factions will one day reunite again. Lord, have mercy!

Malankara Orthodox Church in Western World

After the establishment of the Catholicate our Church grew rapidly. Eventually, many Indians started immigrating to different parts of the world in search of a better life. Which resulted in the formation of our parishes in the Middle East, Europe, North America, Oceania, and Africa.

Bible Verse

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

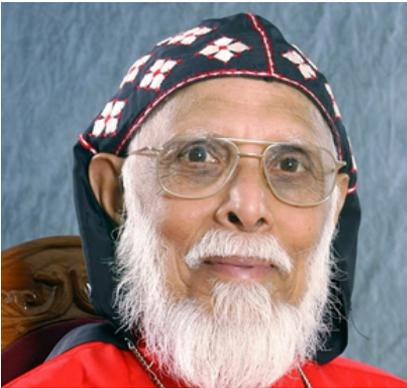
St. Matthew 18:20



In the 1960's, many skilled people migrated to the United States, Canada, the UK, Europe, and parts of Africa. Soon, many more Malankara Christians and their families started moving to North America and Europe for higher education and employment opportunities. Therefore, churches were established in these new areas of settlement to continue the liturgical and spiritual traditions of the homeland. The Malankara Church decided to create more Dioceses around the world to better serve its members. Initially, most of the parishes were under the Metropolitan of the Diocese of Bombay, HG Dr Thomas Mar Makarios.



H.H. Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews I



H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios

Malankara Orthodox Church: History of UK Europe and Africa

The roots of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Syrian Church in the UK-Europe and Africa geographical region can be traced back to the 1930s, when Abo Alexios of the Bethany monastery (later

Bishop Alexios Mar Theodosius) visited the UK. This visit was made possible by the tireless efforts of Prof. A. M. Varkey of Alwaye, a member of the 'Mission of Fellowship to England and Ireland' sponsored by the National Christian Council of India (NCCI). With the help and cooperation of people like Dr William Paton, Canon John Douglas and others, an association called 'The Friends of the Syrian Church' was formed to render help to this ancient Church in India by offering higher theological training. The first candidate thus chosen was Abo Alexios, who also participated in the Jubilee celebrations of the Community of Resurrection, Mirfield. It is commendable that he was able to establish positive rapport with several religious communities in the UK.

The second priest who came to the UK under this scheme was Fr T. V. John of U.C. College Alwaye in 1934. Holy Qurbana in Malayalam was conducted in those days at the chapel at King's College, London. Later on several others came to the UK under this programme. The most important milestone in the early history of the diocese was the visit of the Catholicos HH Baselios Geeverghese II, accompanied by the Ramban C M Thomas (later Metropolitan Thoma Mar Dionysius) and Abo Alexios to participate in the second "Faith and Order Conference" of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Edinburgh in 1937. After the conference Ramban C. M. Thomas stayed with the Cowley Fathers for studies in Oxford and

conducted Eucharistic services. By the 1950s and 60s the influx of migrant communities to the UK laid the foundation to the gradual growth of the Malankara Christian community. Services, however, were held only occasionally by visiting priests and prelates. Noteworthy visits by other clergy who came to the UK region for higher studies and other purposes include Metropolitan Mathews Mar Coorilos (late Catholicos HH Baselios Marthoma Mathews II), Fr Dr K Philipose (late Metropolitan Philipose Mar Theophilus), Fr Dr C. T. Eapen, Fr P. S. Samuel, Fr P. V. Joseph (late Metropolitan Joseph Mar Pachomios) and Fr Yuhannon (late Metropolitan Yuhannon Mar Athanasius).

As years passed by, the frequency of services conducted increased gradually. In the early 1970s late Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, during one of his pastoral visits, organised the St Gregorios prayer fellowship. The growth in the community due to the influx of more migrants led to the inevitable segregation on denominational basis. By 1974, members of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Marthoma Church formed separate congregations and commenced worshipping separately.

The next major milestone occurred in 1976 when the diaspora Orthodox community outside Kerala was reorganised. The European region thus came under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Bombay led by late Metropolitan Dr Thomas Mar Makarios. It was he who, during one of his visits to London, formally de-

clared the congregation in London as the St Gregorios Orthodox Parish. During the 1979 re-organization of dioceses, the European geographical expanse came under the Diocese of Delhi enjoying the privilege of the pastoral care of eminent scholar late Dr Paulos Mar Gregorios who visited the UK on a regular basis.

The European congregations were again reorganised in 1993 under the newly formed diocese of Canada, UK and Europe under the elite leadership of late Metropolitan Dr Thomas Mar Makarios.

The Holy Episcopal Synod of 2009 decided to once again bifurcate the area, thus forming the present diocese of UK-Europe and Africa. The newly consecrated Metropolitan Dr Mathews Mar Thimotheos was appointed as the first Diocesan Metropolitan with his jurisdiction covering two continents, stretching from the western tip of the UK mainland to the southern tip of Africa. The Episcopal guidance of the multilingual and Old Testament scholar HG Dr Mathews Mar Thimotheos was a great impetus in the growth of the Diocese during its founding years.

From November 2022 onwards HG Abraham Mar Stephanos took charge as the Metropolitan of the Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa. There is currently a total of 62 Parishes (and Congregations) in 10 countries over the 2 continents of Europe and Africa.



H.H. Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews III

In October 2021, HH Baselios Marthoma Mathews III was sworn in as the Ninth Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan of the

Church. Let us continue to keep the Orthodox Church and leadership in our prayers.

Summary

As we carefully study our Church's rich divine history, we remember the many sacrifices of our faith-filled ancestors and spiritual fathers. According to God's all-knowing plans, it was because of the brave Apostle Thomas that Christianity first arrived in our motherland of Kerala. We are humbled to know that Christianity landed in India centuries before it ever reached the European Continent. Similarly, our Malankara Orthodox faith first reached these lands because of our loving immigrant parents and holy clergy.

Now, we are the fortunate ones to receive the combined benefits of all their centuries of deep faith, loving efforts and courageous sacrifices. May our true faith grow. May the Orthodox Church and her divine liturgical traditions also continue to eternally bloom in our Dioceses and beyond. All Glory to God!

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it said that the Malankara Orthodox Church is as old as Christianity itself?
2. What were the effects of the Synod of Diamper and Coonan Cross Oath?
3. What if the Portuguese never invaded India? What do you think would have happened?
4. What are the differences between the Malankara Orthodox Church and the Jacobite Syrian Church?

Secularism And Spirituality

Lesson Goals :

- I can explain that Jesus Christ is the Truth, through whom we come to know the true identity of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- I can apply the understanding of sanctity of life to Genetic Engineering (Cloning), Blood and Organ Donation
- I can understand the impact of social media on Mental health
- I can analyse our responsibility as caretakers and stewards of all creation. Also examine the interrelationship between stewardship and climate change



Bible Verse

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

2 Timothy 4:3-4



As seen in St. Paul's letter to Timothy, Christians have constantly faced challenges in this secular (mostly non-religious) world with society's ever-changing expectations. In schools today, students may be taught things that seem different or even the opposite of what

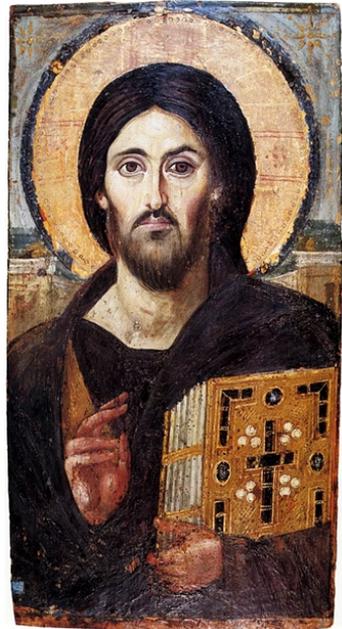
the Church teaches. Movies, television shows and social media may appear to stand up for equality, but often they are just encouraging questionable morality and the pursuit of one's own desires.



Today, most of what takes up our time,

effort, and resources in the world, stands against our faith. Our lives are supposed to be centred on growing in our relationship and communion with God. However, worldly interests and activities seem to take up much of our day and often block our spiritual growth. This tension between the world and our Christian faith is not new, as seen by the cover of Time Magazine in April 1966, which boldly asked, “Is God Dead?”

In this lesson, we will examine what the Orthodox Church teaches about some important earthly matters. We will also explore how we relate to science, which is the effort to find answers about the physical world and how things work in it. To begin, we must first answer a basic question.



Christ Pantokrator

What is the Truth?

In this world, “truth” is what can be measured, proven or recognised as real by our senses. However, in the Nicene Creed, we state that we believe in “One True God... the Maker of heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible.”

This opening statement of faith shows our belief in an unseen reality that exists beyond our senses. The truth is more than what exists in this physical world. As an Orthodox Christian, your body and your soul are one. So, seen and unseen realities are often blurred/overlapping. We participate in the unseen reality, especially through our participation in the life of the church.

In **St. John 18:37**, the Lord says to Pontius Pilate, when questioned by him:

“For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the Truth hears My voice.” For which, Pilate asks that very important question, “*What is Truth?*”

In **St. John Chapter 14:6**, Christ already said this about Himself: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*” In the beginning of John’s gospel, he says, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” In this translation, “Word” comes from the Greek word *logos*, which also means

truth or reason.

Once we understand that Christ is Truth (the reason for all things!), then we know that looking for truth, reason or purpose in this world equals seeking Christ. **St. John Chapter 8:32** *“Then you will know the Truth, and the truth will set you free”*. How we connect with the rest of His creation is an important part of our growing relationship with God.

Caretakers of Creation

We see in the book of **Genesis** that God *“saw everything He had made, and in deed, it was very good.”* All of the elements of the natural world are good, including mankind.

We see that the Holy Trinity is actively involved in the creation of Adam. In **Genesis 1:26**, God says, *“Let Us make man in Our image”* indicating the existence of the persons of the Godhead. God created mankind and placed them in the garden for a specific purpose. He instructed them to “fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion” over all living creatures. God created mankind to care for the rest of creation. Let us take a closer look at these specific phrases above:

- To “fill the earth” means to take the goodness of God’s garden and expand it to the rest of the world. Just as a healthy garden blooms and increases, through our work and participation in God’s grace, we help to expand Eden and spread life to all creation.

- To “subdue it” in biblical terms means to make sense out of chaos or to bring it under control. Through mankind’s participation in the world, the wild, disorganised, and confusing parts will be completely transformed. People were supposed to do the work of expanding Paradise to the rest of creation.
- To “have dominion over” is to participate in God’s rule. God created mankind to be a part of His heavenly kingdom. Dominion is not having authority that conquers or hurts others, but rather encouraging and caring for all creation.

Since we have been created in God’s image and then entrusted to care for and look after all creation, we must be genuine world caretakers. We are to care for all creation just as God Himself would care for it. We have a responsibility to conserve natural resources, protect sensitive ecosystems, and continue God’s work of filling the earth with life rooted in Him. Humans are meant to live in harmony with nature and to bring God’s love to the rest of creation. One of the most important aspects of the stewardship that God entrusted to humans is to protect and care for life, most especially human life.

Understanding that our life’s purpose is to be His earthly caretakers brings us even closer to God as we work towards becoming like God in what we do (theosis). This truth is found in the Holy Trinity, our foundation.

The Sanctity of Life

God is the source of life and gives all life.

Genesis 2:7 says:

“Then God formed man out of dust from the ground and breathed in his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” The Church teaches that life begins at conception in the womb and that “full personhood” exists at the time of conception. **Psalm 138:13–14** says:

“For you possess my heart, O Lord;

You took hold of me from my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You,

For I am fearfully and wondrously made.”

Even the single-celled zygote is an individual. This life is precious and holy because, even while in the womb, it is in God’s image and has every right to exist and live. What makes life holy is that it is given by God for a purpose: to grow in communion with Him and to become like Him.

Although many amazing breakthroughs in medical science have been made in recent decades, some procedures do not have as much respect for the unborn human life as they should. Genetic engineering is when an organism’s DNA is changed to bring about different or more desirable characteristics. This means that many naturally occurring traits or processes are changed or removed by turning “off” or “on” certain genes or introducing genes of other species through a laboratory process. This can happen in plants, animals, and even in humans, as in disease preven-

tion. However, without proper safety rules and serious ethical considerations, this can lead to the manipulation of human traits for selfish, pride-filled reasons. We must always remember that the body is holy as is, because this is how God has created us.

Cloning is recreating an identical copy and is unethically manipulating the life God has gifted to human beings. It wrongly attempts to challenge the divine design of human reproduction. Lastly, the Orthodox Church approves organ or blood donation as it is for protecting and sustaining human life.

Social Evolution of Mankind

Social media has given us the ability to connect with friends and family and easily keep in touch. Another benefit of this technological advance is that we can now cooperate and work together in ways that were unimaginable just a few decades ago.

Sadly, this has also made us glued to our devices, in danger of distancing ourselves from our real lives, family and friends. Social media allows us to anonymously paint an online image of ourselves, which could encourage jealousy, misbehavior and bullying. All this behaviour feeds the craving for ‘likes’ and acceptance, which act as addictive psychological rewards. This leads to unnecessary stress between our real lives and a fake virtual life. It also shows us how vulnerable life has become.

Often, the secular world considers those who are rich and powerful to be "blessed," whereas the Christian focus is always on God and the eternal. As we read in **Psalms 1:1–3**:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the way of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the troublesome; But his will is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by streams of waters, That produces its fruit in its season."

This message is repeated by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount (**St. Matthew 5:3–12**). St. Paul also clearly teaches that the blessed will live in the light of Christ and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22–23**).

Our online image should always reflect our life in the real world and how we behave with others. Our salvation lies in being perfect like our heavenly Father (**St. Matthew 5:48**), which is through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. We are to imitate Christ in all that we do. Regardless of how the world is in reality or virtually (e.g., the metaverse), our focus is always on God and living our fullest life in the light of the Holy Trinity. This will bring us good health, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Science and Religion

Science is often seen as being at odds with Christianity, or that somehow believing in Science automatically makes one not believe in Christ.

For Christians, God is the Creator of everything. As we profess in the Nicene Creed, He is the "maker of Heaven and Earth, and all that is seen and unseen." God created everything out of nothing, and no one is equal to God. We believe this because of our Faith, and because God Himself taught us these truths. As St. Paul teaches, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (**Hebrews 11:1**).

Science has made advancements over the years that have helped all of mankind. The Orthodox Church supports Science whenever it is for good purposes. As Christianity grew in the Western world, other Churches took more of a legalistic view of worldly issues. One example is the persecution of Galileo by the Roman Catholic Church to oppose his theory that the planets revolved around the sun.

The Orthodox Church, in comparison, did not take issue with the scientific order of the Universe. Our Church firmly believes that no scientific theory can ever change the True God. As stated in the Nicene Creed, we firmly believe in One True God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things seen and unseen.

Many scientific theories, such as evolution, have unfortunately become very controversial for some faiths. For Orthodox Christians, we are to remain focused on our Faith. As long as science does not replace God as the Creator or change the Person of Christ, it is acceptable to have opinions about whatever theory has been put forward.



Many great scientists in history are indeed Christians. It is important that as we grow and work in today's world, we sanctify our activities by always staying Christ-centred.

Living our Faith

As Orthodox Christians, it is sometimes difficult to know how to participate in the modern world and still live our Faith. It is true that often the secular world emphasises knowledge without God, as illustrated by the cover of Time magazine in 1966. This is not new, as we saw people literally walk away from Christ Incarnate (**St. John 6:66**) when their secular minds could not accept the teaching that the Eucharist is the Real Body and Blood of Christ.

When we take our focus away from God and prioritise other things, what are we truly worshipping? These temptations and distractions have always been with mankind, beginning with the Garden of Eden. Most times, we can live as true Orthodox Christians and even sanctify the activity, profession, or dialogue with the light of Christ.

Summary

It is important to be a disciple of Christ at any age! The God we worship can never be fully explained, and no scientific theory or advancement can come close to explaining everything. Many highly controversial scientific theories (e.g., evolution, the Big Bang, etc.) will likely change over time. For example,

scientists once "theorised" that the atom was the smallest, indivisible unit. This is the natural advancement of science. The Orthodox Church supports science. Church members can continue to work in these fields to further advance theories because, at no time, this invalidates the Nicene Creed or the doctrines of our Faith.

As discussed in this lesson, there are areas where caution is necessary, which include cloning and the sanctity of life. These are very complex situations, and even adults are encouraged to talk with their priest for more guidance.

Reflection Questions

1. Does Orthodox Church allow Blood Donation? Apply the Orthodox Church's teaching on the Sanctity of life when answering the question and focus on the benefits of blood donation.
2. How can we help friends or family that are being bullied online? What if the person who is the bully is our friend or family member? How can we approach either the victim or the aggressor using the teachings of our Faith?
3. What are the signs that our mental health is being impacted by social media? How can we rely on the support of the Church and the Sacraments to get better?

The Conciliar Church

Lesson Goals :

- *Recognise how the Church adopted a conciliar approach instead of an autocratic one for decision-making*
- *Understand how the Church Fathers used the Holy Bible and Tradition to identify and refute heresies and develop the Nicene Creed.*
- *Study how the Councils came to the decisions that determined the faith of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*



What is a Council?

A **council** is a group of people who consult, mentally process, and make decisions together. A Church council is a gathering of Church leaders to study and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead the Church and to decide on doctrinal, moral, traditional, and liturgical questions. The Orthodox Church is conciliar - operating by councils - on all levels; parish, diocese, and worldwide.

The Holy Church always served her faithful with a conciliar approach. From the beginning, God inspired the Apostles, and later the bishops and other leaders of the Church, to make decisions based on the input of everyone. Sometimes, some council decisions were not universally accepted. Such deci-

sions were then rejected by the Church as wrong (ex., Council of Chalcedon, AD 451.)

The Roman Catholic Church follows the principle of Petrine Primacy, where the Pope of Rome, as successor of St. Peter (the chief of the Apostles and the representative of Christ on earth) approves decisions by himself. They also teach that the Pope is infallible on earth, unable to be wrong or make a mistake. No Orthodox Church agrees with the Petrine Primacy Theory or the Infallibility of the Pope. Orthodox Churches are conciliar, and the Holy Church is the only infallible entity on earth. The Church is not led by one person but by a council of bishops and leaders, just like the 12 disciples around Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Orthodox Church's fo-

cus is whether the council's decisions accurately reflect the truth of the Holy Scripture and follow the traditions of the Church Fathers.

The First Council of Jerusalem, AD 50 (Acts 15)

The first council was convened due to a disagreement among the early Christians. Some men from Judea (modern-day Israel) went to Antioch (modern-day Turkey). In Antioch, many Gentiles (non-Jews) accepted Jesus Christ and became Christians. These Judeans started teaching that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they first followed the Law of Moses, including painful circumcision, before becoming Christians (**Acts 15:1**). Although this issue was already resolved, as we read in **Acts 11: 1-18**, those Judeans again raised this issue with the Apostles. Paul and Barnabas, after sharply debating with those men from Judea, decided to go to Jerusalem to meet with the disciples and elders to settle the matter.

To find a solution, the Apostles and the elders of the Church held a Council in Jerusalem. St. James (first Bishop of Jerusalem and cousin brother of Jesus) led the meeting. They knew that they could not decide on this matter alone with their wisdom. So, they prayed to the Holy Spirit for guidance (**Acts 15:28**).

St. Peter stressed that God, who knows the hearts of men, accepts the hearts of the Gentiles who confess Christ and

gives them the Holy Spirit just as He gave it to His disciples. He also said that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we shall all be saved (**Acts 15:7-11**). Paul and Barnabas explained how God worked miracles and wonders through them among the Gentiles (**verse 12**). They spoke of how God had given the Holy Spirit to all who believed in Him and purified their hearts by faith.

In the light of the Scriptures, St. James interpreted the testimonies of Saints Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

St. James stated that the Gentiles who turned to God should not be given the extra burden of circumcision. After much prayer and discussion, all Council members agreed with St. James' proposal as guidance from the Holy Spirit. The Council wrote a message to the Churches informing them of their decision. St. James told the Gentiles to abstain only from things polluted by idols, from unchastity, and from what is strangled, and to not eat blood (**Acts 15: 19-20**).

The Council of Jerusalem was an example set by the Apostles and Elders to show how the Church should be guided by the Holy Spirit in dealing with faith-based questions and other challenges. From that time on and all through history, the Holy Church has settled difficulties and made decisions through councils. They always prayed for guidance from the Holy Spirit to guide their thinking and preserve their unity.

Background to the Ecumenical Councils

The Early Church (**Acts 2:42–47**) was a community that thrived in fellowship. It was a self-governing community that worshipped God as members of a blessed family. They pooled together their resources and possessions, devoted themselves to the Apostolic teachings, lived in fellowship, broke bread together, and prayed. They had a deep realisation of belonging to the same body of Christ since they had all been born into the same new life.

During the time of persecution, the Christians fled Jerusalem, and the Church spread geographically. Along with the growth of the Church, false teachings and heresies also grew.

The Three Great Ecumenical Councils

When a false teaching threatened the teaching of the true faith, councils were held to settle those issues. There were many local councils handling and settling local issues. However, when there was an issue that affected the whole Church, all churches were asked to get together to settle such issues. Three councils received the universal approval of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as they addressed very important heresies. These are the Councils of Nicea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381), and Ephesus (AD 431). Only these three councils together established the true faith of the ancient Church and are sufficient to define the Christian faith.

These three councils came to be known as the Ecumenical Councils. There were other councils held locally. Some were not recognised by the Church.

The Council of Nicea.

Arius, a priest from Alexandria, wrongly argued that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father and was therefore subordinate to Him.

Arianism raised some deep questions in the hearts of Christians. If Christ were not God, how could He save us? If Christ is just human, how could He judge at the final judgement? How could Jesus be One with God the Father? Following Arian teachings, Christianity would have soon become like any pagan religion.

The Church found these teachings to be more dangerous than the worst persecution. The Church of Alexandria felt the danger of Arius' heresy. Pope Alexander (Bishop of Alexandria) condemned his teaching and tried unsuccessfully to guide Arius to the Christian faith. In Alexandria, in the year 321 AD, a local council led by Bishop Alexander declared Arius a heretic and sentenced him to exile.

However, Arius' big group of followers started causing troubles all over the Roman Empire. During the Holy Week of AD 325, Constantine called for an ecumenical or "world" council in Nicea. This city was ideally located outside of Constantinople and was a central point between the East and West.

The first Ecumenical Council of Nicea (in present-day Turkey) assembled with 318 Bishops. They were known as the Holy Fathers of Nicea' or just 'Holy 318'. The number 318 has significance as the Bishops echo the 318 servants of Abraham, seen in **Genesis 14:14**. The Council of Nicea is well known for having produced a unified Christian doctrine about the Holy Trinity, which is of the same substance, and Christ as God who became man. In over a month's time, this council also passed 20 other lesser-known decrees or canons.

There were three different groups attending the Council of Nicea:

1. **Arian/Heteroousios** (different essence) **Group**, which included a few Bishops who actually believed that The Father and Christ Jesus were of different substances.
2. **Orthodox/Homoousio** (different essence) **Group**, led by Hosius of Cordova and Alexander of Alexandria, along with a notable young deacon named Athanasius. They correctly believed that the Son coexisted with God the Father and was of the same substance as that of the Father. This was the largest group.
3. **Eusebian/Homoiousios** (similar essence) **Group** was led by Eusebius of Caesarea. They believed that begotten, the Father and the Son were only of similar essence. This group was almost the same size as the Orthodox group.

The council studied the teachings of Arius very carefully. The debate was on the difference between Jesus being "created" and Jesus being "begotten". A creation is not of the same essence as the creator. So, if the Son is begotten of the Father, the Son is of the same substance as the Father. Arians could not accept this teaching and wrongly argued that the Son was not eternal and lesser than the Father.

The Homoousian group knew that the Father was always a Father and that the Son, therefore, always existed with him. This is what is meant by the Son being eternally begotten of the Father. Bishop Alexander and his followers believed that following the Arian view destroyed the unity of the Godhead by believing that the Son was unequal to the Father.

Athanasius, at the time of the Council of Nicea, was a deacon and later became the Bishop of Alexandria. He was the strongest supporter of the use of the word "**Homoousia**" (**Same Substance or Same Essence**). He believed that the Father and the Son were both eternal and that they were of substance but were separate beings. St. Athanasius is called the 'Father of Orthodoxy' because he strongly supported the Orthodox faith of the Apostolic teachings.

As a result of the decisions made by the Council of Nicea, the following were included in the Nicene Creed, our statement of faith:

1. Jesus Christ is described as "Light

from Light, true God from true God" because of His divinity.

2. Jesus Christ is said to be eternally "*begotten, not made*," because of His co-eternity with God and confirming His role in the creation of the world.
3. Finally, He is said to be "*of one substance of the Father*," in direct opposition to Arianism.

The Council declared that the Father and the Son are of the same substance and are co-eternal, basing the declaration on traditional Christian belief handed down directly from the Apostles and as written in Scripture.

There were other subjects that were discussed during the Nicean Council. The Easter feast was already linked to the Jewish Passover festival, when the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus occurred. The Council decided that Easter should always be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring (Vernal) Equinox. All Eastern and Western churches follow this Ecumenical Council ruling.

The Nicean Council was successful in partially defeating Arianism. In today's modern world, there are many non-Orthodox denominations of Christianity that still directly or indirectly echo Arianism and continue to trouble the Church.

The Council of Constantinople

The Second Ecumenical Council was held in Constantinople in AD 381. This

Council focused on whether the Holy Spirit was of the same substance as the Father and the Son. The heresies that this council denounced were **Macedonianism** and **Apollinarianism**.

Macodenism is named after Macedonius, Bishop of Constantinople. He falsely stated that the Holy Spirit is not eternal, not of one substance with the Father, and not to be worshipped with the Father and Son as God. They also believed that Jesus Christ, though eternal, was of similar essence (homoiousius). This was also known as the Heresy of Pneumatomachia, meaning fighters of the spirit.

St. Basil the Great, a Church Father, led the fight against the spread of this heresy. He stated that based on the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is "the spirit of God" and "the spirit of Christ."

Apollinarius of Laodocia introduced Apollinarianism, a heresy that questions the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. He wrongly claimed that the Logos (Word of God) entered into Jesus and took the place of his rational mind while keeping the human body and soul. This implied that Jesus was not fully human.

St. Gregory, the Theologian, led the argument against Apollinarianism. He stated that our salvation was only possible because the Son of God was also fully human with a rational mind

As a result of the decisions taken by the Council of Constantinople, the following phrase was added to the Nicean Creed: "(We believe) And in the One Living Holy Spirit, the life-giving Lord of

all, Who proceeds from the Father, and Who together with the Father and Son, is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets and the apostles. "Calling the Holy Spirit "the life-giving Lord of All" rejected Macedonius' claim that the Holy Spirit was not God. The phrase "proceeding from the Father" meant that the Holy Spirit flows directly from the Creator and was not man-made or created from the Son. This point differs sharply from the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Later on, the Catholic Church introduced the Filioque clause, which declared that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Orthodox Church does not accept this clause. We worship the Holy Spirit along with the Father and Son, the complete Holy Trinity.

During this council, there was a conflict between the Churches of Constantinople and Alexandria about their standing in the universal Church. This argument continued into the next council.

The Council of Ephesus

The third ecumenical council was held in Ephesus, Asia Minor, in 431 AD and attended by about 200 bishops. The focus of this council was to address Nestorius, who claimed that Jesus Christ was a human born to St. Mary and that the Word of God entered into Him only later. In other words, Nestorius claimed that Jesus Christ had two separate natures as the Incarnate Word of God. The

council denounced this heresy and declared that Jesus Christ was God from the moment of conception in the womb of St. Mary. Hence, St. Mary is given the title "**Theotokos**", meaning bearer of God, as opposed to "**Christokos**", meaning bearer of Christ. This council also finalised the Creed that we use as our statement of faith in the One, Holy, Apostolic Church today.

Cyril of Alexandria led the arguments against Nestorianism. In the end, Nestorius and his group were banished. The council also decided to finalise the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and never make any more changes.

Rejection of Council of Chalcedon and other Councils

In AD 451, another council met in the small city of Chalcedon, near Constantinople. This council led to the separation of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church. This council incorrectly ruled that Jesus Christ had two natures, one human and one divine, within one person. This is called **Dyophysitism**.

As part of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Malankara Orthodox Church proclaims Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine, with one incarnate nature. This is called **Miaphysitism**. This is different from **Monophysitism**, where Jesus Christ has only a single element to His nature, His divinity. St. Dioscorus of Alexandria, successor of Cyril of Alexandria, led a group in oppo-

sition to the Chalcedon council's wrong decision. However, he was defeated and the council moved forward with its incorrect decision of "in two natures."

Summary

Sadly, the Chalcedon council misunderstood the true position of St. Dioscoros and thus of the Oriental Orthodox Church. We believe Jesus Christ has always been the Incarnate Word of God who suffered as a human for mankind and died for our sins, only to be resurrected on the third day because He is fully divine and fully human. His nature was not separate but rather united

as One

The Malankara Orthodox Church, as part of the Oriental Church:

1. Does not recognise the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) and the decisions it made.
2. Does not recognise all other councils that met after the Council of Chalcedon.

Only believes in the first Three Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381) and Ephesus (AD 431) as completely correct in their holy declaration of faith and doctrine of the Orthodox Church.

Reflection Questions

1. How are we, the Church, learning from the concept of councils today?
2. In your own words, what were the decisions made in the first three councils held at Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus? How have they established the faith of our Church?
3. Why does our Church not recognise the decisions taken by the Council of Chalcedon?

The Creed

Lesson Goals :

- *To understand the meaning and significance of the creed of the Church that confirms our faith in the Holy Trinity*
- *Understand how the Nicene Creed was developed and what arguments were put forward by the Church Fathers to refute the heresies based on Holy Bible*
- *Recognise how the church adopted a conciliar approach versus an autocratic approach in decision making*



Background to the Council of Constantinople

The faith of the first Council (AD 325, Nicea) was agreed upon by the second Council (AD 381, Constantinople). The following simple language changes/additions were made by the Council of Constantinople, to make the statement of faith clearly understood and to finally publicly end false beliefs (heresy arguments).

The statement that 'He became Man' was added to the Creed to show that Jesus had a fully human form too.

'The Holy Spirit is the Lord and the Giver of Life to Everything', means He is the creator, the True God and equal to Father and Son. Hence, he is worthy of being adored along with Father and Son.

So, this part was added: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father... who spoke by the prophets... We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen." The doctrine of the Trinity was now complete.

Since the Council of Constantinople completed the Creed in its present form, the Creed was first known as the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed". It is a declaration of the Orthodox faith of the Christian Church. It opposed many heresies. Now, it is known simply as the Nicene Creed. It is to be recited in full faith and acceptance of the truth, as it blessedly summarises our divine faith.

Filioque -- the great schism

Initially, both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) Churches together believed the Nicene Creed, which states that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father and is worshipped and glorified along with the Father and the Son.” However, in the 6th century, the Roman Catholic (Latin) Church added “proceeds from Father and the Son.” In the Latin language, the word for “from the Son” translates to ‘Filioque.’ The Creed was accepted in its present form in AD 381, but the “filioque” phrase was not added until AD 589.

No one has the right to remove or add anything to the finalised version of the Nicene Creed, for it is the Church’s complete statement of Faith. According to Orthodox Church teachings, even the ecumenical councils do not have the authority to change the Creed.

The statement that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son is wrong because in the gospels, Jesus Christ describes the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father” (**St. John 15:26**). Hence, the ‘Filioque’ is completely opposite to what is written in the gospels and to the teachings of the Church Fathers.

The Orthodox Church opposed the inclusion of the ‘Filioque’ in the Creed. This controversy caused the Great Schism of 1054, or the East-West Schism. The Church became divided into two separate Churches: Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox.

The Council of Ephesus

At the 3rd council (Ephesus 431 AD), St. Cyril was so concerned about keeping the truth in theology that he wrote letters to the council, which were accepted as the true Orthodox doctrine. When it was declared that Nestorius was excommunicated for his heresy beliefs (that Jesus was not of virgin birth because Jesus’ humanity and divinity were separate), the people cheered loudly. It was seen as a victory for the Mother of God. There was no greater joy in the city than this verdict by the Council. Victorious and having solved the biggest crisis in the Christian world at that time, Saint Cyril returned home to Alexandria.

The Council of Chalcedon

St. Severus is remembered in the 5th Diptych of the Holy Qurbana as “the Crown of the Syrians, the eloquent mouth, the pillar and doctor of the Holy Church of God as a whole, the meadow abounding in blossom, who preached all the time that Mary was undoubtedly the God bearer”. But what does this mean, and why did our Church not accept the Council of Chalcedon?

St. Severus was a strong critic of the 4th Great Council (Chalcedon, 451 A.D.) and their unacceptable view of ‘in two natures’ which was very close to the heresy of Nestorius. St. Severus was supported by a large number of delegates of the Christians from the East, representing communities in Egypt, Syria,

Ethiopia, Armenia and India. These communities are now referred to as the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

St. Dioscorus of the Oriental Orthodox Churches taught that Christ is a single personality formed by the union of a perfect Godhead and a perfect manhood. This simply means that Christ is fully God and fully man, human and Divine in One. In the words of St. Cyril of Alexandria, Jesus is 'one incarnate nature of God the Word.'

As we learned earlier, we believe Christ is fully God and fully man, and by imitating Christ, we are acting God-like in all we do. The Person of Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith, and this is why our Church fathers disagreed with the Council of Chalcedon.

Nicene Creed in Orthodox Church

The Nicene Creed was first recited in the Sacrament of Baptism but later was included as part of all Sacraments and at the end of daily hourly prayers. Mar Bar Kepha states three reasons why the Nicene Creed is proclaimed before the priest offers the Anaphora or Qurobo.

- for all to know that we believe what we confess
- to show that our Faith and confession are one, and
- to sanctify our minds, hearts and mouths.

The priest begins the Creed because he is the voice of the whole body of the Church. We make the sign of the Cross three times: when we recall Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Reflection Questions

1. Why should we recite the Nicene Creed out loud daily in our prayers?
2. Which line of the Nicene Creed do you most relate to, and why?
3. How could your Sunday School class use the Conciliar approach towards a local charity project?

Workers in the Vineyard

Lesson Goals :

- *I can briefly summarise the different Oriental Orthodox Churches and their history*
- *I can explain that we are in communion with the Oriental Orthodox Churches*



The Oriental Orthodox Churches

In 1963, the Oriental Orthodox Churches were named and organised as a subgroup of worldwide churches at the World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference, held in Montreal, Canada. Today, the list of Oriental Churches is: Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Armenian, and Malankara. In 1965, these churches gathered together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to understand each other's views on Christ so that they could begin a discussion with our sister Eastern Orthodox Churches (EO).

Brief Background Information of Each Oriental Orthodox Church

Armenian Apostolic Church

Apostle Thaddaues was the first to preach the Gospel in Armenia. King

Abgar of Armenia became ill, and having heard about Jesus' healing miracles, the King sent for Him. Only after His Ascension did Jesus send His disciple Thaddaues (AD 36), who cured, preached to, and baptised the King, along with his household and the people of Edessa. Thus, the Armenian Church began. King Abgar was the first Christian monarch and was very supportive of St. Thaddaues' Apostolic mission throughout Armenia.

In AD 49, Apostle Bartholomew joined Apostle Thaddaues and brought many more Armenians to the true faith. Some evil people who wished to stop the spread of Christianity had these two apostles whipped, crucified and buried. Many more faithful came to strengthen the Armenian Church but were also sadly martyred too, including St. Jude, Eustathius, and Bishop Elisha.

For centuries, Armenian Christians have suffered great torture, and many were put to death. In the 3rd century, King Khosrovo II gave the order for Christians to be killed. In response, Anak (a Parthian nobleman) killed the evil king. Then, Anak and his family tried to escape, but only their infant son survived. By God's grace, this child would become St. Gregory, the Illuminator of Armenia, whose hard work helped to establish the Church in his beloved country.

Coptic Orthodox Church

The Land of Egypt has always had a special role in the history of salvation, beginning with Abraham's life through the Early Church. The Coptic Church sees the Holy Family's visit to Egypt to escape King Herod's persecution (St. Matthew 2:13-18), as their special connection with Church history. Many Coptic legends state that the Egyptians accepted the Divine Child as the Lord long before His public ministry began.

St. Mark the Evangelist founded the Coptic Church when he visited Alexandria. He was the first patriarch of an unbroken chain of 177 Coptic patriarchs. St. Mark wrote the first Gospel, which was later used by the other gospel writers: St. Matthew, St. Luke, and likely St. John too.

A cobbler named Anianus was the first Egyptian convert. One day, while repairing Evangelist Mark's shoe, Anianus accidentally pierced his own hand and

cried aloud, "God is one." St. Mark rejoiced, healed the wound, and preached the gospel to Anianus and his household. They did not know of the Old Testament prophecies and had only read Greek philosophers' books. St. Mark baptised Anianus and his entire household. Soon, he ordained Anianus as a bishop, along with three priests and seven deacons.

In 68 AD, the pagans, who were against Christian conversion, captured St. Mark, tied a rope around his neck, dragged him through the streets of Alexandria, and threw him into prison. The saint received a vision from an angel informing him that he would be receiving the crown of martyrdom soon. The next day, St. Mark was again dragged through the streets until he died from his injuries. The pagans were about to start a fire to burn his body, but a miracle occurred in that "nature would not permit disrespect to the body of the saint, for it thundered and rained heavily, and the fire was put out" (Meinardus, 1999, p. 29-30). Coptic Christians received St. Mark's body and properly buried him in their church, having celebrated the liturgy there.

The Coptic saint, St. Anthony the Great, is known as the Father of Monasticism because he established many monastic traditions. Egypt has also been a significant place for Christian theological education. Many theologians and saints had their beginnings in the land of Egypt.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The official name of the Ethiopian Church includes "Tewahedo," which means united with humans and the divine Christ. From the Holy Scriptures, we know that Ethiopia has had connections with Israel since the time of King Solomon, as Queen Sheeba came from the Ethiopian region to meet the wise king (**1 Kings 10:1-13**).

For centuries, Ethiopians had been coming to Jerusalem and had learned to worship the One True God. In **Acts 8:26-40**, St. Philip meets an Ethiopian traveller who then joyfully returns to preach the Gospel to his fellow Ethiopians. During the time of the Apostles, Matthew and Bartholomew also went to Ethiopia to preach the Gospel.

For centuries, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was under the leadership of the Coptic Patriarch, who would send a Coptic/Egyptian Bishop to look after the Ethiopian faithful. Due to political or practical reasons, there were many years when no communication or travel was possible. Without a bishop present, ordinations and theological issues could not be handled.

By the 19th century, the Coptic Patriarch, Kirilos V, consecrated four bishops for the Ethiopian Church at the request of Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes IV. By 1959, Archbishop Basilios was consecrated by Coptic Patriarch Kirilos VI as the first Ethiopian Patriarch. This resulted in an independent and self-governing Ethiopian Church.

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church

When Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991, the churches in the country organised themselves and asked the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate to establish them as self-governing churches. Within three years, several Eritrean Bishops were ordained in Cairo and assigned to new dioceses. The Eritrean Patriarchate was formally installed in Asmara in May 1998, with the consecration of Patriarch Filipos. The faith and liturgical practices of the Eritrean Orthodox Church are exactly the same as those of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Syriac Orthodox Church

The Syriac Orthodox Church has its beginnings in the city of Antioch, where the believers in Jesus Christ were first called Christians (**Acts 11:26**). Interestingly, before St. Peter or St. Paul could reach Antioch, other believers had already travelled to this city and preached the Gospel to its inhabitants. Many believed and turned to the Lord. (**Acts 11:19-21**).

After the deaths of the Apostles and the destruction of Jerusalem, Antioch became known as the centre of Christianity in the East. Later, when the city became the home of the Patriarch, it claimed authority over Syria, Phoenicia, Arabia, Palestine, Cilicia, Cyprus and Mesopotamia.

The modern Syriac Orthodox Church began after the Council of Chalcedon, when a Christological misunderstanding occurred, causing a split within the church. The three main founders of the Syriac Church are St. Severus of Antioch, St. Philoxenos of Mabbug, and St. Jacob of Serugh. This Church considers itself descendants of the Apostle Peter in Antioch.

Summary

Our **Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC)** is in full communion

with all the churches of the Oriental Orthodox Church. Specifically, we follow the liturgical traditions of the Syriac Orthodox Church. All Oriental Orthodox Churches share the same faith expressed within the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381) and Ephesus (AD 431). Even though the liturgical practices of these churches are different, they express the same faith. St. Irenaeus of Lyons reminded us that the small differences in practice confirm the unity of our faith.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some similarities that are seen between the Oriental Orthodox Churches?
2. What are some differences that are seen between the churches?
3. How can we, as Malankara Orthodox Christians, connect with other local Eastern Orthodox Churches?
4. If you can watch or listen to another Eastern Orthodox Church service, how does our Malankara Orthodox Holy Qurbana service compare or contrast?

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Malankara Orthodox Church Monasteries

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand monasticism.*
- *I can compare monasticism to marriage and how they are two different paths towards salvation.*
- *I can briefly explain asceticism and how all are called to live ascetic life.*



Monasteries

Monasteries are places where monks live together, pray, and are transformed into true children of Christ. A monk (Sanyasi) lives a life of obedience, poverty, and chastity. Monasteries are also called Aashramam or Dayara. There are separate dayaras for men and women. Not everyone who stays in a Dayara is formally a member of an Aashramam. Once they become members of the Aashramam, they have to wear Masanampsa (a special headcloth), which indicates that they chose to be an Aashramasthan. They wear a wooden cross around their neck and also stop eating meat.

Monasteries of the Malankara Orthodox Church

Monasticism refers to a lifestyle involving separation from the world for the purpose of complete dedication to prayer to achieve perfect obedience to the gospel life. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, monasticism is considered full-dedicated discipleship of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is considered the first monastic follower. Our Church has also been blessed to have many Dayaras, and all have been growing in divinity based on prayers, fasting, and the observance of Lent.

The following is a list of most of our Orthodox Dayaras:

1. Bethany Aashramam : Ranni - Perunad

- Order of Imitation of Christ
- Founded in 1918 by Fr. P.T. Geevarghese (later Archbishop Mar Ivanios) and Dn. Alexios (later Alexios Mar Theodosios).
- to teach faith, conduct worship in its fullest form, and encourage people to live a life that's filled with God and to live a life that is an offering for the Church and society.
- An old-age home is found in Kuzhimattom. Priests and Nuns in this order wear a cloth that is Kaavi or orangish in colour.

2. Bethany Matam

- Sisterhood of Imitation of Christ
- Started in 1921 by Fr. Alexios Mar Theodosios and Fr. P.T. Geevarghese. Sr. Hannah and Sr. Sarah were Superiors.
- Patients who are in need are helped.

3. Mount Thabor Dayara: Pathanapuram

- Society of the order of the Sacred Transfiguration
- Started in 1930 by Fr. C. M. Thomas (later Thoma Mar Divanasios).
- The focus is helping in parish ministries and other church spiritual organisations, but mostly to help the needy in providing funds for making homes, conducting weddings, etc.

4. Mount Thabor Convent : Pathanapuram

- 1930, Fr. C.M. Thomas, Sr. Sushana (first Superior Mother)
- The focus areas are Education, assisting with Sthree Samajam functioning, etc.

5. Bethlehem Ashramam : Chengammanaad

- 1960, Mathews Mar Coorilos Thirumeni (Later H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathew II)

6. St. Paul's Aashramam : Puthuppaadi

- 1958, Fr. M.V. George (Later Geevarghese Mar Osthathios)
- Children's home and Evangelisation are the main missions.

7. St. Paul's Convent : Puthuppaadi

- 1978, Children's Home [Shishubhavanam], Girl's Home [Baalika Bhavanam], Old age home [Vridha Bhavanam], Hospital services

8. Holy Trinity Aashramam : Ranni

- 1970, Fr. T. E. George (Later Geevarghese Mar Dioscoros)
- The parish mission is the focus.

9. Holy Cross Convent : Thiruvananthapuram

- 1985, Dioscoros Thirumeni
- Focus is a home for special needs children.

10. Kristhushishya Aashramam, Thadaakam, Coimbatore

- 1936, The first Aashramam, which was founded outside of Kerala and was started by Bishop Peckanham Walsh.
- Evangelization, conducting conferences and dhyanam, and providing medical care are the focus.

11. St. Mary's Convent: Othara

- 1934, Founded by K.M. Annamma

12. Bethlehem St. Mary's Convent: Kizhakkambalam (1937)

13. Nazareth Convent: Kadambanaad, Adoor (1966)

14. Basalel Convent : Shooranaad (1968, Founded by Barskeepa Ramban)

15. Mar Coorilos Dayara: Mylapra

16. St. Mary's Convent : Aduppootti

How is Monasticism different from marriage?

Monasticism and marriage are two different routes towards the same destination. Just like in a monastery, where every monk or nun should forgive their fellow members, inside a family, the husband and wife should also forgive each other. Just as a member of the monastery prays for the unity of all the members of the Aashramam, the husband and wife should pray for the unity of the family. On both of these routes, the challenges are very different, but at the same time, they have many similarities too. In the first days of marriage, life is easy and love

is fresh. However, as life goes on and the responsibilities increase, one should remember the love they first shared. This should help them continue to love and support each other. This same message of remaining devoted in love and in faith with God applies to monks too.

Asceticism

“

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.”

. St. Matthew 16:24; St. Luke 9:23

”

Asceticism comes from the Greek word for exercise or training, which is done in preparation. In spiritual life, this means exercising the concepts of self-sacrifice, struggle, and being in constant battle against our human will, habits, and worldly passions. Asceticism is the way of life that prepares one for the Kingdom of God through the training and conditioning of the whole person (body and soul) towards a Godly life.

Summary

Asceticism is an exercise in goodness and morals. It is the work that we have to do to correct, reform, and purify ourselves. It may involve fasting, prayer, prostrations, participation in divine services, prayer rope (Jesus prayer), or not eating certain foods. These are all acts of self-sacrifice as you try to be closer to God.

Reflection Questions

1. Which Monastery would you like to visit, and why?
2. Explain to your classmates who a monk is.
3. We say that our Church has been in existence since the first century AD. But why did it take almost 1918 years to have a Malankara monastery?
4. Does our Church have any monasteries outside India?

Tending the Heart and Mind

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain how to seek support from my spiritual community.*
- *I can understand when to seek help from a professional for my mental health*
- *I can identify how public expectations are often different from those of Orthodox Christians.*
- *I can state how managing my time, talents, and resources will help me become more like Christ and guide others towards Christ too.*



Bible Verse

Therefore humble yourselves under the Mighty Hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you

1 Peter 5:6



In this lesson, we will read about how we Christians can work towards a healthy body, mind, and soul.

Let us discuss the terms physical health and mental health.

1. *Physical health:* the condition of your physical body and how well it is working.
2. *Mental health:* your emotional, psychological, and social well-being and their impact on how you think, feel, and act

3. *Spiritual health* is expressed through prayer, daily Christian living, and worship, which lead to our union with God.

It is important that we see our well-being in each of these areas and not just our physical health, as getting physically sick is often the easiest to recognise. However, if we do not practise good habits, express our emotions in healthy ways, and keep our focus on Christ, our health can quickly decline in all areas without us even realising it.

Emotions and Experiences

Emotions are reactions that human beings experience in response to events or situations. The type of emotion a person expresses is dependent upon the situation and how that person responds to

that situation. For instance, a person experiences joy when they receive good news. A person experiences fear when they are threatened. We have to understand that even if two individuals experience the same situation, both of them might express very different emotions.

It is important to avoid thinking of feelings as good vs. bad or positive vs. negative. This creates unnecessary judgement on the emotion. It discourages others from expressing themselves openly and in a healthy way. We should think of our emotions as information that we can pay attention to and learn from. This helps us understand our baseline and our normal daily routines. Each of us has regular routines and emotions that we recognise because they happen on a daily basis. That is why it is important to recognise our natural responses to situations. Then we can tell when something feels off or different from our natural responses.

This is a good indicator of whether we need to talk about it with someone or seek out more help. Sometimes we may not understand why we feel a certain way. Sometimes we feel so joyful about something that we should talk to someone to better understand and remember those happy memories. Talking about our feelings and emotions is a good way to process our reactions, understand ourselves, and understand why we may feel the way we do.

We all go through struggles in our lives; some may be very difficult and some not as difficult. We all have

our own individual strengths and weaknesses. It is important to recognise the things we like and dislike and to build on our God-given talents and strengths. One way to figure out how to express and work through our emotions in a healthy manner, mentally and spiritually, is to read the **Psalms**. Here, we read that David learned how to speak with God and how to express his emotions to God in a healthy way. There is both joy and praise in the Psalms and throughout the Scriptures.

There is also sadness. Interestingly, when Christ was suffering on the Cross, He said, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”* (**Matthew 27:46**). In His most painful moment, Christ was actually quoting Scripture (**Psalms 22:1**). We see David expressing anger. Even St. Paul told the Ephesians: *“Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil”* (**Ephesians 4:26–27**).

St. Paul was not saying to never get angry, but rather to express anger in a healthy way. We have to understand the cause of why we are frustrated or angry. We have to make sure that we are not taking out our anger on our family and friends. As we process our anger, we have to direct the anger towards the devil, as this is the appropriate way to express anger and not sin!

Building Relationships and seeking support from our community

As Orthodox Christians, our goal is **Theosis**, to become like God, which means to become like Christ. One of the best ways to grow to become like Christ is to engage in Sunday School, and church services, to read the Bible and other spiritual books, and to learn more about Christ. Building relationships and friendships with people who are also growing spiritually is another great way to keep ourselves growing in fellowship.

Christ taught us to love God and to love others (**John 13:34–35**). Some examples of this are building a good relationship with your parish priest, spiritual father, your Sunday School teacher, and other students about your age. It is like having a Church family. Then we can share our experiences and our struggles with this community. We are able to ask them to pray for us, just like we will pray for others in our community and around the world. So, whenever we are really struggling, we will easily reach out to that parish priest or trusted adult with whom we already have a strong relationship. They will talk with, guide, and pray for us as necessary. Sometimes they might recognise that we may need to talk to a professional therapist. These are all good things to do to make sure that we have the proper support through our difficult times.

Need to seek professional support

If you feel you are having stress and anxiety beyond your normal daily and school stress, it is important that you speak to a trusted adult. Open up to them and express what you are going through.

There is good stress and bad stress. Good stress helps us meet deadlines and makes sure that we turn our homework in on time or that we study well for an upcoming examination. Stress that shuts us down or interferes with our duties means that we are stressing out so much that we are not able to handle or complete any task. It is because fear or anxiety prevents us from being productive or moving forward. Getting extra support is a good reminder of Jesus' message to us:

“

“casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

1 Peter 5:7

”

God wants you to give all of your worries, cares, and concerns to Him. One of the ways He takes care of us is by putting helpful people in our lives for us to go to when we need extra support.

Sometimes we experience situations in our school (bullying, bad grades, etc.) or families (death, excessive fighting, etc.) that cause us a lot of sadness or anger. It is important to talk with a trusted adult about how these situations affect us. This

will help us mentally process and will give us extra support for what we are going through.

During trauma, we do not realise how it can affect us. The sooner we are able to process and talk about the trauma and get help, the sooner we will heal. Then we will be better able to handle difficult situations as they come up.

It is important to recognise our emotions during difficult times and to observe how they affect our daily functioning. If it is affecting us negatively and we are unable to do our daily tasks (examples: not wanting to go to school, etc.),. Then it is important to seek professional support and guidance. You will learn how to process the struggles and eventually go back to your normal daily routine to the best of your ability.

Stay Focused on God

No matter all the joys and struggles that we go through in life, it is important to always keep our focus on God and always walk towards His Kingdom. The gospel of St. Mark reminds us:

“

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength

Mark 12:30

”

When we build up our love for God

and His Church, we become the best version of ourselves and live up to our full potential. The way we live our lives as Orthodox Christians and the way we treat others (with love and patience) show in our daily lives, especially in how we approach school, friendships, Church, and learning how to serve God and others with our time and talents.

The advice a spiritual mentor once gave to an overwhelmed mentee was “*find opportunities to help others, and it will help you*”. This might seem odd and the opposite of what the stressed-out mentee should be doing. However, as the mentee started obeying this advice, it increased her serotonin levels (a hormone in your body that puts you in a better mood), reduced her constant worries, increased her focus on her problems, and reminded her to refocus on God and the Church. This actually helped her to complete her duties and to seek out the support she needed to process the struggles she was going through.

Summary

Our lives have to be centred around God and the Church. We have to get into the habit of loving others in a godly way, serving others, and giving our time and wealth to the needy. These are all ways to reenergize us and refocus our priorities to live a life pleasing to God. We are not to live for worldly treasures that may deceive and harm us.

Being positive physically, mentally, and spiritually is the goal. Healthy daily

habits can help decrease your stress, your energy to be the best Christ-like
lower your risk of disease, and increase version of you!

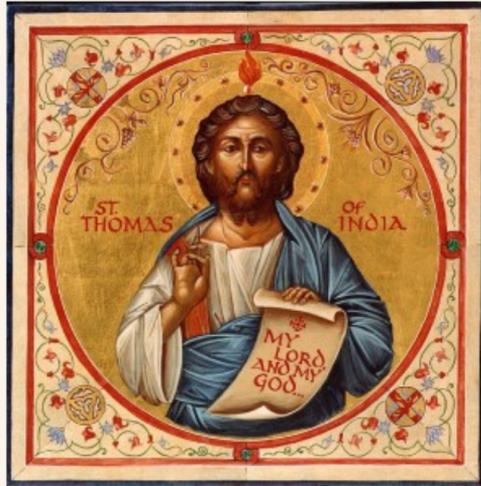
Reflection Questions

1. How can I get past the idea that others will see me differently if I share my struggles?
2. What can I do differently to ensure others feel free to approach me if they need support?
3. What can I do to be a better supporter and help others with their mental health?

Gratitude

Reviewers : Grade 7

Miss. Dibitha Mathew	St. Thomas IOC HEMEL HEMPSTEAD
Mrs. Jizrani Alexander	St. Thomas IOC SOUTH AFRICA
Ms. Nita Paul	St. Mary's IOC BRISTOL
Ms. Jean Jose	St. John the Baptist IOC STOKE ON TRENT



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**FIRST EDITION
2024**