

August 11, 2002  
The Sunday after Transfiguration

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

In the normal course of the life in Christ, not all our communication with God is direct and immediate. The saints not only pray directly to God in Christ; they also seek the intercession of the other saints. Thus the Communion of the Saints includes also a communication among the saints.

Consequently, when the saints gather for worship, the apostle Paul insists that their prayers include intercession, enteuchsis (1 Timothy 2:1), a discipline for which He himself sets the example, both by praying for other Christians (1 Thessalonians 1:2; Philemon 4) and by depending on their prayers for him (2 Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:19, Philemon 22). Another good example was provided by the church at Jerusalem during Peter's imprisonment, when "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church" (Acts 12:5).

Indeed, the saints normally seek that intercession. Several years before he was able to visit the Christians at Rome, for instance, Paul was already beseeching the Lord on their behalf (Romans 1:9), and he went on to "implore" (parakalo) them to "struggle together with [him] in prayers"; that he might come to visit them (15:30-32). This expression, "struggle together (synagonisasthai) in prayers," contains a compound of the verb (agonizomenos) that Paul used to describe the intercessions of Epaphros on behalf of the church at Colossae (Colossians 4:12).

Holy Scripture abounds with examples of such intercession. For instance, those Greeks who "wish to see Jesus" initiate their approach through a saint named Philip. And how does Philip answer them? He brings the matter to the attention of yet another saint named Andrew, and then the two of them intercede with Jesus (John 12:20-22). Two saints, in other words, "agree together" to petition the Lord on behalf of those who made the original request (Matthew 18:19). Such is the communication among the saints.

A further example of this intercession of the saints is found in the story of Tabitha, the seamstress of Joppa. Tabitha died what the Acts of the Apostles indicates was a premature death, for we are told that she perished of a sickness. Tabitha's bereaved companions, learning that the apostle Peter was

currently visiting in the nearby town of Lydda, "sent two men to him, imploring (parakalountes) him not to delay in coming to them" (9:38). We observe here the dynamics of Christian intercession. At Tabitha's death the congregation at Joppa was not content to "go to God directly." They sought, rather, the intercession of Peter, and to obtain that intercession they sent, not one, but two men to "implore" Peter on their behalf. It is clear that "imploing the saints," communication among the saints, took place all through this episode. Later generations of the saints would call this process a "prayer chain."

One is impressed by the several similarities between this story of Tabitha and another biblical account of intercession, the Gospel narrative of the raising of Jairus's daughter. First, each case involves a premature death, the daughter of Jairus being only twelve years old (Mark 5:42; Luke 8:42).

Second, in both episodes attention is drawn to the people weeping near the corpse (Matthew 9:23; Mark 5:38; Luke 8:52; Acts 9:39). Third, in each instance the curious bystanders are dismissed from the room prior to the raising from the dead (Matthew 9:25; Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51; Acts 9:40). Fourth, both Jesus and Peter take the hand of the one deceased (Matthew 9:25, Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54; Acts 9:41). Fifth, there is a resemblance between these two accounts even in the wording of the formulas used to raise the dead persons. This similarity is clearest in Mark, who alone transcribes the original Aramaic of Jesus' command, "Little girl, arise": Talitha, kum (5:41). We note that a difference of only one letter separates this word talitha from the Aramaic name "Tabitha," for which Luke provides the Greek translation dorkas, meaning "antelope" or "gazelle" (Acts 9:40). Thus, Peter's Aramaic command to the deceased seamstress of Joppa was, Tabitha, kum.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in each case there is an intercession, literally an "imploing," and it is instructive to observe that the same word, parakalo, is used with respect both to imploring Jesus (Mark 5:23; Luke 8:41) and to imploring Peter (Acts 8:38). In the context of prayer, that is to say, the saints speak to the saints in a way resembling the way they speak to Jesus. Thus, this identical verb, parakalo, is employed by Paul both to "implore" the Lord in his affliction (2 Corinthians 12:8) and to "implore" the saints at Rome to pray for him (Romans 15:30).

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**

[phri@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phri@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**

[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)

**Pastoral Ponderings:**

[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)