Icons -- Windows to Heaven

ICON OF SAINT GERASIMUS:

On March 4 we remember a saint named Saint Gerasimus. He loved to pray outdoors near trees, birds, and animals because God made them all. So he went to live in a quiet place near the Jordan River. Some other men who also wanted to pray in a quiet place came there too. The men, called monks, lived very simple lives. Each monk had only a few clothes, ate very plain food, and drank only water. They spent their time praying or working. They made baskets.

One day Saint Gerasimus was praying by the river. Soon he heard the roar of an animal. He looked and saw what it was -- a lion! And the lion was limping. The lion roared again, and Saint Gerasimus could tell that it was roaring because it was in pain. He felt sorry for the lion, but he was afraid too. So he prayed, asking God to protect him. When he walked slowly to the lion, he could see a big sharp thorn stuck in the lion's paw. He spoke quietly to the lion,and the lion let him take its paw in his hands so he could pulled out the thorn.

The lion wanted to stay with this kind man who loved all animals because God made them. So he followed Saint Gerasimus back to the monastery, the place where the monks lived. At first the other monks were frightened, but soon they saw that the lion had become a friend to Saint Gerasimus. The lion stayed with them and they took good care of it for the rest of its life. When Saint Gerasimus became very old, he died, and the lion soon afterward died at his grave and was buried nearby. Therefore the lion is shown on icons of the saint at his feet.

Sunday of Orthodoxy

Icons

We venerate icons. What is an icon?
Why are icons important to Orthodox persons?

What does the word "Orthodox" mean?

The English word "Orthodox" is made from two Greek words:
orthos -- which means "correct" or "true"
doxa -- which means "belief" or "faith"
So Orthodox means -- true belief.

What are icons and why are icons of saints important to an Orthodox person?

We know that after they died, all persons who believed in Christ and did their best to live goods lives have gone to Heaven. Saints are persons whose lives are good examples that teach us something about how God wants us to to live good lives.

When the Church recognizes that someone who has died was a saint, a special church service is celebrated, called glorification. This does not 'make' the person a saint. The person became a saint because he or she believed in Christ and tried especially hard to live a good life.

The Church sets aside a particular day when people can celebrate and learn about the saint's life. And icons of the saint are made so that people can learn about them.

What does it mean to "venerate" an icon of a saint?

Many saints are celebrated on each day of the year. When we venerate an icon of a saint we are showing love and respect for the saint and asking the saint to pray for us and help us. We are never praying to the icon itself but to the person in Heaven whose picture we see. None of us can see into Heaven, so an icon is like a "window" that allows us to think about the saint and about God and Heaven.

Triumph of Orthodoxy

A long time ago, there were persons who did not understand what icons are and took them out of the churches to stop people from venerating them. After a while, those persons were taught why icons are important in Orthodox worship, and the churches and people were allowed to have icons again. So, we celebrate this day as the Sunday of the Trimph of Orthodoxy.

WORD SCRAMBLE

1. Orthodox means ___ ___ ___ ___ faith.
E R U T 1 4

2. Saints are examples of people who lived especially good lives and believed in Jesus ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___.
T C R I H S 7

3. Icons are like ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ to Heaven.
N I O W D S W 3

4. We show love and respect for the person whose image we see in an icon when we ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ the icon,
T A V N E R E E 2

5. We can ask a saint to ___ ___ to God to help us.
Y R P A 6

The first Sunday during Great Lent is the day when we celebrate our Orthodox faith and give thanks for the icons of the Saints, Christ, and the Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of Christ our God), which teach us about our faith and help us to pray.

Use the numbered letters above to fill in the blanks:

Today is called the Sunday of the ___ ___ ___ ___ M ___ ___
of Orthodoxy. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7