



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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## THE EPARCHY OF PARMA RECEIVES A SIXTH BISHOP

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Bishop François, Melkite Eparchy of Newton; Bishop Nil, Eparchy of Mukachevo-Uzhorod; Metropolitan Archbishop William, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh; the newly-ordained Bishop Robert (Pipta), Eparchy of Parma; Archpriest Dennis Hrubciak, Eparchy of Parma; and Bishop Kurt, Eparchy of Passaic

On November 8, 2023, the Feast of the Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Michael and All the Holy Incorporeal Powers, The Most Reverend Robert Mark Piapta was ordained and enthroned as the Sixth Bishop of the Eparchy of Parma in the presence of Christophe Cardinal Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America, and by the laying on of hands by The Most Reverend William C. Skurla, Metropolitan Archbishop of Pittsburgh, as

the principal consecrator, and The Most Reverend Kurt R. Burnette, Bishop of the Eparchy of Passaic, and The Most Reverend Nil Lushchak, Apostolic Administrator of Mukachevo-Uzhorod, as co-consecrators. Witnessing and praying at this Divine Liturgy were fifteen other archbishops and bishops, ninety-two priests and deacons, several religious, and many faithful of the Eparchy as well as many friends and family of Bishop Piapta. The ordination was cel-

ebrated at Holy Resurrection Parish in Euclid, Ohio and the faithful were led in song by a seventy-six-person choir; The Most Reverend John Michael Botean, of the Romanian Eparchy of Saint George in Canton, gave the homily.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a cocktail hour and dinner reception at the Cleveland-Marriott East in Warrensville Heights, Ohio. Our Metropolitan William C. Skurla gave the in-

vocation and blessing of food; Bishop François Beyrouti, of the Melkite Eparchy of Newton, gave remarks in which he spoke about the true nature of being a bishop and that God calls men who are imperfect, but He gives them His grace to carry out their important and difficult duties as shepherd of the faithful. Bishop Robert Piapta responded to the remarks of Bishop Beyrouti, in which he expressed his gratitude for the prayers and support of all those who were present and those who could not be present, as well as an acknowledgement of a need for our Eparchy of Parma to penetrate the darkness of the culture in our country with the Light of Faith found in Jesus Christ. Beautiful singing entertainment was provided by The Loya Brothers – Jonathan, Daniel, Thomas, and Nicholas (accompanied by Alyssa Stachowiak on the piano) – and by the Byzantine Singers of Lorain – Andrew Marko, Michelle and Matthew Moran, and Linda Skibo. The evening concluded with a benediction by Archbishop George Gallaro, Apostolic Administrator of Piana degli Albanesi (Italo-Albanese), and closing remarks from the Master of Ceremonies, Sam Michel.

Please visit our website, [www.parma.org](http://www.parma.org), to see many more pictures from this joyous day and to view the recorded livestream of the Ordination and Enthronement Divine Liturgy. Please keep Bishop Robert in your prayers as he begins his new ministry as our shepherd.



Clergy and the faithful from around the Metropolia

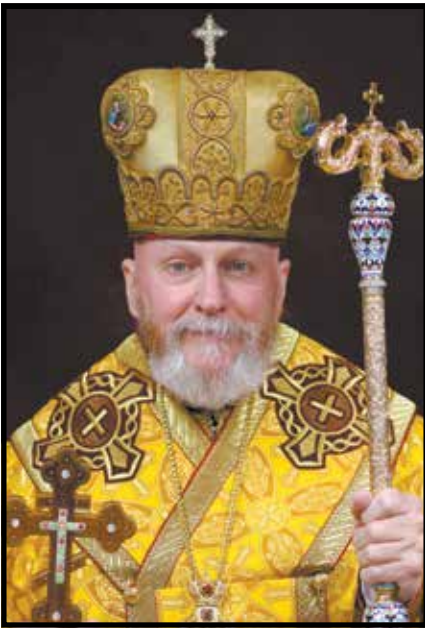


Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Papal Nuncio to the United States



Bishop Kurt leads ordinand, Father Robert Piapta around the Holy Table before ordination





# I LIFT UP MY EYES

*Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt*



## DEATH, BE NOT PROUD!

**D**eath, be not proud, though some have called thee Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so." One of the most popular sonnets by John Donne, begins with these famous words, "Death, be not proud." It is one of Donne's profoundly Christian poems. Jesus Himself tells us not to fear death, years before His own resurrection and conquest of death when He says, "Fear not those who kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). In other words, Jesus teaches us not to fear the death of the body, but to fear evil which can kill the soul for eternity. Our Lord spoke these words in His speech about discipleship and persecution, but He addresses a basic fact of life, that all of us have inside of us, a fear of death.

Our fear of death is natural, is God given and, in the right amount, is healthy. The scriptures say, "God did not make death, and He does not delight in the death of the living" (Wisdom 1:13). The Prophet Ezekiel declares, "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God, so turn and live." After all, the first law that God gave, long before the ten commandments, was the law against killing. He communicated this first law, and the only law for a long time, when He made a covenant with Noah after the flood and when He placed the rainbow in the sky as a reminder of this covenant. Every time we see a rainbow, it is a reminder of God's law against killing each other.

At the time of His covenant with Abraham, God abolished human sacrifice. And in the Ten Commandments He orders, "Thou shalt not kill." So, God gave us a natural fear of death, to protect us from the desire to kill anyone, to kill ourselves, or to kill others, and warning us to avoid mortal danger without a commensurate reason.

After delivering the Chosen People from four centuries of slavery in Egypt, they were purified in the desert for forty years, and at the end of that time, in sight of the Promised Land, Moses reminds them of the Law of God communicated on Mount Sinai. He says in his final speech, "I place before you today a choice—life or death. Therefore, choose life!"

When young David was in his many dangerous adventures, sometimes fighting as a soldier for his nation of Israel, and sometimes fleeing the soldiers of King Saul who was determined to murder for jealousy, he wrote down his fear of death, and his hope in God, his close personal hope in God. David faced death many times in his youth, even as an old king in a time of peace, and he wrote down the songs he composed to thank God and inspire us.

In his most famous psalm, David, who was himself a shepherd, calls God his shepherd. "The Lord is my Shepherd ... 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 comfort me" (Psalm 23). When David was taken prisoner by the Philistines, he wrote, "My enemies pursue me all day long ... when I am afraid, I put my trust in You. ... I will not be afraid; what can man do to me? ... You have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life" (Psalm 56). When David was on the run from King Saul and hid in a cave close to capture, he wrote these beautiful words, "In the shadow of your wings I will take shelter until the danger has passed. He reaches down from heaven and saves me. He rebukes those who trample me. ... My soul is among the lions. I lay down with ravenous beasts, with men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharper than swords." Terror indeed for this young man, whose only crime was serving the King too well! How many young people throughout history have done well, only to find a powerful enemy in an older person who should help the young, but instead is filled with envy-fueled hate? Perhaps that happened to you somewhere in your life. David turns his terror into one of his most beautiful songs. He even tells us, "I will sing and make music. Awake my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn." By the way, this psalm contains one of my favorite verses: "They dug a pit for me, but they fell into it themselves." Most people don't know this, but the priest quotes this psalm at every Divine Liturgy – when you see the priest incensing the gifts after communion, he says silently, "Be exalted above the heavens, O God, and let Your glory cover the earth." David must have liked that verse too, because he says it twice.

Before David left for the desert, the king sent assassins to kill him in his house, and he composed Psalm 59 as a memorial. "Deliver me from my enemies, O my God, ... from workers of iniquity ... from men of bloodshed. See how they lie in wait for me. ... They return in the evening, snarling like dogs and prowling around the city." Imagine how you would feel if you saw men outside your house all night, waiting for the morning

to kill you. David sings to God, "I will keep watch for You, O my strength, because You, O God, are my fortress. My God of loving devotion will come to meet me." By this time in his life, David had been in many brutal battles as a soldier and faced death many times. He credits God with saving his life. How much less honorable to be assassinated outside his house, but he sings, "O my Strength, I will sing praises to You, for You, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love."

Although David was a brave and experienced warrior, he wasn't a superman. In the face of overwhelming forces, he knew his human strength had its limits. Some of his images must be from his experience, his narrow escapes from pursuers. In Psalm 27 he says, "When the wicked advance to devour me ... though an army besiege me ... though war break out against me ... in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling. ... and set me high upon a rock." He seems to be recalling a situation that seemed hopeless, and the next thing he knew, he was up on a rock, looking down at his confused enemies. Also in Psalm 18, he describes his terrifying experiences near to death. "The cords of death entangled me. The torrents of chaos overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me. The traps of death closed on me." David cries out to God for help, and after a gorgeous portrayal of God's majestic presence, he tells us, "The valleys of the sea were exposed, and the foundations of the earth laid bare. He reached down from on high and took hold of me. He drew me out of deep waters. ... He brought me to a spacious place. He rescued me because he delighted in me." Psalm 18 is very much worth reading in its entirety, even worth memorizing.

David, both as a youthful commoner and as the anointed king, experienced the natural fear of death that is common to us all. He was courageous in the face of fear because of his faith in God, and his life experience in which God had been at his side in many fights, whether fighting wild animals to save his sheep, or fleeing for his life when unjustly accused, or fighting an army to protect his people.

Without faith in God, fear of death takes on a sinister role. For some people, it is so extreme that it is classified as a mental illness. Even for the rest of us, it is always in the background, and the Scriptures tell us that fear of death makes us slaves – slaves to sin and slaves to our passions. Most of our desires come from our desire to survive. Although healthy within the limits of God's law, when unbridled, most of the sins flow from these same desires. The desire for food, when unchecked, leads to gluttony, greed, luxury, and physical diseases. The desire for shelter and the

desire for security, when unchecked, leads also to greed, to luxury, and to stealing other people's land and houses. At the base of most wars in history is desire for land and for security. Politicians are experts on playing on people's fear of death to provoke wars.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written that flesh and blood, "through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." It says that the fear of death causes the slavery of sin. In order to free us from sin and slavery, it was necessary for our Savior to take on our flesh and blood and to conquer death. In full, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Jesus Christ conquered death and sin, and faith in Jesus Christ liberates us from sin and from fear of death. The night before His own death, Jesus knew that the events of the next day would shock His disciples and shake their faith in Him. At the dinner itself, they are disturbed when Jesus talked about death and laying down one's life for a friend, so He speaks these words to them: "Let not your hearts be troubled; You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many mansions. If that were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to Myself, that where I am, there you may also be. And to where I am going, you know." Two thousand years later, these words still comfort us. I remember (thirty years ago) preparing a man for death, a man with a strong will and many accomplishments, who fought a battle with his diagnosis of cancer for a year longer than the six months his doctors had given him. Towards the end he said to me, "I am coming to understand what Jesus meant when He said, 'My Father's house has many mansions.'" He never explained to me what he understood, but these ancient words brought him comfort in his final days. As an aside, I was inspired to go to him one day for the "Last rites", and took the Holy Eucharist, the oils, and the Gospel book from the altar. When I told him he would confess and receive the Anointing and Communion, he was a little taken aback. He liked to be in control. He said to me, "Well, if you say so Father, but this isn't my final confession." He was dead two days later. If you ask any parish priest, they all have interesting stories about deaths they have been intimate with.

In one of my parishes, there was a large family near the church. I found myself the family priest, so to speak, when I buried both the father and the mother. Then, the man called one day to say that his sister was diagnosed with terminal cancer and would live with his family until the end. I walked down to their house to give her the sacraments, and everyone was teary-eyed. We closed the door to her room for privacy. Don't worry, I'm not going to repeat her con-



fession; the confessional seal lasts even after death. But it was funny, as soon as the door was closed, she sighed and rolled her eyes and laughed, “Father, everyone is afraid except me. I’m completely calm.” Her Catholic faith in the saving mercy of Jesus Christ took away her fear of death. She knew she would die with absolution from her sins, like the paralyzed man whom his friends lowered through the ceiling to be cured by Jesus. She knew she would die after consuming the Body and Blood of Jesus, Who said, “Anyone who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Her family wept, but by faith, she literally laughed in the face of death.

The icon offered to you in this paper is one of the many precious treasures in your Heritage Center in Woodland Park. Bishop Dudick must have liked this icon, because there are many of this particular icon, all antiques, many purchased at auctions in New York City over the years. It is a complex icon of the Resurrection of Jesus. In the main panel there are two icons combined. In the lower part, Jesus is despoiling the underworld or Hades, taking Adam and Eve by the hand to deliver them from the chains of death. Actually, He is holding the hand of Adam, and Eve is tagging along to the left following Adam. In the garden, it was the other way around. Then there is a curved procession up the icon from lower left to upper right, a parade of the just leaving Hell for Paradise with Christ’s conquest of death, sin, and Hell. Above the procession, there is a second resurrection icon showing Our Lord standing triumphantly in the empty tomb. Many people reading this article have actually visited that tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, perhaps on tours with priests in our Eparchy, Father +Yastishock, Father Cimbala, Father Spera, or Father Hayer, among others. Around the outside of the icon are miniature scenes from our salvation history, beginning with the Birth of the Mother



Icon of The Descent Into Hades with other Scenes of Salvation History

of God in the upper left, followed by her Entrance into the Temple, the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel, down to the Dormition of the Mother of God, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in the lower right corner. You might notice even the banquet of Abraham and Sarah with the three Angels is in the lower row. What a magnificent work of sacred art!

This article began with a great poem by John Donne. In the twentieth century, another poet wrote some powerful words about death. Joyce Kilmer is most famous for his poem *Trees*. It’s not his fault that that simple poem was wildly popular and made him famous. Literary critics never took him seriously because of that. He wrote many

more interesting and profound poems as well. He was from New Brunswick, NJ, and raised Episcopalian, but chose to become Catholic in his youth. He enlisted in the Army as soon as the United States entered the First World War. He was admired by everyone for his bravery and refused a promotion to officer status because he wanted to stay with the “Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>”. Father Francis Duffy, whose statue is in Times Square, was the chaplain and buried Kilmer in France where he had died instantly from a sniper shot in 1918. He continued to write during the war, and one of his great poems, *Rouge Bouquet*, was written after two dozen of his comrades were killed by artillery fire. Remarkably, in his short time there, he wrote a profound poem about the

Easter Uprising, the quickly snuffed out Irish Revolution of Easter Week in 1916, that ultimately led to Irish independence. Kilmer admired the self-sacrifice of these revolutionaries and wrote a poem called *Easter Week*, dedicated to the men executed by the British government. It contains the memorable line, “There is no rope can strangle song.” It seems to imply the persistence of artistic beauty in the face of oppression. King David would approve of that verse. There is a similar sentence in Bulgakov’s *Master and Margarita*, written during the Stalinist purges; it says, “Manuscripts don’t burn.” When that novel was finally published in the 1960’s, that sentence became famous throughout the Soviet Union living under communist oppression. The complete verse in Kilmer’s poem expresses faith in the Resurrection, “There is no rope can strangle song, and not for long death takes his toll. No prison bars can dim the stars nor quicklime eat the living soul.”

John Donne wrote a number of powerful poems after his conversion. In one sonnet, called *A Hymn to God the Father*, he talks about the fear of death: “I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun my last thread, I shall perish on the shore.” In the rest of the poem, he conquers that sinful fear by explicating the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross. This column began with the beginning of Donne’s great sonnet, “Death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.” The sonnet ends with faith in the resurrection of the dead, because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Echoing the sublime ending of the Apocalypse of Saint John, Donne concludes, “One short sleep past, we wake eternally and death shall be no more; Death thou shalt die.”

+Kurt Burnette

## DIRECTIVES FOR THE GREAT FAST

From the Office of the Bishop



### FASTING REGULATIONS

- †Our Tradition is to abstain from meat after Meatfare Sunday and from dairy products after Cheesefare Sunday until Easter. *The following are the minimum requirements:*
- †All who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
- †All adults who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products on the first day of Lent, Monday, February 12, and on Great and Holy Friday, March 29.

#### Dispensation

- †Pastors and Administrators may, for a just cause, grant to the individual faithful and to individual families, dispensations or commutations of the fasting rules into other pious practices.

### LITURGICAL DIRECTIVES

- The Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory, the Pope of Rome, is also called the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts*.
- †All Pastors and Administrators are encouraged to celebrate the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
- †On other weekdays during the Great Fast, Holy Communion may be distributed at other liturgical services.

Please pray for all the victims of war, refugees, and those in the military serving our country throughout the world.

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# PEOPLE YOU KNOW

## IN BEAVER MEADOWS...

*ECF Children active in the Neighborhood*



*ECF students preform a Christmas skit the residents of Heritage Hill Personal Care Home in nearby Weatherly, PA*



*ECF students standing with food they collected during Thanksgiving, which was given to Beaver Meadows food pantry*

## IN PERTH AMBOY...

*Parish Erects Memorial for Longest-Serving Pastor*

Fathers Martin Vavrak and John Zec, together with parishioners of Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church of Perth Amboy, NJ, gather in Saint Michael Cemetery to bless and dedicate a memorial monument to the parish’s former pastor, +Father Basil M. Rakaczky, O.S.B.M. Father Basil, a member of the Basilian Fathers of Mariapocs, is interred in Mariapocs, Hungary; however, parishioners desired a memorial in the parish cemetery to honor their much loved and longest-serving pastor (1974-2010). Father Edward Cimbala is the administrator of Saint Michael Parish.





# AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN SAINT PETERSBURG...

### Southern States Syncellate Wedding Jubilarian Celebration

On Saturday, January 20, 2024, at Saint Therese Byzantine Catholic Church in Saint Petersburg, FL, Bishop Kurt and the clergy of the Southern States Syncellate celebrated a Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving for the couples in the Syncellate parishes who were celebrating a special wedding anniversary in an increment of five years. At the end of the Liturgy, each couple had their picture taken with bishop and received a certificate. A lunch was provided by the church members in the parish social hall.



## IN TRUMBULL...

### New Bishop of Parma Visits Parish

Bishop Robert (Pipta), Bishop of Parma, paid a brief visit to Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, Trumbull, CT, on Sunday, December 17, 2023. This was the first time a bishop from a distant eparchy visited Saint John Parish. Parishio-



ners and Father Gregory Lozinskyy, pastor of Saint John Parish, were blessed with the bishop's presence as he celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Prior to the Divine Liturgy, the students in Saint John's ECF class greeted Bishop Robert and presented him gifts of bread and salt, a traditional sign of Slavic hospitality, and a bouquet of flowers. After the Divine Liturgy, a social was held where the parish family was able to meet and speak with Bishop Robert in a casual setting. The parish family was very pleased to host Bishop Robert during this special visit to Saint John the Baptist Parish.

May God grant Bishop Robert many happy and blessed years in his new assignment as Bishop of Parma!



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Nov 1<sup>st</sup>-Pascha Sat 4 PM/Sun 10 AM  
Eve of Holydays 6 PM





# BUILDING A CONGREGATION FOR GENERATIONS

By Andr a Kakuk, Fort Mill Byzantine Catholic Mission (Charlotte, NC Metro area)

What does a Roman Catholic school, a Byzantine-Rite Ukrainian priest, a few ex-Mormons and a group of devout Byzantine Catholics have in common? Not much unless you are talking about the Byzantine Catholic Mission of Fort Mill, SC (Charlotte Metro area). The Holy Spirit is alive and well in this growing urban center.

Fort Mill, 25 minutes from downtown Charlotte, is one of only three Byzantine Catholic communities in the Carolinas. It was formed in 2016 by Ron Somich, alumnus of Saint Stephen's Byzantine School, Euclid, OH, with encouragement from Father John Giuliani of All Saints Catholic Church of Lake Wylie, SC.

A portable iconostasis, wooden altar, and an industrial-sized laser printer adorn the worship held in a classroom at the Saint Philip Neri Ministry Center. The unorthodox background disappears amidst the beauty of the Divine Liturgy and the warmth of this close-knit community.

It takes devotion and dedication to start a mission, but an eager populace to keep it going. Among the faithful are Mark and Rebecca LeRoy. Former Mormons in their 20's, Mark and Rebecca decided that lifestyle wasn't for them. Mark was always interested in Eastern theology but didn't have access to it until stumbling across CarolinaByzantine.com. These newlyweds decided to take a chance, and found a home at the mission. Mark wanted to add something to the beautiful worship and soon the mission had its second cantor. Fast forward to 2023 and Mark is a second-year seminarian for the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh at Saints Cyril & Methodious Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. He calls cantoring "the gateway to the seminary."

Cantoring is certainly a gateway to understanding. Leading the congregation in *Prostopinije* chant is an honor. Singing develops a deeper connection to liturgy. That is one reason Nick Peleponuk, a fellow cantor and Ro-

man Catholic convert, attends every Saturday.

Fort Mill is a welcoming mission for all ages and walks of life. Retirees of Byzantine Catholic communities in OH, PA, NJ, and NY have not only found warmer weather in the South but a rejuvenation of Ruthenian customs they grew up with 50+ years ago. The mission's mission is simple: to engage new visitors, parishioners, Catholics (established and new) who will carry on the Byzantine Catholic faith with vigor.

The future of the mission holds the hope of more parishioners, a resident priest, and a permanent building. Our mission is served by Father Vasyl Sokolovych, who makes a weekly 4-hour drive from Cary, NC, to be with this welcoming and devout community. The mission has been granted permission to purchase its own property, but a timeline has not been established. Until that time, Fort Mill continues to keep faith and attract newcomers, slowly but surely.



Celebrating the mission's first baptism, former administrator Father Steven Galuschik, All Saints Byzantine Catholic, Fort Myers, FL, with the Kakuk family, 2019

Holden Marks is a new member who, like the LeRoy's, found a home at Fort Mill. "I was raised Pentecostal and went through several religious phases. After visiting the mission, I ultimately decided Byzantine Catholicism was for me. My fellow parishioners are my family. We are happy to see each other, pray during tough times and enjoy the happy moments together." The mission's monthly potluck dinners have made an impact on Holden so far as to perfect Eastern cultural staples such as borscht. This year, he is giving paska a try for the Blessing of Baskets.

Byzantine Catholicism is not an intellectual exercise. It is one of mystery and faith discovered by so many in the Carolinas. We welcome you to worship with us and see a congregation for generations to come.

Visit us at [Carolinabyzantine.com](http://Carolinabyzantine.com) or come see us in person!



Monthly potluck, 2020



Parishioners setting up for Paschal Blessing of Baskets, 2023



Saint Nicholas visits the Fort Mill mission, 2018





## Carpathian Village Saint Nicholas Shrine

802 Snow Hill Road, Cresco, PA 18326-7810  
Tel (570) 595-3265 - Cell (570) 650-3252  
Email: [carpathianvillage@earthlink.net](mailto:carpathianvillage@earthlink.net)  
Father Michael J. Salnicky, Director

*Carpathian Village is presently taking reservations for group retreats, ski weekends, family vacations, day of recollection weekends, parish or group picnics, and private retreats. To schedule your event or for more information call or email Fr Michael.*

### 2024 Eparchial Summer Camps

All Camps will be held at The Carpathian Village

July 14-18: Camp Theotokos, Girls Camp—open to girls ages 6-17  
July 21-25 : Altar Server Congress—ages 6-17  
Aug 11-15: Pre-teen Co-ed Camp—boys and girls ages 6-12

**\*Registration forms for the Camps can be found at**  
<https://www.eparchyofpassaic.com> under Youth and Young Adult Ministries



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You are invited and welcome to join us for

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(Fulfils Sunday Obligation)

Celebrated by Fr. Oleksiy Nebesnyk at

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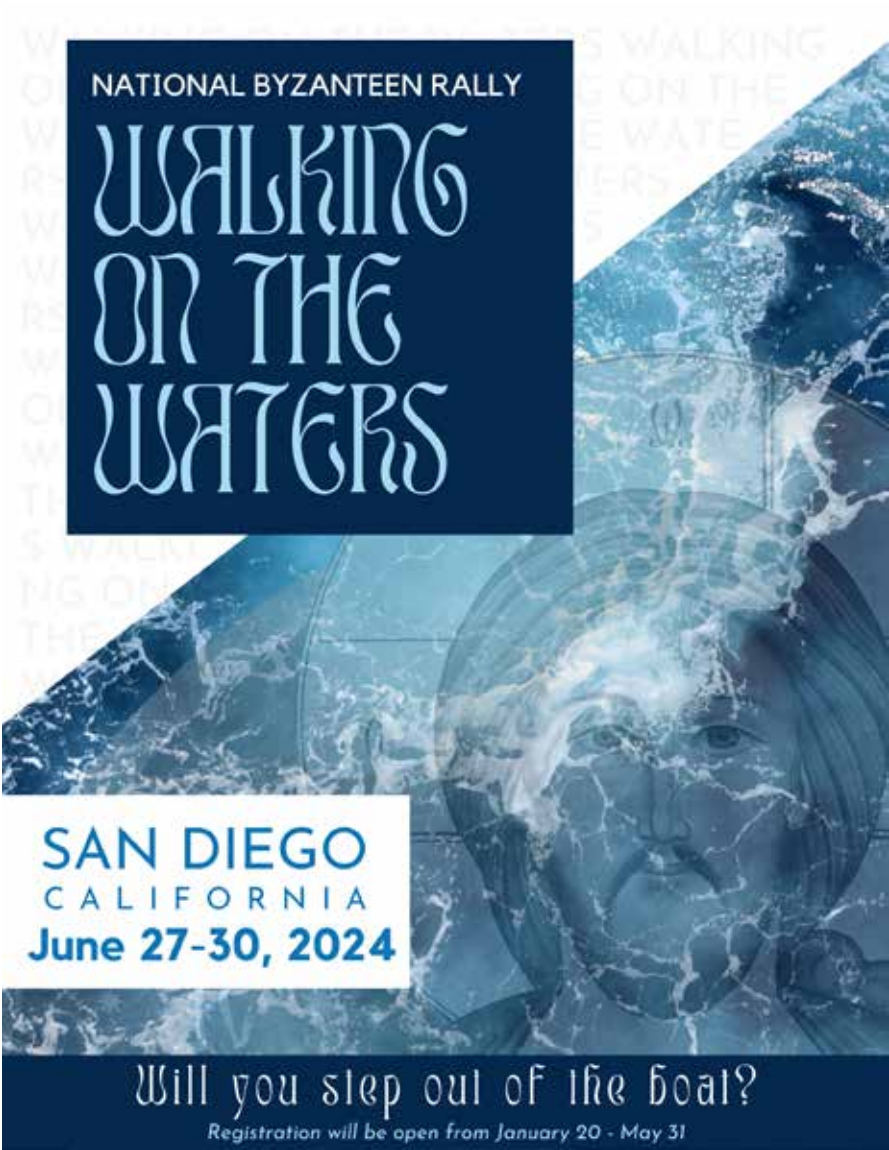
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## NATIONAL BYZANTEEN RALLY

# WALKING ON THE WATERS



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# 1924 — Centennial — 2024

## Establishment of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church Exarchate in the United States



### Most Reverend Basil Takach, D.D.

First Byzantine-Ruthenian Bishop in the United States

Ruthenian Exarchate Established May 8, 1924

Pope Pius XI appointed Father Basil Takach as Bishop for United States May 20, 1924

Bishop Basil Takach Episcopal Ordination, Pentecost Sunday, June 15, 1924,

St. Athanasius Church, Rome, Italy

Bishop Takach arrived at New York Harbor August 13, 1924, on the liner RMS Mauretania  
and offered a Moleben of Thanksgiving at St. Mary of the Protection Church, New York City

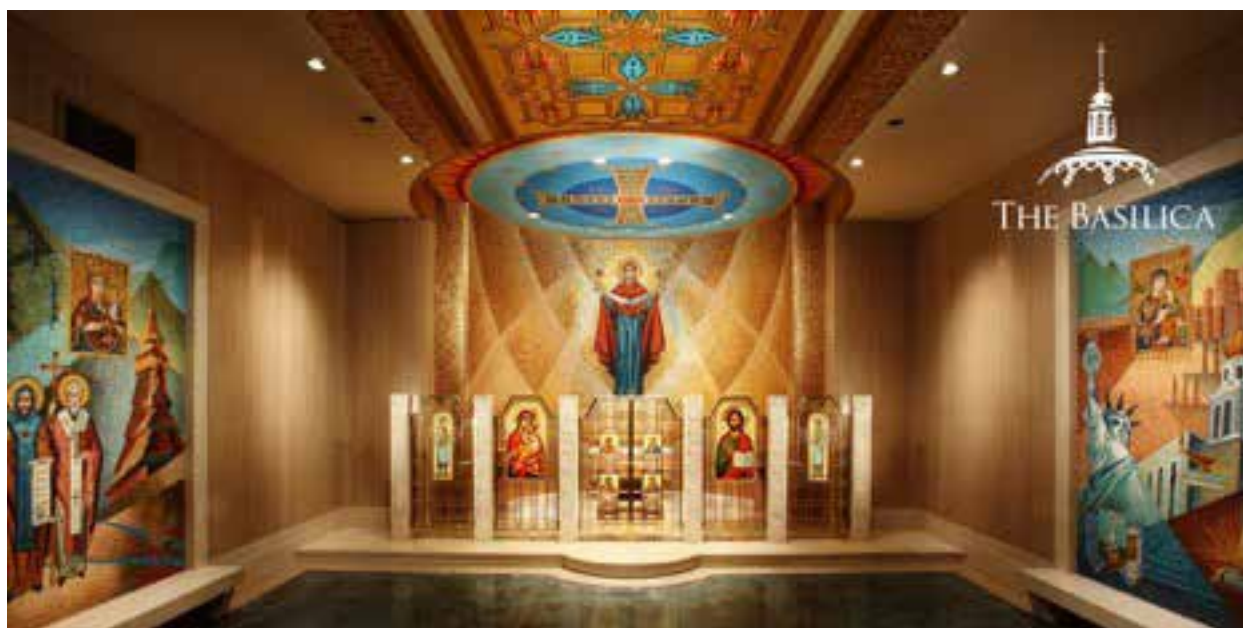






# The Dual Anniversaries

1924 — Centennial — 2024  
Establishment of the  
Byzantine Ruthenian Church Exarchate  
in The United States



1974 — Golden Anniversary — 2024  
Dedication of the Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel,  
Washington, DC  
Dedication of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church  
in The United States  
To The Protection of the Mother of God

Jubilee Weekend Celebration  
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# BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MONEY & POSSESSIONS

By Father Michael J. Salnicky

## INTRODUCTION

Money and possessions are such a central part of our lives that God uses these themes in more than 2500 examples in Holy Scripture designed to teach us how to deal with these wonderful gifts of His. Jesus talks more about money than grace and love, but grace and love are behind these teachings. The first thing we must realize is that all money and possessions belong to God. We are given them to see if we are wise stewards. In Mt 25:14-30 Jesus introduces the Parable of the Talents. The lesson is that, if we put to work, and properly manage, the talents given to us, then we will be given more. If not, then we will lose the little we have. How do we put these talents to work? We start with a plan. The name of that plan is a *budget*!

How do we first establish that budget? Take a piece of paper or use one of the free budget apps available online and track daily all of your expenses to see where your money is going, including every cup of coffee and every bag of chips. You will be surprised. Add your weekly and monthly expenses. Make sure you make your donation to God #1 on the list. Now look at this first month's results. If your income does not cover your expenses, you will see where you are hiding your tal-

ents in the ground, *i.e.*, spending foolishly, and *change*! A budget followed with discipline lets you control your money instead of money controlling you. Some folks, especially seniors on fixed Social Security income and no pension, cannot do this. Your generosity to your parish family through your donations can help these folks in need through anonymous parish gifts like buying heating fuel, food or pharmacy gift cards, gasoline for vehicles, or even a one-time monthly rental or mortgage payment. This is to fulfill the Catholic Corporal Works of Mercy we learned from Jesus. At our parish, this is called our *Saint Nicholas Project*, named in honor of our patron saint. Other parishes have similar programs.

Now that you are giving your first and best to God, have established your budget, and see where you are wasting your income, it's time to *change*. With that 'extra' money you will be saving, it is time to prepare for your life-changing journey to becoming that loving, forgiving, and generous person that God wants you to become.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

 609-394-5004

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**The deadline for registration is Sunday, March 10, 2024**

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March 15-17, 2024

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**5500 West 54<sup>th</sup> St, Parma, Ohio 44129**  
**Attn: Fr. Marek Visnovsky**

**The deadline for registration is Sunday, March 10, 2024**





# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## BETTER THAN EDEN

This season of the Great Fast is moving slowly and steadily toward its fruition in our celebration of the Lord's Resurrection on Pascha. Whatever our sacrifices are, we find ourselves walking through a desert of deprivation – or perhaps falling off the wagon occasionally to indulge in what we've given up, wishing it was all over, already. How we all got here is another story, and it's told in the first three books of the Bible: Genesis 1-3. We should all know the account of Creation and the Fall by now, but I highly recommend opening Scripture for a refresher, because what we think we know is often not the whole story, and the Holy Spirit is always there to inspire and teach us when we pray with the Word. In fact, if you have your Bible handy now, stop reading and dive into the Book of Genesis for a little while. It's a quick read – and I'll wait.

We take life and the world around us for granted, and that's not all bad. If we sat around in wonder and awe every moment of every day, we'd never get anything done. God isn't asking all of us to be that contemplative, but He does invite us (especially in times like the Fast) to think more intentionally in our day-to-day lives about the wonder of life and His generosity toward us, even amid the daily challenges and strife. Consider how gracious God is *in the Beginning* by granting us custody and stewardship

over all Creation, sharing His Kingship and inviting us to take initiative and authority in the world (cultivating the earth, naming the animals, etc.). How generous and completely lacking in the kind of ego most of us possess for God to share even His creative power with us. God alone can create *from nothing*, yet He invites us to co-create with Him, significantly and concretely through the marital embrace and the gift of children. There are countless other ways that He gifts us with the ability to create, too. Think about your gifts, like having a green thumb and cultivating a garden, being a talented cook or artist, or being an empathetic and compassionate listener. These and the many other gifts we possess are no less important ways of cooperating creatively with God, and they bring us closer to Him while making our homes – and even the world – a better place.

*In the Beginning*, God established "communion", that is, the good of relationship – first and above all with Him, then with other persons, and finally with all of Creation. None of us is meant to be alone, and even if we find ourselves living on our own or without family nearby, we're all part of God's "household" by virtue of our Baptism. God is our primary relationship, which is why it's so important for us to attend to and nurture it. We're part of our parish family too, which is why it's important for

the parish to be healthy, to seek healing and reconciliation where there is brokenness, and for us all to be "our brother's keepers" through our interactions and our prayers for each other – and for the pastor who shepherds us.

Of course, we know by now that all good things come to an end, and a look back at Genesis chapter 3 tells us how it all came crashing down. It should also remind us that it didn't have to be this way. Yet like the Man and Woman in the Garden, we too are often easily tempted by a lack of trust, suspicious of God even as we look around at all the good things He's given, and the relationship He established with us. It's sad to think about our First Parents essentially throwing away Paradise, and we can certainly heap a good deal of blame on them. Yet we must be careful not to become arrogant and judgmental. Who among us hasn't conversed with the "serpent of temptation" on countless occasions, fallen into sin, and tried to hide it from others, and even from God. How often do we point the finger of blame away from ourselves, looking for either a scapegoat or a justification for our actions, and suppressing our consciences to get away with whatever we've done wrong. We can argue that our First Parents had preternatural knowledge and an intimate relationship with God, so they should have known better. Yes, they should have – but so

should we. We reap the consequences of the Fall, but we also have the benefit of a knowledge of Salvation History, of God-made man for our sake, of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, and the promise of eternal life if we follow Him. Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden, but we encounter Him at every Divine Liturgy, in the Holy Mysteries, and receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. Given all of that – what is our excuse?

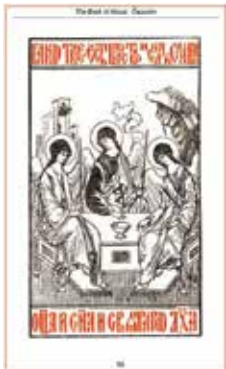
As we continue down our desert path through the Fast, let's learn the lessons from Eden, but set our sights on what God has promised, which is even greater: the eternal Paradise He has set aside for us if we keep our eyes focused on Him. This is the time for us to be grateful for the wonder of life and all Creation, shaded as it is by the effects of sin. Now is the time to renew our commitment to being good stewards of the gifts we've been given, and to enter a creative partnership with God to bring about the fruitfulness He calls forth through us. This is the time to examine our hearts and consciences with honesty and humility, reconciling ourselves to God and others, so that when the time for fasting ends we can confidently and joyfully proclaim that the Lord has risen indeed. **BCL**

### EASTERN CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS ANNOUNCES

#### *The Book of Hours* (Časoslov)

This edition of *The Book of the Hours* (Časoslov in Slavonic and *Horologion* in Greek) is an authentic and complete translation of the typical (official) Church Slavonic edition issued in 1950 by the Holy See of Rome for the Ruthenian Churches. The contents, pagination and layout match the original and include:

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The book is printed in red and black on medium-weight opaque paper, with a black leatherette sewn binding and flexible covers. At 5"x7" and 2" thick, it also matches the original Slavonic edition with approximately 900 pages. The translation has been approved in concordance with the original by Bishop Kurt Burnette of Passaic. Special launch pricing is available at \$60/copy, or \$40/copy for orders of five or more, plus shipping and handling.

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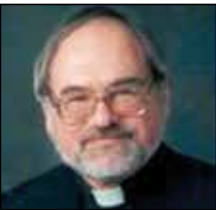
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# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE SACRAMENTAL MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

There are then two sacraments of vocation: Holy Orders and marriage, in which two people, a man and a woman, are joined and “the two of them become one body” (Genesis 1:24). From this union comes new life, and the man and woman become co-creators with God. The matrimonial union is sealed by Holy Communion. There is one criterion for a sacrament that marriage meets, and which was finally crucial to its acceptance as a sacramental mystery. This is its participation in the Paschal mystery. Marriage is a mystery precisely because the love of a husband and a wife for each other are a dying to self for love for another. John Chrysostom asks, “Did you not hear St. Paul who said that marriage is a mystery and the image (*icon*) of the love which Christ shows for the Church?” Marriage, then, shares in the mystery of the death and resurrection, the love of Christ for His people. Precisely because the love of a husband and wife for each other are a dying to self for the love of another, it is an icon of the love of Christ for the Church. Therefore, since marriage is an icon of the death and resurrection of Christ, it participates in the Paschal Mystery, and it was inevitable it would be accepted as a sacramental mystery. This is the reality that remains constant throughout tradition. Marriage was always considered a manifestation of the mystery of love, and this eventually became the crucial consideration.

As a sacramental mystery, marriage is an instrument of grace. It is a synergy, a union between God and human beings, a partnership with God in the way we live. God works within the person, and becomes incarnate in our actions. Grace is a mutual love. It is God’s help and assistance in particular aspects of this sacramental mystery: in the harmony between the marriage partners in their personal relationships, in wisdom in rearing children, in family love. In faith, Christian marriage becomes a whole new reality. It is no longer identified with the two extremes: a) the pagan sacral marriage, or b) the secular, humanistic marriage. Marriage can no longer be understood on a purely natural level, but only in relationship to Christ.

Marriage is not a private union of two people, a solitary mystery of their mutual consent, but an act of the Church, in which the couple not only accept each other, but are blessed by God. The community, then, takes part in the marriage, and the blessing of God becomes manifest in the blessing of the Church. As early as the second century, Ignatius says that the consent of the bishop as the head of the community is necessary for Christian marriage (Letter to Polycarp 5,2).

The distinctive feature of the Byzantine marriage ceremony is the crowning. Today the groom is crowned first,

then the bride, with the same formula. Before crowning, the priest makes the sign of the Cross three times with the crowns over the head of the groom, then of the bride and offers the crown to the couple to kiss. The crowns are either metal or flowers. Early Christian writers first opposed the use of crowns, because of their pagan connotations – flowers could be an offering to the gods. However, after the decline of paganism, Christians had no hesitation about the use of crowns. Saint John Chrysostom gave a Christian interpretation to the use of crowns: “Garlands are wont to be worn on the heads of bridegrooms, as a symbol of victory, that they approach the marriage bed unconquered by pleasure”. When the priest places the crown on the heads of the groom and the bride, he says for each, “The servant of God (*name*) is crowned for the servant of God (*name*) in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. This was originally modeled on the baptismal formula, “The servant of God (*name*) is crowned in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, but now it has been elaborated to the present formula. The Byzantine theologian Constantine Andronikof explains its meaning, “‘The servant N. receives as a crown the servant N. ...’ and vice versa. In this way, there is no doubt of theological meaning: the ‘crown’ of witness is mutual and assumed jointly by the partners”. Marriage is a covenant, a solemn agree-

ment, between the two partners. In this way it shares in the covenant between God and the human race.

The Scripture read at the wedding is the epistle from Ephesians 5:20-33 and the gospel from John 2:1-11. The gospel tells of the presence of Jesus at the wedding in Cana. Just as His presence in the Jordan sanctified the waters of baptism, so His presence at Cana and his miracle sanctified marriage, elevating it to a divine mystery. In Ephesians Saint-Paul compares marriage to the love of God for His Church. The reading from Ephesians is sometimes controversial today because of verse 22 (“Wives should be submissive to their husbands.”) It would be a pity, however, to reject this magnificent passage on the religious meaning of marriage because of one word. “Submission” here does not mean blind obedience but commitment to a husband who is Christ-like, willing to lay down his life out of love for her. In this way the man is also “submissive” to his wife, and the further the man falls away from this ideal, the less binding the “submission” becomes. Marriage, then, as a sacrament signifies mutual service to one another, a covenant like that of God and His people. **ECL**

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# PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

## “A LESSON IN FASTING—OR RATHER—A LESSON IN SALVATION”

I often joke that, when I was a child, *fasting* meant going to Burger King on Fridays during the Fast and getting a fish sandwich. I say without hesitation that these are some of the finest memories I have. The fact that I often use this quip to begin discussions on fasting, as well as having shared it in this column already, speaks volumes to how near and dear this is to me. Regardless of sentimentality, this childhood experience positioned me to learn an invaluable lesson much later in life.

Like many of us, during our formative years as Greek Catholics, the emphasis on fasting was minimal. Don’t eat meat on Friday in “Lent” and “give something up”. That was the battle cry. While noble in its own right, I came to learn that the entire construct of *fasting* as a guiding precept for *salvation* means far more than 40 days without video games and eating fish sandwiches.

In many ways, my entry into seminary shook me to the very core of my being; this is part of formation! One way in particular was with the idea of fasting. Rather quickly, I came to learn that our seminary follows a very *traditional*, and rather *strict*, fasting program – which is wonderful, but it was shocking at first. Strict Fast (every – *EVERY* – Wednesday and Friday (save for those days when fasting is mitigated); Strict Fast the 40 Days of the Great Fast and Nativity Fast; Strict Fast all the days of the Apostles’ Fast, Dormition Fast, and days such as the Exaltation of the Cross and the Beheading of John the Baptizer. All of this was a far cry from the “four of

five fish sandwiches per year” that I had previously known.

Needless to say, I had no idea what this meant, what I was doing, or how this pertained to anything. I was sincerely and earnestly distraught. I struggled immensely. I had no idea what I was doing or how I was going to survive this. I simply didn’t understand. Clearly, I was being set up for growth, but how? Thankfully, I was blessed with a wonderful spiritual father.

During my first Great Fast as a seminarian, I reached out to Father +John, of blessed memory, one day while we were sitting in his living room talking. When I shared my struggles with him, my utter dismay, he gave me the following assignment. He gently said to me: “Paul, here is what I want you to do. Tomorrow is Friday, no? Eat lunch. Eat; I mean EAT. Eat till your heart and stomach are beyond content. Then, once you know you are full, eat a little more, and enjoy it. Eat and enjoy, don’t worry about it – just eat. When lunch is over, I want you to go right to the chapel and pray. Don’t bring any prayer books, any spiritual reading; just sit with the Lord and let Him enter into you. When you come back here on Sunday, please tell me how it goes.”

I followed his instructions exactly. I went to the chapel, sat down, and, within five minutes, I learned perhaps the most valuable spiritual lesson of my life: I couldn’t get comfortable; I was nodding off; I was worried about the class I had in 20 minutes; worried

about my 3-month-old child and his potential skull surgery; I was fidgeting; checking my watch; forcing myself to keep my eyes open. Then, it hit me: I was concerned about everything, everything except Christ. When I relayed this experience to Father +John the following Sunday, all he did was give me a sly smirk and he continued in his preparation for Divine Liturgy.

That day I learned, similar to the Grinch on that cold Christmas morning, that fasting, in a proper understanding, had nothing to do with *food*; no, maybe fasting, perhaps, means something *a little more*. It’s about experiencing Christ in our lives in a real and tangible way. It’s about prioritizing. It’s about growing in asceticism, not over a weekend, but over the course of a lifetime! Each of us is a work in progress, our fasting notwithstanding. Whether or not fasting is a tried-and-true part of our lives, or if the entire concept is foreign to us, and all the areas in between, the goal is the same – *growth*: growth in personal faith and piety; growth in devotion to the teachings of the Church; and growth in love for the Lord God. Whatever the current state of our fasting life, we should not dismay, for as we will hear in the *Paschal Homily* of Saint John Chrysostom:

*Are there any now weary with fasting?  
Let them now receive their wages!  
If they have toiled from the first hour, let them receive their due reward;  
If any have come after the third hour, let him with gratitude join in the Feast!  
And he that arrived after the sixth hour,*

*let him not doubt; for he shall have sustained no loss.  
And if any have delayed until the ninth hour,  
let him not hesitate; but let him come too.  
And he who arrived only at the eleventh hour,  
let him not be afraid by reason of his delay.  
For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first.  
He gives rest to him who comes at the eleventh hour,  
as well as to him who toiled from the first.  
To this one He gives, and upon another He bestows.  
He accepts the work as he greets the endeavor.  
The deed He honors and the intention He commends.  
Let us all enter into the joy of the Lord!*

Let us not live in regret, nor let us delay; rather, let us run to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ as did the Prodigal Son. Let us run to Christ, throwing ourselves before His feet, begging His forgiveness. Let us feel His loving embrace, and, unworthy though we may be, let us hear His loving words, “My child who was lost is now found, my child who was dead in sin is now alive!”

Come, let us rejoice in the Resurrection, let us rejoice in salvation. Above all, let us not forget that without Jesus Christ, all things are merely *things*; with Christ, the things of this life edify us, build us, and strengthen us, not for this life, but for eternal life in Jesus Christ Himself! **ECL**

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# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Father Jack Custer, S.S.L., S.T.D.

## EIGHT STEPS TO DIVINE LIFE (2PETER 1:5-7)

“**T**héosis” is a concept that many Byzantine Catholics have rediscovered by returning to our own authentic sources of worship, theology, and prayer. The English equivalent is “divinization”, but the best translation comes from Saint Peter: God’s plan is for us to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Athanasius expressed the same idea more provocatively: “(God) became man so that He might make us gods” (*On the Incarnation* 53:4), but similar statements can be found even earlier, in 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian teachers like Saints Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Justin.

Théosis is founded on the fact of our creation in God’s own image (Genesis 1:27) and made possible by the fact that the sacramental mysteries unite us personally with Jesus Christ (Baptism: Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3:27; Holy Communion: John 6:50-58; 1 Corinthians 10:16). It is what Jesus promised His disciples at the Last Supper (John 17:22-23). It is implicit in every promise of “life” that Jesus makes to us (e.g. John 10:10).

Théosis is God’s work in us, God’s gift to us. We cannot achieve it on our own. But Saint Peter does list eight steps of progress that we can and indeed must

make, to shed some sinful baggage and open ourselves up to this mystery of God’s grace (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The first step is **faith**, foundation of every good work. Jesus Himself said, “Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Several times each year, we hear Hebrews 11 describe what wonders the heroes and heroines of the Old Testament accomplished by faith. This faith is a fundamental decision to cling to Christ and hope in His kingdom, rather than trying to build my own kingdom and be my own god. All of the following steps could be performed without faith in anything but oneself. The goal, however, would not be life-giving union with God but merely some better version of myself that I created for myself, by myself.

Centuries before Christ, Greek philosophy cultivated **virtue**. All persons of good will agree about basic human virtues because human reason shows us what is necessary for a good life. Virtues are habits built up by consistently seeking and choosing to act on values like prudence, temperance, justice and courage. Saint James insists that our deeds demonstrate whether our faith is real (James 2:26).

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed: “This is eternal life: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent,” (John 17:3). Saint Paul prayed that the Christians of Colossae might be “filled with the **knowledge** of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fulling pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the **knowledge** of God” (Colossians 1:9-10). Knowledge grows from basic questions of right and wrong, to making sense of God’s will in the complexities of daily life, to intimate, interpersonal, even mystical knowledge of the One who is Good (Mark 10:18).

**Self-control** means more than the pagan virtue of moderation. Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 8) warns how easily knowledge can lead to pride and urges practicing self-control especially in our speech and our appetites through fasting and self-denial. The monastic life of poverty, chastity and obedience models this ascetical self-control for the whole Church.

We can see already that it is a slow journey to théosis. **Steadfastness** is the patience and the resolve need to avoid backsliding and to trust firmly in the Lord who leads us toward Himself. Job is the Bible’s greatest example of such patience.

For the pagan Greeks, **godliness** (or piety) meant something like respect for the gods and for others. As used by Saint Peter, it’s a little more like Old Testament wisdom – giving worship to God, revering His reflection in everything He created, respecting His image and likeness in other people, cherishing the values built into creation, and conducting oneself in a manner imitates God in whose likeness to God we were created. We’re getting closer to divine life!

The entire first Epistle of Saint John insists that we are most like God when we show love for each other. Saint Peter calls this **brotherly affection**. Any claim to love God must be built on this practical love of our human neighbor (1 John 4:20-21).

**Love** explains why the Son of God became man (John 3:16), and why He sacrificed Himself for our salvation (John 15:13). Even in human marriage, love unites and creates life. Our increasingly selfless response to God’s love enables us to receive the gift of divine life. We see now why Jesus could sum up the whole Law in the commandment to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Now we how far and how deep that love can go.

In Saint Peter’s eight steps to théosis, the first step is faith and the last is love. Saint Paul teaches that “faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). Everything that falls between these two virtues in Saint Peter’s list can be understood as hope in action or as choices that help us to grow in hope. **ECL**

# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



## THE PRAYER OF SAINT EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN: A PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

**A**s we enter into the time of the Great Fast, our prayers take a more penitential turn. Our liturgical cycle becomes more penitential, as we anticipate the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil on Sundays, Presanctified Liturgies during the week, with other services such as Lenten Moleben, Paraklesis, and other prayers that help our focus to stay on Lenten disciplines. The most famous prayer during this season is the Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian:

*Lord and Master of my life, spare me from the spirit of indifference, despair, lust for power, and idle chatter.*

*Instead, bestow on me, Your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience, and love.*

*Yes, O Lord and King, let me see my own sins and not judge my brothers and sisters; for You are blessed forever and ever. Amen.*

It is a corporate prayer of the Presanctified Liturgy, yet it is a deeply personal

and individual prayer. And although it is one confined to the Lenten season, it should be a prayer that we keep on our lips and in our hearts at all times and in all places. Each line serves to teach us, to humble us, and to lead us to a closer walk with God. The main point of this prayer is to focus on our own sins, our own shortcomings, and our own spiritual walk. Each sentence is accompanied by a prostration, as we totally humble ourselves before God.

First, seeing how broken we are as human beings as we stand before God, we ask Him to spare us from the sins of indifference to our spiritual state as well as in our relationships with one another. This is followed by a petition that we not despair as we try to more closely imitate our Lord Jesus Christ and His saints. Next we ask that we not be blinded by a desire for earthly acclaim, or for temporal riches and honors. Lastly, we ask for the grace to keep us from gossip and talk that serves no heavenly purpose.

In place of all these, we ask our Lord for personal integrity in what we say and do; that our actions mirror our words. We know it when we say that someone doesn’t “practice what he preaches,” but do we apply that to ourselves as well? We ask for humility, which washes away all pride. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he encourages us to “[d]o nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3,4). To the Romans he writes, “...love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:10). In just these two passages, we can see the practical application of how to have the spirit of humility.

Ephraim further exhorts us to pray to God for the spirit of patience, one of the Seven Spiritual Virtues. With humility, patience can follow, patience in situations, patience in dealing with others. It is easy to see how patience stems from pride and self-centeredness,

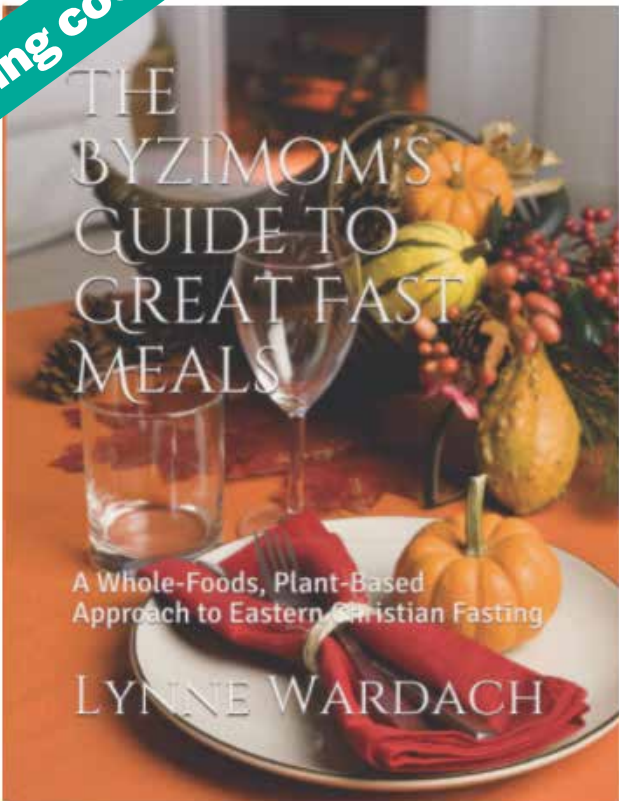
because we are thinking of ourselves, our desires, our expectations, and putting ourselves before others. And ultimately, if we are humble and patient, it is then that we can truly love others.

In the last sentence of this simple prayer, we find the fruit of all that has come before. “Let me see my own sins, and not judge my brothers and sisters.” In our spiritual life, nothing can be more important in seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ. If we are so caught up in looking at what bad sinners other people are, if we are constantly comparing ourselves to others like the Pharisee in the parable: “God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector,” (Luke 18:11), then we will be unable to attain our salvation.

So, the Prayer of Saint Ephraim is not merely a prayer for the Lenten Season, but a prayer for all seasons. May it always be in our hearts and on our lips. **ECL**



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## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



### PRAY FOR PERFECTION

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

In Genesis 17, God appeared to Abram and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be perfect.” (Gen. 17:1).

The saints and theologians often use the term “Christian perfection” to describe the goal of every follower of Jesus Christ.

Father Arthur Devine, in the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia, defines Christian perfection as “the supernatural or spiritual union with God which is possible of attainment in this life, and which may be called relative perfection, compatible with the absence of beatitude, and the presence of human miseries, rebellious passions, and even venial sins to which a just man is liable without a special grace and privilege of God.”

In other words, while the believer will only be truly perfect in Heaven, he can and must strive to become perfect with a “relative perfection.”

Father Devine’s article on Christian and Religious perfection goes on to say: “This perfection consists in charity, in the degree in which it is attainable in

this life (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14; 1 Corinthians 12:31, and 13:13). This is the universal teaching of the Fathers and of theologians.”

“Above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection” (Col. 3:14). The renowned Jesuit Giovanni Battista Scaramelli (1687-1752) says, “The relative perfection for which we should strive, consists in loving God and serving Him as much as our nature, condition and state of life will permit. This relative perfection may be called Christian perfection.”

This perfection is not “sinless perfection” but Christian maturity: a high level of sanctity, holiness, purity of heart, or Christ-like character. Christian perfection is most clearly characterized by the virtue of charity, or Christian love, especially in the form of fraternal charity (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

Other ways that the scripture, saints, and spiritual writers describe this perfection are holiness, sanctity, godliness, blamelessness, heroic virtue, divinization, and Christlikeness. Let us pray for Christian perfection. Isn’t this what Jesus meant when He told us, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt. 6:33)?

Warning! Christian Perfection is not “perfectionism.” Perfectionism (as opposed to Christian perfection) is a psychological characteristic that tends to be unhealthy and self-destructive. Some psychological research suggests “that what is termed ‘adaptive perfectionism’ is associated with suicidal thinking, depression, eating disorders, poor health and early mortality.” We don’t want this!

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perfectionism\\_\(psychology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perfectionism_(psychology))).

Our goal in this life on earth is to pursue Christian perfection, not to beat ourselves up for not achieving it. (Again, we will never achieve perfect holiness in this life.) Instead, let us patiently and unrelentingly strive for holiness, even if we do not fully achieve it here on earth. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux states, “Continual striving for perfection and the efforts made to arrive at it, are already perfection.”

If you fall, get up. As we read in Benedicta Ward’s translation of The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, “A brother asked Abba Sisoës, ‘What shall I do, abba, for I have fallen?’ The old man said to him, ‘Get up again.’ The brother said, ‘I have got up again, but I have fallen again.’ The old man said, ‘Get up again and again.’”

Press on! Even Saint Paul said he had yet to achieve perfection. He writes: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own” (3:12).

Prayer, the Holy Eucharist, Confession, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, and patient endurance of the inevitable sufferings of life are all necessary means to achieve our goal. But if we don’t have a goal in all that we are doing, we will go in circles. Our goal is sanctity, our goal is holiness, our goal is love for God and neighbor, our goal is Christian perfection. As French Catholic novelist Léon Bloy said, “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.” We have our goal. We must become saints!

“Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). Let us also “press on” toward the goal of Christian perfection!

“This is the will of God: your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). Pray for Christian perfection. **ECL**



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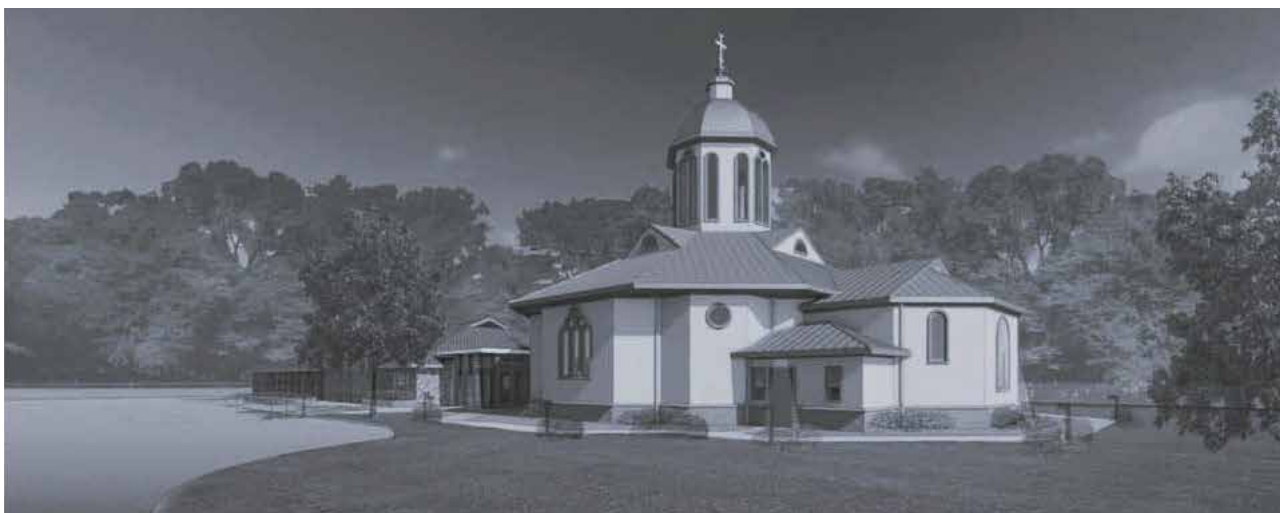
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MARCH, 2024

- 2 Third All Souls' Saturday
- 3 Third Sunday of the Great Fast
- 10 Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast
- 16 Akathistos Saturday
- 17 Fifth Sunday of the Great Fast
- 23 Lazarus Saturday
- 24 Flowery Sunday
- 25 Holy Annunciation of the Virgin Theotokos  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 26 Great and Holy Tuesday
- 27 Great and Holy Wednesday  
March 28 - April 2: Chancery Closed
- 28 Great and Holy Thursday
- 29 Great and Holy Friday
- 30 Great and Holy Saturday

- 31 PASCHA • THE GREAT DAY • THE  
RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, GOD  
AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST

APRIL, 2024

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 1 | Bright Monday  |
| 2 | Bright Tuesday |

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