



EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LXI, NO. 3

MARCH 2025



THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM



Bishop Kurt's Message for the Great Fast

The Holy Land, the Promised Land, the Land where Jesus Walked, is topographically and geologically very interesting, almost as if it were laid out by a theme park designer. In the ancient world it was seen as a highway, a land that connected the great powers of the south, usually Egypt, with the great empires of the north, the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. Geologically it is just as active.

The Holy Land is the northern part of a system that used to be called The Great Rift Valley. In some parts of the United States, the movement of tectonic plates is literally felt on a frequent basis. The northern movement of southern California rubbing up against the main plate of North America produces regular earthquakes along the San Andreas fault. The so-called "big one" is a huge earthquake that will happen in the near future, but who knows when? We know it will happen because part of the fault hasn't slipped for over a hundred years while the land masses next to the fault have moved significant distances. The part that hasn't slipped runs from Cajon Pass, north of where my first parish is located in Fontana, along an easterly line through San Bernardino and out to Palm Springs. The amount of energy stored in this section is enormous and will produce an earthquake between nine and ten on the Richter scale with catastrophic destruction throughout the Los Angeles area. It will release ten thousand times as much energy as the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

Similar movements of the continental masses are producing rifts or tears in the surface of the earth stretching from Turkey, down the Red Sea, and through East Africa to Mozambique. Modern geologists consider these tears to be caused by separate actions, so they are

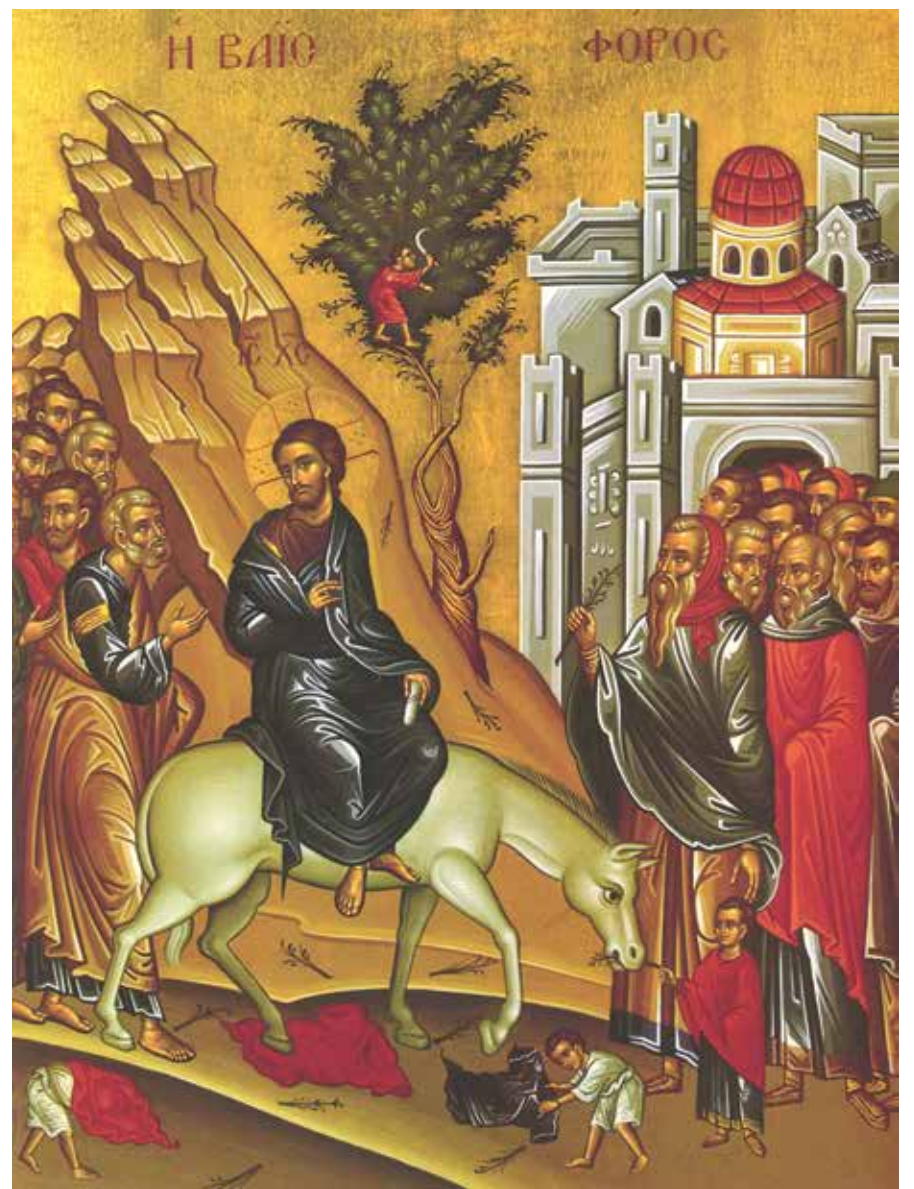
phasing out the term Great Rift Valley, but it doesn't change these recognizable features that go back 35 million years. About that long ago, the Arabian Peninsula separated sufficiently from Africa, that the waters of the Indian Ocean rushed in to fill the new basin, and the Red Sea was born. It was born then, but it is still growing. The Red Sea is getting wider by eight meters a year or 26 feet nowadays. So, it might be ten miles wider now than when Jesus journeyed to Egypt with his parents.

The layout of the Promised Land is similarly defined by this tectonic movement. There is a valley that runs mostly below sea level from the mountains of southern Lebanon to the sterile deserts of southern Palestine. The melting snows of the great mountains of Lebanon flow down the sides of the mountains, but also feed springs that burst out of the rocks. Caesarea Philippi, where Saint Peter identified Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah) and the Son of God, is a natural garden spot where large springs have flown since the beginning of history. As the water moves south, it fills up a rock basin called the Sea of Galilee. The surface of the Sea of Galilee is seven hundred feet below sea level! Since lower elevations tend to be warmer, the area is temperate all year round, tending to the upper fifties in the winter and the upper eighties in the summer. The lake is deep, averaging over eighty feet, and as deep as one hundred and forty feet. Because it is a rock basin, the lake is very stable, and looks very much like it did at the time of Our Lord. Looking out your hotel window at the lake, you expect to see Jesus Himself walking on the water. The lake has many names besides Galilee. It is also called the Sea of Tiberias after the Roman Emperor, the Lake of Genesaret after the town, and the Lake of Kinneret. Kinneret seems to be a very ancient pre-Hebrew name, but many people think it comes from the Hebrew harp called the "kinnor", and indeed it is shaped like an ancient harp.

At the southern end of the Sea, even though it is seven hundred feet below sea level, the rift valley continues downhill, and water pours out of the Lake to form the Jordan River. How much of our salvation history is found in the waters of the River Jordan! When

the Chosen People escaped slavery in Egypt and after they were purified in the desert for forty years, they crossed the Jordan River to enter the land promised to their father Abraham. Here the waters of the River miraculously stopped when the priests entered the river with the Ark of the Covenant and the people crossed the river on dry land. More than a millennium later, Our Lord entered the waters of the Jordan with His sacred flesh to undergo baptism by his cousin John, as an example of humility and to sanctify the water for all time. That is why water was used to wash away your sins in Baptism. And that

lowest on land). Here the elevation is a whopping 1,412 feet below sea level and always hot year-round. The water that started in Lebanon pools up in the Dead Sea and eventually evaporates. Having evaporated this way for at least tens of thousands of years, the Sea is even saltier than the ocean. Our own Great Salt Lake changes from 5% to 27% because it changes in size and is rather shallow. The Dead Sea is over a thousand feet deep and is a consistent 34% salt. Although the Great Salt Lake has brine shrimp swimming in it, the Dead Sea is so salty that the only life is some bacteria and other microbes.



Icon of The Entrance Into Jerusalem

is why the water that the priest used to bless your house is called "Jordan Water". Nowadays, about a million people a year go to the River Jordan to be baptized in the same river as Jesus was.

The River Jordan continues down hill to the lowest spot on earth (that is

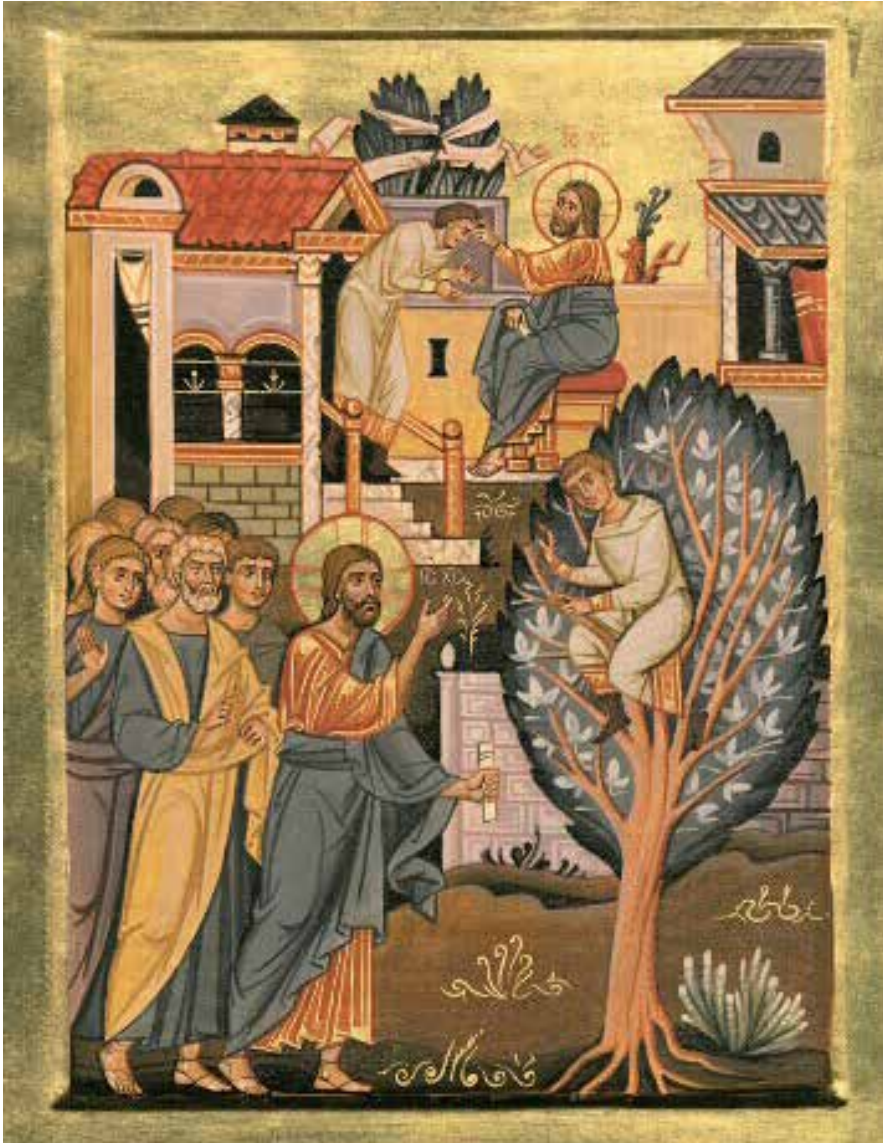
The Jordan Rift Valley is still rifting, or tearing the surface of the earth apart. It seems to me that eventually the waters of the Indian Ocean will flood in from the south, but I was unable to find a time frame for that future cataclysm. Did you know "cataclysm" is really Greek for flood? ...continued on page 2

THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Bishop Kurt's Message for the Great Fast

...continued from page 1

Since the earth is still splitting there, big earthquakes happen from time to time just as they do in California. The last big one was a 7.5 on the Richter scale



Icon of Jesus calling Saint Zaccheus

in 1033 A.D. They expect the next one will be similar in size. Since they use so much masonry in that part of the world, it will probably have many fatalities.

The Dead Sea itself doesn't figure in our salvation history, but the Jordan Valley plays a big role, not only because of the river. The valley is the easiest north-south route in the Holy Land, and Jesus would have traveled it from time to time. The region around the Dead Sea, a very hot sterile plain, is where Sodom and Gomorrah were probably located. The desert is a symbol of the realm of the devils, probably because of the lack of life. The cliffs overlooking this area is the traditional place where Jesus fasted for forty days to prepare Himself for His public life, and where He fought the temptations of Satan, just as monks do to this day. By the way, the river valley was not the route that Jesus took on His last journey to Jerusalem. We know that because the Gospels say that He traveled through Samaria. However, at the southern end of His journey, he did go down into the Valley because He begins His final journey from the ancient city of Jericho, the same city where Joshua entered, and "Jesus" is Greek for "Joshua".

We begin our own Lenten Journey to Jerusalem, to the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, in Jericho. It is in Jericho that Jesus cures the blind along the highway. It is in Jericho that Jesus meets with Zaccheus on the first of our pre-Lenten Sundays. Is there any story in the Scriptures sweeter to us than

the story of Zaccheus? Zaccheus was a true outsider among his own people. Although he performed a necessary legal task of the government of the time, the holier people of the time never let him forget that they looked down on him, that they considered him "unclean". He may have also been a comical figure to the citizens—both important and short. There is no mention that he had any pious attraction to Our Lord, whom many believed was the long-awaited Messiah. The Scriptures imply he climbed a tree to see over the crowd merely out of curiosity, to see why everyone else was so interested. Imagine the thrill when Our Lord calls out, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly! I mean to eat at your house today." Zacchaeus isn't just called to intimate fellowship with the Son of God, he is told to "hurry". Jesus can't wait to have dinner with him.

As Jesus begins his slow hike up the steep rocky trails to the sacred city of Jerusalem, we begin our own journey to Jerusalem, as Saint Thomas said, "to die with Him". And as Saint Paul says, "to rise with Him." Although we associate Lent with repentance and the painful part of life, we begin our journey with this overwhelmingly joyful story. Jesus calls out to each of us, "Hurry! I want to have dinner at your house today!"

+Kurt Brunette

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, March 3, and on Great and Holy Friday, April 18.

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.

Please pray for the health of Pope Francis.

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC 2024 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

Please pledge online at eparchyofpassaic.com
or mail check payable to Eparchy of Passaic
in the envelope provided.

Remember that each Parish that reaches or exceeds their Goal
receives a refund of 40% of the total amount contributed.

\$2,500.00 \$1,000.00 \$500.00

\$250.00 _____ Other \$ _____

- full payment enclosed
- first payment enclosed; I will be billed for 4 additional installments.

The 2024 Bishop's Appeal will run through the end of our fiscal year, June 2025.
Contributions received prior to December 31, 2024 will count toward your 2024 tax year.
Acknowledgement letter will be mailed prior to January 31, 2024.

_____ New Address or Correction _____

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Parish: _____

IN BLESSED REPOSE: +MONSIGNOR NICHOLAS I. PUHAK

Hazleton, Pennsylvania—December 12, 1931 - January 30, 2025

Msgr. Nicholas I. Puhak, 93, a retired priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, fell asleep in the Lord on January 30, 2025, at Lehigh Valley Hospital, Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

Msgr. Puhak was born in Hazleton, Pennsylvania in 1931, the son of the late George Puhak and Magda Szabo. He graduated from Hazleton High School in Hazleton, Pennsylvania in 1949. Afterwards, he attended Fordham University from 1949-1950 and Saint Michael's College from 1950-1951. Later, he attended Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he obtained a Bachelor's Degree. Following this, he attended the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he completed his studies for the priesthood.

He was ordained to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ by Bishop Nicholas T. Elko on May 19, 1957.

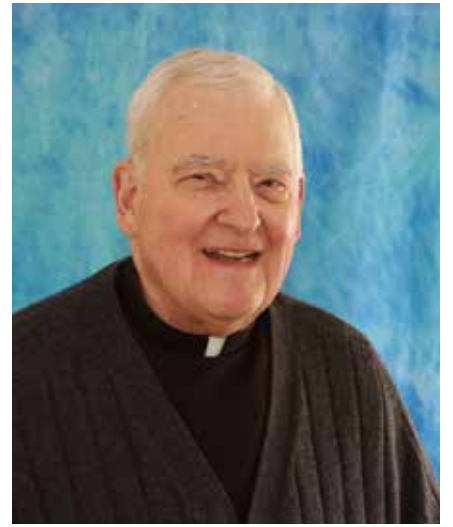
Following his ordination to the priesthood, he served at various parishes including Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Somerset, New Jersey; Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Dunellen, New Jersey; Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Manville, New Jersey; Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Trenton, New Jersey and Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Freeland, Pennsylvania from where he retired from priestly ministry in 2016.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Msgr. Puhak also served as Dean of the Central and South Jersey Deanery, and Advocate in the Eparchial Matrimonial Tribunal. He also had a very successful radio apostolate ministry and provided sacramental and liturgical care to the

Byzantine Ruthenian Nuns of Holy Annunciation Monastery in Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania. In 1988, he was invested with papal honors and given the title "Monsignor".

In addition to his parents, Msgr. Puhak was preceded in death by all of his siblings: George Jr., Therese Puhak, and Claire Chovanes. He is survived by numerous family members including Dr. George I. Puhak, Celine Puhak, Mary Louise Dotter, Dr Robert I. Puhak, and Nicholas Puhak. He is also survived by Dr. Michael Chovanes, Dr. George Chovanes, Dr. John Chovanes, and many great nieces and nephews.

Bishop Kurt Burnette celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Prayer of Absolution and Pouring of Oil on Wednesday, February 5 at 10:00 AM at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Freeland, Pennsylvania, where Father Scott Boghossian is Pastor. The Of-



Office of Christian Burial for a Priest was celebrated the evening before at Saint Mary's Church.

Interment was at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Parish Cemetery, Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

"Well done, my good and faithful servant ... Come, share your master's joy!" (Mt 23)



+FATHER EUGENE JOSEPH FULTON REPOSES IN THE LORD

Hazleton, Pennsylvania—December 23, 1941 - January 29, 2025

schools, he attended Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Fordham University in New York, New York. Later, he attended Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he obtained a Bachelor's Degree. Following this, he attended the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he completed his studies for the priesthood.

He was ordained to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ by Bishop Stephen J. Kocisko in June 1967.

Following his ordination to the priesthood, he served at various parishes including Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Trenton, NJ; Holy Trinity Byzantine Catholic Church in New Britain, CT; St Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Scranton, PA; Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Cathedral,

Passaic, NJ, and Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania.

In addition to this, he served as Director of Trinity Retreat House of the Archdiocese of New York for 35 years. While at Trinity, he worked closely with Father Benedict Groeschel, CFR and for 28 years. He also served as Vicar for Clergy in the Eparchy of Passaic.

In addition to his parents, Father Fulton was preceded in death by his brothers James, John, and Thomas. He is survived by his brothers Robert and Cyril, as well as numerous family and friends, as well as Friars and Sisters from Trinity Retreat.

Bishop Kurt Burnette celebrated the Divine Liturgy with Prayer of Absolution and Pouring of Oil at Saint John Byzantine Catholic Church in Hazle-

ton, Pennsylvania on Thursday, February 6, 2025, where Father Eugene Hradil is Pastor. Friar John Anthony, CFR, Provincial Superior of the Friars of the Renewal, and numerous Friars were also in attendance. Friar Elias, CFR served as Homilist. The Office of Christian Burial for a Priest was celebrated the evening before by local and visiting clergy.

Interment was at Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Parish Cemetery, McAldoo, Pennsylvania.

"Well done, my good and faithful servant ... Come, share your master's joy!" (Mt 23)

Father Eugene Fulton, 83, a retired priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, fell asleep in the Lord on January 29, 2025, at Lehigh Valley Hospital, Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

Father Gene was born in Hazleton, Pennsylvania on December 23, 1941, the son of the late John Fulton and Helen Hress. After his education in local

CHARLESTON AREA OUTREACH INTEREST

Are you a Byzantine/Eastern Rite Catholic that has relocated to the Charleston area and miss attending the Divine Liturgy and other services? The Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic is exploring the possibility of establishing an Outreach Community in the Charleston area. Currently the closest Mission is in the Myrtle Beach area. I'm working with one of the priests in Passaic to help gauge interest. If there is sufficient interest, the plan would be to have a Liturgy somewhere in the Charleston area in the next few months. If you are interested, please send me an e-mail at michael-meador@sbcglobal.net.



CARPATHO-RUSYN SOCIETY

MANIFESTING CARPATHO-RUSYN CULTURE AND HISTORY

The mission of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society is to preserve and perpetuate the distinct culture, history, language, and heritage of the Carpatho-Rusyn people.

CELEBRATING THIRTY YEARS 1994-2024

www.c-rs.org

The Carpatho-Rusyn Society has chapters reaching the Northeast, Lake Michigan area, Pacific Northwest, Texas, and the Southeastern states. The society offers regular educational Zoom presentations, genealogy help by professional Rusyn genealogists, a monthly newsletter, Our People, and scholarships to students. Also offered is an online/mail-in Heritage Store with books and gift items. Listen live on Sunday afternoons to Rusyn music on our Rusyn Heritage Program (also archived).

Visit the headings on our new website where you can find our chapters, genealogy forum, newsletter, events, Heritage Store, our Rusyn Heritage Program and much more information including how to become a member. The dues have not changed in 30 years!



PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

IN ANNANDALE...

Men's Club Presents Check to Parish Building Fund

Members of the Epiphany Men's Club at Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Annandale presented Father John Basarab with a check for the church building fund in January. The check represented a year's proceeds from the organization's Bingo program in 2024. Photo by Jeff Nashwinter.



IN ROSWELL...

Cantor and Choir Member are Crowned in Marriage At Epiphany, Roswell
By Carol Evancho

Sharing a deeply profound love for our Byzantine faith and its liturgical chant, Daniel Malneritch, a choir member of Saint John's Byzantine Catholic Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, met cantor Marie Reidy at Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, Georgia, while visiting his parents in the Atlanta area. After several visits, the two began a formal courtship which led to their engagement.

The Crowning in Marriage of Daniel and Marie Malneritch took place at Epiphany of Our Lord on Saturday, February 8, 2025, with Father Lewis M. Rabayda, Parochial Administrator, as main celebrant, with Deacons James Smith and John Reed concelebrating. Afterwards, all were invited to a cocktail hour and reception at the Cherokee Conference Center, Canton, Georgia, by the overjoyed Reidy and Malneritch families.

Parish members opened their hearts and showcased their talents for this very special celebration. All the floral elements were designed by Shirley Spontak, parish members and family friends formed a schola choir to sing the responses and hymns, and new parish cantor Abigail Francis photographed the joyous events. We will always remember the endearing love and warmth that shone so brightly that day.

May God grant to the newly Crowned couple peace, health, and happiness for many blessed years.



IN WASHINGTON, DC...

March for Life Events

Father Tim Kennedy of Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church, Jessup, participated in the 2025 Prayer Vigil for Life in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

Father Tim, Bishop Kurt Burnette and Very Reverend Vasil Symyon celebrated Compline and Divine Liturgy in the Byzantine Catholic Chapel. Father Tim shared, "It was an honor to celebrate Compline and Divine Liturgy after a pause due to COVID. I look forward to sharing our traditions with people near and far." Father Tim Kennedy is the Director of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic Respect Life office.



Visting the Carolinas?



Check out the Petro Oros Byzantine Catholic Mission

Serving Charlotte metro & upstate South Carolina

Divine Liturgy on Saturdays @ 4:00pm
Location: St. Philip Neri Catholic Church Ministry Center, 292 Munn Rd., Fort Mill, SC 29715 (minutes from I-77)
Email: petromissionfortmill@gmail.com
Facebook: Petro Oros Byzantine Catholic Mission of Fort Mill SC
WWW.CAROLINABYZANTINE.COM



SAVE THE DATES

2025/26 Marriage Jubilarian Dates

October 11, 2025 (Saturday)

Marriage Jubilarians - Middle States
Epiphany of Our Lord - Annandale, VA
4:00 PM - Banquet to Follow on Premise

October 19, 2025 (Sunday)

Marriage Jubilarians - New Jersey, New York, Connecticut
Saint Mary's - Hillsborough, NJ
3:00 PM - Banquet to Follow on Premise

October 26, 2025 (Sunday)

Marriage Jubilarians - All Pennsylvania
Saint John's - Hazleton, PA
3:00 PM Banquet to Follow at Capriotti's Catering- McAdoo

January 17, 2026 (Saturday)

Marriage Jubilarians - Southern States
Saint Nicholas - Orlando, FL
11:00 AM – Banquet to Follow on Premise

If you are celebrating a special Wedding Anniversary – 5-year increments,

Please submit your name to your pastor to be included in this year's Jubilarian Celebration.



Visiting New York City? Come Worship With Us!

Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church
Father Edward G. Cimbala, D.Min.—Pastor

246 East 15th Street, Manhattan, New York
212-677-0516

**Sunday Divine Liturgy
10:00 AM**

ONLINE CHURCH SINGING CLASSES BY METROPOLITAN CANTOR INSTITUTE

The Metropolitan Cantor Institute offers an online, 2-year program in church singing for both new and experienced cantors. Tuition is \$75 for each eight-week class, which includes feedback to help you improve your singing and cantorial skills. Initial classes on liturgy and church singing are free. For details: <https://mci.archpitt.org/classes> or call Deacon Jeffrey Mierzejewski at (412) 735-1676. Classes are offered at no charge to qualified students from any parish with no current cantor.



VOICE LESSONS

Develop your voice for more confident musical participation in liturgies!

Private singing instruction with professional voice teacher & cantor

Andrew Skitko

Lessons available in-person or online. Scholarships are possible to arrange!

Andrew Skitko is Cantor for St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church in Trenton, NJ, director of Theoria Chamber Choir, and holds degrees in Vocal Performance and Voice Pedagogy from Westminster Choir College. He performs regularly with Opera Philadelphia and numerous professional ensembles and teaches singers of all levels.

Contact for more information:
(610) 220-3479
andrewskitko@gmail.com

EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

(USPS 165-600) (ISSN 0894-9786)

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic
Subscription Rate: \$20.00 per year.

News and Photo Services: Member of the Catholic Press Association of America.

Published monthly by the Eastern Catholic Press Association

445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424
Phone: 973-890-7777
Fax: 973-890-7175

Postage paid at Little Falls, NJ, and additional office at Bellmawr, NJ.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
Eastern Catholic Life
445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

Most Reverend Bishop Kurt Burnette
President and Publisher
Father Lewis Rabayda, *Editor & Layout*
Father Ronald Hatton, *Associate Editor*
Mrs. Maureen French, *Circulation Editor*

and address changes
(mfrench@eparchyofpassaic.com)

E-Mail us at:
ECL@eparchyofpassaic.com

Eparchial Website:
www.EparchyofPassaic.com



LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

THE PARADOX IN THE GREAT FAST

Like other mammals in the animal kingdom, human beings possess certain appetites and drives: the need for food and water that gives us energy; sleep, to restore our minds and bodies; the drive to procreate to sustain our species; and a nervous system alerting us to threats that will require fighting – or fleeing. But humans are no mere animals, and unlike your average lovable puppy or curious kitty, we are made in God's image and likeness, with a rich inner life and sense of self, the ability to form deep emotional and spiritual bonds, to reason and make choices, and so much more. As part of our rich intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life we are capable of living in tension – but not the kind that requires an aspirin and a nap. We regularly live in the tension of experiencing emotions that are in direct conflict with each other. For example, we may be asked to give an important presentation at a corporate event, which could lead to bigger professional opportunities. We feel proud, excited, and honored to have been chosen, yet we may also be nervous, even terrified, at the thought of speaking before a large crowd, risking our professional growth and personal pride if we perform poorly. This tension between feeling ready to take on the challenge – while at the same time wanting to run away from it – is one example illustrating the kind of richness in our humanity that separates us from the rest of Creation.

The season of the Great Fast is another example of how we humans live in the tension of emotions, and it reveals the paradox (that is, the seeming contradiction) that the great Orthodox theologian +Father Alexander Schmemmann described as “bright sadness.” He elaborates on this in his book *Great Lent*, which is well worth reading, but the general idea is that the season of Lent reminds us of our separation from God through sin (the sadness) and the hope He gives us through Christ's resurrection (the bright). The Lenten season is therefore marked by self-denial, sacrifice, and generally a more somber, prayerful attitude, counterbalanced by the anticipation of Pascha and the peace in knowing that God did not abandon us forever. For some this may be a new way of viewing the season, especially because we think mostly about what we will “give up,” or what we “can't have” as part of fasting. Self-denial and personal sacrifice are important to preparing for Pascha because these practices – like praying more and giving alms – remind us that focusing only on ourselves leads us further away from God. But without the hope of the Resurrection, they can feel more like punishments than invitations to deeper intimacy with Christ.

Jesus understands this tension in which we live because He allowed Himself to experience it, too. At the Last Supper Jesus said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” (Luke 22:15). In the Garden He

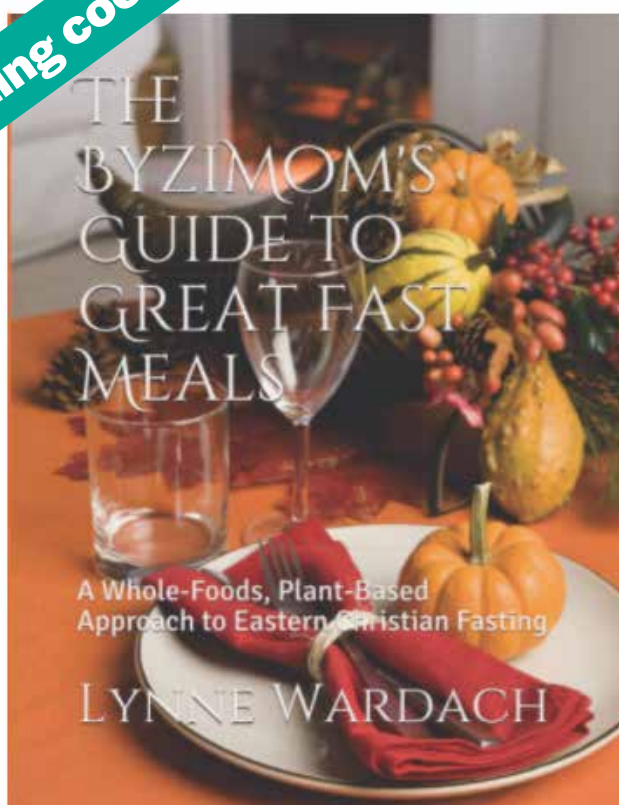
prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus went well beyond our mere human ability to live in the tension of paradox by doing what the Father willed for Him, so that each of us might have the grace to do what God wills for us. This meant completely surrendering to the Father, suffering the spiritual agony of being rejected by those He came to save, and the physical and emotional horrors of torture and the Cross. In the darkness of the events of the Passion shone the Light of Salvation, imperceptible by most, yet burning bright within the heart of the Savior.

One exercise that may help make the most of this Lent is to identify and reflect on those areas in your own spiritual life that can be difficult to hold in tension. For example, do you have a desire to pray more (reading Scripture daily, attending weekly Lenten services, doing spiritual reading, etc.), but find yourself quickly losing interest, tiring easily, or giving up because you tried doing too much? Take it to the Lord in a real, honest conversation with Him. Listen to what He's asking of you and stretch yourself by doing a little more, without trying to do so much that prayer becomes something to “get through” rather than quality time with the Lord. Try doing a similar exercise with fasting and almsgiving, identifying your actual capabilities and where you see obstacles toward growth. Do-

ing some honest reflection then bringing it to the Lord may help enrich your Lenten pilgrimage in unexpected ways.

Suffering and joy, fear and peace, weariness, and anticipation: all of these find expression in our human experience. Let's walk together through the forty days of the Great Fast with a firm desire to grow closer to God, but not by doing the most praying or the hardest sacrifices. “When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. [...] anoint your head and wash your face [...] And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” (Matthew 6: 16, 17, 18). Allowing the Lord to stretch us a little, feeling a little hungry or tired, helps us to reorient ourselves toward Him. God asks this not out of a sense of obligation but because what He desires most of all is each one of us. Let's embrace all that the paradox of the Lenten season entails, asking Jesus to be present with us in its sadness so that we can better appreciate and allow the bright light of His sacrificial love to transform us. **ECL**

Fasting cook book



The ByziMom's Guide to Great Fast Meals

A Whole-Food, Plant-Based Approach to Eastern Christian Fasting

Have you ever wished for a little support as you attempt to keep the Eastern Christian fast? Healthy and delicious ideas and family-approved recipes for every meal of the day!

Breakfasts: Smoothies, oil-free granola, pancakes, puddings, casseroles fit for potlucks, and coffee hours too!

Kid-friendly Lunches: Lynne's family has listed their favorites, including Macaroni and Cheese, lenten style, without dairy, but not without taste! Even the homeschool co-op kids couldn't tell the difference!

Dinner Entrees: Over 50 different delicious recipes and adaptations for your some of your favorite dishes like Lentil Loaf, Enchiladas, Curries, Holupki, Sauerbraten, Stuffed Shells, and more!

Even baked goods, for that special occasion!: A few simple substitutions will allow you to transform your favorite recipes into ones for the fast!

Search for it on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

SPRING TRAINING—PART 2

The sun may be staying up a little later these days. The weather may be getting a tad bit warmer. In certain regions perhaps flowers are even beginning to peek through the soil dampened by the early rains of the Spring that is to come. Let us not be fooled by these strange sensations! Although it may seem as if Pascha is right around the corner, alas, it is very late this year and although our senses might inform us that we must be near that glorious day where we snap into that precious lump of kolbasi, the reality is we are far from it.

Just like the Eagles in this past Super Bowl [GO BIRDS!!!!], we may be reeling and encouraged by a 24-0 lead at halftime, the game is far from over. Mid-Lent, our Great Fast Halftime, is a tricky period for many reasons. Typically, this period, three weeks into the Fast, is characterized by dreary, dark weather, cold temps, and the dying vestige of a seemingly endless winter. This makes this difficult because we get tired of being inside, tired of the monotony, tired of being hungry with the kitchen

being right around the corner. This year, however, we are faced with the opposite problem.

Pascha is so late this year that we find Mid-Lent to be occurring among the early days of Spring, which is unusual but also comes with its own challenges. We are now faced with wanting to be active, maybe squeezing in an early season BBQ, cracking open a cold one with the buds, sneaking away on a short trip, and all the things we've been dying to do since November. Well, what's one steak, right... I mean, God will forgive me, no? – And that right there, brothers and sisters, is the downfall of us all entering into the third quarter of the Fast!

So often we think of fasting as a thing we have to do because the Church says so and God will be annoyed with me if I don't, so I'll just hit the minimum to say I did and I won't have to confess it to the priest and, yeah, when is Pascha again...? What type of motivation is this??? It's not motivating in the least... if anything, this is a recipe for giving up and that is the last thing we need to do

as we engage in the ascetic struggle of the holy athletes. We need to turn this ENTIRE thing on its head!

First of all, we all need to come to terms with the idea that God does not need us to fast! Frankly, it means nothing to Him if we fast or not. He gave us fasting not for us to please Him in some odd transactional process of hunger in exchange for Salvation – no – He gave us fasting so that we may grow in holiness and grow closer to Him through prayer! Fasting is not for God, it is for US! Once we realize this, once we turn the motivation from pleasing someone else to simply pleasing ourselves through personal growth and the reward of coming to know the Lord more closely, we can begin to see why being a little hungry, desire something and not partaking in it, might be a good thing.

When we are hungry, when we are filled with desire, we pray. Don't simply sit hungry and yearning, fill yourself with Christ and pray. Fasting and prayer go hand-in-hand, we cannot successfully do one without the other. Further-

more, we need to admit that every day of the Fast matters, not just Wednesday and Friday. No one thinks that first and second downs can be thrown away and the only down that counts is third before you have to punt! So let's not focus simply on Wednesday and Friday as the "days I cannot eat meat" and let's make each day of the Fast equally important. I encourage you to speak with your pastor, or your spiritual father/mother, and come up with a prayer-fasting routine for the Fast that works for you, making your goals attainable and setting yourself up for ascetical success. Here are some quick tips, expanding our idea of what "fasting" is that might be helpful.

Make it a point to pray everyday, even if it is for five minutes, one psalm, one prayer... just do it!

Don't drink alcohol during the fast - period - just put it down for 40 days.

Don't eat out at restaurants during the Fast. Make it a point to eat at home, together as a family, and do something positive with all the money you save... remember, saving is always a positive!

Cut back on the snacking... pray instead of snacking!

GO TO PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY!!!!

Take a break from social media (and don't post about taking a break, just take a break...)

Put down the electronic devices.

Read something edifying.

Volunteer to help out at your parish, perhaps even as a family

Ultimately, take it all seriously, but never take yourself too seriously.

Yes, there are times when we are called by the Church to do things we may not want to do, but that doesn't mean we can turn a blind eye to it. The Church, in her compassion and wisdom, gives us ways to succeed and the only one holding us back is ourselves. So... let's get out there, pray like we mean it, fast like we truly do want to come to know the Lord more closely, and know that it is never too late to get out there and make it happen. Even if you haven't paid much attention to the Fast yet, start now, for as we will hear at Resurrection Matins: he who began work at the 11th Hour receives the same recompense as he who began working at the 1st Hour. Our Lord doesn't care about your stats, only that you show up with a contrite heart and a humble spirit, desiring to know Him. So get out there and pray and fast like your life – your Eternal Life – depends on it! **ECL**



DECREE

For the Opening of the Jubilee Year 2025

Blessed be the Holy Consubstantial and Undivided Trinity, in the name of the unoriginate Father, the beloved Son Jesus Christ, and the life creating and reviving Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dear friends in Jesus Christ,

The Pope of Rome Francis has declared a Holy Year for all of us, as popes have done from many centuries. The custom is from the Jubilee Year that God ordered for his chosen people, that they should rest every seventh day, that the land should rest every seventh year, and that after seven cycles of years, that is after forty nine years, the fiftieth year should be a time of celebration, for thanking the almighty God for blessing the earth, and for forgiveness of debts and reconciliation.

St. John the Beloved Disciple tells us that to all who receive Jesus, and to those who believe in the name of Jesus, He gave the power to become children of God.

The Holy Father, using the keys given to Peter by Our Lord, and using his power to bind and loose on earth, knowing that God will bind and loose in heaven, has given to all of us the power to obtain a plenary indulgence, the remission of all the temporal punishment due to us for our lives of sins, provided that we repent of these sins, and ask for forgiveness in the Sacramental Mystery of Confession, and receive the Holy Eucharist, and make a pilgrimage to one of the sites designated for this purpose.

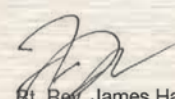
We can make our pilgrimage by traveling to the Eternal City of Rome and visiting a designated church, or by visiting churches in Assisi or Pompeii or Loreto or Padua. In addition, the Holy Father has empowered your bishop to designate pilgrimage churches in our own Eparchy of Passaic.

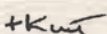
Taking into consideration the vast distances in our Eparchy and the spiritual needs of the people, as Bishop of Passaic, I designate the following churches as pilgrimage destinations:

The Cathedral of St. Michael in Passaic, New Jersey, which is already designated by the Pope, Furthermore, I designate
St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Freeland, Pennsylvania,
Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in Jessup, Pennsylvania,
St. Andrew Byzantine Catholic Church in Westbury, New York,
St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Danbury, Connecticut,
Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Annandale, Virginia,
Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Roswell, Georgia,
St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Orlando, Florida, and
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church in Toms River, New Jersey.

St. Paul tells us that the great virtues are Faith, Hope, and Love, and the greatest of these is Love. We need Faith and Hope to Love, and the Holy Father has asked us this year to pray humbly to God for a rekindling of Hope in our lives and in the world and to meditate on the beautiful virtue of Hope.

Given by my hand, this nineteenth day of January in the year of Our Lord 2025.


Rt. Rev. James Hayer
Protosyncellus and Notary


Most Rev. Kurt Burnette
Bishop of Passaic

NAWAS INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL, INC.

ITALY JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE



HOSTED BY:

Archbishop William C. Skurla

Metropolitan Archbishop of Pittsburgh

Bishop Kurt R. Burnette

Eparch of Passaic, Apostolic Administrator of Phoenix & Toronto

Bishop Robert M. Pipta

Eparch of Parma

With Tour Coordinator:

Fr. Ed Cimbala

**11 Days:
May 5-15, 2025**

\$4829 from NEWARK

(Air/land tour price is \$4299 plus \$530 government taxes/airline surcharges)



VISITING:

Venice ♦ Padua ♦ Ravenna ♦ Florence

Assisi ♦ Rome ♦ Vatican City

Including

The Opportunity to Pass Through The Holy Doors of the Basilica of St. Peter in Vatican City & the Other Three Major Basilicas

TOUR FEATURES:

- Roundtrip air from Newark
- \$530 government taxes & airline surcharges
- First class/select hotels based on 2 persons sharing in twin bedded rooms with private bath
- Most Meals
- Services of a professional English-speaking tour director
- Comprehensive sightseeing



FOR THE FULL DETAILED BROCHURE

For More Information, Please Contact:

Fr. Ed Cimbala

Tel: (908) 872-2928

Email: fredcimbala@gmail.com

SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



THE LOST ART OF FASTING

We enter once again into the time of the Great Fast, that great penitential season before the celebration of Pascha, the Feast of Feasts. In our preparations, we are always encouraged to the three pillars of penitence: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Two are very straightforward in explanation: we are encouraged to pray more deeply, and more often; we are to give alms to all in need. But although we think we know what is needed in fasting, I believe that the depths of fasting have been lost on our society. Fasting has been reduced to “What are you giving up for Lent?” It seems that all Catholics say, “I didn’t think we needed to do that anymore.” During Lent, Western Catholics are now called to abstain from meat on Fridays, whereas that used to be true for the entire year. Eastern Catholics are called to complete fasting and abstinence on the first day of the Great Fast and on Good Friday, and abstinence from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, whereas we used to fast and/or abstain from all meat and dairy for the entire Fast – thus the true import of Meat-fare Sunday and Cheese-fare Sunday.

And so, we need to rediscover fasting. Fasting has its place in every religion in the world, from ancient times. It doesn’t matter if one is Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Native American or Wiccan or pagan – fasting is found in all of them. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches, there is still a strong fasting tradition. But Catholics seem generally to have let it go by the wayside, much to our shame.

We need to rediscover the terms. What is fasting, and what is abstinence? Do either necessarily entail just eating, or are there other aspects of life where it can be applied? Abstinence traditionally refers to certain types of food, regardless of quantity, while fasting traditionally refers to limiting the number of meals and/or amounts of food consumed, regardless of types of food. There can be abstinence from meat and

meat products for an entire period of time, or fasting from every form of food for a period. Most Lenten fasts, when kept traditionally, consist of only vegetables. In our modern society, we can also abstain from certain activities, but the desirable concentration of either abstinence or fasting from food. Why this particular point? Other than the fact that fasting from food is the common fast throughout religions, it is in response to basic needs and desires. No other part of our lives is so fundamental than the need to eat. If there is one addiction that gets short-shrift in our lives it is the addiction to eating, especially in Western civilization. No denial of any aspect of our lives upset us more than when we miss our meal.

I think the main thing that fasting from foods does is remind us of how much we are slaves to our bodies. Hunger can be overpowering, to the point where dieters “cheat” or tell themselves they “deserve a reward for doing so well the past week.” And we can extend this to our treatment of sin. Sinful habits and mindsets overpower our desire to be more like Christ, and we find ourselves crying out as did the holy Apostle Paul: “Indeed, I do not know what I am doing! I do not practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, this is what I do!” (Rom. 7:15). Fasting reminds us that in and of ourselves we can do nothing, and we are in constant need of God in our lives to overcome our sinful nature.

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware says, “Fasting is not a mere matter of diet. It is moral as well as physical. True fasting is to be converted in heart and will; it is to return to God, to come home like the Prodigal to our Father’s house. In the words of Saint John Chrysostom, it means ‘abstinence not only from food but from sins.’ ...It is useless to fast from food, protests St. Basil, and yet to indulge in cruel criticism and slander: ‘You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother.’”

Many years ago, I read something from Father Anthony Coniaris that has stuck with me. His analogy is: When you squeeze an orange, what comes out? Our usual response is, “orange juice.” But Father Anthony says, “No; it is whatever is inside the orange that comes out.” In times of stress or anger, we find out what is truly inside of us. When we get angry, do we yell at a person, or go into road rage, or say things that should not be said out loud? If we do, we betray that what is in our heart is not peace or love but turmoil and anger. When we are stressed at any situation, do we panic, make abrupt, and probably incorrect, assumptions and decisions, or do we take a deep breath and really examine the situation and act prudently. Yes, it is kind of disturbing to find what is really inside us, rather than what we think is inside. Fasting shows us who we are. It shows our weakness and our need for diligence over our hearts, minds and words, and how we cannot do otherwise without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is only then that we can call upon Him to heal us in the very depths of who we are.

Again, Bishop Kallistos: “Fasting, then, is valueless or even harmful when not combined with prayer.” When Jesus’ disciples were unable to cast out a demon, Saint Matthew writes, “Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, ‘Why were we not able to cast it out?’ Jesus replied, ‘Because of your unbelief! Amen, I tell you that if you have faith even like a grain of mustard, you will tell this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and

nothing will be impossible for you! But this kind [of spirit] does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17: 19-21). So, too, it is with us: we cannot expect to make any spiritual progress during Lent without fasting accompanied by prayer.

Of course, we are in need also of the Holy Mysteries. Saint Thomas Aquinas calls the Holy Eucharist “spiritual food and spiritual medicine.” After all communicants have received the Eucharist, the priest proclaims, “Behold! This has touched your lips, and will take away your iniquities and will cleanse your sins.” Holy Confession is also necessary for us to call to mind where we fall short in our efforts to become more like Christ. We relieve the burdens on our hearts, receive counsel from our spiritual father, and received absolution and remission of our sins. This Mystery is the most neglected today, and yet we ask why it seems God does not hear our prayers: “You lust, and do not have! You kill, covet, and [still] cannot obtain! You fight and make war. You do not have because you do not ask! You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, in order to spend it for your pleasures.” (James 4:2, 3).

We need to fast. We need to pray. We need to reach out to others through our giving of ourselves and our substance to others. Without all this, our fasting is doomed to failure; our prayer will be weak and ineffective; and we will not attain the Kingdom we seek. **ECL**



Save the Date — <https://byzantineassembly.org>



Traveling to the Pocono’s? Visiting Kalahari Water Park?
Come Worship With Us At:
St Nicholas of Myra Byzantine Catholic Church
2121 Commerce St (Commerce St & Rt 940)
Pocono Summit, Pa
Divine Liturgy Schedule:
Pascha-Oct 31st Sat 5 PM/Sun 10 AM
Nov 1st-Pascha Sat 4 PM/Sun 10 AM
Eve of Holydays 6 PM

Epiphany of our Lord Byzantine Catholic Mission

Serving suburban Washington, DC, northern Montgomery County and the city of Frederick, MD

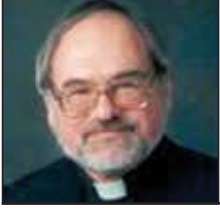
Join us for Divine Liturgy: Visit our website for schedule

Epiphany of our Lord Byzantine Catholic Mission
9301 Warfield Road, Gaithersburg, MD 20882



Questions? Contact us at
703-573-3986

www.eolmission.com



THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

TRUE FASTING

Eating food is an essential component of the physical life of a human being. In order to sustain life, we need food for the body. However, as human beings, we also have a spiritual nature with free will. We can refuse to eat. While it would be sinful to actually commit suicide by refusing essential food, some have starved themselves for the sake of a cause. At the same times, within moral limits, we can freely choose to limit the amount of food or the kinds of food that we eat. It is a spiritual and moral decision to choose wisely how we are to eat. The opposite of fasting, gluttony is a sin. The father Evagrius wrote, “When the intellect is blunted by satiety,” he wrote, “it does not receive the knowledge of God.” The decision about eating is also one of the most controversial of our existence. People choose all sorts of diets for various health reasons and for various ideologies, some personal, some social, some political, some religious. To be a vegan today, to protest the exploitation of animals, is a very popular choice today, and sometimes even conflicts arise between them and meat-eaters.

In our spiritual context, fasting or abstinence is a part of the religious life of a member of the Church. Most common is the simple decision to abstain from meat, or occasionally, from meat and dairy products. Sometimes, there is complete fasting, as, for example, when we fast for a certain length of time before receiving Communion, in order both to honor the Bread of Life, the Body and Blood of our Lord in Communion, and to prepare ourselves physically for the gift of union with God. Everyone must freely choose to do some form of fast or abstinence, and the Church prescribes the minimum that must be done. Those who choose the monastic life may devote themselves to more serious fasting. The ancient monks seemed to keep almost super-human fasts, as if responding to our Lord’s teaching that “whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). The Fathers of the Church tell us we must all be monks in some way, at least in our commitment to follow Christ, though in a different way.

Fasting has a physical component, then. However, it is incomplete without a spiritual will. In the Great Fast, we hear how fasting is truly to be done. On Wednesday of the Sixth Week, we read chapter 58 of the prophecy of Isaiah. This passage is specifically to remind us of the true nature of the fast. It is not simply depriving us of food, but of emptying ourselves of so that we can serve others. Verses 6 and 7 read: “Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless

into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?” St. Paul also teaches us that the Fast must be love and respect for one another. “Now food will not bring us closer to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do, but make sure that this liberty of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the weak.... if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause my brother to sin. (1 Corinthians 8:7-8.13)” This is read on Meatfare Sunday to prepare us for the Great Fast. The spirituality of the Scriptures is repeated frequently in the liturgical texts of the Church during the Great Fast. For example, on Monday of Cheesefare Week, we sing, “By fasting, let us purify ourselves from the stain of our sin. By mercy and the love of our neighbor, by our zeal to help the needy, we shall be able to enter the bridal chamber of Christ. (Vespers Aposticha)” It was the ancient Christian custom to give the money saved by our fasting to the poor.

From this, some have made an erroneous conclusion, due to human thought patterns. People think, if the fast from food is no good except when joined to a spiritual love for others, then we can dispense from fasting, and just do acts of charity for those in need. We think that this is the spirit, we do not need discipline of the body. This ignores the fact that we are body and soul, and that we need this physical asceticism to empty ourselves of self-love in order to love others. Materially fasting from food, or abstaining from certain kinds of food is difficult, and therefore all the more important for our integrity. In the Great Fast, then, we pray daily, “bestow on us a spirit of integrity, humility, patience and love,” which is possible only when we deal with our whole nature.

This, then, is the bottom line of our fasting and abstinence. We must fast in humility. A friend once told me that when Pascha, the Feast of our Lord’s Resurrection came, he did not feel worthy unless he had strictly kept the fast.

However, it is not our fasting that saves us, but only the grace of God. Perhaps the real meaning of the Fast is for us to come to the knowledge that we cannot save ourselves by our own actions, that we are not “self-made men,” but that we need the Spirit of God which is beyond our control. We can only pray like the tax-collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Why, then, do we need fasting, if it alone cannot save us? I think it is because it brings about in us an awareness that God loves us as a people, and that through fasting, the kingdom of God works throughout our entire community. It is not at all that we have glorified ourselves, but that our prayer has been answered, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” **ECL**

ICONOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

THURSDAY EVENINGS

IN THE GREAT FAST

2025

WOODLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY



Fr. Marek Visnovsky will be offering an iconography workshop at St. Michael’s Cathedral Chapel, 415 Lackawanna Ave, Woodland Park, NJ 07424. This class will be on Thursdays, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3 and April 10 from 6 pm to 10 pm. We will paint the icon of CHRIST THE BRIDEGROOM. The cost of the workshop is \$450 and includes boards, paints, brushes, twenty-four karat gold leaf (food and accommodation not included). Beginners as well as advanced artists are welcome. DEADLINE to register is Wednesday, February 19, 2025. Find the registration online at www.stmichaelsarchangel.org For more information, please email Fr. Marek at marekvisnovsky@yahoo.com

Fr. Marek is a married Byzantine Catholic priest, serving as the Rector of the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel in Passaic, NJ. With his wife Miriam they raise three children, Caroline, Elias, and Marco. For 25 years he has been teaching iconography classes in the USA and Europe. He has painted over 800 icons which are venerated in churches and private homes around the world.



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

I CAN DO IT MYSELF

Byzantine hymns in honor of the Holy Cross regularly contrast it to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Paradise. The hymnographers take some poetic license here, since it was at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that our first parents sinned, but eternal, divine life – the fruit of the other tree – was the ultimate goal. The Tree of Knowledge was tempting enough on its own: beautiful to look at, bearing tasty fruit, and promising knowledge – but the Serpent promised even more: “You will be like gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). There’s the real temptation: to be my own god, so I don’t need any other god. Or, as any rebellious three-year-old might proclaim: “I can do it myself!”

That temptation didn’t go away. The people who built the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) were counting on their advanced building skills (they invented bricks!) to get to heaven on their own. Pagans everywhere made idols that were simply larger, more powerful versions of themselves, gods and goddesses who represented all their own

passions (Romans 1:22-23). Even the Law God gave Moses on Mount Sinai to train a chosen people for Himself could be misused and misunderstood to mean that people could “earn” heaven by obeying all the commandments and piling up merit for themselves. The Law itself disproves that error. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy all make clear that it was the Lord who was intervening, forgiving, guiding, and saving His people every step of the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Barely twenty years after the Crucifixion, Paul still needed to remind the first Christians that we need a savior, that we cannot save ourselves. He wrote: “By works of the Law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16). By “justification” he means being in a right relationship with God, freed from the obstacles of sin and death, open to receiving His gifts of grace, life, and love.

That need for a savior should be obvious from our own experience. Threatened with death, we are tempted to

gorge ourselves and hoard whatever power and pleasure this world affords. Yet all these objects of our passions are temporary. They can enslave and addict us but cannot satisfy us, and anyway death puts an end to it all (Romans 6:15-23). Paul (Romans 8:20), like King Solomon before him (Ecclesiastes 1:1 and 36 more times), recognized that this vicious cycle of desire and disappointment is “vanity” or “futility.”

The Savior we need is, of course Jesus Christ, who accomplished this salvation by His Cross and Resurrection once and for all. It is through relationship with Him—a personal bond—that any individual accepts that gift of salvation for him or herself. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). For the very first Christians, as for us today, that bond with the Savior is made real through the sacraments; Paul especially highlights Baptism (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3:27) and the Eucha-

rist (1 Corinthians 11:22-32). From the sacramental presence of Christ in our lives comes the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-17; 1 Corinthians 6:11) who enables us to bear fruit in good works (Galatians 5:22-26).

It’s hard not to hear that original temptation to be our own gods in the claims of those who call themselves “spiritual but not religious” or who insist that they don’t need any church to be “good persons.” The standard in any such “spirituality” is myself, my own thoughts, feelings, preferences, standards, and convenience. Clinging to Christ as Savior requires getting over myself.

Jesus says, “Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). Whatever else the mystery of the Cross may mean in the life of an individual Christian, it means denying myself the temptation to be my own god. Taking up the Cross means that Jesus leads, and we follow. Taking up the Cross means acknowledging by our actions that He is Lord, and we are not. Whatever else the Cross may mean in our lives, it will always be the place where our pride is condemned to die so that we are free to accept a gift we could never earn or afford on our own. **ECL**

SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



THE DANGER OF SELF LOVE

Jesus said, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23).

As a result of original sin, we are born into this world with an egocentric, self-centered, “me first” mentality. Without realizing it, we can live out our whole Christian life and never come to grips with the necessity of dying to ourselves to live for God and others.

Sales guru Brian Tracy trains salesmen to remember that potential customers are tuned into the radio station WIFM (or WIIFM), meaning, “What’s in it for me?” and use that knowledge to their advantage when selling.

It may have been Will Rogers who said: “When you’re 20, you care what everyone thinks; when you’re 40, you stop caring what everyone thinks; when you’re 60, you realize no one was ever thinking about you in the first place.” It’s true; no one thinks much about you because everyone is thinking about themselves.

Many wonderful promises in the Bible tell us that God hears and answers prayer. Some Bible verses even say that God answers prayer without qualification, “whatever you ask you will receive” (see Mt. 21:22, Mk. 11:24, Jn. 14:13). Yet, these promises are not

absolute. We must ask in accord with the will of God for things that are in our best interest (1 Jn. 5:14). The saints and Fathers assure us that God always answers every prayer, by giving us what we ask for, or something better (more conducive to our salvation).

You don’t really want everything you think you want. Imagine giving a child everything they wanted. A child will ask for things that may be dangerous, unhealthy, or even deadly. Additionally, if a parent gave his child literally everything they wanted, a spoiled brat, a little devil, would be the result.

Part of growing up is learning to live with things we don’t like, dealing patiently with people who rub us the wrong way, and giving way to other people’s preferences. It is the same in the spiritual life in our growth toward Christian perfection (Mt. 5:48).

There is a danger of falling into an egocentric and self-absorbed false spirituality. New Age spiritualities like “The Law of Attraction,” “Manifesting,” and books like “The Secret” by Rhonda Byrne or the works of Abraham-Hicks with their “create your own reality” emphasis cater to this narcissistic tendency. Even Christian prayer, fasting, spiritual reading, receiving the sacraments, and attending church services, without the right intention, may be

done in service to self and increase our egocentricity.

The goal of our spiritual striving is to learn to overcome self, forget self, and move from our innate egoism to Christ-centered altruism. Unless we understand and pursue this generosity of spirit, we can become increasingly wrapped up in ourselves, even with all our religious and spiritual practices.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9).

Jesus says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:12-13). As Christ laid down His life for us, so must we learn to die to ourselves and lay down our lives for others.

Christ “died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15).

Saint Paul praises Timothy for being more generous than other Christian workers. He says, “I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:19).

He tells the church at Philippi, “do nothing from selfishness” and “let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

To the Corinthians he writes, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Cor. 10:24). To the Galatians Saint Paul says, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

The Beloved Disciple reminds us, “by this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:16).

Saint Thomas Aquinas says, “self-love is the cause of every sin” (Summa Theologica I-II, 77, 4).

“The sacrifice the good Lord wants of us is to die to ourselves,” said the Italian Franciscan Saint Charles of Sezze (1613–1670).

Beware of self-love, self-centeredness, egocentricity, self-absorption, and narcissism. Die to self and live to serve God and others. Say with Saint John the Baptist,

“He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:30). **ECL**



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
Father Michael J. Salmicky, 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 Father Michael.

2025 Summer Camp Dates

July 6-10, 2025

Camp Theodore Tyros—Teen Coed Camp, Ages 13-17

July 13-17, 2025

Camp Theotokos—Girls Camp, Ages 6-17

July 20-24, 2025

Altar Server Congress—Ages 6-17

Aug 10-14, 2025

Camp St Nicholas—Preteen Coed Camp, Ages 6-12



Southern Summer Camp Survey!!!

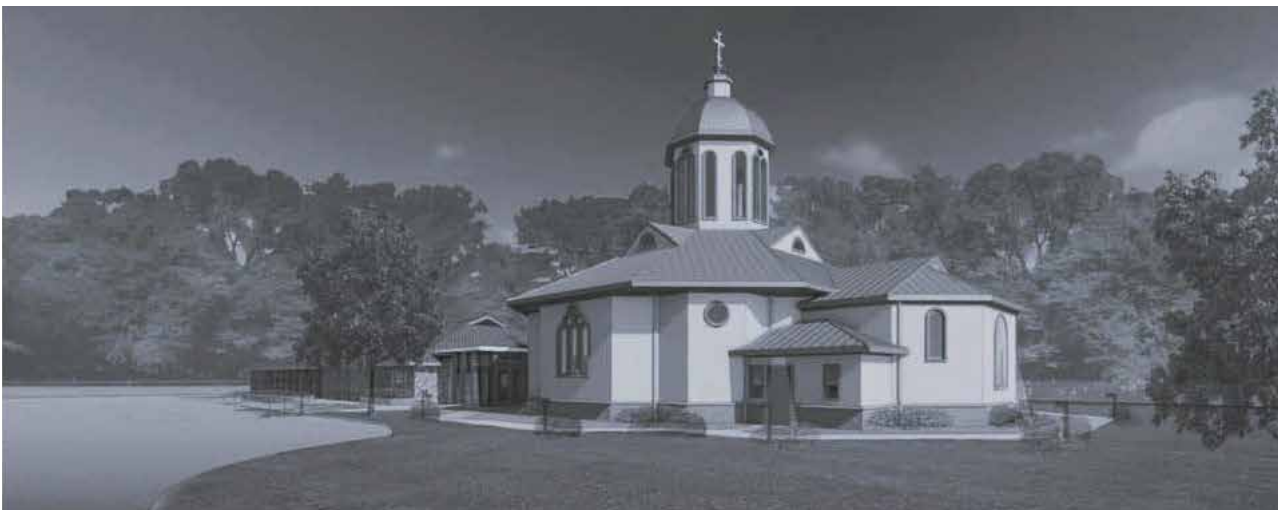
We value your input as we plan exciting new youth camps in the southeastern United States! To help us tailor these camps to best meet your family's needs, please take a moment to fill out our quick survey. You can access the survey by visiting the link provided or by scanning the QR code. Your feedback is essential in shaping an unforgettable experience for your children. Thank you for your time and support! Please complete prior to February 15th, 2025. <https://bit.ly/passaiccampsurvey>

You are invited and welcome to join us for
DIVINE LITURGY (MASS) VIGIL
EVERY SATURDAY 11AM
(Fulfils Sunday Obligation)

Celebrated by Fr. Oleksiy Nebesnyk at
Christ Lutheran Church
15699 SE 80th Ave.
Summerfield, FL 34491
For more information call 352-326-9831



Follow us for updates & live-stream
facebook.com/ByzantineCatholicVillages



New Building arriving in 2024

Your Parish at The Jersey Shore

Our Lady of Perpetual Help 1937 Church Road
Toms River, New Jersey
Home of Eastern Catholic Radio 732-255-6272

Sunday Divine Liturgy at 9 a.m.
OLPHTR.ORG

Visiting The Myrtle Beach Area This Winter?

Blessed Basil Hopko
Byzantine Catholic Mission
3059 SC Highway 90
Conway, SC
All Liturgies will start at 10 AM.
Follow us on Facebook for any schedule changes.

Eastern Catholic Life

Circulation Department
445 Lackawanna Avenue
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

Next Issue:
April, 2025

Copy Deadline:
March, 21 2025

The current issue of the ECL was printed at Evergreen Printing, Bellmawr, NJ, and was distributed from the U.S. Post Office via second class mailing in Bellmawr, NJ.

UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

- FEBRUARY, 2025**
- 21 Bright Monday
- 23 Sunday of Meatfare *Chancery Closed*
- 28 -5/01 Presbyteral Days
- MARCH, 2025**
- 2 Sunday of Cheesefare
- 3 Clean Monday, Beginning of the Great Fast
- 9 Sunday of Orthodoxy
- 16 Sunday of Gregory Palamas
- 23 Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross
- APRIL, 2025**
- 17 Holy Thursday *Chancery Closed*
- 18 Holy and Great Friday *Chancery Closed*
- 19 Holy Saturday *Chancery Closed*
- 20 Pasha; the Great Day of the Resurrection of Our Lord, God, & Savior Jesus Christ *Chancery Closed*

THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC subscribes to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Eparchy, within all its parishes, institutions and programs, is committed to assuring a safe environment in ministry for its children and young people that conforms to Charter requirements. For further information regarding the Eparchial Safe Environment Program please contact:
Father David J. Baratelli, Ed.S., M.Div.
Safe Environment Program Coordinator • 732-280-2682
Dr. Maureen Daddona, Ph.D.
Victim's Assistance Coordinator • 516-623-6456