



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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## THEOPHANY—GOD SHINES LIGHT INTO DARKNESS



### Pastoral Message of Bishop Kurt

**I**n the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the abyss.” With these powerful words, our scriptures begin the story of creation, and our story too. Remember, in Hebrew “Spirit” means breath or wind. He whom we call the Holy Spirit could be translated more accurately, the Divine Breath. And so, the Cosmos begins its advance through time. On our Byzantine calendar, we remember this gracious act of God on September 1 each year.

Over the next millennia, the children of Adam, inheriting the sin of their father, filled the globe with their sins—not only sins of indulgence, but violence and betrayal of the deadliest kind. After over a thousand years of prophecy, God sent a Savior to teach us His Good News and to redeem us from our sins. Every year, we celebrate the public appearance of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, on January 6. Like the first creation, we see the Spirit of God, or the Breath of God, in the form of a dove appearing over the surface of water, and we hear the voice of the Father from Heaven. Instead of saying, “Let there be light!” He thunders, “This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him.” And so, Jesus begins His public life, a life of humility and poverty. He taught, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful,” and so on. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” In His final act of humility, He willingly offered His life to pay the price for all the sins of mankind.

We love our Liturgy in our Church, and the Liturgy of the Theophany is second only to Easter on our calendar, even bigger than Christmas. I used to love the Vesper service as a parish priest, each year preparing the thirteen old testament readings and handing them out to

people as they entered the church. Then the long and moving blessing of water, in which every kind of sin and the injuries of sin, are presented in prayer for God’s mercy. The water is blessed not only by these beautiful prayers, but also by other symbols such as the submersion of the cross and the three-branched candle stick. When we submerge the hand cross, we remember Saint Paul’s words of hope, that when we were baptized with Christ we die with Christ, and when we rise from the water of baptism, we are raised with Christ. The three-branched candle, of course, symbolizes the fullness of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Fire is also a symbol of

speaking and the Holy Spirit hovering in the form of a dove. Did you know, in our iconography the color red is often a symbol of divinity like fire? That is why Jesus often wears a red tunic and blue cloak, to symbolize that He is a Divine Person who “puts on” a human nature. Mary, on the other hand, wears a blue tunic with a red cloak, to symbolize that she is a human being who puts on a divine nature.

We love to go into our beautiful churches and sing our beautiful liturgies so that for a little while we can “put aside all earthly cares.” We can leave behind the evil of this world and its damage. Sadly, sin does not stop, nor does its

“Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning, from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of every man’s brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.” And so, the first great Covenant that God made with us required us, for our part, to stop killing each other. God sealed this Covenant with us with the rainbow. Every time a rainbow appears in the sky, God remembers His Covenant with us, although we have forgotten.

Over many centuries the Christian countries of the world slowly conformed their laws and societies to the law of God as revealed in our faith. Caring for the poor, preventing violence, and protecting the weak are all results of the Christianization of society. Starting in the Age of Enlightenment and accelerated by the French Revolution, western Europe gradually replaced the laws of God with other laws of man. Conquest and economic wealth became the new gods. As people lost their contact with their Creator, and lost their purpose, they began to pursue other gods, including death. Pope Saint John Paul the Great rightly called these new developments “the culture of death.”

In Germany, a heart touching movie appeared sixty years ago called *Ich klage an*, or *I accuse*. It is about a young woman, independent and successful, a talented pianist. She contracts Multiple Sclerosis. Unable to control her limbs, she abandons her career and is eventually confined to her bed in perpetual severe pain. She begs her medical providers to end her misery. Finally, her husband Thomas, who is a physician, ends her life with a large dose of barbiturates. Thomas is charged with murder. The trial scene is the lengthy climax of the gripping two-hour movie. There are clever arguments presented on both sides of the question, though the winning arguments are, not surprisingly, in favor of the mercy killing. The conclusion is a powerful speech by her husband Thomas in which he tells the lawyers and judges that they are not the ones who were forced to watch her lie in excruciating pain while she lay helpless in her bed, this once talented, independent ...continued on page 2



Icon of the Theophany of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

divinity. The flames on the candle are submerged one at a time, as the water is blessed by God, not by us. The flame represents the divinity of Jesus Christ entering the water, but all three persons are present at the event—the Father by

destruction, even though Christ told us the Good News 2,000 years ago. As God looked on His fallen creation with merciful eyes, the first law He gave us was to stop murdering each other. After the Great Flood, God said to Noah,



*“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.’”*

young woman. Who wouldn't sympathize with this skillfully crafted drama?

The movie was commissioned by the Nazi propaganda minister to promote the euthanasia program of the German government which we know by the name Aktion T4. The “Gnadentod” or “mercy death” of the government had been in full tilt since 1938. The first mercy death came to Gerhard Kretschmar, a child with severe disabilities including blindness and birth without some limbs. The program is often called “involuntary,” but its first victim, the child Gerhard, was killed at the request of his father and mother. Their request was forwarded to Hitler himself. He was usually careful to leave no written evidence of his crimes against humanity, but in this case he sent a signed note that set in motion the Aktion T4. Within the next few years, 200,000 people, many Germans, received Gnadentod or mercy death, not from executioners, but from medical professionals. The SS polled Germans for their thoughts on the movie *I Accuse* to see how it was doing. They reported that it was most negatively received by Catholics, followed by devout Protestants, but generally positively received by the general public.

Interestingly enough, Americans were subjected to a movie very similar to *Ich klage* a few years ago. In *Million Dollar Baby*, a strong independent young woman, a champion boxer, is paralyzed by an injury. Her trainer kills her at her own request. This movie includes a Catholic priest who attempts to dissuade the killer. This movie did not need Josef Gobel to be successful. *Million Dollar Baby* was nominated for seven Oscars and won four Oscars, including Best Picture. The makers and actors and actresses included some of Hollywood's most successful and popular people. Twenty-seven of the top movie critics listed it as one of the top ten movies of 2004. John Keats said in a poem, “I have been half in love with easeful Death, call'd him soft names

in many a mused rhyme, to take into the air my quiet breath.” In 2004, the entertainment industry was not “half in love with easeful Death.” It was in a passionate love assignment!

Although the killing of the sick, the disabled, the mentally challenged, the mentally ill, and even injured veterans was carried on relentlessly until the Allies arrived to stop it, there was opposition. The Encyclical of Pope Pius XI, *Mit brennender Sorge*, was smuggled into Nazi Germany in 1937, and read in all the Catholic pulpits in Germany on Palm Sunday. That encyclical condemned all the hellish actions of the Nazi regime, not just euthanasia. In the summer of 1941, the Bishop of Munster, Graf von Galen (Count Galen), delivered a series of powerful sermons opposing Aktion T4, the euthanasia program. In fact, he had publicly opposed the Nazis since 1933, opposing their racism and antisemitism among other things. He called Rosenberg's writings, the sacred scripture of

Naziism, “An occasion for laughter in the educated world.” His opposition to their culture of death and their racism occasioned threatening visits from the SS as early as 1934, yet he continued until the fall of the Reich to warn his flock about this evil state. Hitler stopped the public euthanasia program in the face of Bishop von Galen, but the “mercy deaths” continued without slowing down until the Allies arrived.

Interestingly enough, because of its experience in the 1930's and 1940's, Germany was the last European nation to legalize abortion. Although the parliament tried to liberalize abortion in 1974 when it was the fad throughout western Europe, the Supreme Court of Germany struck down the law saying that they had been through this before with the Nazis. It wasn't until 1992 that Germany somewhat legalized abortion, but still limited it. Germans found out the hard way where the culture of death ends up!

Many Americans are unaware of the extent to which the Nazis copied our own eugenics practices which began much earlier in the century. From the beginning, the elitists who championed abortion, sterilization, birth control, and euthanasia did so largely for racist reasons. Tens of thousands of Americans were involuntarily sterilized in the twentieth century by eugenicists supported by the wealthy elitists of the time. Involuntary sterilization continued as long as the 1950's in California.

Despite recent changes to the constitutional jurisprudence on abortion, the culture of death is inexorably overtaking our country in the area of “Gnadentod,” or “mercy death,” or “euthanasia.” The term “assisted suicide” has been coined recently to avoid any association with its frightening history. These angels of death were first successful in Oregon, but had no progress for quite a long time. In 2015, they scored their greatest victory during a special session of the Califor-



*Children from the Schönbrunn Psychiatric Hospital in 1934. By the end of the war, the Germans killed almost everyone in psychiatric hospitals, as well as the handicapped, the mentally challenged, and disabled veterans.*

nia state legislature. The governor called a special session to deal with budgetary issues. Saint John writes in the Apocalypse, "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him." The pale horse entered the legislature. One of the most dishonest laws was hastily written and passed with no community discussion. The law allows your heirs to have you poisoned, and the death certificate is required by law to lie about the cause of death. The governor who signed the law was educated at the best Catholic schools. It seems that God's law against killing was left out of his curriculum. He even said that he may take advantage of the law himself.

The pale horse of the Apocalypse rode into the states of New York and New Jersey more recently. Both governors claim to be Catholic and had Catholic educations. My Catholic education included memorizing the Ten Commandments in the first or second grade. Their education must not have included those. Even more shameful, there is no exception for conscience in New Jersey. A physician is required by law to participate in killing his patients with poison or referring them to another physician who will do so. Only the Orthodox Jews mounted an opposition to this monstrous law, and the Catholic governor aggressively used the full power of his office to force

but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto yourself the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

The occasion for this column is that a few days ago, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the governor of Illinois signed a law allowing the killing of sick people with poison. Of course, they call the poison a drug, but a chemical that kills a person is indisputably poison, no matter what laws men write. Like the dishonest California law, the death certificate will not say that the person was poisoned with the assistance of the medical industry, but will list something else. They call it the "underlying cause." Well, it isn't a "cause" in any normal sense of the word. It's a "rationalization" or an "excuse," but it isn't the "cause." At least this time, I don't have to report that the guilty governor is Catholic.

Have you ever wondered why these angels of death always demand to involve someone from the medical profession? The simple fact is that you don't need any medical training at all to kill someone, or any education at all, much less eight years of medical school and internship. People kill themselves all the time with readily available chemicals and no

governor of New Jersey who signed the Gnadenotod law pursued riches from his youth and turned to government after making a vast fortune. From the beginning of the culture of death in the United States, the wealthy and elite have promoted it. King David prophesied this when he wrote,

*Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together*

*against the Lord and against his Christ,  
saying,*

*"Let us break their chains  
and throw off their shackles."*

It doesn't take a medical education to kill, and it doesn't take an economics education to see that killing the sick, the disabled, the mentally challenged, and the elderly saves money for the government and for the medical insurance companies. The rich and the powerful say about God's law, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles!" But what does the royal prophet say after this?

*The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.*

*He rebukes them in his anger  
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

*"I have installed my king  
on Zion, my holy mountain."*

The king that the Lord installs on Zion is none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We know this because the Psalm goes on to say,

*"You are my son;  
today I have begotten you.*

*Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.*

*You will break them with a rod of iron;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*

On the feast of the Theophany, the "showing forth of God," we remember that the Holy Trinity, the Creator of all things, the Enlivener, the Law Giver, revealed Himself to us. We remember that Jesus was not cleansed of sin in the Jordan, but rather by touching the river with his Sinless Flesh, He gave to water the power to wash away our sins in Baptism. We remember that Saint John told us, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." We remember that with the armor of God, we have no fear of principalities,

of powers, of the rulers of the darkness of this world, of spiritual wickedness in high places.

My dear friends, why am I writing about this terrible curse now? As I said, Illinois just instituted the "mercy death" on the very feast of the Mother of God, and many of us live in states where "mercy death" is the law. I fear that some of you may fall for the lies of the rulers of the darkness of this world. As your family and neighbors become accustomed to these horrible things, as your medical professionals are corrupted by these powerful rulers, you might be tempted to kill yourself or to have someone else kill you. Of course, I am not talking about a natural death which is your right; I am talking about deliberately killing someone with poison or something similar. Do not be fooled! As Saint Paul says, withstand the wiles of the devil with the armor of God. God's law is clear. If the final act of someone's life is murder, what hope is there for salvation? If you kill yourself, you die a transgressor. If you have someone else kill you, then you kill yourself and some else's soul at the same time, a double crime against God.

Be aware, anyone who undergoes this death must die without absolution. There are no last rites. No priest or bishop has the power to absolve a sin before it is committed.

Why am I writing to you now? I already have personal knowledge of families torn apart by this horror. I know of men who will not speak to their mother because she killed his father. I know of mothers who will not speak to their sons because they talked her into killing her husband. Counselors and medical workers who have killed their own consciences seduce with honeyed words these poor frightened people. No human power will ever reunite those poor families. One of my flock in Canada works at a nursing home. Although they do not kill people at this nursing home, sometimes residents go home to be killed. The staff is expected to be part of a double line of cheerleaders to encourage and rejoice as these people leave the nursing home for their doom. She can't be part of that in conscience, but she knows sooner or later she will be fired for not participating.

Do not be misled by clever arguments or appeals to sentiment. Saint Paul says to the Galatians, "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, he will reap in return. The one who sows to please his flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

+Kurt Burnette

**QUESTIONS  
ABOUT  
"END OF LIFE"  
ISSUES?  
CALL: 215-877-2688**

**If you or someone you know is in doubt about what is allowed, the National Catholic Bioethics Center maintains a 24 hour hotline staffed by trained experts in moral theology and medical ethics. There is no charge.**

the Orthodox Jews to participate. He must know it was the Jews who taught us God's law in the first place.

Saint Paul describes the forces of evil that often seem to triumph in this world. In Ephesians he says, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,

medical training. The reason that these people demand to include the medical profession is because most people know deep inside that it is wrong, that it is against God's law. They want someone in a position of authority to tell them that it is not wrong.

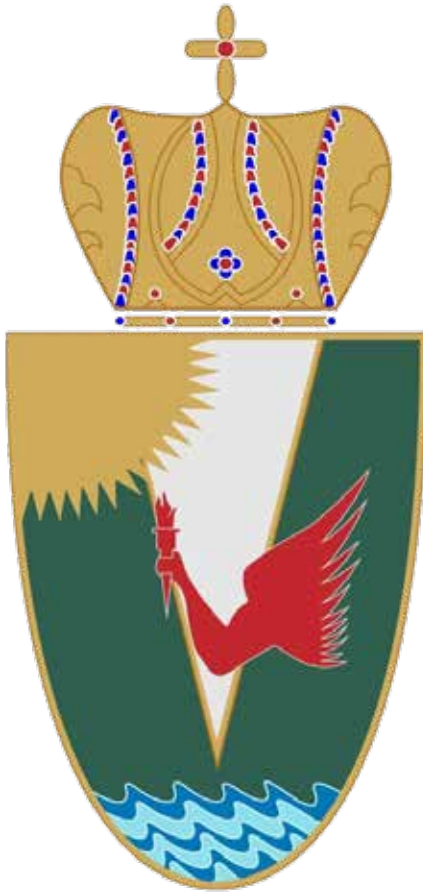
The governor of Illinois isn't a Christian, but he is a multibillionaire. The

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# BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC

## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

### FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2025



**Operating Revenues**

Eparchial assessments	\$696,473
Eparchial Stewardship Appeal	367,150
Donations, bequests and other income	86,158
Ukrainian Refugee Relief	12,972
ECL Newspaper Revenues	62,527
Hospitalization assessments and reimbursements	1,020,003
Life insurance proceeds, net of funeral expenses	72,782
<b>Total operating revenues</b>	<b>2,318,065</b>

**Operating Expenses**

Property, casualty, Auto and Workmen's Compensation insurance	120,178
Hospitalization	1,126,255
Pension and retirement costs	152,702
Administrative salaries and payroll taxes	127,875
Clergy salaries	65,769
Clergy subsistence	32,085
Stewardship rebates to parishes	102,768
Stewardship expenses - postage, printing and office expenses	15,709
Diaconate program expenses	15,359
Eastern Catholic Life publication - postage, printing and office expenses	54,078
Office administration and supplies - general	14,627
Office postage and printing - general	11,051
Communications - Website	18,640
Legal - Immigration	51,245
Accounting fees	96,000
Safe environment audit fees	6,780
Controller and consulting fees	74,612
Eparchial transportation and meeting expenses	114,848
Utilities and telephone	46,090
Maintenance and repairs - Chancery and Chapel	66,313
Assessments - NJ, US and Eastern Catholic Conferences	21,955
Continued education and well-being of priests	48,224
ECF Operating expenses - Eastern Christian Formation programs	93,713
Carpathian Village and Shrine expenses, net of income	155,910
Aid to Eastern Europe - Ukraine	3,500
Assistance to parishes	863,440
Depreciation - buildings and equipment	38,984
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>3,538,710</b>
<b>Net loss from operations</b>	<b>(1,220,645)</b>

**Investment income**

Interest and dividend income	397,308
Realized and unrealized loss on marketable securities	1,117,362
	<u>1,514,670</u>
<b>Net increase in assets as of end of year</b>	<b>\$294,025</b>



BYZANTINE CATHOLIC  
EPARCHY OF PASSAIC  
2025 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

**BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC  
2025 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL**

Please pledge online at [eparchyofpassaic.com](http://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 2025 Bishop's Appeal will run through the end of our fiscal year, June 1, 2026.  
Contributions received prior to December 31, 2025 will count toward your 2025 tax year.  
Acknowledgement letter for tax purposes will be mailed prior to January 31, 2026.

New Address or Correction

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street: \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

## +FATHER NICHOLAS DE PROSPERO ENTERS ETERNAL REST

Reverend Nicholas de Prospero August 14, 1941 – December 10, 2025

POTTSTOWN, PA – Reverend Father Nichols de Prospero, a priest of the Eparchy of Passaic serving at Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in Pottstown, PA fell asleep in the Lord at 10:00 in the morning on December 10, 2025 at Lehigh Valley Medical Center, Bethlehem, PA following a brief illness.

Father Nicholas was born in Philadelphia, PA on August 14, 1941, the son of the late Donato Alfredo de Prospero and Margaret Mary Hays Kirch Sogg. He was Baptized on September 14, 1941 at Saint Monica's Roman Catholic Church in Philadelphia. He received his primary education at Saint Raymond's Catholic School and Cardinal Dougherty High School, both in Philadelphia.

After his education in local schools, he attended Saint Charles Seminary in Overbrook, PA as well as the University of Toronto in Toronto, Canada where he received degrees in Philosophy and Theology. Following this, he attended the Gregorian University in Rome for advanced studies in Theology. He was ordained to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on December 18, 1970 for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh as a member of the Pittsburgh Oratory of Saint Philip Neri.

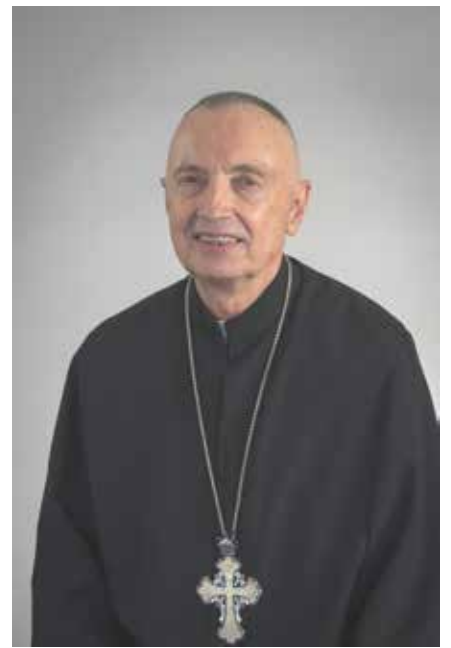
Following his ordination to the priesthood, he studied Art History at the University of Pittsburgh while also serving as Student Chaplain at the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University.

He began service in the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic in 1977, serving at Saint Michael Byzantine

Catholic Church, Mont Clare, PA from 1978-1984; Holy Wisdom Byzantine Catholic Church, Flanders, NJ from 1984-1987; and Saint John Byzantine Catholic Church, Pottstown, PA from 1988 until his death on December 10, 2025.

In addition to his parents, Father Nicholas was preceded in death by his brother, Alfredo de Prospero and his sister, Elisa de Prospero Nocella. He is survived by Dylan and Christine de Prospero, and Gillian Ryan as well as numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

The Office of Burial for a Priest (Parts 1 and 2) was celebrated on Wednesday, December 17 at Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, 301 Cherry St., Pottstown, PA. On Thursday, December 18, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Kurt with Prayer of Absolution and Pouring of Oil.



Internment was at Holy Sepulcher Catholic Cemetery, 3301 West Cheltenham Ave., Philadelphia.

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

*May his memory be eternal!*

## PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

### IN COCONUT CREEK...

*Our Lady of the Sign Supports Local Food Ministry*

Our Lady of the Sign – Coconut Creek, FL recently collected \$500.00 to help feed the hungry in the South Florida community. Thanks to a generous matching contribution from the GCU, the total donation doubled to \$1,000.00! On Monday December 15, 2025, Pastor Father Martin Vavrak and lay trustee Mike Donegan (pictured far right) were pleased to present the combined gift to Our Father's House, a locally owned and operated non-profit organization dedicated to providing food and clothing to those in need.



Every Slavic culture has a tradition of bringing Christmas greetings home to house with carols and often with a simple dramatic production. It can be pious or secular, serious or comic. Among the Rusyns and Slovaks who founded Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Peekskill NY, Administered by Father Jack Custer, such entertainments were called Kol'adi, Vertep, Viflijems'ka Ihra, Jasličkari, or Gubi.

Saints Peter and Paul Parish, in collaboration with a local group of Belarusian Americans under the direction of Lena Rzyz, will host the Belarusian version of this tradition, called Ščiadrouki on Saturday, January 10, at 12 noon in the parish church at 705 Shenandoah Avenue, Peekskill, NY.

### IN PEEKSKILL...

*Parishioners Continue the Tradition of Caroling*

The Belarusian program of caroling and drama, which includes a star, a goat, and a bear, links the Nativity of our Lord with folkloric elements reaching back into the pre-Christian history of Belarus. All are welcome to attend.

### IN RAHWAY...

*Parishioners Continue the Tradition of Caroling*

Saint Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church in Rahway, served by Archpriest James Hayer with the assistance of Deacon Charles Laskowski, presented Saint Joseph Social Service Center with a check to support its food pantry during the holidays.

*Left to right: Sandy Yelenovsky, Saint Thomas Event Coordinator; Mary Phillips, Saint Joseph's Development Director; John Szyphulsky, Saint Thomas Trustee; and Hany Lopez, Saint Joseph's Food Program Coordinator.*



# SAINT NICHOLAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY IN BETHLEHEM...

On Sunday, December 7th, our younger parishioners in Bethlehem gathered to celebrate Saint Nicholas. The Very Reverend Edward Higgins is our pastor. The children each made a Christmas ornament and got to use their ornaments to decorate a tree in our Narthex. Once the tree was decorated, everyone sang Silent Night around the tree. Lunch was served for everyone present. Saint Nicholas paid a visit, and each child was given an icon of Christ. Our younger parish families appreciated the opportunity to get to know one another.



## IN JESSUP...

A festive, fun time was had by all at the annual Holy Ghost Saint Nicholas Party! Students from Gregory the Great Academy's juggling team in nearby Elmhurst Township visited and sang joyful songs while juggling to the amusement of all. Saint Nicholas visited with all who came to celebrate the festivities of his feast day. Father Tim Kennedy is the Parochial Administrator of Holy Ghost parish.



## IN NEW YORK...

Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in New York City joyfully celebrated its Annual Saint Nicholas Party with a day filled with prayer, fellowship, and festive cheer. The celebration began with the Divine Liturgy, setting a prayerful tone for the festivities. The Liturgy was concelebrated by Father Ed Cimbala, Pastor of Saint Mary's, along with Father John Shea, SJ of Fordham University and Father Tyler Strand, a retired priest of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic.

Following the Liturgy, parishioners and guests gathered for a lively celebration featuring delicious food, wonderful fellowship, and spirited music by the renowned Slovak band Pajtáši. The music quickly filled the hall and inspired joyful dancing that brought together all generations of the parish community.

The afternoon also included a special raffle and, most especially, visits from Saint Nicholas himself, much to the delight of children and adults alike. The Saint Nicholas Party was a beautiful expression of faith, tradition, and community, reminding everyone of the joy of generosity and togetherness that this beloved saint inspires.



# SAINT NICHOLAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY

## IN THE VILLAGES...

On Saturday, December 6 after the Divine Liturgy, parishioners of Saint Anne Byzantine Catholic Outreach in The Villages, Florida welcomed a very honorable visitor. Everyone was thrilled to meet Saint Nicholas, receive chocolates from him, and join in a warm coffee-and-doughnut-fueled celebration filled with engaging conversations, laughter, and happiness. Father Oleksiy Nebesnyk serves The Villages Outreach.



## IN ORLANDO...

Saint Nicholas visited the children of Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Orlando, Florida on his Feastday.



## IN ORMOND BEACH...

The Parishioners of Holy Dormition Church, Ormond Beach, Florida celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas with their annual Saint Nicholas Luncheon, Sunday December 7 following the Sunday Divine Liturgy.

Dinner was catered by Sonny's Barbecue, and included a visit from Saint Nicholas, played by Jonathan Hartshorn, with gifts for our youngest parishioners, Some of whom were very unwilling and very frightened to approach Saint Nicholas.

Everyone at the luncheon received special chocolate gold coins. These chocolate coins were a gift sent by parishioner, Jacob Raynor, a student at Embry-Riddle University, Daytona Beach, currently studying abroad in Belgium.

During the festivities, there was a birthday celebration for all parishioners who were celebrating birthdays in the month of December. The day concluded with a door prize raffle. Father Sal Pignato is the Administrator and Father Vince Brady the Parochial Vicar of Holy Dormition parish.

## IN PHILADELPHIA...

On Sunday, December 7, following Divine Liturgy, the Holy Ghost parish community was delighted to welcome Holy Father Nicholas for a special seasonal celebration. The parish hall was filled with warmth and camaraderie as around 50 parishioners and two priests gathered for the annual potluck brunch. Attendees enjoyed a delicious shared meal, a festive choir concert, and the traditional Gubi, making the occasion truly memorable for all. The event beautifully captured the spirit of togetherness and joy that defines our parish family. HOLY Ghost is served by Fr. Vasyl Kopyn (priest in residence) and Father Andriy Kovach is Parochial Administrator.



# SAINT NICHOLAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY

## IN POCONO SUMMIT...

Saint Nicholas of Myra in Pocono Summit, PA celebrated its annual Patronal Feast celebration Sunday, December 7th with a delicious catered Hungarian



Buffet. The event was highlighted by a visit from Saint Nicholas who distributed Saint Nicholas cookies and gold covered chocolate coins. The event concluded with the drawing of the winning tickets for a 50/50 raffle, a Kitchen Appliance Raffle with six winners, and a drawing for both a Basket and a Bucket of Cheer. Three different Tricky Tray raffles allowed everybody to go home a winner. Immediately before the banquet, Knights of Columbus Council 4159 Grand Knight Mike Casey presented the parish Altar Servers with a special Appreciation Certificate and gift cards for their service to Saint Nicholas Parish Family, where Very Reverend Michael J Salnicky is the Pastor.



## IN ROSWELL...

On Sunday, December 7 after the Divine Liturgy, the Roswell, GA parish of Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church was joined by the nearby Melkite parish of Saint John Chrysostom Melkite Catholic Church for a joint Saint Nicholas Celebration. The beloved priests, Father Lewis Rabayda, Parochial Administrator of Epiphany and Father Elias of Saint John's, have made it a tradition, going on two years now, for the two parishes to join together to celebrate the Feast of Saint Nicholas. This year, Saint Nicholas arrived with gold-covered chocolate coins, prayer cards, and little crosses for all the children of the two parishes. During the festivities, the two parishes were praying, singing, and feasting together in a new tradition that keeps the generosity of Saint Nicholas at the forefront.



## IN SWOYERSVILLE...

On Sunday, December 7th, following the Divine Liturgy at Saint Nicholas of Myra Parish, Swoyersville, PA, the parish celebrated an annual dinner in honor of our namesake, Saint Nicholas. A wonderful time was enjoyed by all. Father Andrii Dumnych is Parochial Vicar of Saint Nicholas Parish.



# SAINT NICHOLAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY IN WILLIAMSBURG..

Saint Nicholas visited Ascension of Our Lord parish after Divine Liturgy on Sunday December 7, to the delight of children of all ages. After a brief message, he handed out treats to young and old. Afterward, everyone shared fellowship at a luncheon in the parish hall where a charitable \$1000 Saint Nicholas Grant was awarded to the Latisha's House Foundation. Father Alex Shuter is Pastor of Saint Nicholas Parish.



## Advent Retreat with Father Jerome Wolbert

Ascension of Our Lord hosted Father Jerome Wolbert, who presented a day-long Advent Retreat, "Saint Philip's Fast and the Nativity" on Saturday, November 15. Parishioners and visitors enjoyed his interactive presentation exploring Scripture, hymns, carols and prayers of the Byzantine Catholic Church preparing for the birth of our Lord.



## THE GRACE OF A BISHOP'S PRESENCE ON SAINT NICHOLAS DAY

December 6 and 7 marked a moment of profound significance for the South Florida parish communities of Our Lady of the Sign and Saint Basil the Great. As we celebrated the feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, the beloved shepherd of Myra whose life embodied Christ's compassion and generosity, we were also blessed to welcome our own shepherd, Bishop Kurt Burnette.



Nicholas, who fed the hungry, protected the innocent, and boldly proclaimed orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea, exemplified the pastoral heart that every bishop is called to embody. In welcoming our hierarch, we welcomed one who shares in this same sacred ministry of shepherding God's people.

Bishop Kurt's visit carried special meaning as it came at a milestone moment, two-years since our beloved pastor, Father Martin Vavrak, was installed to shepherd our communities. In these two-years, we have grown together, prayed together, and journeyed together in faith. Bishop Kurt's presence affirms this pastoral relationship and celebrates the fruits of these years of ministry. Just as Saint Nicholas cared for those entrusted to him with tireless devotion, so too has Father Martin served the Byzantine Catholic communities of South Florida faithfully. While Our Lady of the Sign and Saint Basil are the furthest parishes from the heart of the Eparchy, during this weekend of celebration we were reminded that we are not isolated, but part of something greater: a living Church, bound together in faith, tradition, and mutual love.

The parishes of Our Lady of the Sign - Coconut Creek, and Saint Basil the



When a bishop visits a local parish, it is far more than a ceremonial occasion. When our bishop stands among us, we encounter the fullness of the Church's unity, a reminder that we are not isolated believers but integral members of the Body of Christ that spans across time and space.

How fitting that Bishop Kurt's visit coincided with the feast of Saint Nicholas! Like the great saint, Bishop Kurt came as a bearer of God's mercy, a teacher of truth, and a defender of the faith. Saint



Great - Miami, are served by Pastor Reverend Martin Vavrak, Father Deacon Michael Opalka, and Parish Manager and Cantor Fred Wilson.



**MARCH FOR LIFE**

2026 ANNUAL

# PRAYER VIGIL FOR LIFE

*Come together as we pray and make a stand for life!*

**BYZANTINE CATHOLIC SERVICES  
AT THE BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE  
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
WASHIGTON, DC**

<p><b>JANUARY 22</b></p> <p><b>Opening Mass for the Prayer Vigil for Life</b> Great Upper Church 5:00 PM</p> <p><b>Holy Hour for Life</b> Crypt Church 7:00 PM</p> <p><b>Byzantine Catholic Compline Prayer</b> Crypt Church 8:00 PM</p>	<p><b>JANUARY 23</b></p> <p><b>Byzantine Catholic Divine Liturgy for Life</b> Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Chapel of Our Lady of Protection lower level of the Basilica 9:15 AM</p> <p><i>Liturgies celebrated by Bishop Kurt Burnette</i></p>
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## A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP KURT ON THE NATIONAL MARCH FOR LIFE



My dear friends and fellow Christians, in the 1930's, the people of Germany, the best educated population in the history of the world, started down a path into the "Valley of Death". Their dark journey began when Adolf Hitler decriminalized abortion in 1934. Within a few years, he authorized the killing of the sick and old under the name "Mercy Death" or "Gnadentod". The media and university professors were persuasive allies in this unholy war on life. By 1945, all the disabled veterans and the hospitalized mentally ill were killed by doctors and nurses. As the American army came through, they were liberating hospitals as the medical professionals were killing as many patients as possible. It was the prelude to racial genocide for jews, gypsies, and slavs. Within a few years, the world had its eyes opened to the cult of death that engulfed that proud civilized nation. Here in the United States, we made our first big step down that same road when the rich country club lawyers on the Supreme Court told everyone that abortion is part of our US Constitution. Satan has moved more cautiously in our country, but he has made great progress in the past few years. California, New York, and New Jersey have all legalized the killing of the sick and elderly with bills signed into law by governors with Catholic educations. Only the Orthodox Jews tried to stop this horror in New Jersey, and the Catholic governor and the legal establishment rolled over them without a glimmer of conscience. With the Supreme Court decision returning abortion law to the states, the March for Life doesn't seem as important as it used to be, but it is still a life or death struggle. Each state now has its own March for Life, and I encourage everyone to support these efforts, at least by prayer and fasting. The abortion industry is a multibillion dollar cash industry. Together with many of our wealthiest citizens, they promote the cult of death relentlessly. Please consider attending the March of Life in Washington DC, or in your state capital.

The lives you save may be your own grandchildren or great grandchildren. If you can't attend a March, at least pray and fast.



# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

## ACCOUNTING FOR THE PRODIGAL SON

Most of us could probably retell the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). People who faithfully attend Sunday Liturgy hear a homily on this parable once a year. Nearly all of those homilies will focus on God's willingness to forgive us. The rare exception may have seized on the elder brother's bad attitude or driven home the point that sinful pleasures do not satisfy. But, like many of Jesus' teachings, this parable deals with wealth. How might a very attentive accountant understand the story of the Prodigal Son? Let's crunch the numbers.

The parable begins with the younger son demanding his share of his father's estate. Note in passing that this shocking request treats the father as if he were dead, but that's a topic for another time. The father agrees and divides the estate. According to Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 21:17), the firstborn son is entitled to a double portion. Let's imagine an estate worth 6 million (shekels, dollars, bitcoin, whatever) and, once again, let's leave aside the fact that most of the estate would have been in real estate, crops, and livestock that would need to be sold off. The Prodigal left home with 2 million.

The father and elder brother would be left to live on a smaller property now worth 4 million. And, since the father is not yet dead, both of them would derive benefit from the remaining assets. Likely the estate would actually contin-

ue to decrease in value, having to support two adults with one fewer worker, reduced real estate and livestock, and less cash to invest. To keep things simple, let's presume they manage to break even.

The Prodigal squanders his 2 million, repents, and returns home. His father welcomes him with a ring, sandals, a robe, and a party. Let's imagine that the robe is Gucci, the sandals are Prada, the ring has a diamond the size of your nose, and the party takes place at an expensive New Jersey wedding palace with an orchestra of 20 union musicians, for a total cost of 700,000.

The estate is now worth 3,300,000.00, and the Prodigal is home for good. Presuming once again no loss or gain, when the father finally dies, the estate will be divided according to the same law for the second time. The elder brother will receive 2,200,000.00; the repentant Prodigal will receive 1,100,000.00.

If the Prodigal had never rebelled, repented, and returned, at the father's eventual death the elder brother would have inherited 4 million and the younger his 2 million. As it stands, between what he squandered, what his welcome cost, and his final share of the diminished estate, the younger brother will have spent or received a total of 3,800,000.00. In the end, the elder brother will be left with only 2,200,000.00 instead of 4 million.

At this point we might be tempted to cry foul. It's not fair for the younger brother to get away with having his cake and eating it too. Any priest can tell you how often funerals are poisoned by siblings fighting bitterly over inheritances far smaller than this! Or, as one lifelong faithful Byzantine Catholic once told me, "You shouldn't read that Gospel in Church. It just encourages young people to be irresponsible." He had a point. If Jesus' parable were actually about the material goods, it would be hard to justify the way it ends.

But what if, instead of shekels, sheep, and real estate, the "estate" was some limitless good, something that could not be depleted, something that came from an inexhaustible source? The Bible knows about such gifts: the water from the rock and the manna that kept Israel alive for forty years in the desert; the bread that Jesus multiplied to feed four or five thousand men, not counting women and children. What if someone actually did die so that we could enjoy an inheritance? What if the parable is really about God's forgiveness, mercy, and compassion? God is prodigally "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4; 1 Peter 1:3). What if the estate is the Kingdom of Heaven which "has no end" (Luke 1:33)? The Kingdom of Heaven is called our 'inheritance' more than thirty times in the New Testament. And what if the Forgiving Father is eternal and never dies at all? Salvation is not a zero-sum game.

If that's the case, the elder brother has no reason to complain. The righteous (or those who think they are; Matthew 9:13; Luke 18:9) lose nothing (Matthew 21: 1-16) if God chooses to forgive repentant sinners again and again (Luke 15:7). **ECL**



Icon of the Prodigal Son



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## PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

### “PUT ON A HAPPY FACE!”

*“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:16-18)*

It goes without saying that the past two-plus years have been arduous, perhaps even impossible at times. While yes, we might feel drained physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, the Great Fast is upon us nonetheless, and rather EARLY may I add! This year, maybe more so than others, will perhaps pose a specific challenge in that so many of us will be tired in so many ways from just coming off the “Christmas Season.” While many have “returned to normal”

– work, school, sports, etc. – there are also many who struggle to find meaning and normalcy in the ups and downs of the age.

In this seemingly “holiday-weary” state, it may be very easy, even inviting, to throw up our hands and simply give up on the Fast by reducing our participation to the bare minimum, or perhaps even less. While this temptation may exist and may be great, rest assured that our Lord is giving a wonderful opportunity!

As we read in Matthew 6 above, when we fast we are called to do so with joy, with happiness, with a face gleaming with oil – this is our challenge!

With increased fasting and increased prayer comes an increased sense of the presence of Christ within us. This is

not simply “putting on a happy face” to trick others into thinking that “nothing’s wrong.” No. This is the joy of the Resurrection, the joy of Christ! The Fast challenges us to put aside certain things of this world in order for us to search our souls, to search for the light of Christ deep within us, that it may be brought to the forefront of our lives.

When we fast, we are called to do so with joy because we know where the journey ends. We fast in order to prepare ourselves for Holy Week, to walk alongside our Lord as He walks to His life-giving death. An intensified Holy Week then prepares us for Pascha – the feast of feasts, the joy of the Resurrection!

If you are tired and weary, do not be dismayed. Do not look at the quickly approaching Great Fast as just one more

thing to endure. View it for what it truly is: a search for unending joy. This fasting season, we must certainly heed the advice of Christ and put on a happy face in the most positive sense possible, because now – perhaps more than ever – this world could surely use the light and joy of the Resurrection! This joy is the true treasure of fasting, and we mustn’t forget to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:20-21). **ECL**

# ICONOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

## Thursdays Evenings In The Great Fast (Lent) 2026 Woodland Park, NJ



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, February 19, 26, March 5, 12, 19 and 26 from 6 pm to 10 pm. We will paint the icon of “DO NOT WEEP FOR ME, O MOTHER” also known as Pieta (detail). The cost of the workshop is \$499 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 Friday, February 6, 2026. Find the registration online at [www.stmichaelsarchangel.org](http://www.stmichaelsarchangel.org) For more information, please email Fr. Marek at [marekvisnovsky@yahoo.com](mailto: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.



# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## THE EMPTY SPACE

One of the more famous and recognizable icons among Catholics and other Christians in both the East and West is Andre Rublev's *Trinity* – or, more properly, *The Hospitality of Abraham*. The icon illustrates the moment when three men (represented as angels) visit Abraham and Sarah, delivering the message that the long-barren Sarah will conceive and bear a son. The story is recounted in Genesis 18 and is worth reading, especially as part of your prayer time before the icon. If you dive into the story of Abram being called by God (and going through a name change to become Abraham), and follow his story to the end, you'll find a complicated, faithful, and imperfect man (see Genesis 11-25) who was, nonetheless, called by God to be "the father of many nations." That's often how it is with the Lord; He chooses imperfect, sometimes even disobedient people, and accomplishes His great work through them – and very often, in spite of them.

But, back to the icon. Replicas of Rublev's icon, often interpreted somewhat differently at the hands of various iconographers, should be familiar to Byzantine Catholics since it is found somewhere in every church. The icon depicts the Holy Trinity as angels sitting around a table, with the Father on the left, the Son in the center, and the Holy Spirit beside Him. There is much symbolism in the icon, from the position of each Holy Person around the table, to the colors of their garments, and their place in the story of meeting Abraham and Sarah. Lately, I have been praying with the icon and my eye continues to be drawn toward that space in the center of the table. The common interpretation of that space is that it represents God's invitation to us to enter into the communion of Persons – into His very life. God is making space for



*The Hospitality of Abraham by Andrei Rublev*

us, and I think that's an excellent starting point for contemplation.

Next time you're in church, or better yet if you have the icon in your home or can bring it up on your phone or computer, set aside some dedicated time to gaze on it. Begin by taking it all in, the colors, the figures, the story that inspired the image. Try not to rush through it but spend time focusing on as many details as you can. When you're ready, shift your gaze to that middle space in the center of the table, beneath the chalice and between the figures of the Father and the Spirit. Let that space

settle in without forcing thoughts or meaning. After a while, reflect on the invitation the Lord is extending to you, to be a partaker in His life, to sit with Him at this table. Imagine Him inviting you into that space, knowing that it was prepared especially for you. What will you say? Will you enter that space with humility and joy, or stand back in fear and trepidation? Spend some time in that space, contemplating what the invitation to be with God means for you.

Here is where the Lord may be asking you to go deeper in your contemplation, inviting you to engage your imagi-

nation in prayer through the Spirit's inspiration. What else might that empty space mean for you? Ask the Holy Spirit to draw you into it and reveal its meaning. Perhaps you see in that space an emptiness in your life. It could be grief over a loss, recent or in the past. It could represent the emptiness of a promise made but not kept. This space might hold the emptiness of hopes and dreams that have gone unfulfilled, or maybe you've made it the "hiding place" for your sins, the ones you can't shake, and those you stubbornly hold onto. Search your heart to discover where those empty spaces lie within you, and once you've identified them invite God in. If the thought of this exercise seems awkward and uncomfortable, bring that to Him, too. Just try to imagine gathering up all your cares and anxiety, your fears, your deepest desires, and yes, your sins. Place them in that space, the empty space reserved just for you.

Stay in this place in your imagination for a little while longer. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are there, gathered around the table, caught up in their love for each other, while at the same time absolutely open to receive you and to pour themselves out to you. Stay for as long as you need and come back to this place – this Holy Table – when you're tired, worn out, or don't know where to go or what to do next. Bring your weaknesses, your sins, whatever burdens you carry. Bring yourself, bring everything – and place it there in that empty space at the feet of the Trinity. Fill that space completely with everything you are carrying, fill it until there is no more room in it – and that is when the miracle will happen. Because no matter what you bring to it, even if it overflows with your burdens and cares, the Lord will always make a space for you. **ECL**

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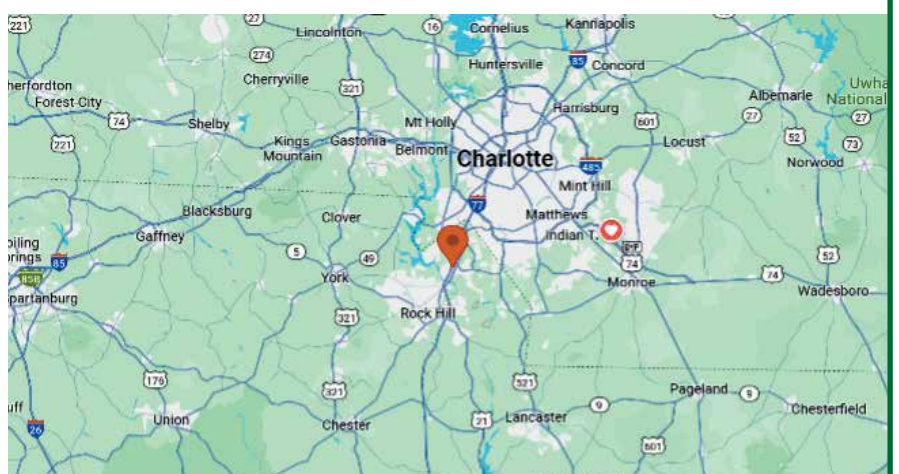
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# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

In his first letter, St. Peter wrote to all Christians, “you are “a chosen race, [and] a royal priesthood. (1 Peter 2:9)” All of us together, both lay and ordained, share in one priesthood, though in different ways. The word priest has now come to mean one thing: a priest is a mediator, one who stands in the middle between two realities. The priest mediates God to his fellow mortals, and their humanity and its needs to God. In reality, there is only one priest, as the Letter to the Hebrews teaches. “since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:14-15)” In the New Testament, no individual Christian is called “priest,” except our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Priesthood, then must be understood properly. Christ alone can be priest because he alone is both God and human. He alone is of both natures by essence, being one person, the Son and Word of God who took human nature in the womb of Mary. The Ambon Prayer of Christmas expresses this in simple words, “O Christ our God, from before all ages, you shone forth from the eternal Father and were not liable to suffering. Yet, in these our days, you became flesh and were born from a holy virgin.” Our Lord alone can be the perfect mediator, since, as God, he perfects the human nature, and, as a man, unites

us with God. He is the High Priest, as Hebrews once again proclaims, “Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)” St. Peter, therefore, does not call us priests, but says that we are “priestly.” We are “priestly” not because we are mediators ourselves, but because we share in Jesus’ mediation. We are not priests by essence, but because Jesus has adopted us into his priesthood. St. Paul says this very clearly, “For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)”

Of course, it is well-known that the Christian Church as a whole forms a common and universal priesthood. I began this article with 1 Peter 2,9, “You are a royal priesthood.” This is recognized in certain liturgical cases, for example, lay persons have the right to baptize and to distribute Communion. As Father Aidan Kavanagh put it, “Every presbyter and bishop is a sacerdotal (priestly, “sacerdos” is the Latin word for priest) person, but not every sacerdotal person in the Church is a presbyter or bishop.” On a deeper level, all the liturgical mysteries are celebrated by the Church, which is the

body of Christ. John Chrysostom said, “The eucharistic prayer is common; the priest does not give thanks alone, but the people with him.” (On 2 Corinthians 18,3) Christ is the true High Priest, and certainly he did not die just for the bishops and presbyters, but for all the faithful, who all share in the priesthood of Christ.

The Vatican II Council recognized this common priesthood, while making an essential distinction between it and the ministerial priesthood. (Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 10.) The imposition of hands confers a special ministry, where one devotes one’s whole life to service of God and the Church. These are the faithful people who preside over the community through a special gift of the Spirit given after baptism. Simeon of Thessalonica made the point that baptism confers all the charisms of the Spirit except orders. The universal tradition is that only the bishop or priest may celebrate the eucharist. This follows the principle that the one who presides over the church presides over the eucharist. In the beginning, only the bishop presided over the eucharist, but the bishop began to delegate priests to preside and to hear confessions. As the church grew larger, the bishop began to delegate more and more, until by the fourth century, this is the established role of the priest. Jerome for the West and John Chrysostom both witness that there is very little difference between what a bishop and a priest can

do liturgically, and only the bishop ordained and consecrated chrism.

We might ask, “why is this so.” It is because, above all, the eucharistic Liturgy is an action that is not possible by human powers alone. Jesus alone is the eternal High Priest, and we are able to offer the sacrifice only in union with him. Therefore, we call our service the Divine Liturgy, because it is done in the power of God. At the very beginning of the Liturgy, the deacon says privately to the priest, “It is time for the Lord to act,” because something divine is about to take place. This, then, is why we need the ordained priest. He is given the power of the Holy Spirit to pray as we ought. Only someone who has been given the charism (gift) of the Holy Spirit to pray the divine words can pronounce them in the name of the community. The people then make this prayer their own by sealing it with “Amen,” which is Hebrew for “may it be so.” The key is that the Holy Spirit guides our prayer. In speaking of martyrdom,, our Lord said, “do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say .... For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matthew 10:19-20)” St. Paul teaches about prayer, “the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought. (Romans 8:26)” Our Divine Liturgy is prayer uttered in the Spirit. **ECL**

## THE REWARD OF A PRIEST

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

At the end of the second prayer for the ordination to the presbyterate, there is an invocation (Greek, epiclesis) specifically for the man being ordained. The bishop prays, “In your great goodness, grant that he may receive the reward of good stewardship in his order, when he will meet the second coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, your only-begotten Son.” A petition of this kind ends all the sacramental ordinations. For the deacon, the bishop prays, “Grant that he, being free from all sin, may stand blamelessly before you and receive the unfailing reward of your promise,” and for the bishop, the petition is, “may he stand unashamed before your throne and receive the great reward which you have prepared for those who struggle for the preaching of your Gospel.” This is a recognition of our humanity, and of the fact that by being ordained and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, one does not cease to be a human being who depends on God for “all generous giving and every perfect gift” (James 1:17).

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in ordination, being enabled to serve among the people of God, is a kind of stewardship, taking care of those entrusted to his ministry. No one can do this by their own power, but only by the grace of God. It requires the gift of integrity, which is being honest to the truth, and of being open and humble for the kingdom of God to work in the human reality. As every baptized human person, the priest also must be willing to accept the will of God for his life and for the lives of the people. Therefore, we all pray daily more than once, “Our Father in heaven, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” This alone is integrity.

The priest, of course, is not a priest because of own merits, but because he shares in the priesthood of Christ. The Lord describes his own priesthood, “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.



Right: Icon of Jesus Christ, The Good Shepherd

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:10-11). The priest is a steward and shepherd of God’s grace in two ways: first, in the sacramental mysteries celebrated for the people, by enabling the presence of God and of his power among them. Second, as the shepherd guides his sheep, the priest must be a model of Christian life and a facilitator of God’s will in the community of faith.

Jesus knew that the image of “shepherd” as a description of the faith leaders of the people is found in the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah says, “Like a shepherd [the Lord God] feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, leading the ewes with care” (Isaiah 40:11). The authorities should imitate God, but Jesus also knows, as Isaiah said, they can go bad: “All the sentinels of Israel are blind (...) Shepherds who have no understanding; all have turned their own way, each one covetous for gain” (Isaiah 56:10-11). Jeremiah is even more graphic on how the shepherds (leaders) can fail: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of my pasture (...) Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your

evil deeds” (Jeremiah 23:1-2). That is why the prayer of ordination asks that the priest may be a good steward in his order, that he might imitate the good shepherd and not being judgment on himself.

We can ask at this point, “How can the priest fail?” The reality is that the priest must imitate Christ, since he shares in his priesthood. He must be willing to give his life for the people given to his care. At the very least, he must be aware that his position is not transactional. It is not for personal gain in return for a sacrifice. He is not a tyrant, but a servant. (This is true for all Christians to a degree.) Priests, however, are human and do fall to temptation. Some make the priesthood an office for their own glory. Some foster a personal cult for their own glory and gratification. Some steal from the funds that are given for their management. Finally, the Church today has been severely damaged by priests who have used their vocation to seduce even children for their pleasure. This has been a factor in why some people may lose trust in the Church. However, the Lord promised that his Church will always be there as the place of God’s presence. We must remain faithful and pray always for good priests to serve the people. In the same passage where Jeremiah prophesied that there

would be bad shepherds, he also recalled God’s promise, “I will raise up shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear or be terrified; none shall be missing” (Jeremiah 23:4).

A wise man once observed that men have basically four vocations: first, as stewards of the world in which we live, managing it to produce the goods that we may lead a good life; second, of leadership, so that we can organize human society in support of one another; third, as scientists, to unlock knowledge of the good gifts entrusted to us

by God; fourth, as priests, to bring God and his people together in a holy union. This must be done in family and fellowship. If we concentrate too much on the material world, we can lose sight of the spiritual reality that surrounds us. It is the noble task of the priest to have a vision for God’s people, and, so the Prayer of Ordination said by the bishop proclaims, “[Master], make this man worthy, whom you have been pleased for me to ordain, to receive the great grace of your Holy Spirit in a blameless life and unshaken faith, and to be a perfect servant pleasing you in every way.” **BCL**

## SAVE THE DATE

Wednesday, April 15, 2026, you are invited to a special event at our Cathedral Chapel in Woodland Park, starting at 2:00 PM. All the priests of the Eparchy will be present for historical lectures and prayers commemorating the birth of our Church, the Union of Uzhorod. Everyone is invited to this beautiful and educational event. Learn your history — take pride in your identity.

## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



### BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD

“I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.’” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Rev. 14:13, RSV).

Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) comments on this verse saying, “Blessed are those, who, when dying, are found dead to the affection of this world. By such as these, death is not feared, it is desired, it is joyfully embraced; for instead of separating them from all that they love, it then unites them to their Sovereign Good, Who is alone loved by them, and Who will make them blessed for evermore.”

He says for those who love God, “death is not feared, it is desired, it is joyfully embraced!”

The saints did not fear death; they welcomed it. They wished to die so they could be united with God. They grasped the joy of heaven: union with God, the presence of Jesus Christ, Our Lady, the saints, and our departed loved ones who died in the state of grace.

It’s regrettable that we sinners fear death. This fear may arise from weak faith in the heavenly joy promised to those who repent and believe, or from

our attachment to sin, which has no place in Paradise.

Saint Paul the Apostle (5-65) said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21, RSV). In other words, he means, “I’d rather die! I would rather be in heaven than here on earth, crushed by so many trials, hardships, and persecutions.”

Continuing this theme, Saint Paul goes on to say, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:23, RSV). Far better! Why do we fear death? Only in death shall we be united to God, only after death will we know God as He knows Himself, and love God as He loves Himself. To die is “far better” than to live!

Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP (1877-1964) writes, “To attain heaven is to reach our ultimate and supernatural goal, to see God as He sees Himself, to love Him as He loves Himself, to possess Him unfailingly forever.”

Saint Paul says, “we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord (...) and we would **rather** be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6, 8, RSV).

We would **rather** be away from the body, with Jesus Christ Our Lord in

Heavenly Glory, than remain in this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4, RSV), this “valley of tears” (Salve Regina), this life “short and full of trouble” (Job 14:1).

But in Heaven, God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) says, “death is precious as the end of labors, the consummation of victory, the gate of life.”

“O beautiful death, and who is he that does not long for you, seeing that you are the end of all work, the end of toil, and the beginning of eternal rest? May I die, O Lord, that I may see You,” says Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607) was told by his doctor to stop thinking about his death. The Cardinal replied, “And why? Do you think I fear it? I do not fear, but I love it.”

When Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) was dying, he began to sing and said: “I cannot do less than sing, seeing that within so short a time I am going to enjoy God.”

Alphonsus tells us of a Carmelite nun who, while dying at a young age, saw the other nuns cry and said to them, “Why do you weep? I am going to find my Jesus; if you love me, rejoice with me.”

“He who loves God ought to long and sigh for death, because death unites us eternally with God, and frees us from the danger of ever losing Him again. It is a sign that we love God but little, if we have no desire soon to go to see Him,” says Saint Alphonsus.

David says, “In thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11, RSV).

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!”

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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.



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

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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!

**CHARLESTON AREA OUTREACH INTEREST**

Are you a Byzantine/Eastern Rite Catholic that has relocated to the Charleston, SC 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](mailto:michael-meador@sbcglobal.net).

**BEST OF ITALY & SICILY PILGRIMAGE**  
**12 DAYS: APRIL 27 - MAY 8, 2026**

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**UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS**

- JANUARY, 2026**
- 1 The Circumcision of Our Lord, & Saint Basil the Great  
*Solemn Holyday/Chancery Closed*
  - 6 The Theophany of Our Lord, God, & Savior Jesus Christ  
*Holyday o Obligation/Chancery Closed*
  - 30 Thre Holy Hierarchs  
*Solemn Holyday*

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:

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