



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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## PREPARING TO REPENT

### Lenten Pastoral Message of Bishop Kurt

We take repentance seriously in our Church. Although the rest of society seems to have abandoned it, nothing could be farther from reality. The need to repair breaks in families, in friendships, and in society is deep in our human nature, even in our fallen nature. The modern “cancel culture” is based on the belief that certain people have offended the norms of society and cannot be readmitted to society until they repent. I just read Ronan Farrow’s book about the predatory Hollywood producer who was protected for years by his power and money. If you recall, many famous people denounced him in public even though he created their fame and wealth. Others didn’t denounce him loudly enough and were then shunned until they properly repented. Some were never admitted again into the ranks of the glitterati.

In our tradition, we recognize that “repent” is not the best translation for the Greek word that Jesus used when He began His public life, going from synagogue to synagogue where God’s law was studied, proclaiming “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” The word that Jesus used was “metanoieite”, which means “change your mind”. Indeed, Jesus is not asking simply that we feel bad about things in the past, He is asking us to change our mind, change our thoughts, change our purpose, and change our attitude.

In our Church, we prepare for our great Lent or great repentance with five preparatory Sundays, the Sunday of Zacchaeus, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Sunday of the Last Judgment, and the Sunday of Forgiveness. Perhaps by plan, God also began to prepare us in Holy Scripture with five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The story of Zacchaeus is a fitting preparation for the saving works of Jesus in

Jerusalem. Jesus is on His way to the Holy City of Jerusalem to meet his end. I call it His “end” because He himself uses that word which also means “purpose” or “destiny”. Located deep in the great rift, Jericho is 846 feet below sea level, the lowest city on earth in the vast plain that includes the Dead Sea. Jericho is a good place to begin the journey up from the depths of our history of death and sin, up the steep trail, and ending on Mount Calvary where we are finally liberated from the sins of history and our own sins—a journey from slavery to freedom, from death to life. Each of us must travel the same route with our Lord, and each year we commemorate His journey in our annual calendar.

Zacchaeus was the somewhat comical chief tax collector, though not funny to his fellow residents of Jericho. The Jews saw him as a collaborator. When foreign invaders have been expelled in the past century, we have seen many times that serious and bloody retribution taken on collaborators. Yet even Zacchaeus wanted to see this famous preacher, healer, exorcist, and miracle worker, whom many believed to be the heir to the throne of David. If Jesus did liberate them from the Romans, the tax collector might be out of work or worse. Because he was short, he climbed a sycamore tree to see over the crowd, and heard those sweet words of Jesus, “Hurry! Get down from that tree. I mean to eat at your house today.” How much we all long to hear those words from the lips of Our Lord. We hear from the murmuring of the crowd, that they did not approve. It is the same in our journey. How many times have other people told you that you are on the wrong path, or that you are not worthy to have Jesus eat at your house? How many times have you heard words in your own head saying the same thing to yourself? Yet Our Lord looks over the crowd and says to you, “Hurry! I mean to eat at your house today.”

The first book of the Bible is called Genesis which means “Beginnings” or “Sources”, because we use the Greek names in our Church. In Hebrew, the name is Bereishit, which is the phrase “in the beginning”. The Jews name their books after the first words in a book, and bereishit is the first word of the book. The Book of Genesis is a good

place to start our repentance or metanoia. The Book of Genesis begins with the overview of all creation and all the cosmos, and tells us that everything God made is good, and that we are made in His image and likeness—male and female. What a great beginning, and what great motivation to repent! It goes on to outline where we went wrong, and the history of sin and degradation of the children of Adam and Eve, the degradation of themselves and the degradation of others. In our Church,

age and likeness, for that is indeed the reason He gives to Noah for outlawing murder.

Genesis begins with the creation of the cosmos, the creation of men and women, and the early history of our sins and salvation through the Egyptian captivity. It ends with the great repentance of Joseph when he forgives his brothers for the horrible crime of selling him to the merchants as a slave. Joseph teaches us a valuable lesson about forgive-



Icon of the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee

we read the entire book of Genesis during Lent as we make our own journey with repentance with our Lord. Where the word “repent” or “metanoia” appears in the Book of Genesis is when God Himself says He “regrets” making mankind. He then goes on to wash the world free of sinful men, starting over with Noah and his family, and giving us the first of His laws—do not murder. He did not regret making us in His im-

ness when he says to his brothers, “You intended evil, but God intended good.”

The Second Sunday is the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. The Second Book of the Torah is Exodus. This parable is one of the most thought provoking in the Gospels. It is thought provoking because it seems to give the wrong lesson at first. After all, what did the Pharisee ...continued on page 2

do wrong? He didn't commit adultery, he didn't break God's laws, and he thanked God for it. What did he do wrong? There is a clue in the introduction. Unfortunately, we often read scripture out of context in our Church. The introduction to the parable says clearly, "And He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Jesus has a particular audience in mind. If you trust in yourself instead of God, and also look down other people when they sin, then this parable is for you. St. Basil says that the Pharisee did double damage to himself by first judging himself before God, then condemning another. "Be on your guard, therefore! Bear in mind this example of severe loss sustained through arrogance. The one guilty of arrogance suffered the loss of his justice and forfeited his reward by his bold self-reliance. He was judged inferior to a sinner because in his self-exaltation. He did not await the judgment of God but pronounced it himself. Never place yourself above anyone, not even great sinners. Humility often saves a sinner who has committed many terrible transgressions." Sometimes when I hear someone pronounce judgment on others I feel like saying, "So Jesus doesn't have to show up for the Last Judgment. You already did His job for Him."

The Book of Exodus tells the story of the liberation from slavery of the Chosen People. "Exodus" means a "journey out" in Greek. The Jews call the book *Shemot*, which means "names". Recall they call a Book by its first word or words. The first verse says, "These are the names of the sons of Israel." In fact, *Shemot* is the fourth word in the first verse. No book of the Bible has a more obvious connection to repentance than the Book of Exodus. Egypt is the land of luxury and wealth and a mixing pot of nations and pagan religion. Even the mandate by the Pharaoh to kill all the first born of the foreigners is echoed today in the obsession of our richest nations with abortion and the culture of death. No doubt, the pagan religion of the Egyptians was seductive in its rich art, ceremonies, and promises of similar luxury in the afterlife. The intelligent Hebrews might have avoided slavery if they had assimilated to their pagan overlords. Perhaps deep down, the Hebrews knew there was something wrong with these gods who promised riches and pleasure in the next life to the same people who had riches and pleasure in this life on the backs of foreigners and poor people.

Like the Publican and the Pharisee, Exodus has two main characters: the self righteous and respectable Egypt contrasted with poor Israel. Israel was duped into moving to Egypt with promises of security, and eventually found himself the slave to wealthy Egypt. No nation in history bragged more shamelessly about its own glory than Egypt. As a matter of fact, one of the great battles in all of history was between Egypt and the Hittites, the only two superpowers in the region. The Hittites defeated the Egyptians decisively and set the terms of surrender and future relations. However, Rame-

ses II, the Pharaoh, created stunning artistic renderings of his "victory". His propaganda was so well executed that historians believed Rameses won the battle until the twentieth century when a German linguist figured out how to read the Hittite libraries. Imagine bragging so successfully about yourself that the world is fooled for over three thousand years! The bragging self righteous Pharisee has nothing on Rameses. Like the Publican, enslaved Israel cries out

we use these miraculous hands and feet for violence and warfare. The human mouth can form the sounds of the hundreds of disparate languages on earth, and sing like an angel to praise God, but we use the mouth to lie for power and prestige and to hurt our friends and neighbors. The lovely eye is the jewel of the body. We can use it to read the word of God and great literature and to take in the unlimited beauty of God's creation. Yet we use it as a channel to



*Icon of the Final Judgement*

to heaven for mercy. Behold, God hears the cries for mercy of the enslaved Chosen People, and frees them from the all powerful armies of Egypt.

Our third Sunday is for the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Many people have no idea what "prodigal" means. Prodigal means wasteful. It comes from a Latin verb meaning consume or squander. It can also mean extravagant. Nowadays, it is even used to mean the extravagance with which God showers blessings on us. The younger son isn't called prodigal because he repented. He was called prodigal for squandering his inheritance. As we climb the mountain from Jericho to Jerusalem, we remember how we and the rest of the human race squandered the treasures that we were given at our creation. Look at our beautiful bodies. Is there anything more amazing than the hand? If you ever learned a musical instrument, or watched someone else play well, isn't it astonishing that these little complexes of bone, muscle, and ligaments can do the things they do on a violin, a guitar, or a keyboard. They caress divine sounds out of a cold dead instrument. Our feet are such marvels. No engineer can make something that takes the pressures and forces of the human foot for over a hundred years. And yet

bring every kind of temptation into our souls, greed, acquisitiveness, envy, and judgment to name a few. We squander our bodies, our talents, and our time on things that are taking us away from God, not closer to God.

Is there any hope for us prodigal sinners? It tells us in the story, that the son came to his senses, or more literally, came to himself. He journeys back to his father's house as we are journeying up the mountain trail from Jericho to Jerusalem. We make up speeches along the way hoping to get back on our father's good side with melodramatic professions of humility. Yet, who is at the top of the mountain? The Father comes running out to meet us! He doesn't listen to our offers to be less than we are, but dresses us beautifully and prepares his best feast for us.

The third book of the Torah is the Book of Leviticus. You can probably figure out that this book is the book of the Levis, the Hebrew priests. And so it is called Greek. In Hebrew it is called "Wayiqra", which means "He called". The first sentence is "He (the Lord) called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting." There isn't much of a plot to this book, compared to the other four. The book is mostly lists of

laws for society, laws for individuals and laws for the priests. It contains many commands and many prohibitions, and sometimes the consequences that society is to inflict on violators of the law. Many of the laws are strange to us, such as not planting two different crops in the same field or not blending two materials in one fabric. For many of these regulations we can only speculate on the purpose, or sometimes even the exact meaning. As Christians we are taught that we are "liberated" from the law, but that does not mean that we have no law at all. The Christian teachers told us we are liberated from the burden of the Law of Moses so that we have the time and energy to practice the Law of Love. How many Christians actually calculate how much time they have saved and then use it for acts of charity? If we use our new found freedom for self indulgence we would be better off going back to the time consuming laws of the ancient Hebrews. At least we wouldn't be squandering our inheritance.

In the middle of these times of repentance, when the initial enthusiasm is waning, and the exciting finish is still in the distance, it is a good time for reflection. There are many catalogues of character flaws we can study and take a look in the mirror. Like the Prodigal Son, we may come to our senses, or come to ourselves.

If there has been no change of heart at this point in our pre-Lenten journey, we have plenty of motivation on this fourth Sunday, the Sunday of the Last Judgment. The entire twenty fifth chapter of Matthew is devoted to our end. The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins warns of a frightening destiny for those who put off preparation until it is too late. Many of us have seen cases of someone who died in sin, not just someone suffering the later consequences of bad choices, but someone whose last moments are spent executing a fearful sin. My column last month was about the horrible choice to end your own life with homicide, and the wicked cheerleaders in society who smile and croon as people destroy their immortal souls. Worse than the foolish maidens in the parable, they were not just asleep, but actually destroyed their own lamps when the bridegroom arrived. What a sad society we have created! How accurate when Jesus said, "Weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children's children. For if such things are done in the green, what will be done in the dry?"

The second parable in this chapter is similarly about preparing for the coming of the Great King. In this parable, we are given different gifts to use for God. When He returns, what will find? Did we use our gifts for His glory, or did we bury them in the ground.

The third speech of Our Lord in this chapter is not a parable which is a tale, but a frightening description of the future. It is the description of the Last Judgment. Each of us will stand before the great Judge, Jesus Christ Himself. The scripture tell us He is not without compassion because He was like us in

all things but sin. That also means we can't fool Him with excuses. The description of the Last Judgment is similar to a final exam in school—it has several questions and each question has a correct answer and an incorrect answer. Really, the description of the Last Judgment is quite comforting when we consider that Jesus already told us the correct answers for the exam: did you feed the hungry, did you give drink to the thirsty, did you welcome the stranger, did you clothe the naked, did you visit the sick, did you visit the imprisoned? In order to pass this test, you must answer “yes” to each question. What happens if you get four out of six correct? It's better not to find out. It's better to get six out of six.

The fourth book in the Torah is Numbers. It is called “Numbers” in Greek because it begins and ends with a census. In Hebrew it is called “Bamidbar” which means “in the wilderness”. The first words in Hebrew are “and God spoke to Moses in the wilderness”. So Bamidbar is actually the fifth word in the Hebrew text. The book begins with a census when the Chosen People prepared to leave Mount Sinai and make their journey to the Promised Land. Most of the book is most of the forty years in the desert. At the end, there is a second census as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. I can't think of a better book to describe our own journey uphill from Jericho to Jerusalem. We should begin the journey with a census of our own life and soul, and end the journey with a reexamination. In a sermon many years ago, I described the practice of making a list of grudges, real and imaginary injuries, from ones own life in order see clearly ones own character flaws. It is a practice used in twelve step programs. A parishioner did exactly that at the beginning of Lent and had a list of her own faults to work on during Lent, as well as perhaps a few people to forgive whom she had not yet forgiven. The journey through the Sinai Desert and through the Book of Numbers is similar to the description of the Last Judgment. Most of the adults who began the journey at Mount Sinai did not make it to the Promised Land. Many people at the Last Judgment will not be on the right hand of the judge, but on the left hand with the goats.

After the long and complex readings of the first four Sundays, the last pre-Lenten Sunday is short and simple: forgive each other and God will forgive you. One of the most black and white things that Jesus ever said was, “If you forgive each other, your Heavenly Father will forgive you. If you refuse to forgive each other, your Heavenly Father will neither forgive you.” Matthew 6:14. Much like the Last Judgment, this teaching is the most comforting or the



Icon of the Parable of the Prodigal Son

most disturbing in the Gospel depending on how we choose to apply it. If we work on forgiveness as a lifelong project, day by day, month by month, year by year, then there is no more comforting verse. On the other hand, anyone who makes a decision to reject forgiveness will also reject the mercy of God.

The last book in the Torah, is called Deuteronomy in our tradition from the Greek meaning “Second Law”. In Hebrew it is called “Devarim”, which means “Words”. The Book begins, “These are the words that Moses spoke

to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan.” Devarim is actually the third word in Hebrew, or second if you look at it as “ha-devarim” which means “the words”. Most ancient writing didn't put spaces between words at all, so we could argue all day about how many words there were. Modern Thai has no spaces also, which is quite confusing to foreigners. Deuteronomy is called “Second Law” because it contains a recap of the laws including the ten com-

mandments that were revealed in Exodus on Mount Sinai. Most of the book is three speeches by Moses on the plains of Moab getting ready to enter the Promised Land. The first speech recounts their history of the forty years in the desert. The second speech emphasizes the requirement to follow God's laws and to stay close to the heart of God if they are to succeed in the Promised Land. The third speech, one of comfort for them and us, tells the people that even if they fail to live up to God's requests, they can still

return to Him with repentance. As we enter into the Promised Land of Lent, we take to heart these speeches of Moses. Recall, the Promised Land was not taken when they crossed the Jordan. There were many years of battle with enemies before the great kings, David and Solomon, held the Promised Land in security.

*Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak,  
and let the earth hear the words of  
my mouth.*

*May my teaching drop as the rain,  
my speech distill as the dew,*

*like gentle rain upon the tender grass,  
and like showers upon the herb. ...*

*He found him in a desert land,  
and in the howling waste of the  
wilderness;*

*He encircled him, He cared for him,  
He kept him as the apple of his eye.*

*Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,  
that flutters over its young,*

*spreading out its wings, catching them,  
bearing them on its pinions,*

*the Lord alone guided him,  
no foreign god was with him ....*

*See now that I, even I, am He,  
and there is no god beside me;*

*I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver  
out of my hand. ...*

*Rejoice with Him, O heavens;  
bow down to Him, all gods ....*

*He repays those who hate Him  
and cleanses His people's land.”*

+Kurt Bennette

## DIRECTIVES FOR THE GREAT FAST

From the Office of the Bishop



### FASTING REGULATIONS

†Our Tradition is to abstain from meat after Meatfare Sunday and from dairy products after Cheesefare Sunday until Easter. *The following are the minimum requirements:*

†All who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.

†All adults who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products on the first day of Lent, Monday, February 16, and on Great and Holy Friday, April 3.

#### 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.

# BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC TO COMMEMORATE THE 380TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNION OF UZHHOROD APRIL 15 | ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL, WOODLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY

The Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic will solemnly commemorate the 380th Anniversary of the Union of Uzhhorod with a special ecclesial and educational celebration on April 15, at St. Michael's Chapel in Woodland Park, New Jersey. This significant anniversary recalls a foundational moment in the life of the Byzantine Catholic Church and honors the faith, courage, and historical consciousness of those who shaped its enduring legacy.

The Union of Uzhhorod, proclaimed on April 24, 1646, marked a decisive step in the history of the Byzantine rite communities of Eastern Europe. On that day, sixty-three priests of the Byzantine tradition formally entered into full communion with the Catholic Church while preserving their Eastern liturgical, spiritual, and theological heritage. This act of union became the cornerstone for the future development of the Byzantine Catholic Churches in present-day Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and throughout the diaspora, including North America.

The Union of Uzhhorod emerged during a period of political tension, religious division, and cultural transformation, offering a path that safeguarded the Byzantine Christian identity while affirming communion with the See of Rome. Over time, this union matured and expanded, shaping generations of clergy and faithful whose spiritual descendants now form vibrant Byzantine Catholic communities around the world.

The Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic recognizes this anniversary as an opportunity not only to remember the past, but also to deepen appreciation for the spiritual inheritance that continues to guide the Church today. In doing so, the Eparchy affirms the conviction that a people who cherish and understand their history are better prepared to live their faith with integrity, hope, and responsibility in the present.

The April 15 commemoration will consist of three integral parts, each reflecting a dimension of Byzantine Catholic life:

### Hierarchical Divine Liturgy

The celebration will begin with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, the highest and most solemn expression of prayer in the Byzantine tradition. This liturgy will offer thanksgiving for the witness of the priests and faithful who embraced the Union of Uzhhorod.

### Conference: Historical and Theological Reflection

Following the Divine Liturgy, a conference will explore the historical, theological, and cultural dimensions of the Union of Uzhhorod, offering participants a deeper understanding of its lasting significance for the Byzantine Catholic Church.

### Dinner and Fellowship

The celebration will conclude with dinner and fellowship, offering participants an opportunity to gather in community, share reflections, and strengthen bonds rooted in a common heritage. The cost for dinner is **\$20 per person**.

Attendance at the **Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and conference is free of charge**; however, **advance RSVP is required for all attendees due to space limitations**. The \$20 fee applies only to those who plan to attend the dinner.

The commemoration of the 380th Anniversary of the Union of Uzhhorod is open to clergy, faithful, scholars, and all who are interested in the history and mission of the Byzantine Catholic Church. It stands as an invitation to remember, to give thanks, and to draw inspiration from the lived faith of those who came before us—whose courage and vision continue to shape the Church today.

For more information, please contact **Fr. Yuriy Oros** at (609) 394-5004 or via email at [uzhhorod380@gmail.com](mailto:uzhhorod380@gmail.com).

Manuscript of signatures from Union of Uzhhorod

**UNION OF UZHHOROD**  
380 YEARS  
1646 2026

**EPARCHY OF PASSAIC**  
**HEIRARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY & CELEBRATION CONFERENCE**  
**APRIL 15, 2026 | 2:00 P.M.**  
ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL, WOODLAND PARK, NJ

2:00 PM – HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY  
3:30 PM – BREAK  
4:00 PM – PRESENTATION  
Fr. Yuriy Oros, S.E.O., Dr.  
4:30 PM – Q&A  
4:45 PM – BREAK  
5:00 PM – PRESENTATION  
Fr. Andrew Summerson, S.Th.D.  
5:30 PM – Q&A  
6:00 PM – DINNER

**Register Now: Scan QR Code**  
Space is limited

Liturgy & Conference: Free  
Conference Dinner: \$20  
Contact: [uzhhorod380@gmail.com](mailto:uzhhorod380@gmail.com)

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

# PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

## IN PEEKSKILL...

*Holiday Events in Peekskill*

On the feast of the Theophany, the faithful of Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church celebrated the Great Sanctification of Water on the banks of the Hudson River. Joining Father Jack Custer and parishioners were local clergy, Pastor Asayo Okumura Thomas, Reverend Jean Quatorze, faithful from Passaic and Mahwah, and local residents. Photos by Meghan Merschen.

On January 10, the parish hosted a group of Belarusian Americans under the direction of Lena Ryzy, who shared their caroling tradition called *ščiadrouki*. Singing and socializing continued as the performers, parishioners and guests enjoyed refreshments provided by the parishioners. Father Jack Custer is Parochial Administrator.



## IN PITTSTON...

*Blessing the Susquehanna River*

The faithful of our Byzantine Catholic Churches of Saint Michael the Archangel, Pittston and Saint Nicholas of Myra, Swoyersville, gathered at Riverfront Park in Pittston on Sunday, January 11 for a traditional blessing of the Susquehanna River. This was the first time a blessing was held at this section of the river, and the first time ever in the Greater Pittston area. The park is a short distance from Saint Michael Church. Those present for the service braved the cold sustained winds with an overcast sky. Fifteen minutes before the blessing, a strong white-out snow squall converged on the region. Hope appeared to be lost, but not for long as the skies opened, a very bright sun appeared at the start of the 3 o'clock hour, with everyone grateful the service could



begin. Prayers were led by Father Andrii Dumnych, and Deacon Lawrence Worlinsky, with liturgical assistants from both parishes contributing. Father Andrii Dumnych is Parochial Vicar of both parishes and Deacon Lawrence Worlinsky is Temporal Administrator.

## IN ROSWELL...

*Blessing the Chattahoochee River*

After the Divine Liturgy on January 6, the clergy and faithful of Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic church celebrated the Great Blessing of Water for the Chattahoochee River, only 4 miles away from the parish. Father Lewis Rabayda is Parochial Administrator of Epiphany parish, assisted by Deacon James Smith and Deacon John Reed.



Deacon Boboige, Father Tim Kennedy, Father Jerome Wolbert OFM, Bishop Kurt, Father John Basarab, and Father Vasyl Symyon

## IN WASHINGTON D.C....

*2026 National March for Life*

We had a great turnout for Byzantine Catholic Compline on January 22 and Divine Liturgy on January 23 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC during the National Prayer Vigil for Life. Bishop Kurt celebrated both services. Father John Basarab, being syncellus, is the Administrator of our Chapel at the Basilica, and Father Tim Kennedy is the Eparchial Pro-Life Director.

# CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY IN BELTSVILLE...

Saint Gregory of Nyssa parish in Beltsville, MD celebrated the feast of Saint Nicholas on December 14th with a Nativity play, potluck lunch, and a visit from Saint Nicholas himself! Our ECF students acted out the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, the Nativity of our Lord and the Adoration of the Shepherds, and the Adoration of the Magi while the scripture verses were read. After each scene, they led our parish family in the singing of some of our most beloved Christmas hymns: Joyful News, Jesus Came from Heaven, and Heaven and Earth. It was a joyful afternoon for all! Father Vasyl Symon is Parochial Administrator of Saint Gregory Parish, assisted by Deacon William Szewczyk.



# IN MAHWAH...

Father Ihor Voronstov-Parochial Administrator



# IN PASSAIC...

Right Reverend Marek Visnovsky-Rector of Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel



# IN PERTH AMBOY...

Saint Michael's Byzantine Catholic Church and Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church of Perth Amboy, NJ celebrated Saint Nicholas Day and Christmas Luncheon on December 7th at Saint Nicholas Church. Children performed a puppet show as well as singing. It was a joyous day with wonderful food, laughter and visit from Saint Nicholas. Father Ed Cimbala is Parochial Administrator and Father Roman Vasylnka is Parochial Vicar of Both parishes.



# CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE EPARCHY

## IN CARTERET...

*Liturgy for Health and Blessings*

A Liturgy of Health and Blessings for parish Cantor Nicholas Polanin, who celebrated his 65th Birthday and 48th year of ministry, was served on Saturday December 6th at Saint Elias in Carteret, NJ. Pictured in the photo are Nick's wife and son, Natalie and Christopher, his brother and sister's families along with their mom Theresa who is 98 years young. An Italian Dinner was held in the rectory for every one to enjoy. Saint Nicholas Day initiated a clothing drive for homeless male and female veterans sponsored by Kyle Hansen, parishioner and marine veteran who delivered 35 large bags of new and gently worn winter clothing, along with undergarments, blankets, boots, shoes, socks etc. to the post in Paterson NJ. The parish family celebrated an Epiphany



*Kyle Hansen and Father Michael Popson*



*Cantor Nicholas Polanin and family*

Party on Saturday, January 10th with Slavic Dinner held in the rectory prepared by the European Deli in Woodbridge, NJ. Currently the parish is also participating in a Baby collection to support "Raphael's Life House", in Elizabeth NJ. They help homeless and pregnant young women and houses them for up to 18 months and equips them to support themselves. Father Michael Popson is Parochial Administrator of Saint Elias parish.

## IN PHILADELPHIA...

*Father Kopyn is Priest in Resident of both Holy Ghost & Holy Trinity, Father Paul West is Parochial Administrator of Holy Trinity and Father Andriy Kovach is Parochial Administrator of Holy Ghost*



## IN RAHWAY...

*Right Reverend James G. Hayer is Parochial Administrator and served by Deacon Charles Laskowski*




## IN SCRANTON...

*Father Roman Vasylynka is Parochial Administrator of both Saint Mary's & Saint John's parishes*



# ICONOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

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



Father Marek Visnovsky will be offering an iconography workshop at Saint 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 Pietà ( 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 Father Marek at [marekvisnovsky@yahoo.com](mailto:marekvisnovsky@yahoo.com)

Father Marek is a married Byzantine Catholic priest, serving as the Rector of the Cathedral of Saint 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.

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## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### LITURGICAL MEMORY

I can't sing the First Kathisma ("Blessed is the man,") at Great Vespers without remembering my time as Dean of our Seminary and a particular cohort of seminarians in the early 2000's who sang this psalm so beautifully. Nor can I sing the stations at funerals without remembering Monsignor John Sekellick who taught them to me. The resurrectional tropar in tone three always brings to mind Cantor Emery Rosko of Flanders NJ; *Jedin Svjat* (One is Holy) takes me back to Saint Mary's in Jersey City and my first chant teacher, Cantor John Soga with his distinctive tenor voice. Music and memory are powerfully linked.

Whenever I feel down, the Paschal Canon of Saint John Damascene can lift my spirits, bringing back the sights, smells, and beloved faces of Paschas past in all the places where I have celebrated it. As it turns out, God's Word also recommends singing liturgical memories as a cure for sadness. A number of Psalms recall such liturgical moments.

Psalms 42 and 43 (a single composition) record the voice of an exile. The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the people (587BC). How could God let this happen? Where could God be found now that the Temple had been destroyed? Three times (42:5.11; 43:5) this exile speaks to himself: "Why are you cast down, my soul? Why groan within me. Hope in God; I will praise Him still: my Savior

and my God." And each time, he climbs a little more out of depression until he can finally exclaim: "I will praise you on the harp, O God, my God!" (43:4). How does the change of attitude happen?

First, the psalmist chooses to remember past Temple liturgies: "These things I will recall and pour out my soul within me. How I would pass through the magnificent pavilions, even to the house of God, to the sound of joy and thanksgiving: a throng at feast!" (42:4) These memories seem to boost his confidence in the Lord's enduring presence: "By day, the Lord will send His steadfast love. By night His song will be with me: a prayer to the God of my life" (42:8). Soon he can see an end to his suffering: "I will come to the altar of God, to God, the joy of my life." Why despair if he can reach the Lord's presence with a song of praise even in darkest Babylon? Psalms 42-3 have been preserved as sacred Scripture because both Israel and the Church recognize in it the breath of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who still has the power to lift believers out of despair.

Psalm 118 seems to reflect the period when Persia replaced Babylon as Israel's master, and the Temple was rebuilt (444BC). The final section describes moments in a solemn liturgical event in Jerusalem. The details of this remembered or imagined celebration are vivid enough to be realistic but vague

enough to accommodate many different experiences of struggle, victory, and thanksgiving (118:19-29):

"Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. . . . This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice. . . . Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God and has revealed Himself to us. With boughs in hand, join in the festive procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever."

Psalms 120-134 form a unit within the Psalter and share the title 'Psalms of Ascent' (or 'Gradual' Psalms; *Stepenna*). Taken together (as they are at Presanctified Liturgy) they describe a virtual pilgrimage that begins in exile and culminates in the Jerusalem Temple: "I rejoiced when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord; our feet were standing within your courts, O Jerusalem . . . For the peace of Jerusalem pray: May peace be in your homes; in your palaces peace. For the love of my brethren and friends, I say 'Peace upon you!' For love of the house of the Lord, I will ask for your good." (123). "How good and how pleasant: brothers living in unity. . . it is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the heights of Zion. For there the Lord gives his blessing: life

forever" (133). "Come, bless the Lord, you who serve the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God. Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord through the night. May the Lord bless you from Zion, the maker of heaven and earth" (134).

I cannot pray these words without thinking of late-night hymn singing sessions at the Uniontown Pilgrimage; that memory is always consoling. But the breath of the Holy Spirit empowers even more than memory: the Psalms enable us to converse with God. **ECL**



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# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

The ordination to the office of bishop takes place in the Divine Liturgy after the Trisagion. This was the ancient beginning of the Liturgy, and the bishop, as the presider over the liturgy, was ordained at this point, which is still the moment when the bishop enters the sanctuary in a hierarchal liturgy. The bishop kisses the altar, as did the deacon and priest. The imposition of hands takes place in front of the altar, rather than at the southern corner, since the bishop, by right, presides at the Liturgy. He is ordained by three other bishops to represent the hierarchal college. The bishops impose hands, but they also hold the gospel book over the head of the ordinand, as a sign of his service to the gospel of our Lord. In the first prayer for the ordination of bishops, he is then given a three-fold office: apostle, prophet and teacher. In the letters of Saint Paul, these were three separate offices, but now they are combined in the position of bishop. The word “bishop,” (Greek, *episcopos*), actually means “administrator,” or “overseer.”

The office of apostle (“someone sent,” an “envoy”) was destined to be temporary, since they were those sent directly by Jesus to be witnesses of his gospel. Eusebius said they “laid the foundation of the faith in foreign places and established others as pastors.” (Church History 3,37) Hegeppus in the second century was the first to call bishops the “successors of the apostles.” The immediate reason for this was Gnostic heresies which appealed to apostolic authority to justify their teachings. They claimed to have received secret mysteries from the apostles. Of course,

no one could challenge them, since the apostles were all dead. Therefore, Hegeppus and, later, Irenaeus said that the only true successors to the apostles were the bishops, “those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these (heretics) rave about.”



Icon of Christ the Good Shepherd

Prophets were likewise a separate office in the early Church. They seemed to have a charismatic role and took no part in administration. We don’t know how they were chosen, how they functioned and what their responsibilities were, but we find references to them here and there in the New Testament. Agabus is mentioned in Acts 11:28 and 21:10, and Judas and Silas in Acts 15:32. Already, Paul has to put restrictions on the prophets, “Let no more than two or three prophets speak, and let the rest judge the worth of what they say. (1 Corinthians 14:29)” The order of prophets was not to last. The main difficulty was that there was no control. 1 John 4:1-6 has to give instructions on discerning the spirits, and Didache

13 on discerning true prophets. The prophets possibly contributed one of the books of the New Testament (Revelation), which was written by John, of the brotherhood of prophets (Revelation 22:9). The prophets had to be restricted because of the danger of false prophecy and heresy. The bishops did not become prophets in the classical sense, but, as the people who received the highest gift of the Holy Spirit in the community, they inherited what remained of the prophetic authority.

This likewise applies to the office of teachers. In a revealing passage, the Didache says, “Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons, for they are performing for you the office of prophets and teachers. (15:1)” The office of teacher was quite powerful in the church, they were what we might call “super-catechists.” They had charge of the books of the community, when books were valuable and difficult to reproduce. They taught and kept the deposit of faith. An example of an early teacher (second century) is Clement of Alexandria. For similar reasons as the prophets, the bishops had to take over the office of teaching, since the catechists were causing dissension in the community. The bishops became quite active teachers, and patristic literature is composed mainly of the instructions of the bishops and their commentaries on the books (Sacred Scripture). The catechetical homilies of Saint Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, are the best example of this.

As the presider over the life of the community, the bishop also presided over the liturgy. Thus, the second prayer of

ordination say, “...in your plan of salvation, you have appointed for us teachers subject to the same infirmities as ourselves to stand before your altar and to offer sacrifices and oblations for all your people.” Therefore, the bishop presides over both the community and the liturgy. In this role, he is the “good shepherd.” The second prayer says, “Make him, O Lord,...a follower of you, the true Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep.” The signs of his office as shepherd were the staff and omophorion (from the Greek word “to bear on the shoulders.”) The first mention of the omophorion is in Saint Isidore of Pelusium (d. 450 a.d.), who wrote, “The bishop’s omophorion is made of wool, and not of linen. It represents the lost sheep that our Savior went to seek and brought back upon his shoulders.” Simeon of Thessalonica says that, by the omophorion, the bishop “is shown to be the pastor of Christ’s flock and to become, by grace, Christ himself.” The omophorion is distinct from the orarion in being shorter and wider and designed to be worn over the shoulders. The staff represents the shepherd’s crook by which he herded sheep. It seems to have evolved from the walking-stick, quite common in earlier times, and we have references to bishop’s staffs from the sixth century. They now have become very elaborate, and are capped with a cross between two snakes to symbolize the victory of the cross over evil. **ECL**



# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## GOD DOESN’T NEED YOU

Everyone wants to feel *needed*. What mother isn’t a little unsettled when everyone in the house seemingly functions just fine if she’s away or down for the count with illness? Every employee, parish helper, community leader, husband or wife, virtually everyone, wants to feel valued, irreplaceable – *needed*. This is a natural human desire and it’s actually implanted deep in our hearts by God Himself. Human persons were created in God’s image and likeness, *icons* of the Trinity, meaning that we are to image Him in love and being in *communion*. Putting it plainly, we’re not meant to be on our own, separate little islands with boundaries not to be crossed. We’re meant to live in friendship, intimate partnership if we’re married, and part of a community. Inherent in this Trinitarian imaging for us is

the experience of needing each other, to greater and lesser degrees at different times and stages of life. The great American story of the self-made man (or woman) with a daring independent streak is all well and good; but there is no one alive, regardless of how wealthy, intelligent, or self-sufficient who doesn’t need the love, counsel or help of another. That neediness, if you will, is not a sign of weakness but of what it means to be human. To need and be needed is a way of reflecting the love of God in our humanity. And of course, we can’t mention our uniquely human needs without acknowledging that we need God, first and foremost. He is the one “in whom we live, and move, and have our being,” as Saint Paul reminds us (Acts 17:28).

If the idea of “need” is an aspect of our humanity that reflects God’s love, pointing us toward Him and inviting us into a communion of reciprocal giving and receiving, and if we need God above all else, then it stands to reason that God has needs, too. *God must need us*, right? Well, actually, no. God is perfect in Himself, perfect communion and love, the perfection of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. God certainly isn’t an American, but He is the epitome of self-sufficiency. God is the Creator of all things, so what could He possibly need, or want? If that’s the case – that we need Him and each other, but He doesn’t need anything, least of all you and me – well, that’s kind of a bummer. We want to feel wanted, desired, irreplaceable – needed. If God doesn’t need us then what are we doing here?

And what does that mean for our lives here and now, and in the next life?

In my graduate studies I remember bumping up against these questions in a few classes. As our professors posited to us, “Why the world?” and reiterated in course after course that “being is gift,” I pondered why on earth God would create a world – and people, like me – He didn’t need, the way I needed others (and so much more) to live a happy, good life. If God doesn’t need me what good am I anyway? The more I pondered (and paid attention in class), the more that phrase “being is gift” came into sharper focus. Human neediness impacts our lives in the good ways I mentioned above but is also tainted by the effects of sin. It can lead us to take others for granted or take ad-

vantage of their kindness and generosity. That neediness can feed laziness, be weaponized, or used to manipulate. But God – He isn’t subject to such human whims and temptation. We don’t exist because God *needs* us, or even because He *wants* us in that very human (sometimes insecure) way that we want a relationship. We exist, we “live, and move, and have our being,” because God loves us. That’s the simple yet powerful truth. The whole of Creation, our lives, how we are icons of the Trinity, our *whole being*, is a gift. None of it satisfies a deep need in God that drives Him crazy, takes away His “loneliness,” or makes Him more, better, and bigger as God. The world, the universe – you – exist

because of God’s love, a love that is forever.

The season of the Great Fast is upon us, and this is the time to contemplate what it means that only did God not need us, but He didn’t need to save us. And yet, He did. During these forty days you may find yourself *needing* a double cheeseburger, mounds of chocolate, or mindless moments scrolling social media. If you do, and if you fall off the wagon, climb back in and start again. And when you do, take hold of God’s hand (in prayer, Confession, Liturgy) and let Him lift you up again, because you really do need Him - and He really does love you. **ECL**

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Maureen French  
ECL circulation editor

**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).

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**DEVELOP SELF-CONTROL**

In their 2014 study, ‘Self-Control and Grit: Related but Separable Determinants of Success,’ published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, researchers Angela Duckworth and James Gross write, “Other than talent and opportunity, what makes some people more successful than others? One important determinant of success is self-control – the capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation.”

Isn’t it the same with following Jesus Christ and becoming saints? We must have self-control. The saints tenaciously sought holiness and understood the importance of self-control and self-discipline, or what we call temperance. The Baltimore Catechism says, “temperance disposes us to control our desires and to use rightly the things which please our senses.”

The Bible on the importance of self-control:

“Like a city that is broken down and without walls is a man whose spirit is without **self-control**” (Prov. 25:28).

“One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who has **self-control**, than he who takes a city” (Prov. 16:32).

Preaching to Felix and Drusilla, Saint Paul “reasoned about righteousness, **self-control**, and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

“Every man who strives in the games exercises **self-control** in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible” (1 Cor. 9:25).

“Older men should be **self-controlled**, sensible, sober minded, sound in faith, in love, and in perseverance...” (Titus 2:2).

“The bishop must be... fair, holy, **self-controlled**” (Titus 1:7-8).

“We should live **self-controlled**, righteously, and godly in this present age” (Titus 2:12).

“The fruit of the spirit is... **self-control**” (Gal. 5:22-23).

“The end of all things is near. Therefore, be of sound mind, **self-controlled**, and sober in prayer” (1 Pt. 4:7).

“God didn’t give us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and **self-control**” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Saint Paul said, “I discipline my body and bring it into submission, lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27). Self-discipline. Self-control.

Do you get out of bed as soon as your alarm rings? Saint Teresa of Avila said a nun should leap from bed when she hears the bell; good advice not just for

nuns, but for anyone seeking self-control and self-discipline.

Many lack self-control with food and drink. Rather than dreaming of fasting for days, it may be more realistic to simply keep our appetites in check.

Saint Alphonsus writes that “Saint Bonaventure says we must avoid four things. First, eating outside mealtimes, as animals do. Second, eating with too much avidity, like famished dogs. Third, eating too much food. Fourth, indulging in too much delicacy.” Saint Francis de Sales said, “We must eat to live, not live to eat.”

Saint Thomas Aquinas says, “The devil, vanquished by temperance [in eating], does not tempt to lust.”

Temperance, self-control, and self-discipline mean conquering oneself. Saint Alphonsus says, “Our heart is a garden where wild and noxious weeds always grow. We must always have the hoe of mortification in hand to remove this harmful growth, or the garden will be choked with thorns and thistles.”

“Overcome yourself,” was a favorite saying of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. “Overcome your self-love; break your self-will,” he would say.

Thomas a Kempis says, “Watch over yourself, arouse yourself, warn yourself, and regardless of what becomes of oth-

ers, do not neglect yourself. The more violence you do to yourself, the more progress you will make” (Imitation, Book 1, Chapter 24).

It took Saint Francis De Sales twenty-two years of unrelenting effort and prayer to overcome his bad temper. Pope Pius XI, in *Rerum Omnium Perturbationem*, writes:

“One would err, however, if he imagined that such a character as Saint Francis de Sales possessed was a gift of nature, bestowed on him by the grace of God ‘with the blessing of meekness.’ On the contrary, Francis naturally was hot-tempered and easily aroused to anger. Since he had vowed to take as his model Jesus Who has said, ‘Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart’ (Mt. 11:29) so, by means of constant watchfulness over himself and of violence to his own will, he succeeded in learning how to curb and to control to such an extent the promptings of nature that he became a living likeness of the God of Peace and Meekness.”

Saint Alphonsus says, “I have not the slightest intention to underestimate the value of vocal prayer, works of penance and other spiritual exercises; but they must be performed with this end in view, to obtain the victory over your passions.” One goal: self-control.

Pray to develop self-control. **ECL**

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The society offers regular educational Zoom presentations, chat groups, in-person events in our chapters, genealogy help by professional Rusyn genealogists and scholarships to students. Also offered is an online/mail-in Heritage Store with books and gift items. New is our first-ever activity book for children (and adults) to engage learning about the Carpatho-Rusyn Culture. We also carry three-bar cross candles. Listen live on Sunday afternoons to Rusyn music on our Rusyn Heritage Program (also archived). Check out the headings on our new website to find this information and more. Visit Facebook Carpatho-Rusyn Society, our strictly informational page, to learn about past and upcoming events. For more information contact: Bonnie Burke: [bb@c-rs.org](mailto:bb@c-rs.org)

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**TYPICON AND CHANCERY OFFICE SCHEDULE**

- FEBRUARY, 2026**
- 2 The Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon  
*Solemn Holyday*
  - 8 Sunday of Meatfare
  - 15 Sunday of Cheesefare
  - 16 Clean Monday, First Day of the Great Fast  
*President's Day, Chancery Closed*
  - 22 Sunday of Orthodoxy, First Sunday of the Fast

THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC subscribes to the

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