



EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

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I LIFT UP MY EYES

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



Set Aside All Earthly Cares

Note: this column is from some years ago, but seemed apropos to our turbulent times today.

Every Divine Liturgy we sing together, “Let us lay aside all earthly cares.” How comforting those words can be if we listen to them and take them to heart. The earthly cares of recent times have been remarkable and frightening. It is as though all of our conflicts and disappointments of recent years are feeding on one another. To say that there is anger everywhere is an understatement. Once when I was living in a men’s dormitory, there was a student who put a can of beans on hot plate without opening it first. He must have raised it to a high temperature all the way through. When he took it off the hot plate, he allowed the outside to cool, and then he punctured the lid with a can opener. Evidently it was still blistering hot in the center because, in the twinkling of an eye, the can emptied its entire contents through that tiny whole, covering the ceiling, the walls, and the drapes with steaming bean paste.

One of the dangers of watching anger is that it always makes us angry too. Anger, after all, is one of our social emotions, a gift from our Creator that serves an important purpose, it is one of the three primary negative emotions. All of our senses and feelings were given to us by our Creator to give us knowledge about the world around us. Whether it’s the sound of running water, bright colors, intense heat, or vague discomfort, these senses and feelings give us knowledge of the world around us to allow us stay safe and to seek happiness. They are disordered by sin, but they are still one of the ways that we learn. Anger is a social emotion because it tells us, when properly ordered, that someone else has done something that is a threat to the good of society. That is why it is so contagious. Since we are social creatures, when we see other people angry we want to know why, and we react by joining them in their outrage

or perhaps rebelling against their goal and becoming angry at the harbinger.

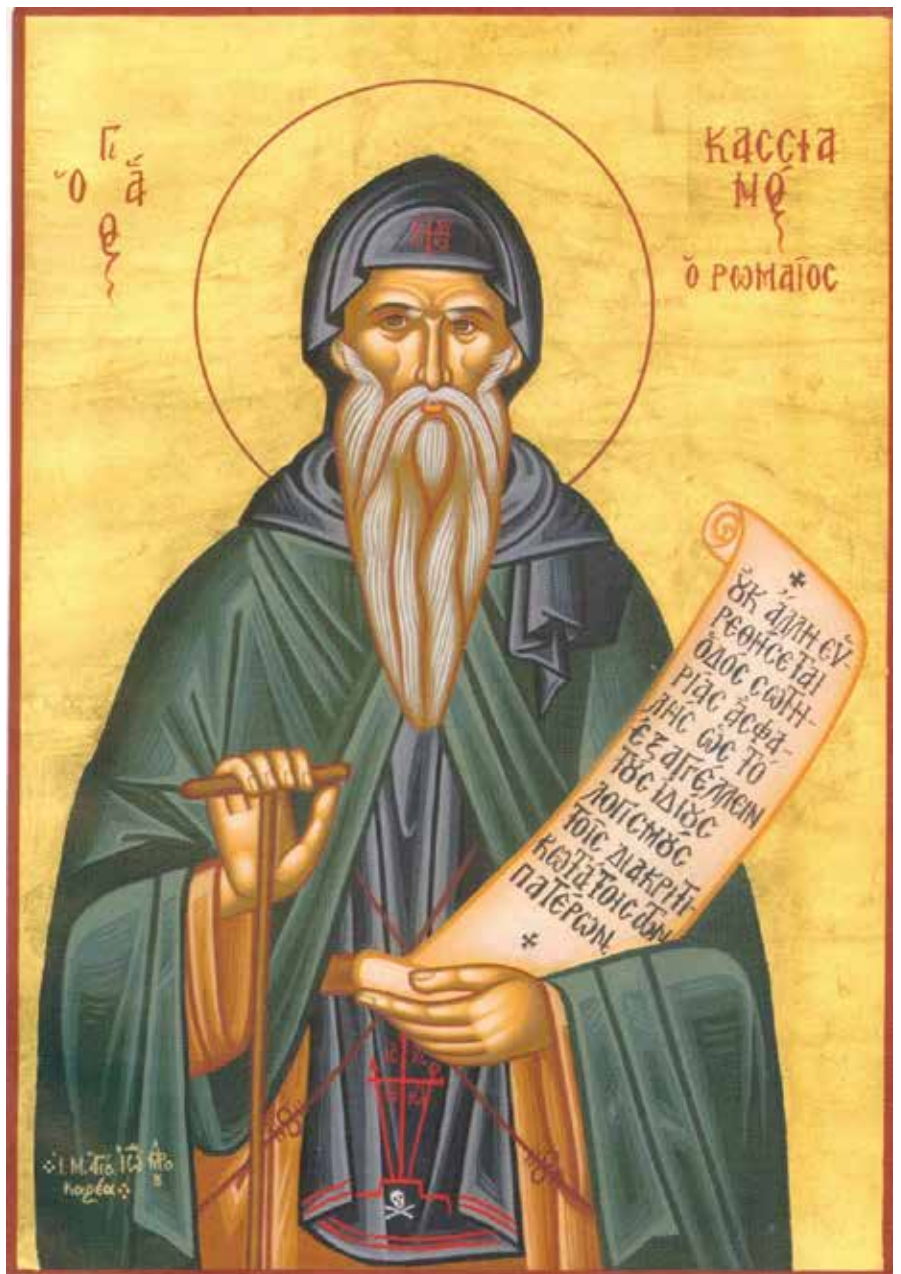
There are always a lot of things to be angry about. If you lived in the year 360 A.D., you might say that there were a lot more things to be angry about then, even though there was a fraction of the number of people on the planet—and no internet. Although Christianity was legalized 45 years earlier, it was not the state religion of the Roman Empire but was tolerated. In fact Christianity was outlawed soon after 360. Slavery was still a universally accepted social convention. Public executions and torture on the highways were as common as people picking up litter nowadays.

In the year 360, the last of the sons of Constantine ruled the Roman Empire, and after his passing, the rule passed to Julian, called Julian the Apostate, because he was raised Christian in his family but preferred the old pagan practices. Rather than persecute the Christians openly, which he knew from history made them stronger, he encouraged dissensions between the bishops. As Ammianus Marcellinus says, “knowing as he did from experience that no wild beasts are such enemies to mankind as are most Christians in their deadly hatred of one another.” Ammianus Marcellinus (325-395) was a Greek from Antioch who joined the military when he was young. He is considered to be one of the more impartial and accurate historians of the late Roman Empire. He accompanied the Emperor Julian on his fatal expedition to teach the Persian Empire a lesson in 363. If anyone doubts that we live in good times, I encourage you to read ancient history. The matter of fact way that people back then killed each other and sold each other into slavery is really beyond our comprehension nowadays. Marcellinus describes many battles as they travel east into the Persian empire, killing and destroying everything they encounter. I include one sentence which I found shocking for its very casualness, “From there we crossed the river and entered the city of Diacira, seven miles distant. This place was without inhabitants, but rich in grain and fine white salt; there we saw a temple, standing on a lofty citadel. After burning the city, and kill-

ing a few women whom we found, we passed over a spring bubbling with bitumen and took possession of the town of Ozogardana.” His history isn’t all bloodbaths though. He describes all sorts of local cultures and goings on. I include another passage, irrelevant to this column, to demonstrate the diversity of his book, “In another place (in the city of Rome) a wife hammering by day

the burial of rich matrons, on the other telling women that for their husbands’ funerals now quietly approaching they must make the necessary preparations. And a maid servant bears witness, by nature somewhat pale, as if dead from consumption.”

In the year 360, at the end of the reign of Constantius, and just before Julian



Saint John Cassian

and night on the same anvil—as the old proverb has it—drives her husband to make a will, and the husband insistently urges his wife to the same. Skilled jurists are brought in on both sides, one in a bedroom, the other, his rival, in the dining room to discuss disputed points. These are joined by opposing interpreters of horoscopes, on the one side making profuse promises of prefectures and

took over the empire to swiftly meet his own death at the hands of the Persians, a boy was born with a different path in life, also born for warfare, but for spiritual warfare not earthly. John Cassian was born in 360 and became a soldier of spiritual combat, not to kill, not for vain-glory, not for fame, and not for wealth, but for earthly poverty and heavenly riches. In- ...continued on page 2

stead of fighting for wealth, he fought the internal sin of greed. Instead of fighting for vainglory, he fought the internal sin of desire for fame. Instead of fighting other men because of anger, he fought against anger—his own anger. He was a spiritual warrior. John was born in Dacia, the part of the Roman Empire that is now Romania. He seems to have been born into a well off family and received the standard classical education, but as a young man he left all that behind and went with a friend to Bethlehem to join a monastery there. He went with a friend Germanus, a little older than he was. At this point in history, monasticism was like John: it was very young. After the Christian religion was legalized, and the official persecution by the government ended, and there was not much chance to earn the crown of martyrdom described in the Apocalypse, some Christians began to seek a higher path by martyring themselves, so to speak, by dying to the world and living in isolated places away from the temptations of secular life. John is so self-effacing that we only learn a little about his life from him, yet he became one of the most influential Christians in the past 2000 years.

After some years in Bethlehem, John and his friend moved to Egypt where monasticism was invented and where

monks prayed almost exclusively from the Book of Psalms, and learned spiritual wisdom in conversations with older monks. Some scholars call this an oral-aural society. The younger student asks questions, and the older teacher speaks. When we come to the writings of St. John, it will be presented in that very format, questions and answer. [Interestingly enough, one of the most important music theory books ever written was written in the same format in 1725. In *Gradus ad Parnassum* by Johann Joseph Fux, the pupil asks questions and Palestrina answers them. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all learned counterpoint from that book.]

As I mentioned, the first monks did not have today's systems of prayer, but instead read the Book of Psalms starting with the first one and going through to the 150th, and then starting over. After many years of that, they often had most of them memorized. For some reason, John and Germanus left Egypt around the year 400, perhaps because of the theological upheaval in Egypt, or perhaps to listen to the great St. John Chrysostom. For whatever the reason, John and Germanus stayed in Constantinople for a few years, met St. John Chrysostom, and John was ordained a deacon and Germanus a presbyter. Within a few years, John and Germa-

op had just intervened with the Emperor Theodosius on behalf of the citizens because they had gone on a rampage and had destroyed statues of the emperor and his family. At the request of the bishop, Chrysostom preached over twenty homilies during Lent of 387 urging the citizens to repent. The sermons were so successful that even many pagans became Christian.

Getting back to John and Germanus in Rome, John was asked to start an eastern monastery in the city of Marseilles, France, known as Massalia in ancient Latin. No doubt John was happy to return to monastic life and share what he had learned in Egypt. It also seems likely that he would have maintained monastic teaching in the same way that he learned it, that is, oral and aural, question and answer. Nevertheless, around 420, Bishop Castor of Apt asked John for help in starting another monastery, and so John Cassian began to write. He was so self-effacing that he didn't write until asked to do so. His two great works on monasticism, the *Institutes of the Cenobites* and *Collations* (or *Conferences*) of the ascetic desert fathers, became the foundation of western monasticism and indeed almost all of western spiritual writing for the next 1600 years. Among other things, he brought the idea of the eight deadly sins from the east based on the spiritual writings of Evagrius as a foundation for spiritual combat.

He wrote one other work of great importance. Because he was familiar with the great theological controversies in the East, he wrote a theological work explaining things for the Romans. Some people believe he is actually the theological brains behind the great *Tome of Leo*, which is considered the theological standard of our faith and was endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon.

His influence on Benedictine spirituality is enormous. St. Benedict ordered that his *Conferences* or *Collationes* be read after their light evening meal (and no one is to speak after compline!), and so the title of his book came to mean a light meal, and it is the word in modern Italian for breakfast—*prima colazione*!

Living in these turbulent times with so much anger all around us, how can we “lay aside all earthly cares” today? What can St. John Cassian tell us about anger? In his fifth conference (or collation) St. John gives a systematic treatment of six of the eight vices: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, and akedia. Although he systematizes them, his presentation is not as detailed nor as colorful as the later work of St. John Climacus. St. John Cassian says that each vice in the order that he has listed them leads from one to the other, and just as it is necessary to kill a large tree in the roots, it is necessary to kill a vice in its cause. So he says that to get rid of anger, we must get rid of avarice, and to get rid of avarice, we must get rid of lust. To get rid of lust, we must get rid of gluttony. For St. John, there is no vice that lives on its own, but they are each related to the others. So a problem with anger might be caused by an

attachment to material things. By the way, St. John says that pride and vainglory, the other two vices of the eight, are in their own family or system. At least for monks, pride and vainglory appear after the other six vices are in retreat. It is certainly true that the angry people we have watched smashing windows are placing a lot of importance on material wealth, so much importance that they will probably go to prison. And those of us who are angry watching them are also angry because we don't like to see property destroyed. Instead of anger about the property, we should be weeping for the souls of the rioters and praying for their salvation.

Later, St. John Cassian says there are three kinds of anger. The first he calls *thymos* in Greek and is an interior emotion. The second he says breaks out in word and action. He calls this one *orge*. Finally, there is *menis*, or wrath. *Menis* has a special meaning in the ancient world, it appears at the beginning of the *Illiad* as the wrath of Achilles. If you recall, Achilles nursed his anger, first at Agamemnon, and then he bided his time (waiting for new armor) before he acted out his anger and killed Hector. His simmering rage led to the death of his best friend Patroclus. When his uncontrolled anger burst like a dam burst, it led to the sacrilege of desecrating Hector's body and turning the gods against him and the other Greeks.

According to St. John Cassian, the next sin, which he calls sadness, is really the remembrance of past injuries. This is one of the deadliest of sins. Jesus says that forgiveness is not optional for Christians. “If you forgive other people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive you.” (Matthew 6:14-15) In his great passage on love, St. Paul says, “Love does not remember injuries.” Indeed, people who harbor grudges eventually are incapable of love.

Since remembrance of past injuries is so deadly, how can we avoid it? St. John Climacus gives a much more detailed and entertaining account of all these vices. When he talks about anger, he says that there is one form of anger that is sometimes valuable, namely, when someone is driven to an outburst. He says that the outburst might lead to reconciliation or an apology. Indeed, modern psychologists say that unexpressed anger is what leads to permanent attachment to the anger, what we call a “grudge”. That is why St. Paul says in another place, “Don't let the sun set on your anger.” In other words, get over it, or say something about it at the time, but don't smolder.

Does St. John Cassian, the great theologian, the great monk, the great traveler, and the great spiritual father, have any more advice to help us in these turbulent times? Remember that for St. John, and all the early monks, the only prayer book was the Book of Psalms. He would tell you to read the Psalms. When you finish the Psalms, then start over at the beginning. But St. John also recommended finding a single psalm verse to repeat, like a compass in the



Saint John Climacus

there were still old men with the teachings of the very first monks. He seems to have spent about ten years in Egypt. At a monastery especially, life was very different back then. Not only was printing not invented, but even books were not invented. Writings were on scrolls. There was no flipping pages. There were no systematic prayer books or manuals of spiritual theology. The

nus moved on to Rome, this time to carry letters from St. John Chrysostom appealing from the Synod of the Oak which condemned and deposed St. John Chrysostom in 403. In Rome, John Cassian was ordained a priest.

Here is an incident from that era that is especially timely: when St. John Chrysostom first arrived in Antioch, the bish-

wilderness. One verse that would help nowadays is Psalm 78:35, "Then they remembered that God was their Rock, the Most High God their Redeemer." Another verse you could use is Psalm 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver him from them all." The verse before that one is also comforting Psalm 78:34, "The Lord is close to the broken hearted, and he delivers those with a crushed spirit." If you read the Psalms for yourself, which I most fervently hope that you do, you will find other psalm verses that you might decide to make into your own guide in your daily life.

Since St. John Cassian recommends a single psalm verse to take for your lodestar, does he recommend any particular verse? As a matter of fact, he does. St. John Cassian says that you can

base all of your spiritual life on Psalm 69:2, "O God come to my assistance. O Lord, make hast to help me." This verse summarizes the entire faith and spiritual life. It begins by invoking the name of God—I believe in the one true God and I am his creature. "Come to my assistance"—I can talk to God and God hears me—I am in need of help—God has the power to help me—and He hears my request. "O Lord"—God is not only the God of the universe, but also my personal master. "Make haste to help me"—these final words arouse some passion in the prayer—it's not just a formal request—it's a passionate request—hurry up! In Western monasticism, this verse begins all of their formal monastic prayers, because of the over arching influence of St. John Cassian. St. John himself says this, "This verse is an impregnable wall for all who

are laboring under the attacks of demons, as well as impenetrable coat of mail and a strong shield. It does not allow those who are in a state of moroseness and anxiety of mind, or depressed by sadness of all kinds of thoughts to despair of saving remedies.

If you pray the Office or the Hours with your Latin rite friends, you will notice how often they open their prayers with this very verse recommended by St. John Cassian, going back all the way to St. Benedict and his respect for this great monk/theologian/saint. It is fascinating that a saint so great and so influential is obscure, seemingly by the plan of God. For St. John's feast day is February 29, and he is only remembered once every four years!

Surrounded by imperial armies and all the allurements of the late Roman Empire, St. John Cassian chose a different path from those around him. He invites us to follow the same path today. Not the path to material wealth, or success, or anger, or fame, or selfishness, or self-righteousness, but rather the gentle invisible path into the tender heart of our loving Creator. "O God come to my assistance. O Lord make haste to help me." "Let us who represent the Cherubim, and sing the thrice holy hymn to the life creating Trinity, now set aside all earthly cares."

+Kurt Burnett

+MITRED ARCHPRIEST MARCEL SZABO FALLS ASLEEP IN THE LORD

September 9, 1944 – February 7, 2026

MORRISTOWN, NJ – Father Marcel Szabo, 81, a retired priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, fell asleep in the Lord at the Hospice Care Center of Morristown Medical Center, Morristown, NJ on February 7, 2026.

Father Marcel was born Ludwig Szabo in Lorain, OH on September 9, 1944, the son of the late Joseph and Anna (Mendzenoff) Szabo. Discerning a vocation to the Religious life, he entered the Order of Saint Basil the Great of St. Josaphat where he attended St Paul University in Ottawa, Canada. Following graduation, he was ordained to the priesthood of Jesus Christ on July 11, 1971 at Our Lady of Mariapoch Monastery in Matawan, NJ by Bishop Michael J. Dudick.

As a Basilian Father, he offered liturgical and pastoral assistance throughout the Eparchy of Passaic including: Temporary Administrator of St. Michael Byzantine Catholic Church, Perth Amboy, NJ (1972); Director of the Byzantine Catholic Youth, Trenton District (1973); Temporary Administrator of St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church, Perth Amboy (1974); Administrator of Holy Cross Byzantine Catholic Church, New York City (1974-1978); Director of Byzantine

Catholic Youth, Coastal States (1975); and Pastor of Holy Trinity Byzantine Catholic Church, Bridgeport, CT (1978-1989).

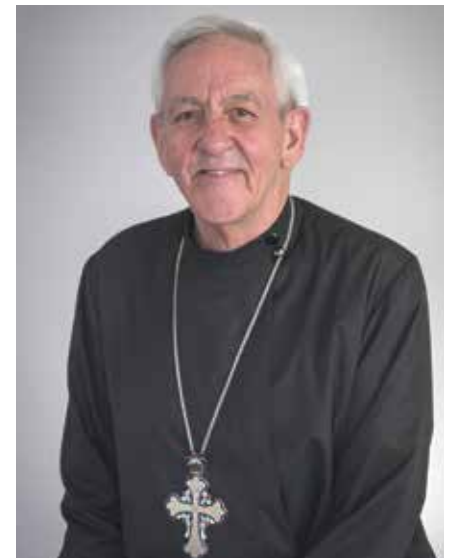
Discerning that he could better serve the Lord through full-time pastoral ministry, he left the Basilian Order in 1984 and was incardinated as a priest in the Eparchy of Passaic. He continued to serve as pastor of Holy Trinity Byzantine Catholic Church in Bridgeport, CT until 1989 when he was appointed Rector of St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral in Passaic, NJ.

Arriving at St Michael's Cathedral in 1989, Father Marcel prepared for the milestone celebration of the Cathedral's Centennial Anniversary in 1990. This included the renovation and restoration of all properties and grounds, as well as the spiritual and pastoral preparation of the parish. Remarkably, Father Marcel's time at St Michael's Cathedral spanned the tenure of four eparchial bishops. During his 26 years at St Michael Cathedral, Father Marcel not only cared for the parish and its properties, but also the community at large. This was symbolized by an annual procession through the streets of Passaic with Our Lady of Passaic Icon, donated by Bishop Dudick.

In addition to his pastoral duties, Father Marcel also served as Protopresbyter, Syncellus, Consultor, Member of the Eparchial Cemetery Commission, and Member of the Advisory Committee of the Heritage Museum and Library of the Eparchy of Passaic. During this time, he also offered administrative and pastoral care to Holy Spirit Byzantine Catholic Church in Mahwah, NJ as well as Holy Wisdom Church in Flanders, NJ. In recognition of his dedication, Bishop Kurt elevated him to the dignity of Mitred Archpriest on September 14, 2014.

Father Marcel continued to serve at St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral until 2015 when he was appointed Pastor of St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church in Bayonne, NJ, Administrator of St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Jersey City, NJ, and Administrator of St. George Byzantine Catholic Church in Newark, NJ. He retired from full-time priestly ministry in 2018. Father Marcel enjoyed visiting parishes, priests, and participating in church activities in his retirement, until health concerns curtailed his activity.

In addition to his parents, Father Marcel was preceded in death by his siblings Nicholas, Anthony, Paul, George,



Joseph, Rosolyn (Nadasady), and Margaret (Wilson). He is survived by Michael, Doris (Reynolds), Donald, Theodore, as well as cousins Theresa Connolly and Chris Hansen, as well as numerous nieces, nephews, other family members and friends.

The funeral liturgies for Father Marcel were held at St Mary Magdalene Byzantine Catholic Church, 5390 W 220th ST, Cleveland, OH on Tuesday, February 17th, and Wednesday, February 18th, with interment at Calvary Cemetery, 55445 N. Ridge Rd., Lorain, OH. A Divine Liturgy with Panachida for Father Marcel was also celebrated at the Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel Chapel, 415 Lackawanna Ave., Woodland Park, NJ on Sunday, February 22nd.

May his memory be eternal!

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.

Manuscript of signatures from Union of Uzhhorod

UNION OF UZHHOROD
380 YEARS
1646 2026

EPARCHY OF PASSAIC
HIERARCHICAL 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
Email: uzhhorod380@gmail.com
Phone: (609) 394 5004

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC 2025 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

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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.

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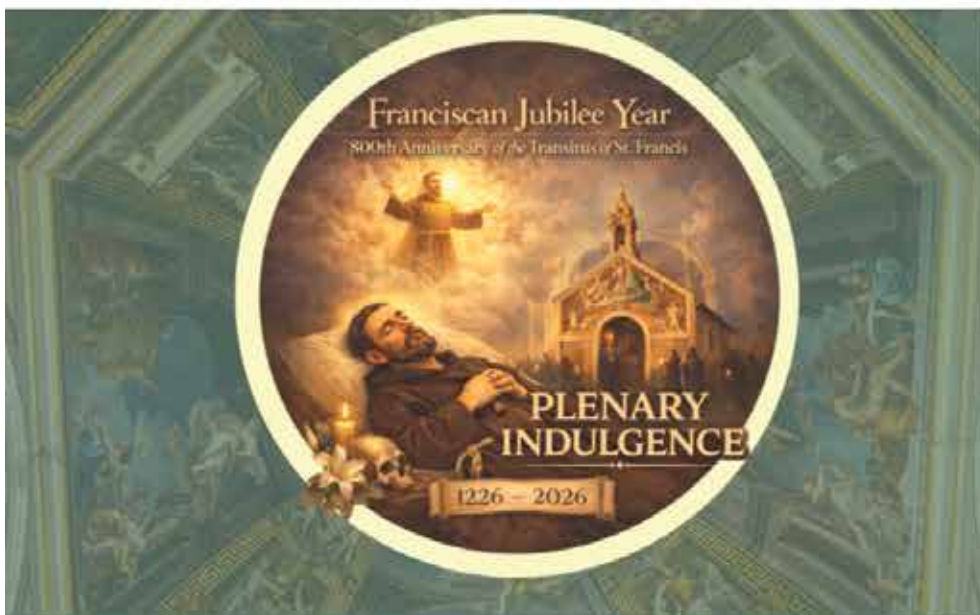
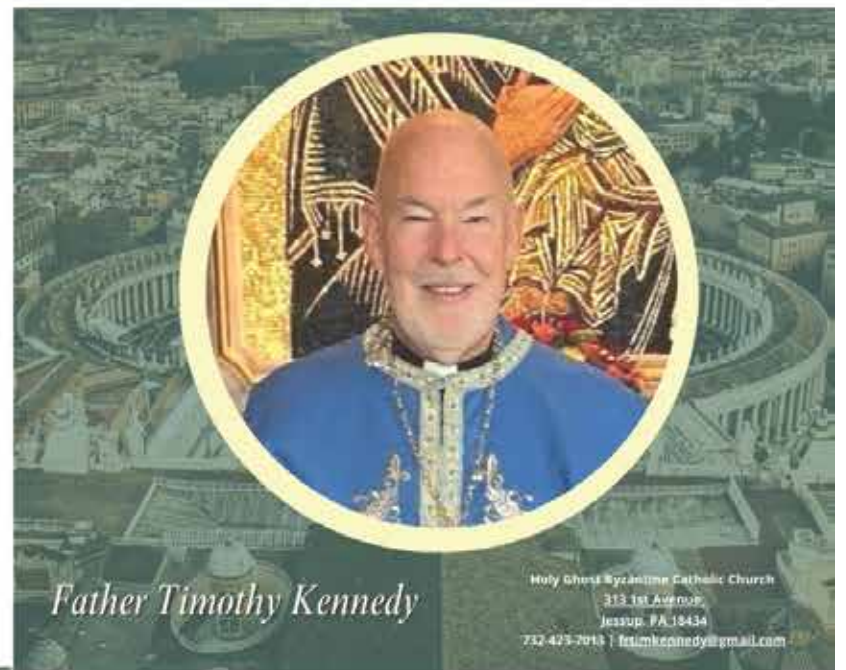
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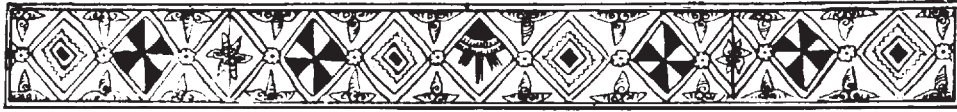
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Most Reverend Bishop Kurt Burnette
President and Publisher
Father Lewis Rabayda, Editor & Layout
Mrs. Maureen French, Circulation Editor and address changes
(mfrench@eofp.org)



PEOPLE YOU KNOW

IN PERTH AMBOY...

Parishes Join in Celebrating Fasiangy

Saint Michael's and Saint Nicholas of Perth Amboy celebrated their Fasiangy - Celebration before the Great Fast. Bishop Kurt was in attendance to celebrate the Liturgy and join the parishioners for a joyous occasion. ECF students showed their talent by performing for everyone. Father Edward Cimbala, is Administrator of both parishes and Father Vasyl Remitskyj, is Parochial Vicar.



**QUESTIONS
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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.

AROUND THE EPARCHY



IN PHILADELPHIA...

Carpatho-Rusyn Society Sponsors Pysanky Event

On February 22, 2026, the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society hosted a pysanky class at Holy Trinity, near the Cheltenham section of Philadelphia, PA. The workshop focused on the basics of egg division, traditional designs, different tools and techniques.

Carole Smith led the class, with a little assistance from Steve Bachovin, who demonstrated the traditional “drop-pull” method. Father Vasyl Kopyn offered a reflection into the spiritual symbolism behind pysanky. He spoke of traditionally abstaining from eating eggs, dairy, and meat for the entire Great Fast. Pysanky were often made on Good Friday—a day of great silence, as well as the reverence surrounding the Plashanitsa (Holy Shroud) and the quiet, prayerful spirit of the day—no unnecessary talk, no hard work. After a long Fast without eggs or dairy, to finally taste that blessed egg on Pascha – what joy. What a gift to remember and pass on these traditions. A big thank you to John Kopcha, Carole Smith, her mother also named Carole and everyone that came to participate.



IN SMITHTOWN...

Parish Spaghetti Dinner Fund-raiser

On February 1st, 2026, the parishioners of the Smithtown Byzantine Catholic Church held their annual Spaghetti Dinner. The fund-raising event is an important activity in the parish’s social calendar, bringing together parishioners, their families and friends, and people from the local community. A sumptuous dinner of pasta, “Joe’s Famous Meatballs”, salad and desert was enjoyed by over a hundred attendees. Generous donations from community members supplied over 60 auction baskets; cries of joy and applause accompanied the lucky winners. Members of Smithtown High School’s String Quartet provided entertainment. The recent death of Joseph



Andrews, dinner organizer and author of the close-held meatball recipe, added a somber note to the festivities. Joe’s wife and members of his extended family were in attendance to maintain his legacy. Blessed repose and eternal memory, dear Joe!

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**Slava Isusu Christu!
Slava Na Viki!**



A JOURNEY FROM HOLY WEEK TO THE RESURRECTION..

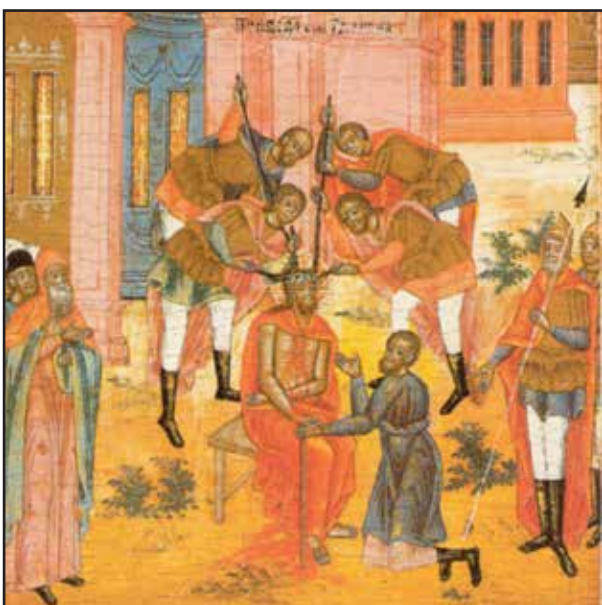


Passion Week or Great Week

The Liturgical theme of Passion Week is the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The services therefore reflect the terrible tragedy of Calvary. During the first three days, the Church invites us to pray in the words of the troparion: "Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight and blessed is the servant whom He shall find awake." Then, step by step, she leads us to every place which our Lord blessed by His presence at the end of His earthly life.

The triumphant entrance of our Lord to Jerusalem provoked the anger of the Jewish leaders to a point where they decided to put Him to death. This is why the liturgy on the evening of Palm Sunday asks us to hasten "from palm and branches to the fulfillment of the August and saving passion of Christ."

On Holy Thursday, three events are recalled in the liturgy: the institution of the Eucharist, the washing of the feet of the disciples, and the betrayal of Judas. Throughout the liturgy the following idea is repeated over and over again, as expressed in the troparion: "Receive me today, O Son of God, as a partaker of Your Mystical Supper, for I will not reveal the Mystery to Your enemies nor give You a kiss as did Judas, but like the repentant thief I will confess to You: Remember me, O Lord, in Your



kingdom." "Let no one, O believers, fail to join in the Lord's Supper. Let no one whatsoever approach the table, like Judas, with deceit."

The wickedness of Judas is expressed very realistically. Judas is called "law-breaker," "son of vipers," and the "murderer" who sets up for himself the gallows of wealth and loses both temporal and divine life.

During the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, the bishop blesses the chrism and the antimensia. Then, before the dismissal, he washes the feet of twelve persons, usually clerics or persons with minor orders, symbolizing Christ's washing the feet of the twelve apostles. The particular ceremony is a very old one and is already mentioned by Saint Augustine (430 AD).

Good Friday

In the morning, Matins (Office of the Sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ) is performed. The characteristic feature of this service is the reading of twelve Gospel passages selected from the four evangelists. These twelve readings describe in detail the passion of our Lord, beginning at the Mystical Supper where He conducted the holy and touching discourse with His apostles prior to His departure for Gethsemane. The entire service has its aim on stirring up in the hearts of the faithful sympathy and love for Jesus, who willingly laid down His life to reconcile man with His heavenly Father and, thus, to obtain eternal salvation for us all.

The day of our Lord's passion is universally regarded as a day of mourning and sadness. There is scarcely any other point on which such perfect agreement exists in all lands and in all periods of Christian history. In the Middle Ages, however, a discussion arose over the question as to why the days of saints' deaths were kept as feastdays, but Good Friday as a day of mourning. The answer is obvious. Christ, unlike the saints, attained a yet higher degree of glory through His resurrection. He died not for His own sake, but for our sake.

On Good Friday, the Church strives to express her mourning over the passion and death of Jesus in every possible way. She even goes so far as to forbid the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Because Matins have already been celebrated, the Daily Hours are altered. They are somewhat expanded with sticheras, and readings from the Old and New Testaments. They are called "Royal Hours" because usually the emperor (or king) attended them. During these, the Church asks us to read once again the history of Christ's sufferings and death as described by the four evangelists. During the Royal Hours, the psalms, readings and hymns refer to the passion of Christ.

In the evening, Solemn Vespers are performed. At the end of Vespers, the priest, vested in full priestly vestments, makes a procession around the church carrying the *plashchanitsa* and places it in the tomb

made ready to receive it. The *plashchanitsa* is a winding sheet with a picture of Christ's body lying dead in the tomb. In English it may be called the "Holy Shroud." During the procession the people sing the following troparion: "The noble Joseph, having taken from the cross Your most pure body, wrapped it with pure linen and anointed it with fragrant scents, placed it in a new tomb."

As mentioned already, there is no Divine Liturgy on Good Friday. If, however, the feast of the Annunciation should fall on the same day, then the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is celebrated before the service just described.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is dedicated to the memory of Our Savior's entombment and to His descent into Hades to save the souls of the just and to open for them

Having suffered to
Jesus Christ,
have mercy

the gates of Heaven. This, too, is a day of mourning. It is numbered among the fast days, although originally in the East, no Saturday was kept as a fast. But the sadness of the day is already lightened by the approaching Resurrection. This anticipation of Christ's victory is already evident in the Liturgy.

On Holy Saturday the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great is celebrated together with Vespers. Instead of the trisagion (since formerly on this occasion the catechumens used to be baptized) another hymn based on Galatians 3:27 is substituted: "All you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia."

The priest begins Vespers and the Divine Liturgy in dark vestments, but before the Gospel he changes into white vestments because in the Gospel of the day, Christ's resurrection is already mentioned. During the Divine Liturgy, instead of the Cherubic Hymn another hymn is sung: "Let all mortal flesh keep silence."

The Resurrection Period

For a long time, by many prayers, liturgical services and ceremonies, the Church has been preparing us for the glorious day of Christ's Resurrection, Pascha. Hoping that during Lent everybody had an opportunity to be cleansed from his personal sins,

the Church now celebrates externally and with beautifully joyous ceremonies the final triumph and life-giving Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. After the long ages of darkness brought about by the Fall, after the seemingly endless expectation of the prophets, after the thirty hidden years and the three years of public life, after the frightful passion which had seemed to be the end of all hope, after the three days in the depth of the tomb, behold: Christ is risen! The time of weeping is over; now is the time for joy. Christ's resurrection is the greatest miracle. It is the most divine and the least human, for it took place when the Man-Christ was in the grave. We now know that Christ is God and we rejoice.

Resurrection

The festivities of Pascha begin with the Resurrection Matins. There is a procession around the church during which the people chant the troparion: "Your Resurrection, O Christ our Savior, the angels praise in Heaven. Grant us on earth with pure heart to glorify You." Wherever it is not possible to have a procession outside of the church, it is held inside. This procession symbolizes the myrrh-bearing women who "very early in the morning, the first day of the week" came to the tomb to anoint the body of the Lord.

Following the procession, Resurrection Matins begin. Preceded by candle bearers and by bearers of the processional cross, church banners, an icon of the resurrection and the Gospel book, the priest goes to the main church doors and from outside, after incensing the closed doors, he intones: "Glory be to the holy, consubstantial and indivisible Trinity always, now and ever, and forever and ever." After

*the passion for us,
Son of God,
 mercy on us!*

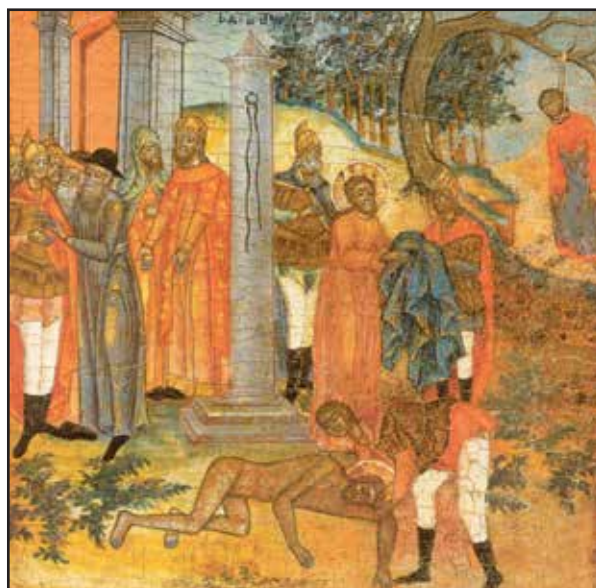
the people answer with "Amen," the priest sings the glorious Paschal troparion: "Christ is risen from the dead, by death He conquered death, and to those in the graves, He granted life. After the celebrant finishes, the whole congregation bursts into a joyous, jubilant singing of the same troparion twice. But all this is only the beginning of the jubilation. The priest sings to the Risen Christ, "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered, and let those who hate Him flee from before His face." The congregation replies spontaneously: "Christ is risen from the dead - *Christos voskrese!*" "As smoke vanishes so let them vanish, as wax melts before a fire," the priest continues. Again a thundering *Christ is risen!* closes the priest's intonation. "So let the wicked perish at the presence of God and let the righteous ones rejoice," proclaims the celebrant. Another *Christ is risen!* Then, "This is the day which the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it." Another *Christ is risen!* In conclusion the celebrant again sings, *Christ is risen!* As he reaches the words, "and to those in the graves He granted life," he strikes the doors with the cross. They are then opened and he enters, followed by the entire congregation. The priest in front of the closed doors represents the angel announcing the joyful news of the resurrection. The people represent the myrrh-bearing women. The striking of the doors with the cross and their opening symbolize the fact that Christ by His death on the cross opened for us the gates of Heaven.

The priest then comes to the altar and, after singing the Great Litany, begins the Paschal Canon, the Canon of the Resurrection. This Canon, composed by Saint John Damascene (675-748 AD) is a series of hymns written according to certain rules, hence its name "canon (rule)." It is a type of liturgical poetry, especially interesting because of its specific form and content. Similar hymns appeared in the East already around the middle of the seventh century. It replaced the kontakion, a type of liturgical poetry composed of 24 short odes or strophes with the purpose of conveying to the people a certain religious message.

The Canon of the Resurrection, as any other canon, is composed of nine odes, with the exception of the second one, each containing three or four troparia, the first of which is called an "irmos." The first troparion or "irmos" contains the chief theme of the ode and serves as a model for other troparia of that particular ode. The Canon of the Resurrection is a hymn of victory, both an expression and a description of the joy and fruits of Christ's victory as crowned by His glorious Resurrection. As the Jewish Passover was celebrated to commemorate the exodus of the Jews from Egyptian captivity, so also the Christian Pascha is an exodus "from death to life and from the earth to heaven." A certain victorious atmosphere pervades the entire canon. Perhaps the third troparion of the first ode expresses this mood best: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth exult. Let, moreover, the whole universe, both visible and invisible, celebrate; for Christ is risen, joy eternal."

The prototype of the ninth ode is the song of the Mother of God, "My soul magnifies the Lord" and recalls the Angelic Salutation: "The angel exclaimed to her, full of grace: Rejoice, O pure Virgin! And again I say: rejoice! Your Son is risen from the grave on the third day and has raised the dead. O People, rejoice!" The angel brings the joy of the Resurrection to Mary also, and this joy is indeed a double one: Her Son is risen and by His resurrection has saved others. The words of the ninth ode are a response to words of the Mother of God, in which she expresses her humility in the yard of Zachary's house: "He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid; for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; because He who is mighty has done great things for me." (Luke 1:48)

The Canon of the Resurrection ends with the hymns of Lauds, which exhort us "to sing hymns to Your (Christ's) saving passion and glorify Your Resurrection." Christ must be glorified on this day for "He has endured crucifixion, overthrown death and risen from the dead." Today, "we praise Your divine condescension and sing hymns to You, O



Christ! In order to save the world, You were born of a virgin without leaving the Father. You suffered as man and willingly endured crucifixion, and You rose from the tomb. O Lord, glory to You."

The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom has a slight deviation from its ordinary celebration. Immediately after the initial invocation, the celebrant sings the Paschal troparion in order to emphasize the joy and solemn happiness brought by the glorious Resurrection of Christ. The Gospel, taken



from John 1:1-17, is divided into twelve verses. After reading each verse, the celebrant pauses and all the bells are rung. The Gospel is read in various languages, signifying that the redemptive work of Christ applies to all peoples, to the whole world. During the Eucharistic commemorations, instead of the usual hymn in honor of the Mother of God, "It is truly proper to glorify you ..." the Angelic Salutation from the Resurrection Service with the irmos of the ninth ode is sung: "Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem..." After the Communion, all hymns are replaced by the Paschal troparion.

A special feature of Pascha is the blessing of the Paschal food. Cleansed in body and soul, it is only right that our food also should be blessed so that we may in every way enjoy our pasch - great, solemn and sanctified - the feast of Christ's glorious and victorious Resurrection.

During Vespers, instead of the usual introductory prayers and Psalm 103, we repeat many times the Paschal troparion because the Resurrection of Christ is the crowning point of all the prophecies of the Old Testament. During the procession around the altar the priest carries the Gospel book and after the prokimenon reads the section which describes the apparition of the Risen Christ on the evening of the first Paschal Sunday and the doubting of Saint Thomas the Apostle. At the end of Vespers, the Paschal sticheras are sung while the people kiss the cross.

Pascha is celebrated publicly as a solemn feast for three days. Liturgically, it is observed for the whole week, called "Bright Week," and its post-festive period lasts until the Ascension, that is, for 39 days.

(From: *The Liturgical Year of the Byzantine Rite* by Father Basil Shereghy, 1968, Seminary Press. Imprimatur: Most Reverend Stephen Kocisko, DD)



WHAT'S COOKING FOR PASCHA?

By Georgia Zeedick

Slavic people everywhere will be taking baskets loaded with holiday foods to church for the traditional Paschal blessing which is a *must* prior to eating those exquisite foods.

Neatly arranged in the baskets will be *sunka* (ham), *slanina* (bacon), *chrin* (beets with horseradish), salt, *pascha*, *kolbassi*, *hrudka* (*sirets*), butter, *pysanki* (ornately decorated eggs for decoration), colored eggs for eating, and *kolachi*. Some people may add candy and a bottle of wine (or other items of Lenten sacrifice) to their baskets.

After the foods are placed in the basket, an embroidered cloth cover is placed over them and a blessed candle is fastened upright near the basket handle.

For the first-timers who have never put together a Paschal basket, let alone prepared foods for it, the whole process can be mystifying. Every cook has his or her favorite way of preparing these foods and of measuring the ingredients for them, and asking for recipes can result in confusion.

To take some of the mystery out of the preparation of the traditional foods, here are a few recipes gleaned from my own experience and a few Slavic cookbooks.

open end with string, placing string very close to top of ball. Caution: This will be hot. Hang over sink until cool. Remove cheesecloth when cool; wrap and refrigerate. (The whey from the *hrudka* can be saved and used when making *pascha*. To conserve the whey, place the colander over a large pot before pouring mixture into cheesecloth.)

Pascha

3 cups scalded milk, or enough scalded milk added to whey from *hrudka* to make 3 cups
 ½ tsp. salt
 6 beaten eggs
 ½ cup lukewarm water
 ½ cup sugar
 1 cup melted butter
 ½ large cake yeast or equivalent portion of dry yeast
 12 to 14 cups flour.

In a large bowl, combine milk, sugar, with butter and cool to lukewarm. Save 2 tablespoons of the eggs and add the rest of the eggs to the milk mixture. In a separate bowl, crumble yeast in water and let stand for 10 minutes. Add to above mixture. Add flour, about 2 cups at a time, until the dough can be handled.

Knead on floured board for 15 minutes. Place dough in greased bowl, grease top and let rise in a warm place for about 1½ hours.

be saved and shaped into designs (plaits, crosses, etc.) and placed on top of the unbaked *paschy*. These fancy shapes can be prevented from scorching in the oven by placing aluminum foil on top of the *pascha* during baking.

Hrin

(Beets with Horseradish)

8 cans whole beets, drained

3 bottles horseradish (Do not use creamed horseradish.)

Grind beets, using fine grinder attachment. The juice can be saved for soup. Add horseradish to beets; mix well, refrigerate. An empty horseradish jar (washed, label removed and dipped in boiling water to sterilize it) can be filled with the mixture and placed in the Easter basket. The jar's cap can be disguised with aluminum foil, thus hiding any advertisement.

Kolachi

(Nut and Poppyseed)

8 egg yolks
 8 cups flour
 ½ lb. butter
 1 cake yeast
 1 cup sugar
 2 cups scalded milk
 4 tbs. shortening

Beat eggs and sugar. Melt butter and shortening in hot milk, saving ½ cup for the yeast. Dissolve yeast in lukewarm milk and let stand for a few minutes. Combine both mixtures in large bowl.

Add flour and mix well with hands until dough leaves the hands. Refrigerate overnight. In the morning, divide the dough into eight balls and let rise for one hour. Roll out on floured board and spread with filling. Roll up gently, tucking in ends.

Bake at 350 degrees until brown, about 45 minutes.

Brush tops of rolls, prior to putting into oven, with an egg-milk mixture. Doing so produces beautifully browned, shiny rolls.

Nut Filling

1 lb. ground walnuts
 1 cup canned milk
 ½ cup sugar
 2 eggs
 ½ cup honey (optional)

Combine sugar and nuts. Beat eggs and add to mixture, add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly. Bring to boil, remove from stove; let cool. Roll out dough to ½-inch thickness; brush with butter; place filling on dough and roll up. Bake.

Poppyseed Filling

1 lb. ground poppyseed
 ½ cup honey
 ½ cup sugar
 2 Tsp. butter, melted
 ½ cup milk

Combine sugar with poppyseed. Add melted butter and then add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until blended. Cool and spread over dough that has been rolled out to ½-inch thickness and brushed with butter. Roll up and bake.

Ham

The ham is decorated and baked according to your favorite recipe. How large a ham you buy and use depends on how many people you are serving. For a 20-pound ham: Cut it in half, decorate the halves, bake them and place one of them in the basket.

Kolbasi

Again, the amount of kolbasi purchased depends on how many eager eaters you are serving.

Place the kolbasi in a pan, cover with water and boil for about 45 minutes. Some cooks, after the kolbasi is boiled, place a few into a baking pan and sprinkle them with about 2 tablespoons of brown sugar and honey. This is then popped into the oven for about 15 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool before refrigerating.

Butter

If you prefer not to use already prepared butter for the Easter feasting, the butter can be made by whipping heavy cream. Use either one pint or one-half pint heavy whipping cream. Place in bowl and mix with hand beater until butter forms. Place butter in a small fancy bowl and decorate for use in Easter basket.

(The above is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in the April 10, 1979, edition of the *Homestead, PA, Daily Messenger*.)



Hrudka (Sirets)

1 doz. eggs
 1 or 2 tsp. vanilla
 1 qt. milk
 ½ cup sugar

Combine all ingredients in a white enameled pan. Cook over medium to low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture curdles. Pour mixture into a colander that is lined with several thicknesses of cheesecloth. Once mixture is drained, pick it up, cheesecloth and all, and shape into a ball by twisting the top part of the cheesecloth. Tightly tie

Punch down, and let rise a second time for about 45 minutes.

After second rising, shape into four balls and place into greased pans. Small, 1½ quart enameled saucepans can be used for baking. Let rise. Brush tops with 2 tablespoons eggs to which some milk has been added. To achieve that glazed appearance on the loaves, brush tops several times prior to removing them from the oven. Bake at 325 degrees for about 1 hour.

Note: Before placing dough in pans, about 1 cup of the dough can

How to Put Together a Traditional Easter Basket



mira farahat



PASCHA - The Easter Bread (pronounced "Paska.") A sweet, yeast bread rich in eggs, butter, etc. Symbolic of Christ Himself, Who is our "True Bread." Usually a round loaf baked with a golden crust, decorated with a symbol indicative of Christ. Sometimes a cross † of dough is placed on top, encircled by a plait, giving it a crowned effect; or the Greek abbreviations for the name of Christ, IC XC (Jesus Christ), may be used. The letters XB are an abbreviation for "Christ is Risen".

HAM (Slav, "Šunka" – pron. Shoon-ka) - the flesh meat popular with the Slavs as the main dish for Holy Pascha, because of its richness and symbolic of the great joy and abundance of Easter. Some may prefer lamb or veal. These meats are usually well roasted or cooked ahead of time so that the festivity of the day will not be burden anyone with food preparation, and that all may be free to enjoy the Feast.



SAUSAGE (Slav, "Kolbassi" pron. Kol-bus-i). A spicy, sausage made of pork products and garlic; indicative of God's favour and generosity.

EGGS (Slav, "Pysanky" pron. Pi-sun-ki). Hard-boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and designs made with beeswax, indicative of new life and resurrection.



HORSERADISH (Slav, "Chrin" pron. Khrin) Horseradish mixed with grated red beets symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds, yet sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. The bittersweet red coloured mixture reminds us of the sufferings Christ endured for us

CHEESE (Slav "Hrudka" or "Sirets" pron hrood-ka or si-rets) A custard-type cheese shaped into a ball, with a slight sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. Also, creamed cheese is placed in a small dish. Both cheeses are decorated with symbols (IC XC, or XB, or the cross) using cloves or pepper balls.



BUTTER (Slav, "Maslo.") This favourite dairy product is often shaped into a figure of a Lamb, or small cross and decorated as the cheese. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have towards all things.

BACON (Slav "Slanina") A piece of uncooked bacon cured with spices. Symbolic of the super-abundance of God's mercy and loving-kindness to us.



SALT (in Slav, "Sol") A condiment which gives flavor and preserves food. It is a reminder of Christ's words, "You are the salt of the earth." As Christians, we are called to be the "salt of the earth," to give "flavor" and meaning to human life on earth by living according to the Gospel; and thus, to preserve human life from moral corruption and decay.

THE EMBROIDERED PASCHAL CLOTH. The articles mentioned above are placed in a wicker basket and a ribbon or bow is tied to the handle. A decorated candle is placed in the basket and is lit at the time of blessing. A linen cover, usually embroidered with an image of the risen Christ, the cross or another appropriate symbol, together with the words "Christ is Risen - Truly He is Risen," is placed over the food when brought to Church. Before the blessing, the cover is removed, set on the ground or table, and the basket is placed upon the cloth for the blessing.

The above is a description of TRADITIONAL EASTER FOODS included in an Easter Basket in Central and Eastern Europe. However, you may substitute Traditional Easter Foods with foods common to your own country of origin. Almost every nationality has its own type of sausage or prepared meat. The important thing is that after the Great Fast, the first food you eat should be blessed food, which should be eaten and enjoyed together as a family on EASTER SUNDAY, after church services. Another popular custom is to let children have (or make up themselves) their own baskets, to instill in them the tradition for the future. These may be filled with eggs, chocolates, toys, etc.



PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

FASTING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

For better or worse, social media has come to play a very significant role in our society in a relatively short period of time. It certainly is a double-edged sword. While it does bring many beneficial things to society, it also leads to many, many temptations. There is one temptation in particular that perplexes me to no end: the idea of broadcasting our fasting to the entire world.

At the outset of the Great Fast mere weeks ago, I almost immediately noticed a rather intriguing phenomenon. Many people from many different Churches/jurisdictions/traditions were posting memes and commentaries about fasting and the start of the Fast, both in the East and in the West. Were these positive, prayerful posts? However much we would all hope they were, they were far from it! These posts were primarily rooted in how one tradition is superior to another because

the fasting regulations are more strict, or how one is better than the other because the penitential season started earlier. I could go on, but I am pretty hopeful my point has been made.

I was really upset by this, I would say almost furious. All I could think about was what Christ teaches about fasting in the Gospel of Matthew.

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)

Our fasting is to be conducted in secret. We are to put on a spirit of joy and

love. No where does Christ say to rub your fasting in your fellow man's face for your own self-engrandizement. I am sorry if this seems a little harsh, but it is true nonetheless.

Fasting is not a competition. Fasting is an ancient practice meant to bring us closer to God, closer to His Christ, through a spirit of integrity, humility, patience and love to use the words of Saint Ephraim. As we pray in the *Lenten Triodion* as the Fast approaches:

O my soul, if you are fasting from food but not purifying yourself of your passions, it is useless to be without food and to boast of it. For if you do not wish to correct yourself, you shall become a liar before God. You shall be like the evil spirits who never eat. Watch, therefore, that you do not waste your fast by sinning. Be insensitive to your foolish passions. Act as if you were standing before the crucified Savior,

or even, be crucified with the One who was placed on the Cross for you. Call out to Him, saying: Remember me, O Lord, when You shall come into your kingdom. (Apostica at Matins, Wednesday of Cheesefare Week)

There is great wisdom in this rather short prayer, far too much to discuss now. Let this be a meditation for us all.

Doctor Seuss' Grinch eventually came to the realization that Christmas didn't come from a store; that Christmas meant something a little more. If we truly fast, from food and from influences that draw us away from the glory of the Resurrection, perhaps we, just as the Grinch, may realize that fasting isn't about food; that fasting, perhaps, means something a little more. **ECL**



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

MOTHERS WHO FAST AND THE SONS THEY RAISE

Byzantine liturgical hymns are Bible study set to music. All the stichiri sung between Psalm verses at Vespers and Matins, the canons of Matins and the tropars and kondaks that vary from day to day, all draw their inspiration and many of their actual words from the books of the Old and New Testaments. Often, they weave texts together into new patterns that surprise us, make us think, and maybe even repent.

In the ninth ode of the Matins canon for the second Tuesday of the Great Fast, we sing, “You bloomed with Samuel, the fruit of fasting; you nursed Samson, the great prince. You perfect priests and prophets. Sanctify us, O honorable Fast.” Once we get over our surprise at speaking to the Fast as if it were a person (personification happens regularly in these hymns), we may find ourselves wondering what Samuel and Samson have in common and what any of this has to do with fasting. To find the answer, we need to ask their mothers.

In the first chapter of the First Book of Samuel we meet Elkanah and his infertile wife Hannah. Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah, who has produced sons and daughters, misses no opportunity to taunt her rival. When they make their annual pilgrimage to the shrine at Shiloh to offer sacrifice, Elkanah is careful to show his love by giving his Hannah a double portion of the sacrificial feast. Hannah, depressed and embittered, refuses to eat and spends the night in

prayer at the shrine. An encounter with the priest Eli begins badly but ends with Eli’s blessing on Hannah’s silent vow to dedicate a son to serve the shrine if only the Lord will allow her to give birth. The prayer is granted, the son is born, the vow is kept and, at three years of age, Samuel begins his apprenticeship in the shrine at Shiloh where he eventually succeeds Eli as priest.

Hannah and Elkanah dedicated their son to the Lord by vowing him to be a Nazirite. The requirements for this unique role in Israel are defined in the book of Numbers 6:1-21. The dedicated man or woman (although no female Nazirite ever appears in the Bible) must abstain from wine and strong drink (and from grapes, raisins and vinegar), refrain from cutting the hair of the head, and avoid ritual impurity by approaching a corpse (even of his own parents). Such a vow was normally made only for a limited time. St Paul made such a vow, along with four other Christian men in Jerusalem, only to be arrested at the sacrifice terminating their vow (Acts 21:23-29). The vow made by his parents on his behalf seems to have made Samuel a Nazirite for life. As the two books that bear his name recount, he grew up to be a great prophet who anointed and counseled Israel’s first two kings: Saul and David.

Samson lived before the era of kings, when the Lord Himself was acknowledged as Israel’s king. From time to

time, when Israel was threatened by the nations around them, the Lord would raise up some man or woman to defend His people. These charismatic, informal leaders are called “judges” in Scripture and the book of Judges describes a progressive decline in the morals of God’s people under their rule.

Like Hannah, Samson’s mother (whom the Bible never names although Jewish tradition identifies her as Hazeleponi: 1 Chronicles 4:3) was barren. One day, she was suddenly visited by a “man of God,” (eventually revealed as an angel), who promises her a son. He commands her to abstain from wine and strong drink and to eat nothing unclean until her son is born. He further imposes a lifelong Nazirite vow on the child and predicts that “he will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines,” (whose center was the coast of modern Lebanon; Judges 13:1-25).

The similarities between Samuel and Samson end there. Scripture describes the adult Samson as supernaturally strong but morally and mentally challenged. He breaks two of the three Nazirite restrictions casually (drink: Judges 14:10-20; ritual impurity from a corpse: Judges 14:6-9; 15:15) and stupidly permits Delilah to cut his hair (16:17.19) leading to his capture by the Philistines and his eventual death, along with some 3,000 of his enemies, in a final moment of brute strength.

Our Lenten hymn celebrates the role fasting played in the lives of the pious mothers of Samson and Samuel. Especially Hannah, who combined fasting, prayer and tears with patient endurance of other people’s harsh words (1 Samuel 1:12-16) is an excellent model for what Lent can be. Samson’s casual attitude toward the Nazirite discipline offers instead a cautionary tale about the need for self-control, vigilance, and wisdom—some of the very qualities the daily Lenten reading from the book of Proverbs urges us to acquire. **ECL**



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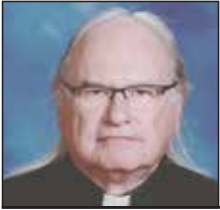
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THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

THE HISTORY OF THE BISHOP'S MINISTRY

The role of bishops in the Church has developed in history. The word "bishop," itself means "overseer." In origin, they were appointed by the apostles to "oversee" the communities they had established. The apostles were missionaries, the bishops were local clergy. The bishop, therefore, as the successor of the apostles, is often called "shepherd." This was the commission given by Jesus to Peter, "Feed my lambs, "Feed my sheep." The bishop is also a member of an episcopal college. In the Gospels, Jesus treats the apostles as a kind of council. There are to be twelve, to witness to the resurrection to the twelve tribes of Israel, and, in the future, to judge them. When Judas betrays Jesus, Matthias must be elected to make up the number twelve. There are indications that this number was symbolic. In the New Testament, there are many more "apostles," and the bishops, as successors of the apostles, are not limited to twelve.

As shepherd, the bishop is charged with guiding, leading, teaching and enlightening the people. Since there was to be only one shepherd of the sheep, each bishop was restricted to guiding the Christian community of one city. As presider over the eucharist, his church included the area that could be covered by a viable eucharistic community. Sometimes bishops had to be disciplined on this score. The Nicene Council, Canon 15, forbade the transfer of bishops from city to city, a law that is honored more in the breach, and Canon 16 forbade them to ordain clerics from another city. After the conversion of the empire, the bishops also acquired a civil custody of the city. This

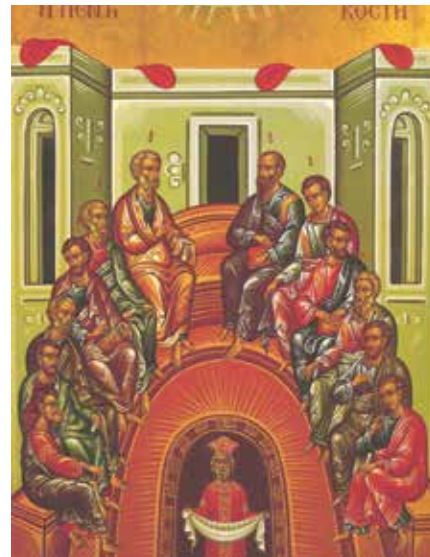
was symbolized by the eagle rug upon which bishops stand ceremonially. The eagle represented his guardian role over the city, as Psalm 90:4 says: "With his pinions he will cover you, and under his wings you will take refuge." The requirements for a bishop, therefore, were, 1) that he be a people's man, chosen from among the people; 2) that he be suitable for times of poverty; 3) that he be a good man, generous, merciful and wise. The earliest way of choosing bishops was election from the people, either by the presbyters or by the presbyters and people together. The choice of a bishop was very important, since he acquired a great role in the whole society, especially in the social services, feeding the hungry, taking care of the sick, the widows and the orphans.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* (Syria, 4th century), describes one process for choosing bishops: "A bishop to be ordained is to be, as we have already said,...chosen by the whole people, who, when he is named and approved, let the people assemble, with the presbytery and the bishops that are present, on the Lord's day, and let them give their consent." (8, 2, 4)

The consent of the people is still given, in the singing of "Axios," after the ordination. In the second century, it became a necessary part of the rite that the bishop be ordained by at least three other bishops. This was to give the neighboring churches a say in the election of bishops, and the episcopal college would have a veto power on an unworthy choice.

In the third century, bishops begin to form a definite college. Saint Cyprian noted:

"There are many bishops in the body; they are joined together by the cement of mutual concord and the bond of unity so that if any one of our college attempts to frame a heresy, to wound and worry the flock of Christ, the others come to the rescue." (Epistle 68:3-4) Examples of this are the condemnation of the Novatian heresy in Rome, and the deposition of Paul of Samosata in Antioch. Bishops wrote letters of communication to each other, a practice noted by the pagan Emperor Aurelius. (*Church History* 4, 22, 1).



Icon of Pentecost

In the fourth century, this collegiality reached its ultimate point in the institution of the ecumenical council. Patriarchates, Metropolitanates and Provinces are established and the Church becomes organized across the Empire. Beginning with Nicea (325), the ecu-

menical council became the highest dogmatic authority in the Church, because it represented the consensus of the bishops of the world (or, at least, those outside its boundaries usually did not participate, this led eventually to the rejection of the Council of Ephesus by the East Syrian Church and the rejection of Chalcedon by the "monophysites").

One problem with this was that the new system tended to favor administrators rather than leaders. Bishops were to become "the moderators, protectors of the status quo, defenders of tradition, administrators, and not innovators." This happened because of the need in the Church for tradition. The Spirit is present in the Church always, but "He will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears...He will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 16:13; 15:25) There is a necessity for some standards of faith, otherwise, the Church would split into numerous sects, and the unity of the Body of Christ would be destroyed. Saint Paul warned, "Keep watch over yourselves, and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given you to guard. Shepherd the church of God, which he has acquired at the price of his own blood. I know that when I am gone, savage wolves will come among you who will not spare the flock. (Acts 20:28-29)" One can never pretend that bishops are always perfect leaders, but they are the most visible sign of the Spirit in the Church and respect for their office is necessary so that "there will be one flock, one shepherd.. (John 10:16)" **ECL**



LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

FORTY DAYS OF THE GREAT FEAST

By now we are fully entrenched in the Great Fast, and the cycle of fasting, abstinence, almsgiving, and prayer are part of our routine. Maybe. The first week of the Fast is a bit of a learning curve, stepping out of old routines and into new ones. But for most of us, the muscle memory is there, and we make it through Clean Monday a little hungrier but mostly unscathed. Wednesday comes and our breakfast order at the drive-thru makes a quick switch as we change it from bacon and eggs on a biscuit to a sandwich that contains no meat. Now we're remembering that this is a time to sacrifice a little more, and we fall into a Lenten rhythm. Prayer becomes more of a priority, perhaps doing the daily readings from Scripture, maybe using a prayer app for daily accountability, and set-

ting aside an evening or two to make it to services. We're on our way. We can do this!

As the weeks roll by fatigue can set in. Physically, we might feel like we're "dragging" ourselves to church more often, those "Byzantine calisthenics" (also known as prostrations) engaging muscles we forgot we had, and were content not to disturb at all. Mentally, it may be hard to concentrate, and spiritually – we may wonder if we're really getting anything out of all this. The longer the Fast goes the harder it may become for us to stay committed, or to focus on the meaning and purpose of this time.

Sacrifices are hard to make, there's no question. That's the definition of *sacri-*

ficial, things that make us uncomfortable and push us out of complacency. The sacrificial aspect of the Great Fast is designed to conform us more and more to Christ, to transform our hunger for food, possessions, or experiences into a hunger for Him. These sacrifices are also meant to reorient our gaze away from ourselves and onto both God and others. When we talk ourselves out of getting to a weekday service, spending time with Scripture, or making any of the other sacrifices we promised ourselves at the beginning, we're looking only at ourselves, which is dangerous unless that look inward is to reflect on our sins, the ways we have been honoring God and neighbor, and how we can better surrender ourselves to Him tomorrow.

None of this is meant to guilt or scold anyone; we're all in the same boat, to greater and lesser degrees and at different times throughout the Fast, and on our lifelong Christian pilgrimage. And that's precisely why we need this reset, something to shake us up (wake us up!) so that we can remember we are God's sons and daughters, and though sin makes life a whole lot harder, we're not doing any of this on our own; He's with us in all of it. The sacrifices are good, they teach us detachment, which helps us to be less self-centered or dependent on things that aren't good for us spiritually, emotionally, or physically. But what if all these sacrifices lead us in the opposite direction: to becoming prideful and judging others who don't sacrifice as much as we do, or in the way we think they should?

What if our efforts at self-denial are too extreme, or our attitude toward them is one strictly of “rule-following,” and we become resentful of having to *do* all of these extra things that are hard, boring, or just don’t seem to mean anything to us?

This column is definitely not making the case to forget what the Church says about the Fast, or to abandon the ancient practices of more time in prayer, less indulgence in certain foods, and greater charity toward others. The Church puts these in place not to torture or control us, but to give us guidance that we’d likely never come up with on our own. That said, the title

of this column is not a typo, but a suggestion that a shift in mindset might be just the thing needed to knock us out of any Lenten doldrums we may face. Make the sacrifices the Church asks of you, and any others you think you can do. But instead of letting the fatigue of sacrifice start weighing you down – or making you give up – perhaps it’s time for some “feasting.”

As you look ahead at the rest of your Lenten pilgrimage refocus from all the good things you must fast from and make a list of what you can feast on, the things you can indulge in right now that will also draw you closer to Christ, be more charitable toward others, and

begin seeing how God is transforming you. What does this “Great Feast” look like? It’s up to you, but here are some ideas: indulge in kindness and gratitude. When you see an opportunity to help someone, take it (see Proverbs 3:30-31). Always thank someone who does a good deed for you and remember to thank those you love just for being in your life. Instead of feeding on gossip, lay out a feast of kind words and invite those talking out of turn to also indulge in kindness, and have the strength to walk away if the feeding frenzy continues. Feast on the word of God in Scripture, on moments of quiet where He can speak, and times of rest that don’t need to be filled by

“noise,” except good conversations with friends, quality time with family, or opportunities to help people who need your presence and unique gifts.

As these days move on toward the glorious celebration of Christ’s Resurrection, don’t let go of fasting. It’s an important item in your spiritual backpack and a powerful tool against temptation. But don’t be afraid to pair it with some targeted feasting on all the good opportunities God is placing before you to better love, serve, and prepare to receive all of the joy He has waiting for you at Pascha. **ECL**

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.

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Maureen French
ECL circulation editor

SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



THE HIDDEN LIFE OF NAZARETH

Our Lord lived in obscurity and silence for eighteen years. After Mary and Joseph found Him in the Temple at the age of twelve, “He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them” (Lk. 2:51). “Jesus Himself was about thirty years old when He began His ministry” (Lk. 3:23), and was crucified and raised, at the age of thirty-three. The vast majority of Jesus’ life (from twelve to thirty) was lived in obscurity, hiddenness, and seeming insignificance.

Even though we might want to be known, loved, and appreciated, Scripture calls us to a hidden life, in imitation of Our Lord’s life of Nazareth. Our Lord worked as a carpenter (Mk. 6:3) and fulfilled His daily duties in the home of Joseph and Mary. He lived a life of intense prayer, silence, and labor. Let’s forget about “making our mark” in this world, and live the hidden life of Nazareth with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

Saint Paul directs prayer to be made “for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim. 2:2), and tells us: “make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, and to mind your own business, and to work with

your own hands, even as we instructed you” (1 Thess. 4:11). In other words, imitate Christ in His hidden life. Make Nazareth your home.

In a few years, we will die, and after we die, we will be quickly forgotten. Do you remember your great-grandparents? Most people didn’t know and don’t remember their great-grandparents. They are largely forgotten. You and I will soon be forgotten too. You’ll probably be forgotten within one hundred years of your death and more likely, you’ll be forgotten within fifty years. To desire to be known, revered, praised, appreciated, or famous, is pride, it is the “pride of life.”

“Don’t love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father’s love isn’t in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—isn’t the Father’s, but is the world’s” (1 Jn. 2:15-16).

Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) writes: “A hidden and obscure life affords great security to those who sincerely desire to love God. Our Divine Master Himself deigned to teach us this by His own example, for He spent thirty years in the obscurity of Nazareth and the workshop of a humble carpen-

ter. In imitation of their Divine Model, many saints withdrew into the desert and lived in remote caves to escape the esteem of men. The desire to put ourselves forward and merit the plaudits of men, to be regarded as very successful in our undertakings, is, according to Saint Vincent de Paul, an evil which causes us to forget our God; it vitiates our holiest actions and more than anything else impedes our progress in the spiritual life.”

Thomas A’ Kempis (1380-1471) writes: “The man who longs for the true, eternal glory does not care for that of time; and he who seeks passing fame or does not in his heart despise it, undoubtedly cares little for the glory of heaven” (Imitation, 6).

“Truly You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Is. 45:15).

Father Louis Lallemand (1588-1635) says of Our Lord, “He is hidden in the bosom of His Father, in the womb of His Mother, in His birth, in His childhood, in His exile into Egypt, in His abode at Nazareth, in the course of His ordinary life, in the ignominy of His death, in the world after His resurrection, in heaven after His ascension, in the Holy Eucharist which may be called

the great mystery of the hidden life. When we love Jesus Christ, we love to abide with Him. ‘Your life is hid with Christ in God.’”

If we love Jesus Christ, we will love the hidden life of Nazareth. Don’t be concerned about fame, honor, earthly glory, or reputation. Don’t be down on yourself if you feel you’ve never accomplished anything of significance. Live not for this world but for eternity. In the hiddenness, obscurity, and seeming insignificance of Nazareth, know that you live for Jesus Christ and His heavenly kingdom. **ECL**



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TYPICON AND CHANCERY OFFICE SCHEDULE

MARCH, 2026

- 11 Mid-Lent
- 25 Annunciation of the Theotokos
Solemn Holyday
- 29 Palm Sunday

APRIL, 2026

- 2 Holy Thursday
- 3 Good Friday
- 4 Holy Saturday
- 5 PASCHA: THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST
- 6 Bright Monday
Solemn Holyday

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