



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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## UNDERSTANDING ICONS

### Icons of Saints Peter & Paul Holyday of Obligation, June 29

Written by Father Joseph Bertha, PhD, Originally Published in the June, 2012 issue of the Eastern Catholic Life

*Lord, you have received your steadfast*

*and inspired preachers, the foremost of your apostles,*

*into the enjoyment of your good gifts and repose.*

*You preferred their sufferings and death*

*above any sacrifice. For you alone know*

*the secrets of the heart.*

*—Kontakion of Saints Peter & Paul*

Icons for this feast generally are of the same iconography, Saint Peter stands on the east side of the icon, while Saint Paul is shown on the western side. Each of the Apostles is shown with individual characteristics in Byzantine icons, which distinguish one from the other. Many of these traits developed early on in the development of icon painting, and already by the fifth century in surviving icons, these qualities can be easily recognized.

One of the earliest depictions of Saint Peter is the 6th century encaustic (colored wax) icon exhibited at the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai. In this icon, several features typifying Saint Peter appear: 1) He has a full head with white tightly curled hair and beard, which indicates his approximate physical age at his martyrdom; also the white color signifies the multiple graces radiating forth from his priestly heart. 2) Saint Peter clutches the keys to the kingdom in his hand, a reference to the authority bestowed on him by Christ to bind and loose sins. 3) Saint Peter's

eyes search and plumb the depths of human souls seeking and granting God's ever abundant mercy, eyes which also portray the light of the presence of Christ in this world. Remember that Saint Peter actually perceived and recognized Jesus as the Messiah, proclaiming him the Son of God. These very same eyes were also purified by his tears of repentance shed after a triple denial of even knowing Our Lord on the Holy Thursday evening. 4) His high brow expresses his dignity as the primary of the apostles, and also indirectly suggests a rock, the prominent "Peter" of the Church of Christ.

Saint Peter wears a himation (cloak) and chiton (tunic), typical daily attire from the epoch. Frequently, horizontal stripes, called clavi can be seen cross hatching his chiton (tunic) and refer doubly to the clavi, the ribbon like streams which portray his teaching office (and are found on the contemporary Byzantine Bishops mantiya), and secondly harken back to the Jewish prayer shawl or tallit.

On the other side stands Saint Paul, a bald mature man with a very large forehead who holds either a book or scrolls. Saint Paul is shown as the author of many of the New Testament epistles which he holds in his hand. His grand temple of his head highlights his profound intelligence in the ways of the Lord, while the creases in his skin indicate the sufferings he endured for the faith. He too is dressed in a himation and chiton daily wear for the time, and is shown aged at the approximate period of his martyrdom.

Sometimes, the two apostles hold a model of the Church between them, it is because of their preaching, teaching and evangelizing that the Church is based on the solid rock foundation of the truth in Jesus Christ.

An interesting interplay occurs between Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Saint Peter, who denounced Our Lord on the night of Holy Thursday, has his eyes opened with the appearance of the Resurrection Lord at the shore in Galilee where

Saint Peter is commanded to "feed my sheep." Saint Paul too, was a vehement denouncer of the Lord, before his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. It is there that Our Lord opens his eyes to the Truth, and Saint Paul preaches the Way throughout the entire world. How significant that these two holy men with feet of clay become the models and columns of the faith, gifted with wisdom from God to both see and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord to the world! **ECL**



# I LIFT UP MY EYES

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



Right: Seminarians for the Eparchy of Pas-saic Alex and Jacob and Jacob's family. They are studying at the International Theological Institute in Trumau. Please pray for them.



Right: Trinity tower in Baden. The Emperor ordered these towers built in every city to commemorate delivery from the bubonic plague. They are called "trinity tower" or "plague tower". The German word for "plague" is "pest".



Above & Left: Velehrad was the center of missionary activity for Saints Cyril and Metho-dius before their trip to Rome where Cyril died. His baptismal name was Constantine, but he took the monastic name Cyril before his death in Rome. Our Church has a pilgrimage to this site every year. Metropolitan Archbishop Jonas is speaking after the Divine Liturgy. Archbishop Cyril Vasyl is to the right and then Bishop Milan Lach. Bishop Kurt is to the left of the Metropolitan.

Right: Maria Theresa was the great Empress of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her full name was Maria Theresia Walburga Amalia Christina. In addition to ruling the empire and fighting constant wars, she gave birth to sixteen children in nineteen years. She said that she would have been fighting on the front lines if she were not constantly pregnant. She is also the "mother" of our church. In our Eparchy, the Maria Theresa foundation helps our married priests with their family expenses, like a good mother. I was able to visit the tomb of her and her husband at the "Kapuzinergruft", which means Capuchin Crypt. They share a tomb and monument. They must have been very much in love. She described her accession to the troubled throne as follows: "I found myself without money, without credit, without army, without experience and knowledge of my own and finally, also without any counsel because each one of them at first wanted to wait and see how things would develop." She got us our first diocese, and gave us our buildings in Uzhord, where there are a chalice, crozier, and wash basin donated by her to our bishop.





Above: The great Esterhazy family lived in Hungary, but their land and palace is now in Austria. One of the greatest composers in history, Jozef Haydn, worked for them for twenty years and you can visit his house there. This is his piano. Behind the piano you can see one of the uniforms he was expected to wear as a servant of the aristocratic family.



Right: The most important church in Vienna (and there a lot of important churches in Vienna) is Saint Stephen Dom. Among other things, it houses the original Mariapocs icon. At the end of World War II, the retreating German army was ordered by the Nazi leader of Vienna to reduce the cathedral to rubble with bombardment, but the German officer disobeyed orders and saved the structure. Then as the Red Army entered the city, looters lit fires that destroyed the roof of the cathedral. The roof was replaced with this beautiful tile roof, and each tile was donated by citizens rather than paid for by the government or wealthy donors. There are 230,000 glazed tiles.



In front of our Cathedral in Uzhhorod, there is a wall with over one hundred photos of local men killed in battle in the current war. You can see here Taras Gavrish, age 21, Mykhaylo Kozak, age 46, and Roman Hapak, age 21.



There was a Panachida for a fallen soldier at our Cathedral



I took t-shirts with me commemorating the 250th birthday of the United States of America, and some similar baseball caps. The seminarians seemed pleased with their t-shirts, and gave me a beautiful miter in return. I also visited a hospital in Uzhhorod, and did not take pictures. We visited the severely wounded and maimed soldiers. They are receiving the best possible wound care, though much of the damage is permanent, of course. The hard working physicians teleconference with the best in the world every few days, including the experts at Johns Hopkins. I suppose after the war, the best wound care specialists in the world will be these physicians from Ukraine. I gave the leftover baseball caps to the staff at the hospital. Last year, I was able to have five hundred Saint Michael medals blessed by the new pope, Pope Leo, and I gave them to the chaplain at the hospital to send to the troops.



Saint Martin Cathedral in Bratislava was one of the most important churches in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Emperors were crowned here for centuries, including our mother Maria Theresa. There was an important synagogue next door. Wherever the Marxists are in control, they try to erase all history, as they are doing now in our own country. They destroyed the historic synagogue and built an enormous highway in front of this cathedral as an insult. The ancient building is being damaged now by the truck traffic which shakes the foundation.



Our most important icon is the Mother of God of Mariapocs. After weeping and many miracles the emperor moved the icon to Vienna from the village of Mariapocs. The journey took a very long time because of the crowds and miraculous healings on the journey. This icon, the original, never wept again, but the copy in Mariapocs wept several more times at the Divine Liturgy, presaging momentous events such as the Russian Revolution and the two world wars of the tragic twentieth century. It was an honor and blessing to be able to pray for all of you in front of this great icon.



The crypt in our mother Cathedral in Uzhhorod is home to the tombs of many of our bishops. Of course, some of them were desecrated by the communists. You can see benches in the photo, because the crypt is now a bomb shelter for the elementary school next door. The area was quite safe until recently. Right after I left, there was a massive drone strike in Transcarpathia. I presume the children spent the time in this space under the Cathedral.



As in most of Europe, Hungarians have stopped having children and will disappear in a few decades. When I visited in 1987, the joke in eastern Hungary was that the only people having children were the gypsies and the Greek Catholic priest. The gypsies are continuing to have plenty of children and live in extreme poverty. The areas are rife with drugs. The daughters are frequently turned into prostitutes at age 16, not by their own choice. Our church has worked heroically with the gypsies for many decades while they were ignored by the government and the other churches. I visited our gypsy parish in 1987, and Bishop Abel took me to see the many facilities built since then including a full parish and schools. In this photo is Bishop Abel and the pastor of the gypsy parish.



I was able to spend a couple of hours in Baden. Baden means "bath" and there are cities in Germany, Austria, and England named after these spring fed natural baths. Beethoven lived here for three summers and composed his Ninth Symphony here. Mozart wrote his great hymn to the Holy Eucharist, "Ave Verum Corpus" which means "Hail True Body" here as a gift to the local choirmaster, his friend.

+Kurt Bunette



There is beautiful art everywhere in Austria, and much of it is pious. In Vienna, this spectacular statue shows Saint Michael the Archangel defeating the evil one with the help of a gold shield and a gold flaming sword. Saint Michael is the Patron of our Eparchy of Passaic.

# THIRTY YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP AND DIALOGUE: ORIENTALE LUMEN XXX IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

How often do you have the chance to sit down with a cardinal, archbishops, bishops, clergy, theologians, and lay leaders, from the Orthodox and Catholic traditions—not across a formal conference table, but in joint prayer or over coffee, meals, and evening conversations with others who deeply care about the unity of the Church?

That spirit has defined the Orientale Lumen conferences for the last three decades, even continuing virtually through the pandemic. This summer the gathering returns for its thirtieth meeting, in person.

Orientale Lumen XXX will take place July 13–15, 2026, at the beautifully renovated retreat center of the Saint John Paul II National Shrine in Washington, DC. Since its beginnings in 1997, the conference has quietly become one of the rare places where Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, and Roman Catholic Christians come together not only for theological discussion, but also for genuine friendship and prayer.

Many who attend each year speak about the accessibility of the speakers and the relaxed atmosphere. Participants do not simply listen to presentations and leave. They ask questions freely, continue conversations at social receptions and in the hallways, and often form friendships that continue long after the conference ends.

This year’s conference comes at an important moment in ecumenical dialogue. Discussions will focus on recent agreements between Catholics and Orthodox concerning primacy and synodality, and on how these agreements can be lived concretely in the life of the Church. Unity has been agreed upon: What’s next?

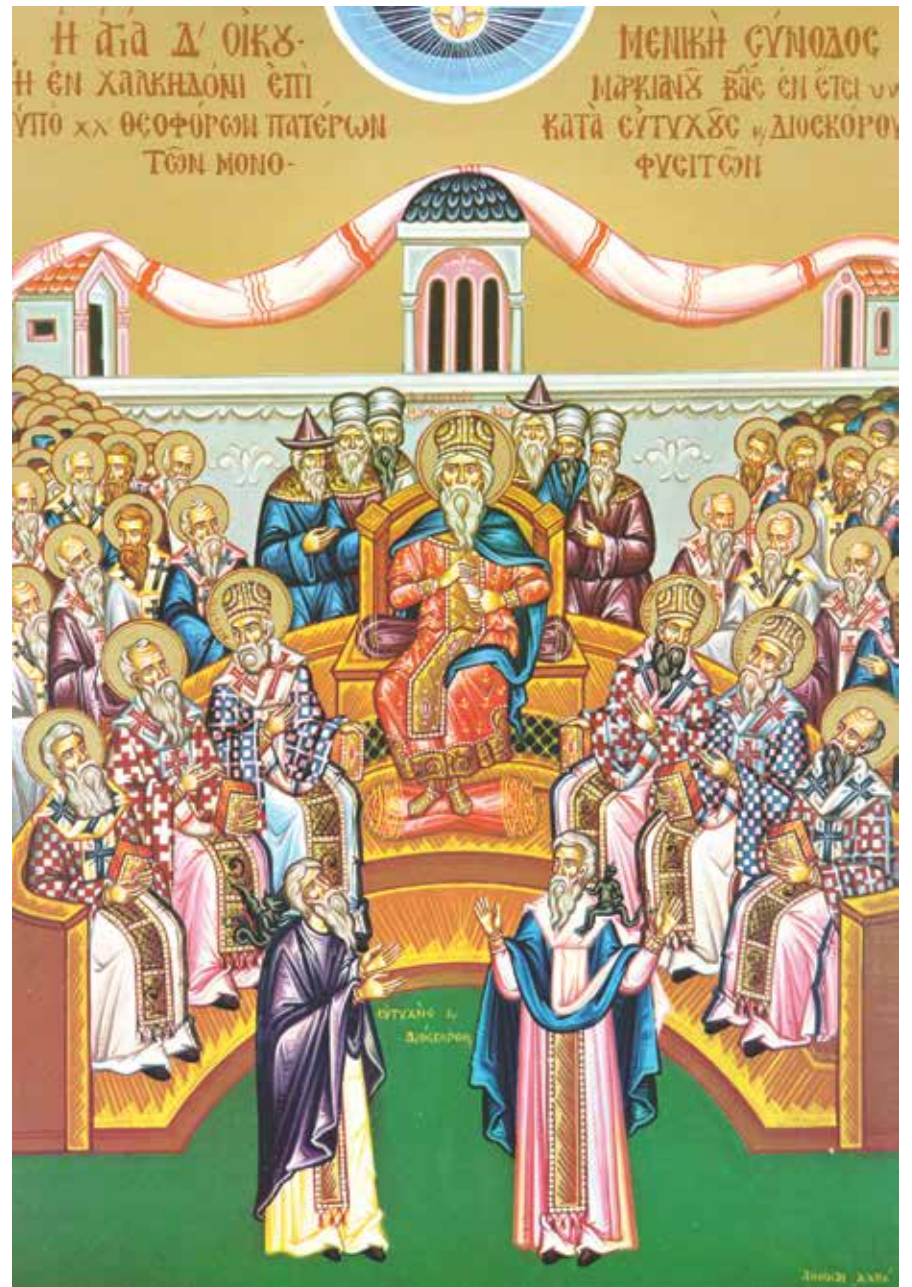
Among the speakers attending in person will be Cardinal Seán O’Malley, retired Archbishop of Boston, long known for his concern for Christian unity and reconciliation. Also joining

the conference is Archbishop Flavio Pace, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome, who is directly involved in the Catholic Church’s dialogue with the Orthodox Churches. Bishop Anthony Vrame of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Director of Holy Cross Press, will bring an Orthodox pastoral and theological perspective, while Bishop John Michael Botean of the Romanian Catholic Diocese of Canton returns as one of the faithful participants who has been the Catholic co-patron of Orientale Lumen conferences throughout its thirty-year history. Reader Jack Figel, founder of the conference, will also offer personal reflections after decades of organizing these gatherings.

Important voices will also participate virtually by video, including Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, Orthodox co-chair of the International Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, and Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia.

As Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said in a gathering in Constantinople, these conferences are a “grass roots” movement among lay persons and clergy which provide a forum for Christians to learn about the “light from the east.” Over the years, Orientale Lumen has welcomed many respected figures from East and West, including Metropolitan +Kallistos of Diokleia, Archbishop +Vsevolod of Scopelos, Archimandrite +Robert Taft, and numerous bishops, priests, theologians, monastics, and lay faithful. What has kept people returning is not only the quality of the presentations, but the sense that authentic Christian encounter is still possible.

For Eastern Catholics especially, the conference offers a natural home: a place where the traditions of the Christian East are appreciated, where questions about Church unity are discussed seriously, and where participants can meet others who share love for the



Icon of the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils

Eastern Churches and hope for reconciliation among Christians.

ence information can be found at: <https://olfoundation.net/upcoming-events/orientale-lumen-xxx/>

There are multiple registration options (full 3-day attendance, 1-day attendance, and discounts for clergy, faculty, and students). All the confer-

## SAVE THE DATES

### 2026 Marriage Jubilarian Dates

If you are celebrating a special Wedding Anniversary – 5-year increments, Please submit your name to your pastor to be included in this year’s Jubilarian Celebration.

**October 4, 2026 (Sunday)**

New York/New England Syncellate at Saint Nicholas, Danbury CT. 3:00 PM

**October 18, 2026 (Sunday)**

New Jersey Syncellate at Saint Mary’s, Hillsborough 3:00 PM

**October 25, 2026 (Sunday)**

Pennsylvania Syncellates, Saint John’s Hazleton, PA 3:00 PM

**November 14, 2026 (Saturday)**

Middle States Syncellate, Epiphany of Our Lord, Annandale, VA 4:00 PM

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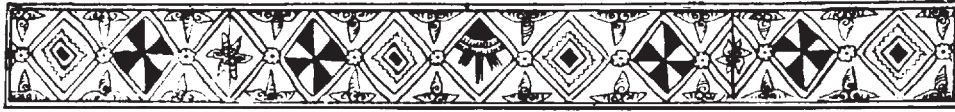
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# PEOPLE YOU KNOW



## IN PEEKSKILL...

The Paschal joy continued at Saints Peter and Paul parish in Peekskill NY as parishioners and guests gathered for a Saint Thomas Sunday celebration following Matins and Divine Liturgy. Children made new Church friends.

Filipinos discovered hrudka. Rusyns sampled spring rolls. Everyone enjoyed Italian pizze rustiche, both sweet and savory. Čeresňa palinka and Montepulciano were raised in toasts and a tray of empanadas disappeared. Kolbasi? Imported from Wallington NJ, of course! Father Jack Custer is Parochial Administrator.

## IN PERTH AMBOY...

College Graduate

Congratulations to Nicholas Mindaik, a parishioner at Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church, Perth Amboy who graduated with a BA in Psychology from Rider University on May 16, 2026. Nicholas is the son of Donald and Michele (nee Billy) Mindaik. Nicholas is currently a Wish Fulfillment Intern at Make-A-Wish Foundation of New Jersey. May God Grant Nicholas many Happy and Blessed Years! Father Vasyl Remitskyi is Parochial Vicar and Very Reverend Edward Cimbala is Parochial Administrator.



## IN PHILADELPHIA...

Mother's Day Event

Holy Trinity Byzantine Catholic Church celebrated Mother's Day following the Divine Liturgy, with special gifts distributed by Father Vasyl to all the mothers and grandmothers in attendance. The gifts included handcrafted treats prepared by Pani Anhelina, along with special goodies for the children. The parish was grateful for the opportunity to celebrate and honor the love and dedication of mothers and grandmothers within our church family.



Father Vasyl Kopyn, Priest in Residence, presents Lisa Mersiowsky her Mother's Day gift.

## IN PERTH AMBOY...

May Crowning

Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church, Perth Amboy, NJ had its May Crowning on May 3, 2026. Father Vasyl Remitskyi, Parochial Vicar, and the ECF Children participated in the Procession. After Liturgy a breakfast celebration was held. Very Reverend Edward Cimbala is Parochial Administrator.



# AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN ROSWELL...

Mother's Day Tea Party

The ladies and mothers of Epiphany of Our Lord celebrated Mother's day early on May 3rd with a Tea Party. It was a beautiful day to relax and celebrate our mothers. Father Lewis M. Rabayda is Parochial Administrator.



## IN WILKES-BARRE TOWNSHIP...

Mother's Day Tea Party

On May 15, 2026 representatives from Saint Mary of the Protection Kingston, PA and Saint John The Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church Wilkes Barre Twp, PA presented checks to Saint Vincent DePaul Soup Kitchen Wilkes Barre City. The amounts given were from special collection, held at both parishes during Great Lent and matching funds from the GCU.

Pictured are (left to right) Father Mykhaylo Prodanets Pastor/Administrator, Laurie Marcin Saint Mary's/GCU Representative, Panii Ivanna Prodanets Saint John's GCU Representative, Mike Cianciotta Saint Vincent De Paul Soup Kitchen and Stephen Kozich St John's.



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- 1:00PM Food Service Begins (Pavilion)
- 1:30PM Anointing Service (Shrine Bldg)
- 2:00PM Confessions Begin (Shrine Gazebo)
- 3:15PM Procession from Picnic Pavilion Tent to Shrine Altar
- 3:30PM Hierarchical Divine Liturgy (Shrine Altar) with Ordinations to Minor Orders

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ROME

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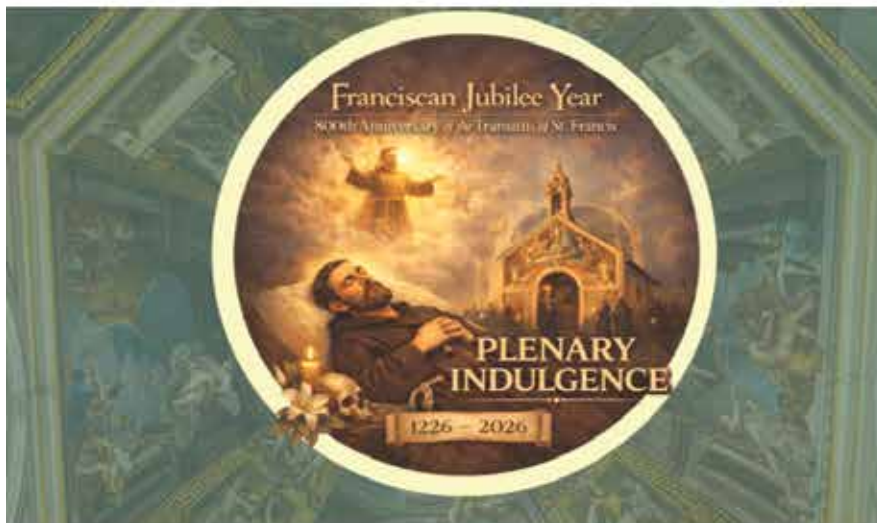
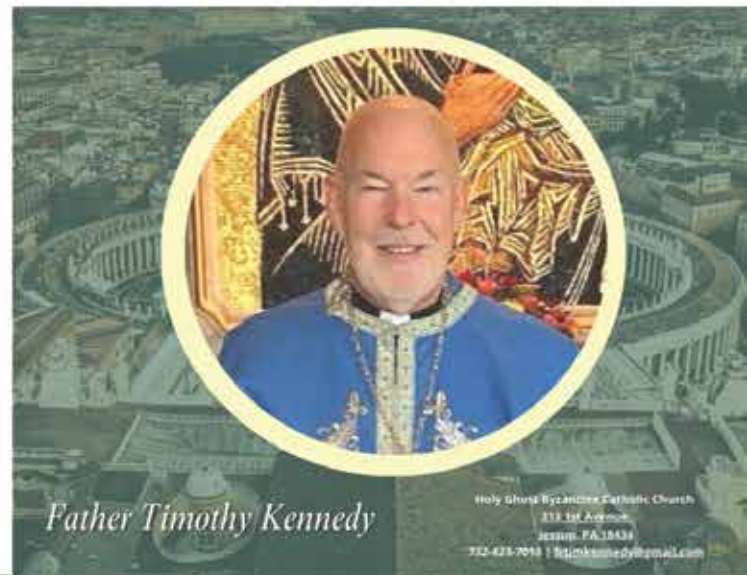
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# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

## THE LAST JUDGMENT: GOOD NEWS

Chances are you've driven past one of those roadside billboards warning about God's impending judgment. Everything about them seems meant to scare you into behaving better! In the middle of his explanation of how all people—Jews and pagans alike—need a Savior, Saint Paul also points to "the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16). You could miss it in translation. Whether in the prophet Isaiah, 750 years before Jesus, or in the New Testament, the Hebrew (*bashar*) and Greek (*evangelizo; evangelion*) words consistently mean "good news." Saint Paul says the last judgment is good news. . . or at least it should be.

Paul says that our deeds (Romans 2:6) and thoughts (Romans 2:15) will be scrutinized to judge whether we have done good (Romans 2:10). But how can we even know for sure what is good? In the previous chapter of Romans, Paul insists that any reasonable person can start by looking to the order God built into creation. It's no coincidence that religions and philosophies across all times and places have agreed on basic values: it's obvious that protecting life, telling the truth, and respecting each other's possessions are good for all of us.

Next, Paul says, we can consult our own conscience. But conscience isn't something we're just born with like an arm or a leg. Conscience has to be

developed—like a muscle. It has to be formed by experience but most of all it has to be informed. More than 500 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Baruch exclaimed, "Blessed are we, O Israel, for what pleases God is known to us!" He was thinking of what God revealed to Moses—the Ten Commandments, a way of life and a way of worship. We read Baruch's prophecy (4:4) on Christmas Eve because the God who revealed Himself in a book to Moses has now revealed Himself as someone who shares our human nature and experience. Even though he didn't like the answer, the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-22) asked the right person the right question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?" "No one is good but God alone," Jesus replied.

Knowing WHO is good is the best way to know WHAT is good. The New Testament insists on this point: "Have the same mind in you which was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). "Let everyone please his neighbor for good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself" (Romans 15:2-3). "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). But Jesus is not just one spiritual guide among the many you can choose from. Only Jesus Christ has redeemed human nature by taking it upon Himself, taking it to the Cross in a sacrifice of atonement, and taking it through death to resurrection, to a throne of glory at the

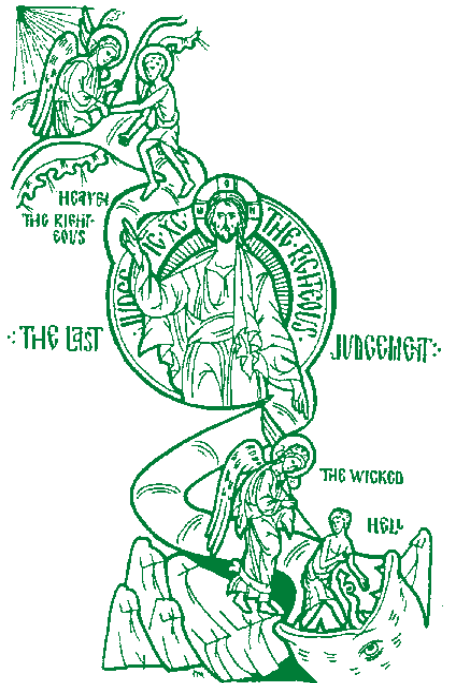
right hand of the Father. There He has prepared a place for us and He himself is the Way that leads to it (John 14:1-6).

But, at 2000 years' removed, what prevents me from answering the question, "what would Jesus do?" any way I want? On Pentecost we celebrated how the Holy Spirit that was upon Jesus Christ (Luke 4:16ff) has been poured out on the Church, just as Jesus had promised (John 14:15-18; 16:5-15). The Holy Spirit empowers the Scriptures and the sacraments that continue to make Jesus truly present among us. The Holy Spirit endows us with Christlike gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2-3). We have all the tools we need "to know the one true God and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). We were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and we can choose actions and attitudes that imitate Jesus Christ, who Paul says, is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). In this way, we can gradually "attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Our choices and our actions matter; that's good news if you want your life to matter.

We can realize our full potential in Jesus Christ. That's good news if you need a reason to hope.

Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and, for people who have chosen to follow Him, that, too, should be good news. **BCL**



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## THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

### THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL; PART 2

The rite of Christian Burial in the Byzantine Church is based on the liturgical morning prayer of the Church. We have seen how the psalmody, now at the vigil, and the scriptural odes are the first part of this service. The morning office concludes with what are called the Hymns of Saint John Damascene, because they are attributed to the monk John, a famous theologian and hymn-writer of the eighth century from Syria. The beautiful Paschal Canon of the Feast of the Resurrection, is also attributed to him, and so it is said that he wrote about both the resurrection of the Lord, and the falling asleep in death of the Christian person. These hymns are written in each of the eight different tones that are interwoven in all the Byzantine liturgy, and originally there were three hymns for each tone, but all churches have now shortened them to the first of each tone, and of the eight tones, only three are directed to be sung. In the morning office these were called the *apostichera* and they concluded the daily Matins (morning praise) of the Church.

In the Creed, our profession of faith, we proclaim that death is not final, that it is an entrance into eternal life, and that there will be a future resurrection of all the faithful. We say, "I expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen." However, in these hymns, there is not much said about the resurrection. Instead, there is a kind of realism about what death means now and what has happened to our loved one who has passed now. In this our hymns struggle with where we are now, for we have lost someone dear

to us. There is first an admonition to us still in this world and in this life. It is what death should teach us. We lament, "What mortal delight endures unmingled with grief? What glory on earth remains without change? (Tone 1) Every human thing which does not survive death is vain. Riches do not endure, nor does fame accompany us; (Tone 3) Where is silver, where is gold? Where is the multitude of servants and of cares? All is ashes, all is dust, all is shadow: (Tone 5) I weep and lament when I contemplate death and behold, lying in the grave, the beauty fashioned for us by God in his own image disfigured, deformed, and without distinction (Tone 8)."

These stichera, then, are a warning to us who are still living. Do not count on the riches and assets we have. We will be judged on how we have followed Christ's laws of love. Here the general resurrection is mentioned once, but in the context of judgment, "when the trumpet sounds, O Christ God, like an earthquake, all the dead will rise to meet you. (Tone 2)"

Judgment is the reality for those departed, and every person will have to answer for themselves, without any help, "Looking to the angels, the soul entreats in vain; reaching out to mortals, there is none to help. (Tone 2)" However, these hymns are not negative, but they are a reminder to pray for one another. Each of the eight hymns ends with a petition to God for his mercy and love:

"in the light of your face, O Christ, and in the sweetness of your beauty, grant rest to the one whom you have chosen, for you love us all. (Tone 1)"

At this point in the service, we sing the Beatitudes, which are the foundation of all Christian life, and then the Divine Liturgy itself, if it has been scheduled for this funeral. Not all funerals are celebrated with the Divine Liturgy. At the end of the Liturgy, we celebrate the rites of farewell proper to the funeral itself. These begin with another series of stichera (hymns), called the hymns of farewell. This is because the mourners approach the casket as a gesture of farewell, to look at their relative or friend for the last time. This is somewhat muted in our modern society, because of our discomfort with any inappropriate emotion and a fear of death. In older days, the body would be kissed, but that is very rare now. Indeed, sometimes the coffin is closed, so that we do not even see the body, but only pass by the remains. The priest offers a hand cross to kiss, because of our faith that through the death of Christ, we have been granted eternal life., as we pray in Sunday and Paschal Matins, "behold, through the Cross, joy has come to the whole world.... by enduring the Cross for us, [Christ] destroyed Death by death." Because of discomfort with kissing or lack of faith, many refuse to kiss the Cross.

These stichera have many of the same themes as the Hymns of Saint John Damascene. What is different is that words are put into the mouth of the departed. We are approaching to bid fare-

well, and the Church speaks for them to us. They may say, then, "I go to the Lord God, my judge, to stand before the judgment-seat and to answer for my deeds. But, I implore you, pray for me that the Savior be merciful to me on the Day of Judgment." and "Family and friends, all you relatives and acquaintances, look at me lying with no voice and no breath, and weep for me. Only yesterday I was speaking with you, then the fearsome hour of death came upon me suddenly. But come, all who love me, and bid me a last farewell." This was at one time the rule for the sermon to be preached at funerals. The priest was expected to address the congregation in the words that the departed would have used. I was once asked by a grieving family to deliver a homily exactly like that, but I refused, feeling that I could not really speak in their behalf. As for the earlier hymns, therefore, these are very concrete and personal, trying to construct for us the reality of death and what is happening between us and the departed, and to in some way bridge the mystery of death. At the same time, it is also meant to be comforting, as we pray for their good estate, especially as we pray to the Mother of God for their salvation in the final hymn, which was sometimes sung in the Divine Liturgy during the Anaphora, "Save those who hope in you, mother of the never-setting Sun who gave birth to God. We beseech you, through your prayers intercede with God most good to grant rest now to this departed servant, where the souls of the just repose." **ECL**



## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

### FROM THE HEART OF THE FATHER

Last month's column was all about the many facets of relationship with our mothers, many beautiful, some marked by the grief of loss, or fraught because of the complicated, fallen humanity we all bear. Whatever the circumstances surrounding our relationship with our moms, we can all take refuge under the mantle of the most Holy Theotokos, the Mother of God who is our mother, too. Now that Father's Day is upon us it would be easy to draw similar connections with our earthly fathers – the ones who have loved and guided us, fallen asleep in the Lord, or the ones for with whom a relationship is marred by pain, disappointment, and estrangement. It would be easy to rework last month's column into a reflection on Father's Day, but that would kind of feel like cheating. In-

stead, I'd like to offer some thoughts on what I've been praying through for the last few months, which is, coincidentally, about a *Father*.

The Lord's Prayer (what we usually call the "Our Father") is one of the first prayers we learned as children. It is chanted at every Divine Liturgy and during other services, traditionally as part of our prayer before meals, and perhaps incorporated into our daily personal prayer routine. It's one of those prayers that is so deeply imbedded in our minds that we can very easily rattle it off without paying much attention to the actual words we're saying. That has been my relationship to the Lord's Prayer for much of my life, with sincere efforts here and there to slow down and let its meaning penetrate my

soul. It worked for a while, but then it was back to the old habit of saying the words on autopilot. I am not claiming to have experienced an epiphany that has changed my way of praying to be more solemn, intentional, and steadfast. I get lazy with prayer, just as we all do. But the Lord has been tugging at my heart in a very specific way, and it's all about *Our Father*. Yes, the prayer, but more than that: *our* Father, yours and mine, who desired us and loved us into being, not simply for a finite time on earth, but destined for eternal life with Him.

These are the words that He keeps drawing my attention to lately: "Give us this day our daily bread[...]" Because I am the director of a nonprofit ministry the concept of "daily bread" is very fa-

miliar. Fundraising is the challenge for every ministry (and parish) to not only survive but thrive. I think God keeps bringing me back to these words, to this concept, as a way of meeting me in my anxiety over the future of the ministry and worries about its financial stability. He is reminding me that it is His work, and He will provide what is needed when it is needed. Of course, I can extend this out to other areas of my life, for example the *daily bread* my husband and I need to pay our bills. There is the *daily bread* of patience, generosity, and selflessness he and I need to nourish and sustain our marriage. I need the *daily bread* of charity to deal kindly with difficult people, and the *daily bread* of motivation to combat my tendency toward laziness, of humility so that I can take responsibility for my mistakes, and

of grace to acknowledge my sins and make a sincere effort toward a conversion of heart. God is showing me (despite my fear or reluctance to let go of control) that asking for *my daily bread* means abandoning myself to Him completely. More than material needs or emotional reassurances, God is inviting me to place my trust in Him, to entrust my heart to His, and to believe that even the *bread* of sorrow, challenges, and pain will be transformed by Him for my ultimate good into “bread from Heaven.”

There’s a lot to unpack – more than we may realize because it’s so familiar to us – but I think there’s value in slow-

ing down for a moment to revisit this prayer that is so familiar to us that we can too easily breeze through it without allowing ourselves to be moved, convicted, encouraged, or consoled by its words. In the spirit of Father’s Day, I invite you to go deeper with the Lord’s Prayer than you may be used to doing. Sit with it and notice where God is asking you to focus. He might be pointing you toward a particular line, or even just one or two words that convey what He wants you to hear, coming straight from His heart to yours. Take a moment right now to stop reading and say the Lord’s Prayer slowly, paying attention to what you’re saying, and noticing the words or phrases God is underlining in

your heart. You may need to repeat the prayer a few times, or plan to come back to it several times with intentionality – and patience. This kind of meditative prayer takes practice, and I’ve certainly not mastered it! But our Heavenly Father is less concerned about perfection, and more desirous of your presence.

What is the *daily bread* you are most in need of today, and where are you finding God’s provision for that need? Take some time in quiet contemplation and listen for His voice. If you do, as patiently and intentionally as you can, you may be surprised by the message coming straight from the heart of the Father into yours. **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



## SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

Joy signals authentic Christian life and is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Rejoicing is not optional but fundamental for followers of Christ, as Scripture commands: “Rejoice always” (1 Thess. 5:16) and “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil 4:4).

Today, we rarely radiate joy and gladness. We are burdened by problems, complaints, disagreements, and crises. It seems things are worsening, with little hope ahead.

But with the prophet Habakkuk, we declare, “For even though the fig tree does not flourish, nor fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive fails, the fields yield no food, the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!” (Hab. 3:17-18).

In Deuteronomy, Moses warns against joyless religion: “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things; therefore you will serve your enemies whom the LORD sends against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in lack of all things. He will put an iron yoke

on your neck until He has destroyed you” (Dt. 28:47-48).

Today, lacking joy, we find ourselves in a similar situation. To reverse this reality and strengthen our Christian witness, we must repent and intentionally “serve the LORD with gladness” (Ps. 100:2).

Of the early desert fathers, Rufinus of Aquileia (345–411) writes: “They were always cheerful and full of such spiritual joy as few have experienced upon earth. None was sad, and if one ever appeared so, at once the holy Abbot Apollonius asked for the cause. He often told them that a man who placed his salvation in God and his hope in heaven could not be sad. Pagans might have cause to mourn, Jews to weep and lament, sinners to be troubled; but the just should be glad and cheerful.”

Saint Francis of Assisi said, “We Friars Minor, what are we other than God’s singers and players, who seek to draw hearts upwards and to fill them with spiritual joy? Let those who belong to the devil hang their heads — we ought to be glad and rejoice in the Lord.” For Saint Francis, spiritual joy was essential for living a holy life, as “when the soul is troubled, lonely

and darkened, then it turns easily to the outer comfort and to the empty enjoyments of the world.”

Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274) wrote, “The best sign of indwelling grace is spiritual joy” and “The heart that is free and joyful with good will is better disposed for the reception of grace than the heart that is fettered with sadness and bitterness; for the Holy Ghost is the love and good-will and joy of the Father and the Son; and like naturally loves like.”

Blessed John Colombini (1304-1367) wrote to his wife, “I beg of thee, live not in sadness, but in joy. If there is any place that gives thee joy, then go thither, and enjoy thyself, so that it be in the Lord. Be always cheerful! The more cheerful we are, the easier it is to serve God. Christ rejoices in us; we should rejoice in Him. Let us shun sadness and bitterness, which is a snare of the devil, and celebrate a long festival for Jesus Christ and all mankind.”

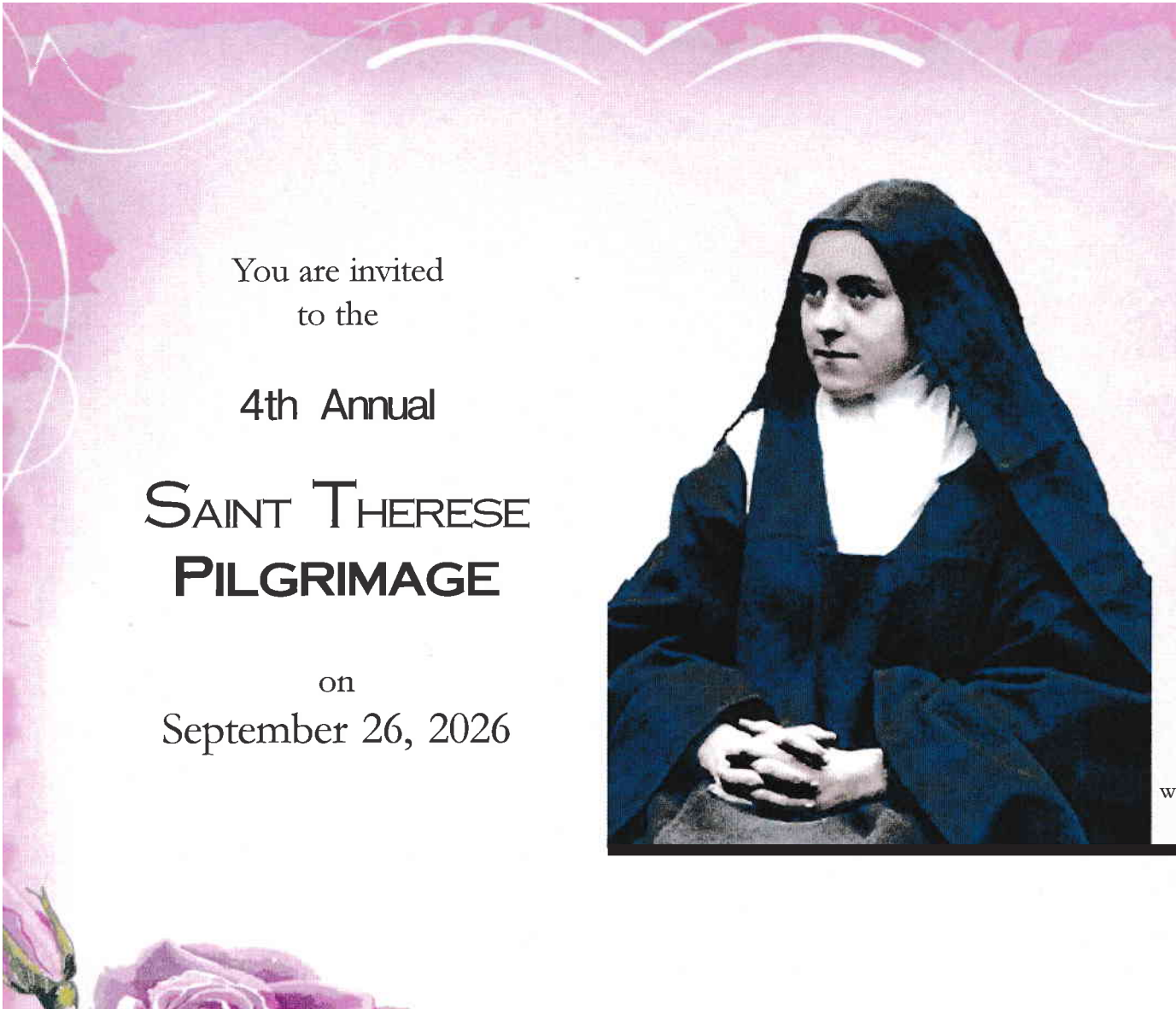
Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595) said, “The true way to make progress in virtue is to preserve holy joyousness; a cheerful mind strengthens the heart and makes one steadfast in good conduct; hence the servant of God must

always be good-humored.” To those in leadership, he adds, “In the spiritual life, it is much easier to lead the cheerful than the sad.”

François Fénelon (1651-1715) wrote, “If children (and people in general) come to think that virtue is sad and gloomy, but that freedom and license are pleasant, then all is lost; every effort will be in vain.”

Why so glum? Our lack of joy makes us lackluster Christians and explains our limited success in winning souls for Christ. Radiating Christ’s joy would draw multitudes to salvation. “With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation” (Is. 12:3).

Let us love Jesus Christ, for Saint Peter writes that love for Jesus Christ produces “inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Pt. 1:8). Serve the Lord with gladness! **ECL**



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### JUNE, 2026

- 24 Birth of John the Baptist  
*Solemn Holyday*
- 29 Saints Peter & Paul  
*Holyday of Obligation, Chancery Closed*

### JULY, 2026

- 3 Fourth of July,  
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