



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LII, NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2016

## BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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### *Proclamation*

FOR THE INDICATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

Today, God who is rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), extends that mercy to us, for His mercy endures forever (Psalm 135-136).

Today, the Only Begotten Son of God announces a year of favor, fulfilled in our hearing (Luke 4:18-21) if only we have the ears to hear (Matthew 13:9).

Today the Holy Spirit hovers over us (Genesis 1:2; Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 4:18), the heavens rain down justice, the earth brings forth salvation (Isaiah 45:8) and there is hope for a new creation (Psalm 104:30; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Today we proclaim a year of favor from the Lord (Luke 4:19; Isaiah 61:1-2).

Today the prophet David stands with us and teaches us to repent and to sing "Have mercy on us, O God, according to Your great mercy" (Psalm 51).

Today Zacchaeus the publican calls us to make the effort to see Jesus, to meet His gaze, to accept His invitation, and to receive His forgiveness (Luke 19:1-10).

Today the Lord's gaze falls on us as once it fell on Matthew the tax collector, and we are the objects of His compassion and of His choice (Matthew 9:9-13, commented by Bede the Venerable).

Today the Lord reaches out to us with the touch that raised the Jairus' daughter from the dead and healed the woman of her flow of blood (Mark 5: 22-43).

Today the Good Shepherd seeks His lost sheep and the Lord searches for the lost coin stamped with His image (Luke 15:4-9).

Today the door of paradise is thrown open and the flaming sword is turned aside (Genesis 3:24). Today the Good Thief enjoys the promised paradise (Luke 23:43) and that promise is extended to us.

Today the promised bliss extends to all of us who choose to show mercy and to make peace (Matthew 5:7-9).

Today the Temple's eastern door stands open (Ezekiel 44:1-3) and the Theotokos advises us in wisdom to "do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5).

And so today, let us confidently draw near to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), to receive the mercy that forever flows from the side of Christ (John 19:34) through the ministry of the Church.

Today let the trumpet of Jubilee sound (Leviticus 25:9) as we begin a year of mercy, seeking the Lord's mercy while it may be found (Isaiah 55:6) and sharing that mercy with everyone we meet.

**Today, in communion with our Holy Father, Francis, Pope of Rome, I solemnly proclaim a Jubilee of Mercy in the Eparchy of Passaic, by the opening of this Holy Door. In union with the Holy Father, I urge all the faithful of the Eparchy of Passaic to seek the graces this Holy Year offers, through prayer, sacramental confession of their sins, the worthy reception of Holy Communion and a renewed dedication to the practice of mercy in their daily lives.**

Given at the Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel, Passaic, New Jersey

December 13, 2015

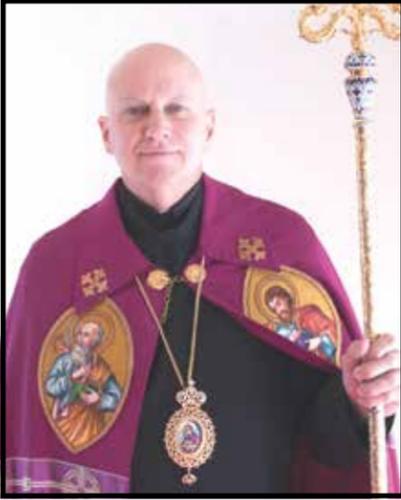
Most Rev. Kurt Burnette, Bishop of Passaic

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# I LIFT UP MY EYES...

*Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt*



## PASTORAL MESSAGE FOR THE GREAT FAST: OVER NATIONS AND OVER KINGDOMS

Suddenly, the Great Fast will be upon us. Already, the Pharisee is replaced by the Publican, the Prodigal Son is running home to his Father, Zaccheus climbs up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, and the Last Judgment and Forgiveness Sunday have arrived. We call these last two Sundays Meatfare and Cheesefare because traditionally they are the last day to eat meat and the last day to eat dairy products until Pascha or Easter. The reason Easter baskets are blessed in our Church at Easter is that, by tradition, people went without these foods for all of the Great Fast. The ham, the sausage, the bacon, the cheese and butter and eggs were fresh and exciting after the long abstinence. If you have never given up all meat and dairy products for Lent, perhaps this year you might try to do if for just a week or two. It seems impossible at first, but then it seems natural. Young people especially seem to like the challenge. Over the years many young people have told me they come to look forward to Lent. Everyone in our country is on a diet nowadays anyway; why not diet for an eternal reason?

It seems that we can endure any hardship if we know it has a purpose and an end to it. The prayers and fasting of Great Lent can be accomplished and even sweet if you offer them up for someone who is in need of prayers. Everyone knows someone who is badly in need of God's grace, and if you become discouraged part way through the Great Fast, it is easy to start again when you remember that you are helping someone else. No prayers are ever wasted, and we may never see the effects of our sacrifices in this life, but we know that God is not limited by time nor by our perception.

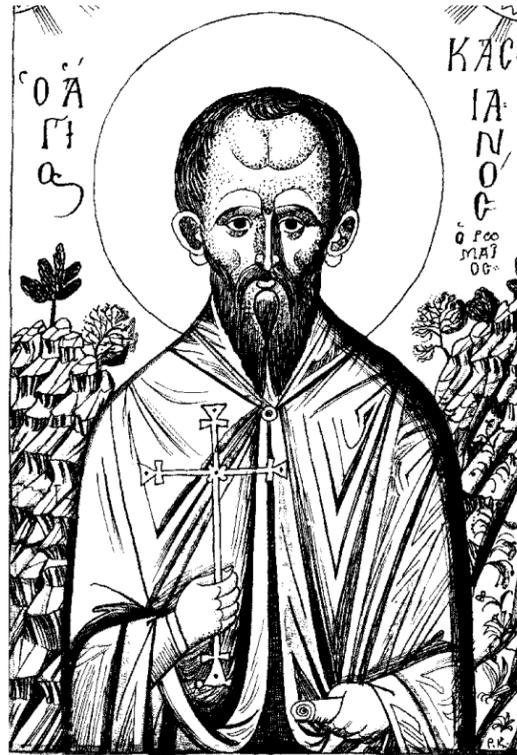
In addition to offering your sacrifices for someone else, God Himself tells us that it is pointless to fast unless we also try to give up evil—at least try. Pope Francis has said, God never tires of forgiving us, but we get tired of asking. There are many different programs for avoiding evil and doing good. When God appointed the prophet Jeremiah, He said to him, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." The first thing that we learn from this passage is that avoiding evil and doing good does NOT start with us, but rather God Himself starts it when He gives us his Word. After we receive the Word of God, and all of us have, what a breathtaking commission God promises us: I have set you this day over nations and kingdoms. When we receive the Word of God, we are more powerful than all the kingdoms and nations with oil or banks or armies or navies. With all their power, nations and kingdoms do not have the power you have, the power to receive eternal life. The worldly powers can kill many bodies, but they cannot create a single life nor an immortal soul.

Saint John Cassian considers this verse in Jeremiah to describe the entire saintly life. He says it is easier to grow virtues than to be rid of sin, because there are four tasks for avoiding sin, and only two

tasks for acquiring virtue. God's Word allows us "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow" sin, but then "to build and to plant" virtue.

Some sins are habits and must be plucked up like a weed. No amount of understanding or counseling or encouragement will get rid of a habit, just as you can't get rid of a weed by reasoning with it. The only way to get rid of a habit is to say "no" to it when it appears. Each time we say "no" it gets a little bit easier. But weeds reappear even after a long time, and unless they are plucked immediately, they take over the garden again.

Some sins must be broken down. They must be analyzed and understood, and then a plan of action must be created that might involve timing and encouragement and disclosure and perseverance.



Even with these deeper sins, there is sometimes an element of habit, and a program of change won't accomplish anything without also breaking the habit.

Still other sins, we are told, must be destroyed. Some sins are only symptoms of a deeper spiritual disease, a broken relationship with our Creator. When Saint John says that some sins must be destroyed, I think he is referring to this deeper shift in our spiritual make up. These sins are particularly dangerous because they distract us from the real problem—our broken friendship with God—and these symptoms not only distract us but destroy our faith in God's mercy and lead to self destruction and despair.

And finally, Saint John says that sin must be overthrown. What happens when something is overthrown? It means it is not just destroyed, but also completely replaced by something else. And so sometimes the most deeply rooted sins require a whole new system—perhaps an entirely different outlook on the world, but sometimes it also means entirely new friends. How many well intentioned people have returned to crime or drugs because of their friends! In one of my parishes, I remember

a sweet young man who had been in legal trouble several times, often beginning with drugs. During his last stay in prison, he was able to get completely clean of drugs despite enormous pressure. Recognizing that the drugs made him do things he didn't want to do, he was determined to stay clean when he was released from prison. One night he returned to a bowling alley where he had been the local star, and a "friend" offered him just one pill. Within a few months he was arrested and will die in prison because of the third strike law in that state. I attended his sentencing with his poor father who wept uncontrollably; his mother couldn't bear the pain of seeing her son locked away for life. Jesus said, "If your hand offends you, cut it off." I think he meant, if your friend leads you into sin, get rid of him.

In our little parishes, the deeply rooted sins of gossip or constant criticism or hostility towards the pastor are kept alive by groups of people. If there is no one to listen to gossip, how quickly it disappears! When criticism is challenged, how quickly it is silenced! People gossip and criticize to feel important, and if they are deprived of that feeling of importance, they will find something else to do, something more acceptable to the group.

Saint John says that the Word of God also gives us the power to attain virtue, but he says that is easier because it only requires two things, building and planting. Planting requires a seed, and the seeds of virtue are everywhere. They come in through our ears when we hear the Gospel and they come in through our eyes when we see someone else doing something good and we want to imitate them. Near my last parish, the Franciscans opened a soup kitchen, and our parishioners from our Byzantine Catholic parish became their source of volunteers. Everyone agreed it was great fun. One woman who is in her 80's helped there every week. The newspaper did a story about her, and the reporter was surprised when walking near downtown that all the homeless people knew her by name and said hello to her! She planted virtue when she heard about the soup kitchen, and she built the virtue when she went every Wednesday. One week a holy day fell on a Wednesday and our pastor scheduled services at noon. The Franciscans told him to never do that again—they had no volunteers that day!

There is another passage in Jeremiah where God says, "I will send serpents among you, adders that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you." Saint John Cassian interprets this to mean the sin of envy. He says, "You should know that the disease of envy is the most difficult to cure of all. Someone contaminated by this poison is almost beyond curing." Some people say that envy is the original sin, because Satan envied God, and because of his envy, he seduced Adam and Eve. You could also say that Adam and Even envied God. Perhaps it is because of the serpent in the garden of Eden that Saint John associated this verse in Jeremiah with the sin of envy.

I said earlier that gossip and criticism are rooted in a desire to feel important. At a deeper level, I think they must be rooted in envy. People gossip and criticize to tear someone else down, and they do that because they are unhappy at seeing someone else with something good, or they gloat when someone else is hurt. The antidote to this deadly poison, a poison that Saint John calls almost incurable, is charity. Love is the antidote to envy and will put an end to gossip and habitual criticism. The holy apostle Paul tells us how to achieve this state when he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep." The antidote to envy is to feel what others feel, to be compassionate as "the heavenly Father is compassionate". If the

Good God blesses someone else with something good, we should rejoice for them. If someone else is injured, then we should feel hurt as well.

This Lent, this Great Fast, in addition to fasting and praying, find some sins to uproot and some virtues to build and plant. If you love our churches, try to root out the sin of gossip, try to root out the sin of always seeing the worst in others. The most wonderful thing about these virtues is the immediate rewards of happiness. Gossiping and seeing the worst in others are really enormous burdens. The burden of constantly staying on top of things, of making sure that no one else beats us to the punch, of not missing out on any delicious detail, of being the first to spread bad news, how exhausting these sins are!

And although we do them to feel good, underneath they make us feel worse about ourselves, like a deep underground river of weak acid silently corroding the foundation of our souls. The happiness that comes from overthrowing these burdens is immediate and deep. Make this Lent a happy Lent! "Oh Lord, set a guard over my mouth; keep watch over the doors of my lips." God has placed his Word in your mouth, now rule over nations and kingdoms!

+Kurt Brunette

# DIRECTIVES FOR THE GREAT FAST

*From the Office of the Bishop*



## FASTING REGULATIONS

- +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 8, and on Great and Holy Friday, March 25.
- +These are the minimum requirements; however, the faithful are encouraged to do more.

### 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

### Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

- +All Pastors and Administrators are encouraged to celebrate the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
- +A liturgical service at which Holy Communion is distributed may be celebrated on the other weekdays of the Great Fast.

We ask you to pray for peace throughout the world, and for the victims of war. Please remember in your prayers all those in the military who are serving our country throughout the world.

# SCHEDULE OF LENTEN VESPERS AND CONFESSION

## WYOMING VALLEY

- Sunday, February 14 Saint Mary—Wilkes-Barre
- Sunday, February 21 Saint John—Wilkes-Barre Twp
- Sunday, February 28 Saint Nicholas—Swoyersville
- Sunday, March 6 Saint Michael—Pittston
- Sunday, March 13 Saint Mary—Kingston

All Services begin at 3:00 p.m. followed by opportunity for Confession and Lenten refreshment Social Hour. April 12th followed by dinner at the Knights of Columbus, Luzerne.



## SCRANTON AREA

- Sunday, February 14 Holy Ghost—Jessup
- Sunday, February 21 Saint Nicholas—Old Forge
- Sunday, February 28 Saint Michael—Dunmore
- Sunday, March 6 Saint John/Saint Mary—Scranton
- Sunday, March 13 Saint John—Forest City

All Services begin at 3:00 p.m. followed by opportunity for Confession and Lenten refreshment Social Hour.

## CHESTER & MONTGOMERY COUNTIES

- Sunday, February 14 Saint John the Baptist—Pottstown-
- Sunday, February 21 Saint Michael—Mont Clare
- Sunday, February 28 Blessed Virgin Mary—Coatesville

All Services begin at 3:00 p.m. followed by opportunity for Confession



# PEOPLE YOU KNOW...

## IN RAHWAY...

*Saint Nicholas honored with special program and award*

On Sunday, December 6, the Feast of Saint Nicholas was celebrated at Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish, Rahway, NJ, with a parish-wide gathering of food and fun. A traditional pork dinner with ample desserts was served to over 100 parishioners and guests in attendance. The children of the parish ECF program and the BCY delighted all with their Christmas hymns and narrations, including an appearance of the "Bethlehem Carolers" in costume! A special highlight this year was the surprise presentation of the Saint Nicholas Award to Mr. Andrew Lech in recognition of his many years of service as as sacristan/custodian of Saint Thomas Church. Presenting the award was Father John Zeyack, former Pastor of Saint Thomas Church. The day concluded with the singing of Christmas Carols led by Cantors Patricia Dietz and Doreen Plahovinsak, and, of course, a visit from Saint Nicholas himself! Saint Thomas Parish is served by Archpriest James Hayer with the assistance of Deacons Charles Laskowski and Thomas Shubeck.



*Saint Nicholas greets the children.*



*Presentation of icon of Saint Nicholas to Mr. Andrew Lech by Archpriest James Hayer, right, pastor, and Father John Zeyack, center, pastor emeritus.*



*The children show their devotion to Saint Nicholas by singing hymns*

## IN PASSAIC...

*Parishioners donate toys to hospital for Christmas*



*Saint Michael Cathedral parishioners, Joanne and Natalie Fencik, RN, delivered nearly 100 stuffed toys to children at Saint Joseph's Hospital, Paterson ,NJ, in time for Christmas. Jordan Hulliger RN, accepts the toys donated by Saint Michael's parishioners.*



*Bethlehem Carolers from the ECF Program at Saint Thomas*

### EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

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# ...AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN NEW YORK CITY...

Parishioners celebrate opening of Holy Door and Feast of Saint Nicholas



Saint Nicholas surrounded by the children of Saint Mary Parish



All I want for Christmas is...



Saint Nicholas and Father Hospodar with some ladies of Saint Mary Parish



A happy family celebrates Saint Nicholas Day and the opening of the Year of Mercy

## IN ANNANDALE...

BCY Christmas carolers visit the elderly



Members of the Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Youth organization spent some time singing Christmas Carols to older parishioners and shut-ins in the parish. Last stop: Mrs. Elisabeth Basarab, mother of Father John Basarab, Epiphany's parish priest!



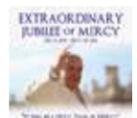
### Lenten "Munching & Learning"

Fridays \* February 12, 19, 26, March 4  
Noon and 7:00 PM

(Prayer Service in the church followed by Lenten Meal and presentation in the Parish Center)

**St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church**  
1900 Brooks Boulevard  
Hillsborough, NJ 08844

**A Special Lenten Series for the Jubilee of Mercy**



*Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'*



- Week 1 – Friday, February 12**  
What is Mercy?  
Mercy is not weakness or detached from Justice, but God's healing salve
- Week 2 – Friday, February 19**  
Who is Mercy?  
God is the Fountain of Mercy who pours Himself out for us
- Week 3 – Friday, February 26**  
The Door of Mercy  
God's mercy is free and overflowing but requires our open hearts to receive it
- Week 4 – Friday, March 4**  
Being Mercy  
God's mercy is not to be contained, but flows through us into the world

**Our Presenter - Ann M. Koshute, MTS** Ann is Adjunct Instructor in Theology at St. Joseph's College of Maine and DeSales University. She obtained her Master of Theological Studies from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America. In addition to working on marriage preparation and adult faith formation programs, Ann is a retreat leader and writer. She and her husband Keith are parishioners of St. Ann Byzantine Catholic Church, Harrisburg, PA.



908-725-0615 \* [www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org](http://www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org)

# RIVER BLESSINGS FOR THEOPHANY...

## ...THROUGHOUT THE EPARCHY

### Saint Michael Cathedral, Passaic, NJ

Fearful of a swollen Passaic River, but trusting in God, the faithful of Saint Michael Cathedral, together with Bishop Kurt and the cathedral rector, Father Jack Custer; Father Jody Baran, assistant pastor; and local clergy, gathered for the traditional Great Sanctification of Waters, except this was a very

special ceremony since it was the first time in 120 years that this tradition had been practiced at our cathedral in Passaic. Even members of the Wallington Emergency Squad helped out as the river was blessed from the John M. Scerbak Bridge (commonly known as the Market St. Bridge)!



A smiling Bishop Kurt reflects on the river blessing



Bishop Kurt with Cathedral Rector, Father Jack Custer; Assistant Pastor, Father Jody Baran; visiting clergy; and faithful who attended the Great Sanctification of water



At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed.



A member of the Wallington Emergency Squad retrieves the troica.

### 29th Annual Slavonic Festival in Rahway, NJ Saturday, February 6th, 2016 - 12 Noon to 8PM

All are welcome to attend the 29th Annual Slavonic Festival at Saint Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church, 1407 St. Georges Avenue, Rahway, NJ on Saturday, February 6, 2016! The new festival hours are 12 Noon to 8PM.

The festival features ethnic food specialties including pirohi, holubki, haluski, potato pancakes, goulash, chicken paprikash, kielbasa and more! You can play games of chance, enjoy live entertainment, tour our beautiful church, visit our parish gift shop, or try your luck at our 50/50 raffle and Giant Cash raffle!

There is no admission charge and plenty of free parking! For more information call the parish office at 732-382-5300.

Saint Thomas Church is served by Archpriest James Hayer with the ministry of Deacon Charles Laskowski and Deacon Thomas Shubeck.

**Eparchy of Passaic - Financial Report**

Eparchy of Passaic and Affiliates

Combined Statement of Activities for Year Ended June 30, 2015

Revenues

Eparchial assessments	\$ 909,193
Eparchial Stewardship Appeal	444,079
Donations, bequests and other income	43,154
ECL Newspaper Revenues	74,134
Interest and dividend income	553,759
Realized and unrealized gain on marketable securities, net of fees	10,664
Hospitalization and life insurance	1,273,309
Property and casualty insurance	1,159,386
	4,467,678

Expenses

Property and casualty insurance - Parishes	1,113,782
Property and casualty insurance - Eparchial subsidy	532,580
Property and casualty insurance - Chancery	13,421
Hospitalization - Parishes	810,977
Hospitalization - Eparchial subsidy	156,315
Hospitalization - Chancery and Retirees	156,568
Pension	34,826
Administrative salaries and payroll taxes	182,188
Clergy salaries	245,008
Clergy subsistence	4,275
Stewardship rebates to parishes	32,162
Stewardship expenses - postage, printing and office expenses	14,952
Diaconate program expenses	8,577
Eastern Catholic Life publication - postage, printing and office expenses	71,641
Office administration and supplies - general	25,141
Office postage and printing - general	15,366
Legal Fees	49,152
Accounting fees	63,980
Safe environment audit fees	2,266
Celebrations, anniversary and gifts	22,254
Consulting fees	30,445
Eparchial transportation and meeting expenses	89,349
Utilities and telephone	44,472
Maintenance and repairs	54,718
Bishop's residence	5,499
Assessments - NJ, US and Eastern Catholic Conferences	26,284
Eparchial retreat and Presbyteral Days	46,931
Continued education and well being of priests	8,295
ECF Operating expenses - Eastern Christian Formation programs	8,495
Books, literature and subscriptions	118,888
Carpathian Village expenses	86,997
Heritage Museum and Library	999
Aid to Eastern Europe eparchies	80,000
Property maintenance and upkeep	27,324
Depreciation - buildings and equipment	126,723
	4,310,850

**LENTEN DAY FOR MEN**



**THE  
DESIRE  
FOR  
MORE:**

**FASTING AND FULFILLMENT  
LED BY FR. MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN**

**Saturday, February 27, 2016**  
St. Michael's Cathedral Chapel  
445 Lackawanna Avenue  
Woodland Park, NJ

Divine Liturgy: 9:00am; Reception: 10:00am;  
Conferences, Lenten Luncheon, Opportunity for  
Confession, Vespers, Concluding by 4:00pm  
There is no charge for this event.  
RSVP: 973-777-2553



**LENTEN DAY FOR WOMEN**

**WHAT'S SO GREAT  
ABOUT  
THE GREAT  
FAST?**



LED BY SR. BARBARA JEAN MIHALCHICK, OSBM

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2016**

ST. MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL CHAPEL  
445 LACKAWANNA AVENUE,  
WOODLAND PARK, NJ

DIVINE LITURGY: 9:00AM  
RECEPTION 10:00AM  
CONFERENCE, LENTEN LUNCHEON, OPPORTUNITY FOR  
CONFESSION, VESPERS, CONCLUDING BY 4:00PM.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THIS EVENT.  
RSVP: 973-777-2553

# CELEBRATIONS FOR THE OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR

## Saint Michael Cathedral, Passaic, NJ

The Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel in Passaic, NJ, welcomed its Chief Pastor, Bishop Kurt, for the opening of the Holy Door, ushering in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, on Sunday morning, December 13th, 2015, at 9:00 a.m. First, Bishop Kurt, vested for the Divine Liturgy, chanted a series of prayers and then cut the ribbon sealing the door. Then, he tapped on the door with his pastoral staff. Then, the Holy Door was opened and everyone passed through in

order to gain the plenary indulgence and to celebrate the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Bishop Kurt was assisted in this by Cathedral Rector Father Jack Custer, and Father Robert Wisniewski, a bi-ritual priest of the Diocese of Paterson, NJ. The Knights of Columbus Monsignor Stein Assembly Color Corps participated by guarding the Holy Door.



The Holy Door, written in three languages



Bishop Kurt strikes the Holy Door with his djezl (pastoral staff)



The Holy Door now opened, Bishop Kurt enters with clergy and faithful to celebrate the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy



Bishop Kurt prays before the still-sealed Holy Door

## JERSEY CITY CHOIR OFFERS CDs AND CASSETTES

St. Mary Church Byzantine Catholic Church announces the sale of their four compact disc (CD) recordings and their four stereo cassette recordings.

Compact discs are \$12.00 each, or any four for \$43.95. Stereo cassette recordings are \$7.95 each or any four for \$29.95. All orders are postage and handling free.

Select from

- (1) Great Fast and Resurrection
- (2) Divine Liturgy in Old Slavonic
- (3) Divine Liturgy in English
- (4) Christmas Caroling

Send orders to:  
Saint Mary Choir  
231 Pacific Avenue,  
Jersey City, NJ 07304

# RS FOR THE JUBILEE OF MERCY AROUND THE EPARCHY

## Saint John the Baptist, Bayonne, NJ

On Sunday, December 13th, 2015, at 3:00 p.m., our Chief Shepherd, Bishop Kurt, gathered with the parishioners of Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, Bayonne, NJ, together with their pastor and local Syncellus, Father Marcel Szabo, together with many of the faithful and priests of other

Byzantine Catholic parishes in New Jersey, to celebrate the opening of the Holy Doors, ushering in the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The church was filled with faithful joining their voices with their Bishop to implore the Lord's mercy. It was such a significant event that there was even local media coverage.



Bishop Kurt officially open the Holy Door



The numerous faithful assembled listen attentively to their Chief Shepherd



Bishop Kurt preaches about the mercy of God



Let us pray to the Lord. Lord, have mercy!



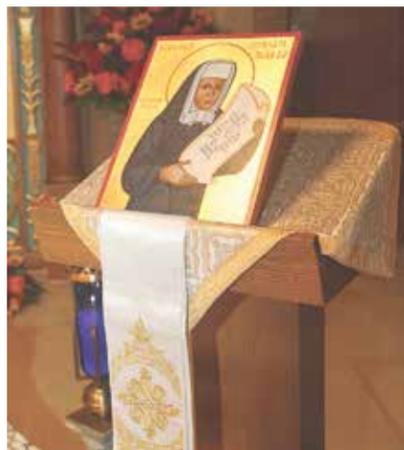
The Holy Door for the Jubilee Year of Mercy



Father Michael Yurista (foreground) and Father Marcel Szabo, pastor of Saint John the Baptist and local Syncellus, anoint the faithful with blessed oil



The faithful process singing of the mercy of the Lord



Blessed Miriam Theresa Demjanovich joins her prayers with the faithful assembled



Area cantors lead the faithful in prayerful song



Area clergy listen closely



Bishop Kurt officially open the Holy Door



Father Gregory Noga interviewed by the media for the momentous occasion.



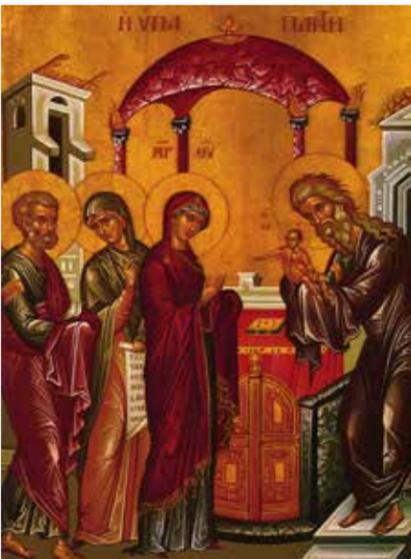
## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### THE HOLY ENCOUNTER IN THE TEMPLE

Saint Luke (2:22-35) recounts how Jesus was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after His birth “according to the Law.” Actually, two different Old Testament rituals are combined here. The first reading for Vespers of the feast (Exodus 12:51-13:3, 10-12, 14-16, 22-29; Leviticus 12: 1-4, 6-8; Numbers 8: 16-17) assembles all the Old Testament legislation for both events. The first ritual is the purification of a mother from the blood of childbirth (Leviticus 12). Saint Luke notes that Mary and Joseph offer the pauper’s sacrifice of two doves or pigeons rather than the much more costly yearling lamb. Saint Paul reminds us that “Christ . . . for your sakes became poor that you, through His poverty, might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). We also know that, in Mary’s case, this sacrifice is simply an act of humble obedience, since her virginity was preserved even in the act of a painless childbirth.

The second ritual, the main focus of the feast, is the redemption of the firstborn son who, according to the Law, belongs in a particular way to God, just as the firstborn males of the herd and the first fruits of all crops do. We know from other biblical texts that the actual sacrifice of children was not unknown in the world of the Old Testament. God Himself puts an end to that practice for His people by commanding Abraham to substitute a ram for Isaac, the beloved son he was about to sacrifice to the Lord on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22). The symbolic sacrifice of firstborn sons takes on a new meaning at the Exodus, when the tenth and final plague struck the firstborn males of both man and beast among the Egyptians, but spared the Israelites, whose houses were marked by the blood of the Paschal lamb. (Exodus 13; Numbers 8).



Saint Luke does not mention the custom (still practiced by observant Jews today) of “buying back” the firstborn son from remaining in the Lord’s service (Numbers 18: 15-17). The prophet Samuel was similarly presented as a firstborn son by his parents, Elkanah and Hannah, at the age of three and not redeemed. He remained in the service of the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1: 19-28; the Jerusalem Temple had not yet been built). Saint Luke may wish us to see that Jesus, like Samuel, remained in the Lord’s service in a special way. Indeed, in the very next scene in Saint Luke’s Gospel, we see Jesus remaining in the Temple as a twelve-year old boy (Luke 2 41-50).

In a practical way, the Lord’s presentation in the Temple is a reminder to parents that their children are not their exclusive possessions, but rather a gift entrusted to them by the Lord. Despite all the manipulations of which contemporary science is capable, the procreation of life remains a mystery that God alone can control and into which a married couple are invited to participate through their own faithfulness and mutual love. On a deeper level, the sacrifice for Jesus’ redemption and the elder Simeon’s prophecies (Luke 2 :34-35) all point forward to the Cross.

This is where Simeon’s words about a sword piercing Mary’s heart are fulfilled, as so many of our liturgical hymns remind us. Jesus’ faithful service culminates at the Cross. God, who restrained Abraham from sacrificing his beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22:12), accepts the sacrifice of His own Beloved Son for our salvation (Romans 8:32). **ECL**



## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

### BODY, SOUL,...AND DIVINITY

I don’t know about you, but I’m never more desirous of a thick, juicy cheeseburger – or other succulent slab of meat – than on the first day of the Great Fast. Having overdosed on cookies, candy and all manner of rich foods over the holidays, my body inevitably craves greens, whole grains and fresh fruit. Even so, Forgiveness Vespers has barely ended and I’m already confessing my desire for “forbidden fruit,” or, in this case, meat. This carnivorous madness waxes and wanes, finally reaching its fulfillment after the last bell has tolled for Pascha, and I’m hungrily eyeing my – and others’ – ready-to-be-blessed basket at the parish center. Why does my mind – and my body – play this cruel trick on me? Why do my good intentions – and my near indifference to tempting foods before the Fast – turn on me, making it tough to control my appetites? Why does my body betray me? And after all, does God really care whether I eat a steak on Clean Monday, or crush my craving until Bright Week?

The short answer to my shortcomings is “sin.” My inclination toward sin, the propensity to “take the easy way,” and my pride all conspire against me. But it’s not as if I’m at the mercy of my weakness. No, I’m not a “saint on earth,” and I surely can’t save myself. But because of the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, I’m not a slave to sin. By cooperating with God’s grace (participating in the Holy Mysteries, praying, worshiping, and loving God and others the best I can), I can move further and further from sin and closer to being the person God created. Each time I turn from sin and choose instead to love, I become more of who He made me to be, and I flourish. “The glory of God is man [and woman!] fully alive,” said Saint Irenaeus. What he meant is that, when we choose love (that is, when we choose God), we become fully human – true icons of God, Who is Love.

Back to Clean Monday and my obsession with two all-beef patties, special sauce, etc.: why do I let my intellect – my ability to think, reason and un-

derstand the meaning of things like fasting – get wrestled into submission by my body and its cravings? Are my mind and my matter at war? Do they hate each other? Well, no. Just speaking about myself this way – as if there’s a split in who I am – is a sign of dualism. Dualism (in simplistic terms) is a way of looking at the human person that separates body and spiritual soul, and it’s been the cause of heresy throughout the Church’s history. It’s also a way of thinking that contributes to many of the social and cultural changes we’ve witnessed in the last 30-40 years. You don’t have to be a philosopher or theologian to know what dualism is – it’s all around us: “It’s my body; I can do what I want with it.” “In his mind the marriage is over. He ‘loves’ the other woman. The heart wants what it wants.” “Her Alzheimer’s is getting worse. She’s ‘not my Grandma’ anymore.” “It’s all online, so it’s not ‘cheating.’” See where this is going? We “split” ourselves all the time, depending on what suits our need or argument. This split is dangerous, and leads to all kinds of wrong thinking about who we are, and goes against the Christian understanding that human persons are created in God’s image. God is one, yet a communion of persons. Human persons are one yet a unity of body and soul. God isn’t “fragmented,” and neither are we. We aren’t minds carried around in flesh cases; we are our bodies! Who I am as a human person is body, soul, and that “spark” of divinity that is God’s life within me, His image in Whom I am created and sustained.

Now I’m back where I started, dreaming of a juicy filet... My craving doesn’t mean my thoughts are bad or my body is bad. Nor does it mean meat – or chocolate, lattes, or whatever I “give up” – is evil. If I listen, my cravings remind me that I’m good, the world is good, and the gifts God gives me are all good! What’s not good is when I forget that the world doesn’t revolve around me: my appetites, my needs, my difficulties – my, My, MY! God doesn’t ask me to fast for Him (‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ Matthew 9:13), but because I need it. I blame my sinfulness on my “weak

flesh,” or my inability to understand what God really wants. I justify my sin by saying it doesn’t matter what I do as long as my intentions are good, or I “feel” it’s right for “me.” Now the split isn’t just within myself, but between me and my actions and my relationship with God and others.

During the Fast I’ll do my best to forget myself in favor of God and others. It’s a pretty good bet that I’ll fail some time or another, despite my good in-

tentions. But God knows that for me to “be His glory” takes not just my initiative, but His love and mercy. He knows the Fast isn’t about my willpower in the face of cheeseburgers and chocolate bars. The Fast is my opportunity to yield to His craving for me.[ECL](#)



## UNDERSTANDING ICONS

Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.

### THREE ICONS OF CHRIST

#### Feeding the Hungry

Installment 5 of 12

One of the most dramatic demonstrations of God’s mercy: feeding the hungry is the only miracle which occurs in all four gospel accounts; The Feeding of the 5,000: this astonishing nourishment demonstrates God’s unfathomable abyss of mercy on many different levels. They include:

1. It shows God’s great mercy by nourishing the hungry with bread, and fish, is reminiscent of Joseph the Patriarch feeding the Chosen People and nourishing them through the times of famine.

2. It is a Eucharistic miracle recalling the feeding of the Jews during the Exile, where they received their daily nourishment from manna and the fall of quail. This echoes one of the petitions of the Our Father: give us this day our daily bread.

3. It is a teaching moment by the Lord to His disciples, and by inference, to all believers of the need to feed! Feed yourself first, then you can extend that feeding to others.

4. Jesus does not ask his disciples to count the people, nor count the amount to charge for food, yet the disciples automatically calculate both, the count of 5000 men by number is mentioned in each Gospel! We can also hear the disciples asking our Lord to send the people away to buy provisions for themselves in the local town.

5. Jesus challenges them: Feed them yourselves!

I have selected three contemporary icons to illustrate this act of mercy, two from other than Byzantine tradition: one Coptic, a second one from Ethiopia, and third, a narrative wall Greek Byzantine painting. Each of these offers specific insights into this wondrous act of mercy!

In the traditional Byzantine icon, three different moments are articulated in the unfolding of the events. One Jesus asks the apostles to feed the people, second, the apostles distribute the food, and thirdly twelve baskets remain. Our Lord is the only haloed figure in the scene and is somewhat larger in size than the apostles, while the people are all seated and diminished in size. Our Lord’s right hand is held upright in blessing, showing that He is pronouncing the prayer over the loaves and fishes.

However, the Byzantine iconographers have portrayed Our Lord off to the side, and He is somewhat lost in the multitude of figures portrayed amid

the grass.

In the Coptic icon, Christ stands in the center of the icon towering over all other figures in stature and bearing. He is standing on the earth with both arms portrayed as offering food for the hungry. Several apostles flank our Lord, while directly in front of Him and at His feet are women and children. A young boy offers a basket with loaves and fishes to the Lord. To either side, the landscape is filled with throngs of people portrayed only by a sea of heads. Clearly, our Lord is emphasized in this icon because of His size, while interestingly, He wears the colors of mercy – red and white – which originate from His heart.

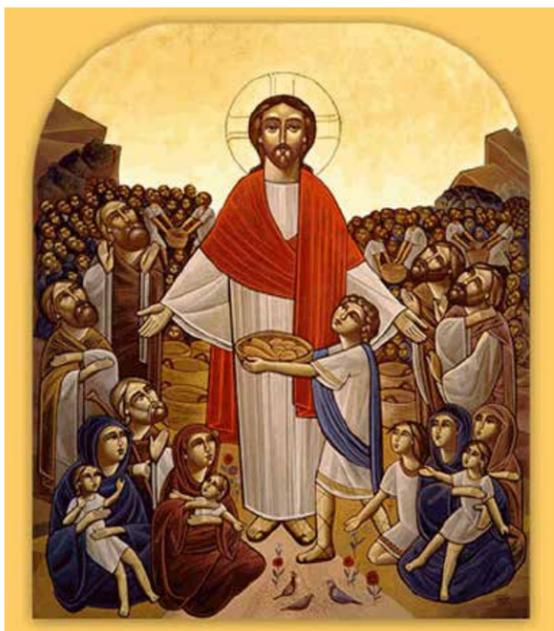
In the third icon, from Ethiopia, a different priority is demonstrated. Our Lord is bowing to receiving the basket of food from the young boy, while the apostles, seated, lift up their hands in conversation. Behind them are rows of just bust-figures of men waiting to be served by the six baskets directly in front of the scene.

I have selected three icons to illustrate this powerful miracle to not only highlight different traditions and how they contribute to our understanding of the sacred scripture, but also to underscore the differences which can be gleaned from the depiction of the same event.

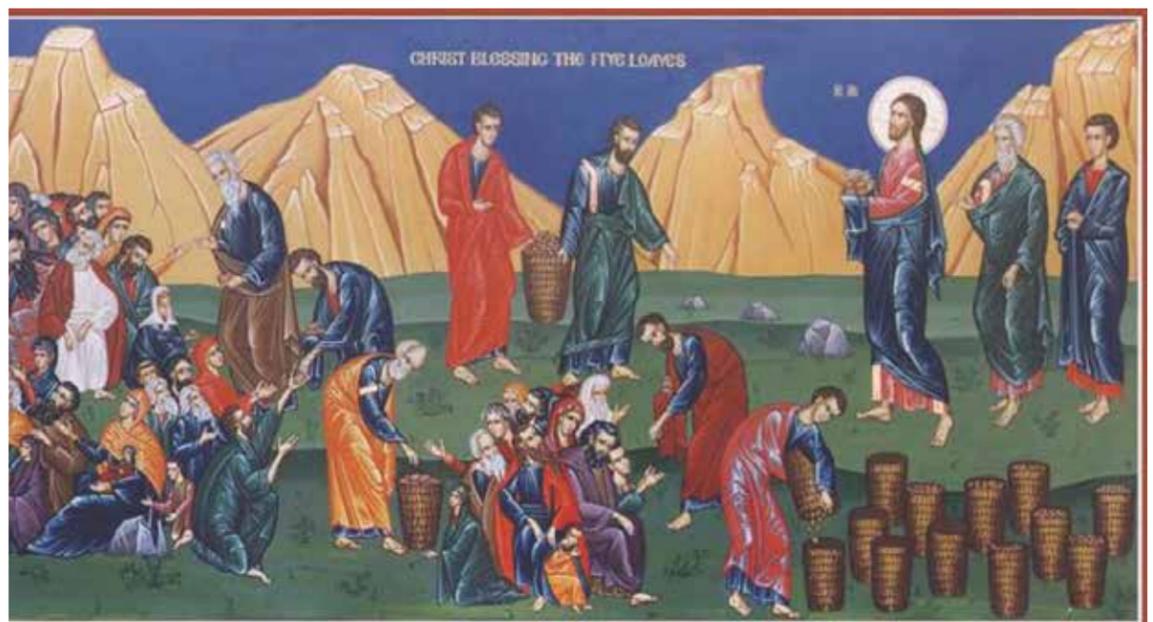
In this, perhaps the most overt demonstration of God’s mercy to His people, it is very important not to get lost in the details. Personally, I would have loved to have been present there when our Lord instructs the apostles to feed the people by themselves! They must have been perplexed and flummoxed to no end, because they remark, “even if we had a year’s worth of salary we could still not afford to feed this many people.”

Our Lord does not ask them to pay for or count the people, but instead instructs them to “feed My people.” This is very much akin to the words Jesus speaks to Peter after He has risen from the dead. “Feed, tend, nourish my sheep,” He instructs the first pope. Yet we too, like the apostles, are always fascinated with counting how many, calculating how much, etc.

God, in His infinite mercy, not only provides nourishment for believers, but also leaves ample leftovers in reserve to feed others. We need to nourish ourselves with God’s abundant mercy in order that we may in turn distribute His mercy to all those around us. His mercy is without beginning or end, without number; it is infinite without counting; it is to be distributed to all.[ECL](#)



Contemporary Coptic icon



15th Century Icon from Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

## GUEST EDITORIAL

Father Robert F. Slesinski, Ph.D.



### POPE FRANCIS, THE THEOLOGIAN-ECOLOGIST

As His Holiness Pope Francis is about to conclude his lengthy reflection on climate change and environmental issues, he ends on a most personal note, confessing, indeed, that his effort was “both joyful and troubling” (n. 246). It was “joyful” because he was able to praise Almighty God, the Creator, and afford him an opportunity to render homage to one of his spiritual heroes, St. Francis of Assisi (1181/1182 – 1226), universally known for his deep sensitivity to the whole created order, be it animate or inanimate. Indeed, the very first paragraph of his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* is but a gloss on St. Francis, the very title of his Encyclical being a quote from the Medieval saint’s “Canticle of the Creatures,” which begins with the words: “Laudato Si, mi’ Signore” (Praise be to you, my Lord), only to continue quoting St. Francis’ “pregnant” verse: “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs” (n. 1). How cannot these opening words but touch the hearts of all sensitive Christians? Indeed, in the Orthodox world, they cannot but recall to mind the equally ascetical life of one of their own saints, Seraphim of Sarov (1754 – 1833).

These poetic words not only set the tone for the pontiff’s extensive remarks, but also underscore the pace and direction of his discourse. In a word, His Holiness is not intent on entering into, let alone settling, the scientific matters relating to environmental issues. Indeed, he hastens to state “on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion” (n. 61), only to repeat his stance much further on regarding certain environmental issues: “Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics” (n. 188).

But, then, what is the pontiff’s precise point in penning this lengthy Encyclical? This brings us to the second motivation for his reflections: they were and

are “troubling.” The created order as willed by Almighty God is, in our own time in particular, being challenged by “environmental degradation,” directly resultant upon a no lesser evil— “human and social degradation” (n. 48). The very joy that imbues us with the poignancy and beauty of creation can seem to be all but cancelled by the violence, as it were, inflicted upon the created order by a truly disordered conception of human dominance over creation. As the pontiff directly—unabashedly—declares: “This sister [Mother Earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (n. 2). Venturing beyond a merely scientific and technological approach to addressing environmental degradation, the Holy Father takes a definitive stance as to how this—the whole of the created order being inherently interrelated—relates to human and social degradation. Pope Francis could not be more blunt on this environmental issue: “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—to offer just a few examples—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble” (n. 117).

On this note, we can, indeed, grasp the central point of his Encyclical—the crucial need to develop and foster an integral ecology, one that would, it certainly would seem, put inanimate and animate created reality on parity, living organisms being able to be such only in harmony with the environment in which they are enveloped. Creation is a fundamental good at the caressing hands of Almighty God freely given to humankind, not for its dominance, but for its stewardship.

His Holiness Pope Francis concludes his Encyclical beautifully subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home” with two lengthy, moving prayers. We end by quoting them in part as we pray along with the pontiff:

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe

and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out

upon us the power of your love,

that we may protect life and beauty...

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction...

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.

They come forth from your all-powerful hand;

they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.

Praise be to you!...

Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined

to everything that is... **ECL**

## SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Monsignor John. T. Sekellick, JCL



### ETERNAL MEMORY

Marked on our liturgical calendar this month can be found two of the five Saturdays on which we publicly commemorate our beloved departed. This year those dates are February 20 and 27 (2nd and 3rd All Souls). The first was January 30 (preceding Meat-fare Sunday) and the remaining two, March 5 (4th All Souls) and May 14 (Saturday before Pentecost). On these five Saturdays our Church has us remember publicly those who have departed from us to eternal life with the offering of a Divine Liturgy followed by a Panachida during which all the names of our beloved deceased are commemorated and read.

As we prepare for the radiant resurrection of our Savior from the dead, our Church reminds us particularly during the period of the Great Fast that death separates us only bodily from our loved ones, not spiritually. Sacred Scripture, Holy Tradition and the writings of the Saints help us focus on death as a transition from earthly to everlasting life. The beautiful prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi ends, “... It is in dying that we are born to everlasting life.”

Saint Paul, writing to the Corinthians for the first time, declares, “I tell you a mystery ... We shall all be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of

death is sin . . . but thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (15:53-57, *passim*).

Our great Eastern Saint and Doctor of the Church, John Damascene (c. 675-749), penned the inspiring text of his hymns chanted at funerals, among which we find: “Your creating command was my origin and formation; for You willed to fashion me a living creature out of visible and invisible nature. From the earth You formed my body and gave me a soul by Your divine and life-creating breath. Therefore, O Christ, give rest to Your servant in the place of the living, in the abodes of the just.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny.” (No. 1013). For this reason, since a person who has passed from this life can no longer merit God’s favor, the Church urges us, the living, to pray on their behalf for their blessed repose especially on the third, ninth, fortieth days and then the yearly anniversary of death in addition to the public commemorations described earlier. It has been a respected and pious practice at the time of death to request the celebration of the Divine Liturgy for the repose of the newly-departed. Unfortunately, in recent years this devout practice has noticeably declined and truly merits revival.

We pray for the departed on the third day remembering Christ's third-day resurrection. The ninth day symbolizes the nine choirs of angels among whom is our guardian angel given us at Baptism and who accompanies us through life and death at the judgment seat of Christ. The fortieth day marks Christ's holy ascension until the day of His second coming and the resurrection of all those who have fallen asleep in Him. Thus the memory of the departed is zealously and faithfully commemorated.

Although death understandably brings sorrow,

grief and lamentation, since as humans we experience these emotions, the evangelist John writes in the Book of Revelation, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... God Himself will wipe away every tear... and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (21:1-4 passim) Moreover, as Christians we are inspired by Jesus' words to Martha at the tomb of her brother, Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who

believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25)

May our beloved deceased rest in peace and their memory be eternal. **ECL**



## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

### HEARING FROM GOD

**S**aint Ambrose says that when we pray, we talk to God, and when we read the Bible, we listen to Him. In other words, prayer is a two-way conversation wherein we talk to God, and then hear Him speak to us, and one of the ways He speaks to us is through the Holy Scriptures.

There is only one book that is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that book is the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16). When we say that the Bible is inspired, we are saying that the Holy Spirit is the primary author of the Bible. If that is the case then we can be confident that the Bible "firmly, faithfully, and without error," teaches the truth (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 107). The Bible is God's Word (CCC 135).

Let us read the Bible every day, and read it slowly and prayerfully. If we do, we will experience God speaking to us.

Most Catholics don't realize that the Catholic Church urges us to read the Bible frequently. The reason for this is because it is in the Scriptures, and especially in the Four Gospels, that we can come to know Jesus Christ. Saint Jerome says that "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (CCC 133).

It was in reading a passage from Saint Paul's epistle to the Romans that Saint Augustine experienced a deep personal conversion and became a committed follower of Christ. Saint Anthony of Egypt was moved by the Holy Spirit to embrace the monastic life when he heard the Gospel read during the Divine Liturgy where Jesus told the rich man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matt. 19:21). God spoke to both of them through the Holy Scriptures.

The Church Fathers tell us to read the Bible. Saint Jerome wrote to Eustochium, "Let sleep surprise you only reading; fall asleep only on Sacred Scripture." Saint John Chrysostom also strongly urges us to read the Bible. He says, "Procure books that will be medicines for the soul... get at least the New Testa-

ment, the Apostolic Epistles, the Acts, the Gospels, for your constant teachers. If grief befalls you, dive into them as into a chest of medicines; take from there comfort for your trouble, be it loss, or death, or bereavement of relations; or rather do not merely dive into them but take them wholly to yourself, keeping them in your mind" (Hom. IX On Colossians).

Saint Therese of Lisieux writes how reading the Bible was a great help for her in her spiritual life. She says, "It is especially the Gospels which sustain me during my hours of prayer, for in them I find what is necessary for my poor little soul. I am constantly discovering in them new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings" (S 179).

Do you have a good Catholic Bible that you can understand? When you get one, keep it in a place that will remind you to read it every day. One method of daily Bible reading is to read one chapter of the New Testament every day. Before reading, ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you in reading God's Word. Another possibility is to read the readings assigned to the day as indicated on the Byzantine Catholic Calendar that your parish distributes every year. There are other plans available that will get you through the entire Bible in one year, but if you are just starting out, or haven't been reading the Bible for a while, it might be better to keep it short and simple, so that you can take your time and read prayerfully and slowly.

Sometimes a passage or verse will stand out to you, or speak directly to your current life situation. At other times, nothing specific will stand out, but you will have the sense that there is something that makes reading the Bible different from reading any other book. By experience you will perceive that the Scriptures contain a special grace that encourages and empowers you to love and serve God with greater fervor and strive more earnestly to imitate our Savior Jesus Christ. Read the Bible because it is God's word to you. **ECL**

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# FAITH AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

By Father Carmen Scuderi, OFM, Ed.D., P.C.C.

## THE EFFICACY OF SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

### *Do they really work? How well if they do?*

Comer (2011) is direct in his research into De Leo and Evans (2004) in stating that there is a high degree of difficulty in scientifically measuring the efficacy of suicide prevention programs. There exists a variety of programs, each with its own philosophy of treatment, serving as varied populations of people of differing age and numbers per age bracket.

Comer (2011) cites communities that have a majority of elderly populating them or areas suffering economic privation may suffer from higher incidences of suicide than other populations. These incidences may prevail, the efficacy of the existing prevention programs notwithstanding.

Asking the question, “do suicide prevention centers reduce the number of suicides in a community” (Comer, 2011, p.253)? Comer cites Van Orten et al. study of 2008 with the bald statement, “Clinical researchers do not know” (2011, p. 253). According to Comer, comparative studies of suicidal rates in local communities prior and post establishing of prevention centers provide differing results. In some communities, there is a decline in the suicide rate; in others, no change, and in other groupings there is a marked increase in suicides (De Leo & Evans, 2004; Leenaars & Lester, 2004, as cited by Comer, 2011). Comer is quick to point out that in some cases an increase in suicides may actually present a positive value provided the local increase is less proportionally than the increase of suicidal behavior in the larger community.

### *How Well Utilized are Suicide Prevention Centers?*

Do people ideating suicide take advantage of assistance by contacting suicide prevention centers in their respective local communities? According to Comer (2011) only a very small percentage pursue the opportunity, and those callers appear to be “young, African American, and female” (p. 253). According to Maris, 2001; Lester, 2000, 1989, 1972 (as cited by Comer, 2011), it is the older white male population that has the tendency to commit the greatest number of suicides than any other population. Comer cites Stolberg et al. (2002), identifying a key problematic issue among suicidal populations as being non-communicative about feelings, whether discussing with friends, family or even professionals.

For those who do take advantage of prevention programs, an apparent reduction of suicides has been recorded especially among the higher risk populations who do call for help. Comer cites Farberow and Litman studies of 1970 in the Los Angeles area of the 8,000 high-risk people who did contact the center; approximately 2 % of them later committed suicide as compared to the 6% rate typically registered among high-risk groups. For Comer, there is a clear and present need for suicide prevention centers to become more visible and accessible to people contemplating suicide; as observed by Oliver et al. (2008) and cited by Comer (2011), the increase in advertisements and web announcements, newspaper publications and television, radio and billboards reveal a positive response to the need for high visibility and publicity.

### *The Need for More Public Education*

Comer (2011) cites numerous authorities (Baber & Bean, 2009; Gibbons & Studer, 2008; Ban Orden et al., 2008) calling for more public education on the topic of suicide as the “ultimate form of prevention, and at least some suicide education programs (emphasis, author’s)—most of them concentrating on teachers and students—have begun to emerge” (p. 253).

As far as a viable curriculum is concerned, there has been much debate according to Comer, but Comer quotes Shneidman with whom, again according to Comer, most clinicians side in the statement:

The primary prevention of suicide lies in education. The route is through teaching one another and . . . the public that suicide can happen to anyone, that there are verbal and behavioral clues that can be looked for . . . and that help is available. . .

In the last analysis, the prevention of suicide is everybody’s business (Shneidman, 1985, p. 238; as cited by Comer, 2011, p. 253).

### *Psychological and Biological Insight shortfalls*

Once a mysterious and hidden problem, hardly acknowledged by the public and barely investigated by professionals, suicide today is the focus of much attention. During the past 35 years in particular, investigators have learned a great deal about this life-or-death problem (Comer, 2011 p. 254).

Suicide has moved out of the shadows and into the daylight of public awareness. It has been more closely studied within the sociocultural model than any other modality of study to date, according to Comer. The importance of natural caregiving providers, such as religious affiliation, or the effects of societal change and stressors in daily living, relational situations – marital status, gender, race and mass media – all have an impact upon the individual. According to Comer, the research gleaned through the studies by psychological and biological specialists has been more limited in result.

Although the data concerning peripheral issues, general background and triggers that result in suicidal activity, the ability to predict with accuracy that a particular person will commit suicide, still eludes scientific study.

According to Comer (2011), the insights of psychology and biology need to match pace with the insights of the sociocultural researchers if clinicians are to gain a deeper understanding into the mechanism of suicide.

### *Treatment shortfalls*

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and other related modalities appear to give some assistance in coping; there have yet to be developed therapeutic modalities that are clearly successful in the treatment of suicide. Suicide prevention programs witness to the commitment of the clinical field in the helping of suicidal people; there is little clarity as to the level of reduction these programs bring to the overall risk or rate of suicide (Comer, 2011).

### *The Role of Education in the Treatment/Prevention of Suicide*

Comer sees promise in the growth that is taking place today in the area of research into the problem of suicide. Of greater promise is the amount of public enlistment which the clinical world is inviting in the war against suicide and suicidal behavior. Broader education of the public regarding suicide, with programs targeting specifically the youth and the elderly, potentially brings about a profound understanding of suicide. The further the understanding is deepened, the greater the possibility of creating more successful interventions, eventually leading to successful prevention. Comer’s concluding observation rings with accuracy in that “[A]lthough suicide itself is typically a lonely and desperate act, the impact of such acts is very broad indeed” (Comer, 2011, p. 254).

### *Contact Places for Suicide Intervention*

One of the best places to begin to seek information about suicide locally, is found on the website: [www.helpstopthesilence.org](http://www.helpstopthesilence.org), put out by Catholic Social Services of Hazleton, PA. There are numerous links to websites that deal with suicide, offer counseling, hotlines for crisis intervention, and support groups for both families and people contemplating suicide or who have attempted suicide. Calling “911” and asking for the suicide crisis line will put one directly in touch with 24-hour support on a one-to-one basis. Your local hospital can also supply information for crisis intervention and/or support groups and, in the Hazleton-Lehighton, Nanticoke, PA, areas, Northeast Counseling Services offer direct access to crisis intervention and follow up. Consult the phone book or information on-line for local phone numbers and locations of centers or support groups nearest you. **ECL**

THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC subscribes to the

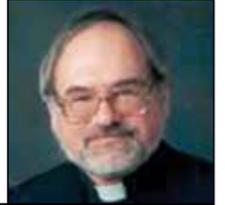
Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Eparchy, within all its parishes, institutions and programs, is committed to assuring a safe environment in ministry for its children and young people that conforms to Charter requirements.

For further information regarding the Eparchial Safe Environment Program please contact:  
 Father David J. Baratelli, Ed.S., M.Div. • Safe Environment Program Coordinator • 973.890.7777  
 Dr. Maureen Daddona, Ph.D. • Eparchial Victim Advocate • 516.457.5684

# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

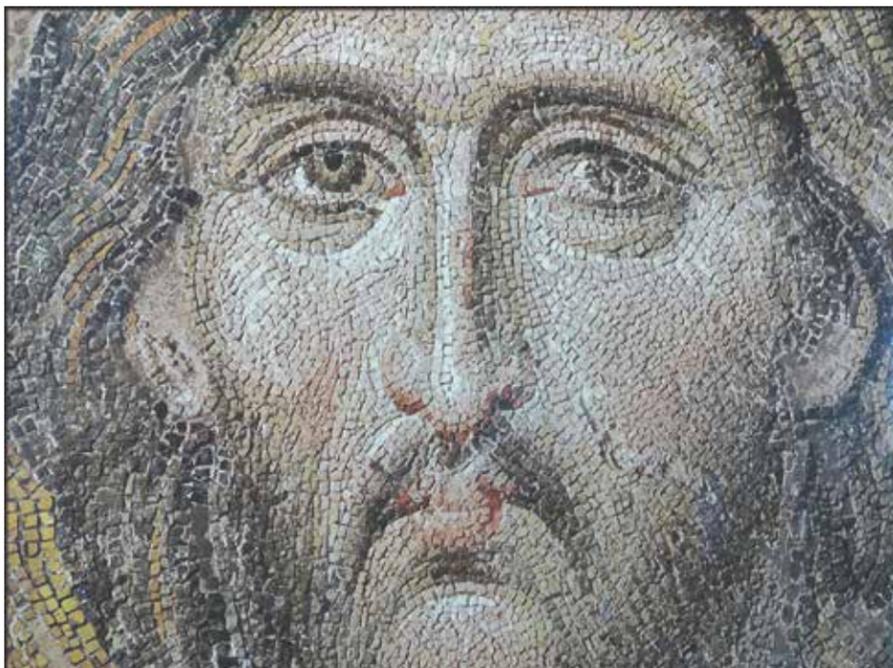


## GOD OF MERCY AND JUSTICE

God revealed himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai as, “The Lord, the Lord, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity.” (Exodus 34:5-6) Yet in the conflicted and polarized world we live in, some might point out that this revelation is incomplete, for it continues, “continuing his love for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but bringing punishment for their parents’ wickedness on children and children’s children to the third and fourth generation!” (Exodus 34:7) Saint John teaches us that “God is love. (1 John 4:8),” and certainly God’s relationship with his creatures is one of love and mercy for those he has brought into being, but we must also face the reality that he is completely just, and we cannot “sugar-coat” God as if he does not punish sinners justly. God’s strict justice is revealed frequently in the Scriptures, so much so that there were some early Christian teachers who felt that the God of the Old Testament had to be a different God than the one revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. They were condemned as heretics. Jesus himself, who spoke very mercifully about sinners - publicans and prostitutes especially - sometimes also spoke harshly about those who were evil. He said, “And as for you, Capernaum: ‘Will you be exalted to heaven? You will go down to the netherworld.’ For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. (Matthew 11:23)” For all that, the people who earned his strongest condemnation were those who pretended to be good and did not need God’s mercy.

What are we to think of this? We must first be aware of a reality which is beyond doubt: that for God, love and hate are not the same as for us physical human beings. We sometimes love another person, sometimes hate them, and we can change in our feelings toward them. Certainly our love or hatred comes from our mind and our soul and our wills, but it is expressed through our bodies, which can feel love or hatred through the hormones which course through our veins. This is evidently not true with God, who, as Saint John again tells us, is spirit. God, as the very foundation of all being, is also the foundation of all

love, which is the will for what is the best for all his creatures, for their life and the fulfillment of all their potentiality. Our loves and hatreds are a poor shadow of the absolute spiritual love that God has for all that he has created. Otherwise, why would they have been created? A wise man once said that God’s justice is his mercy. This is because God has only one eternal relationship for all his creation, that it reach the fulfillment for which it is destined, and this we call love. In God it is absolute and unconditional. Sometimes God’s love is compared to human love, as, for example in the prophet Isaiah, where he compares God’s love to one of the most powerful human loves, that of a mother for her child. Isaiah pro-



claims the words of God, “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. (Isaiah 49, 15, read on the feast of Theophany)” The love of a bridegroom for his bride is the model of the love of Christ for his Church in the New Testament. Yet human love cannot compare with God’s infinite love.

There is, then, one relationship of God for the people he has created, and it is love, for “God is love.” However, a part of this relationship for love is hatred for sin. Sin is the negative reality of human existence, the consequence of the freedom of our wills, which can choose not-God. Sin is anything that destroys the destiny to which we are called, it is anything that brings death, and this God hates. Saint Paul could not be more clear on this point, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)” Scripture tells us over and over

again that God wishes the salvation of everyone, but the problem is that sometimes we will to be associated with sin, which is the abomination of death. If we freely hold on to our sinfulness, and do not accept God’s mercy, then we “feel” God’s wrath directed against the sin to which we cling. The writers of Scripture, those inspired by God, did not always make this subtle distinction, for sin brings death, and if we are entangled with it, we “feel” our spiritual death.

Pope Saint John Paul II explained this reality in the same way. In a catechesis he gave on July 28, 1999, speaking about hell, he said: “God is the infinitely good and merciful Father. But man, called to respond to him freely, can unfortunately choose to reject his love and forgiveness once and for all, thus separating himself for ever from joyful communion with him. It is precisely this tragic situation that Christian doctrine explains when it speaks of eternal damnation or hell.” He quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’ (Paragraph 1033)”

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew (25:31-46), the Lord gives salvation to the just, to those who are loving to others because they can see the image of God in them. These are the sheep who enter into the joy of their destiny. The goats, on the other hand, who did not show love to others are condemned together with their sin. We see here that this was not the destiny that God intended for us mortals, describing hell as “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41)” The mercy of God, in his infinite love, is always open to those who freely accept it, as, for example, Saint Paul did even after persecuting sinners, or as Saint Mary of Egypt did, even after a life of flagrant prostitution. God’s wrath is a manifestation of love, destroying sin and the death associated with it for those who are being saved. **ECL**

## ARTICLE SUBMISSION REQUEST

Does your parish have Feast Day events, fundraisers, community service projects, special liturgical services, or any other type of happening? Speak with your pastor and become your parish media liaison!

Articles can be emailed to the editor at:

**ECL@eparchyofpassaic.com**

### Article Submission Requirements:

- Article must be approved by the pastor
- Article written in Microsoft Word
- Author’s name
- Photographer’s name
- Key people present in photographs
- Photographs preferred at a resolution of-

300ppi, 150ppi minimum

- Photographs must be attached to an email; they may not be embedded in the body of the text.



# SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

Deacon Lewis Rabayda

## CHILD-LIKE INNOCENCE



I don't have children, so I don't have first hand experience of what it's like to raise them. And although I don't have children of my own, I do have nieces and nephews whose growth to adulthood I have witnessed. But when I'm in public or interacting with parishioners, I'm reminded of the innocence that children convey. While some may contest and argue that children are not without their faults, or at times can appear anything but innocent, I agree. However, even though children may not yet be able to fully understand reason, or have had the time to be taught all of God's laws, they still possess a very real innocence. These small children still do not have the capacity to truly hate or abuse others. This is even evident

in our system of law, where a minor cannot be convicted for life of a crime that they cannot fully comprehend. It is only when the youth reach their mid-teens when they may be recognized by the court as possessing true comprehension of their crimes and can therefore be held accountable and receive an adult sentence.

The innocence of children reminds us about the purity that can exist in the human person. It reminds us adults of a time when we didn't know all about the tragedies of the world, when we believed that everyone has the desire to love and help others, and that malice is incomprehensible and unknown. If we assume then, that these innocent children have had a normal Catholic upbringing, it is difficult for us to imagine them committing grievous sin. Can we look at a child and imagine them committing mortal sin? Can those innocent faces be the faces of thieves and adulterers? Can we imagine these small people raping and killing, or defrauding their neighbor or government?

It is difficult for us to entertain this juxtaposition because we know that if children are raised well, they are inherently good. We see children as a source of joy and a hope for the future. We love them and want the best for them and can barely comprehend the possibility of them committing serious crime. This, in a sense, is how God looks at us. We are His children. We are young in His eyes, we are precious in His eyes. We should be innocent in His eyes, because we do not have the cares or experience of being omnipotent.

Just as a parent gives good instruction to their children and guides them to do the right thing, so too, God has given us the guidelines for an innocent life. God has given us His upbringing, He has written His laws on our hearts and it is just as difficult for God to witness us sinning, as it is for us to imagine a child committing mortal sin.

Jesus instructs us, "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3). Jesus says that we must turn, and become like children, but in what way? If we value this childlike innocence, then it is necessary for us to turn away from our adult-like guilt. To be a child is to listen to those who are in charge of us, to those who know better. To be innocent is not to sin in grievous ways, but to show love to all we meet. If we have failed in this attempt at innocence, if we have forgotten the innocence of our past childhood, or worse, if we have purposely neglected our innocence, then we must turn to Christ in the Mystery of Confession and allow Him to turn us back into His innocent children. Because, to be an innocent child is to not know the stain of sin, to not be a child of this world, but to be a child of God. **ECL**



## UPCOMING EVENTS FOR FEBRUARY

### Eparchial and Parish Events

Glory to Jesus Christ!  
Glory forever!

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>2 Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon and Anna<br/><i>Solemn Holyday * Chancery closed</i></p> | <p>7 Sunday of Cheesefare * Sunday of Forgiveness</p>                      |
| <p>8 First Day of the Great Fast * Clean Monday</p>   | <p>15 Mercy Saturday<br/><i>Saint Michael Cathedral* begins 9 a.m.</i></p> |
| <p>14 First Sunday of the Great Fast *Sunday of Orthodoxy</p>                                   | <p>15 Presidents' Day<br/><i>Civic holiday * Chancery closed</i></p>       |
| <p>21 Second Sunday of the Great Fast</p>   | <p>25 Vocations' Board Meeting<br/>Chancery, Woodland Park* 10-3</p>       |
| <p>28 Third Sunday of the Great Fast * Veneration of the Holy Cross</p>                         |  |

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