

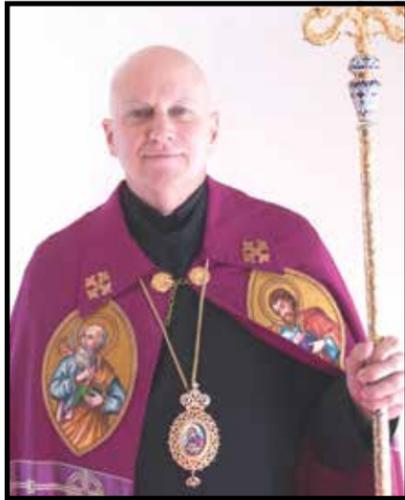


# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LIII, NO. 2

FEBRUARY 2017



## WHILE THE BRIDEGROOM IS WITH US Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Beginning of the Great Fast

Prophet Isaiah, in which God says, "Isn't this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring

break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily, your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard." And in another passage He says, "If you take away the yoke from your midst, the point-

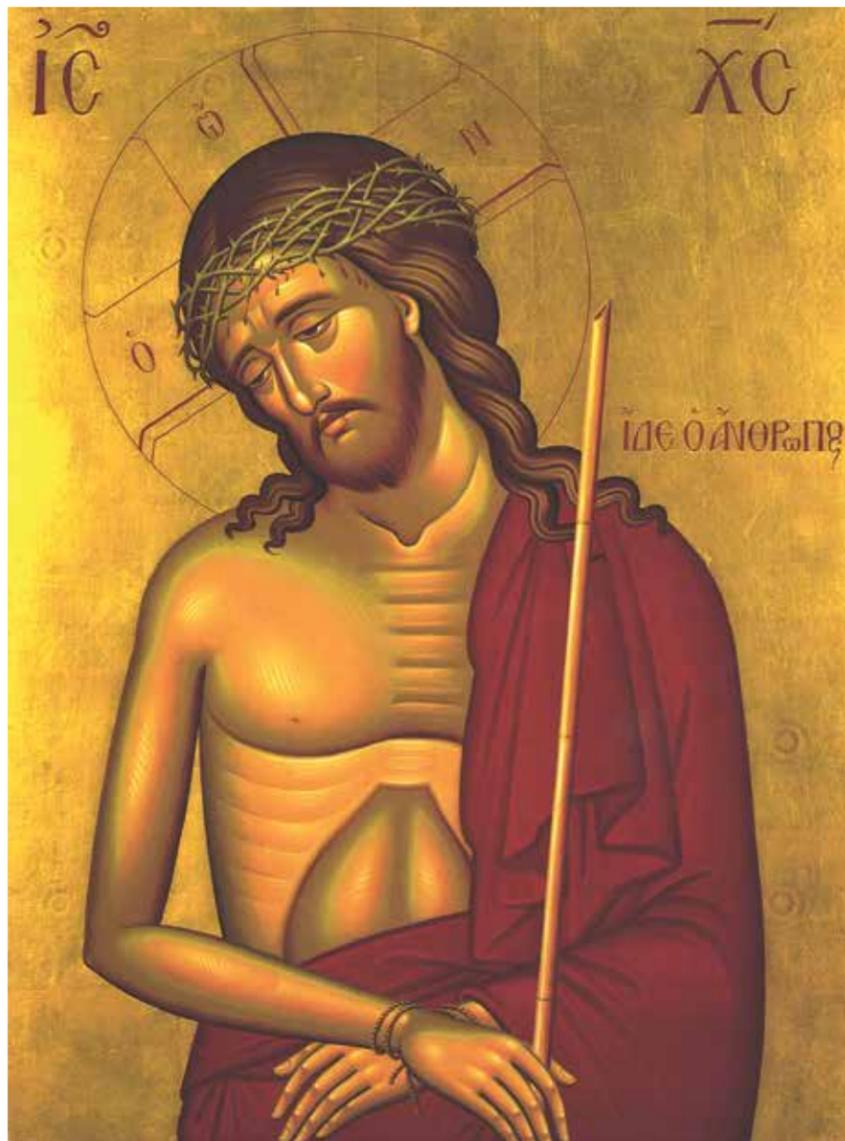
keep rereading it for the rest of your life. You'll say to yourself, why did I never read this before?"

On January 20, our new President asked six religious leaders to pray, three before the oaths and three after. I was thrilled to hear some of them quote from the prophets, the very passages that I mentioned above in which God commands us to care for the poor and helpless. Imagine—a president that listens to the words of the Old Testament prophets. We will pray for him in our Church as we do for every president that he will listen to the guidance offered him by God.

It is clear from the Scriptures that God has no use for fasting if we do not also do works of charity and also try to turn away from sin. However, none of these readings tell us not to fast. Should Christians fast? Why do we fast? Well the answer to the first question is remarkably easy. When the followers of Saint John the Baptist asked Jesus, "Why is it that we fast and the Pharisees fast, but your followers do not fast?" Jesus replied to them, "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then they shall fast in those days." So if someone asks why we fast, the answer is so very simple, Jesus said that His followers would fast. (By the way, this passage is why we Eastern Christians do not celebrate the Divine Liturgy on weekdays during Lent. How can we fast while the Bridegroom is present? It's like showing up glum at your friend's wedding and refusing to celebrate.)

Now that we see that Christians should fast, from words of Jesus in three of the Gospels, we still might wonder, but why? What is the purpose of fasting? The answer to that question is deep in our metaphysics. We believe that the real you is both

*Continued on page 2*



*Icon of Christ the Bridegroom*

The other day my gas station attendant, who is from Turkey, decided to ask me some questions about my religion. I said to him, "You are Muslim, aren't you?" He got an enormous boyish grin and said, "Yes, thank God." I often thank God that I am Byzantine Catholic. I am so grateful that God has put me in this Church that still professes our ancient unchanging life-giving faith in the most beautiful liturgies and customs. In a world of uncertainty and doubt, our Church holds fast to the life giving words of Jesus Christ, and his message of hope. We are not animals; we are not a chemical accident. Every human being is important to God, and is endowed with an immortal soul, free will, and the knowledge of good and evil. Each of us will be judged by the just God according to the nobility of our actions. To say that we will not be judged is to say that we are not responsible for our actions, that we are mere animals or chemical reactions. I am not saying that God is not merciful to those who ask for mercy, but our sins cost Him an enormous price, the sacrifice on the cross. When sin is denied or made light of, it not only denies our noble status but also denies the enormity of Christ's death on the cross. For these reasons, I thank God that I am in a Church that still teaches God's law, that still teaches about sin, that still says "Lord have mercy" over and over, that still teaches we must confess our sins, and that still celebrates the great season of Lent.

A popular reading for the season of the Great Fast is chapter 58 of the

the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh." God reminds us that the purpose of the fast is not some kind of magical ascetic power, but to reaffirm our dignity through self-discipline, and also the dignity of every man, woman, and child, the poor and homeless, for example. God promises us some spectacular rewards in the surpassing poetry of this chapter, "Then shall your light

ing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness, and your gloom be as the noonday...and you shall be like a watered garden." There is so much beauty in this chapter, I don't have space for half of it. I hope you read Isaiah chapter 58 for yourself before Lent. For that matter, I hope you read the whole book of Isaiah. If you do, you will probably

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Ask a priest a question—p9

## WHILE THE BRIDEGROOM IS WITH US

### Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Beginning of the Great Fast

*Continued from page 1*

a body and soul. We do not believe that the important part of you is the soul, and the body is unimportant. I often hear people (people who are sincerely trying to live a better life) say, "You are a spiritual being having a human experience (or a physical experience)." This ancient heresy was battled by the earliest Christians, including the ones who wrote the New Testament. It has been fought by the Church in every era. It is the heresy that says that the physical world is evil or a trap, and we need to liberate our spirit from its physical body. This heresy was at the root of Calvinism that has misled so many people and made them into miserable, unhappy Christians. This heresy is at the root of much of the contemporary hatred for the human race that encourages abortion and artificial contraception.

A strange thing about this heresy, whether you call it "puritanism" or "dualism" or whatever, is that its followers use it to justify the most extreme, but contradictory, positions. Some of these heretics have said that since the flesh doesn't matter, we should indulge all of our sexual desires without shame or limits. Others of these heretics have said that no one should marry or have sexual relations to avoid bringing more children into the world. In our culture today, we have combined these two sinful positions into one: our culture says that we should have sex with no limits, and at the same time, have no children. The ancient Gnostic teachers also taught both at the same time: they said that their followers should be disciplined in the flesh, but the elites could do what-

ever they felt like.

Because we believe that we are a unity of body and soul, and that both are important to God, and that God made both in the image of His own beauty, it is not enough to simply practice our faith "in the spirit". We cannot reduce our faith to ideas or emotions or beliefs. Jesus gave us physical signs as part of the Holy Mysteries, the Sacraments. Jesus gave us water and oil and marriage and His flesh and blood to sanctify us. The good God made the physical world too, and He made it because He loves it. We can sin in our spirit and we can sin in our mind, and we can also sin with our bodies. Since the body is so important, it must be disciplined in the Christian faith, just as we discipline our spirit and educate our mind. And that is why we fast!

Not only did Jesus tell us that we would fast, but He also gave us His example. Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days before He began His public life. We know that the first Christians fasted two days every week, Wednesday and Friday. As time went on, the Church added a forty day fast in imitation of Jesus Christ. In our Church, it is the tradition to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year (unless there is a celebration on that day), and we have four public fasts in addition, namely the two forty day fasts before Christmas and Easter, and then two shorter fasts before Saints Peter and Paul and before the Dormition.

In the West, where everything is done by legislation, fasting has disappeared with the laws that

enforced it. I began by saying how happy I am that I am Byzantine Catholic. I am so happy that I am in a Church where we respect tradition instead of just rules and regulations. And what is our tradition for the Great Fast? Meatfare Sunday is approaching quickly, right after the pre-Lenten Sundays of Zacchaeus, and the Publican and the Pharisee, and the Prodigal Son. Meatfare Sunday is called "Meatfare Sunday" for a reason. Traditionally it is the last day to eat meat until Easter. The next Sunday, Forgiveness Sunday, is also called "Cheesefare" for a reason. Cheesefare Sunday is called Cheesefare Sunday because it is the last day to eat dairy products before Easter, that includes milk, milk products, and eggs. The reason that we make Easter baskets is because of the Fast. The Easter basket contains all the things that we gave up for Lent. What is the point of an Easter basket if we don't keep the traditional Fast?

I strongly encourage everyone in our Eparchy to consider seriously our traditional fast because Jesus fasted, and because Jesus said we would fast, and because God made our bodies and loves our bodies. In conclusion, I offer one more thing for you to think about. Whenever we indulge our desires continuously, we stop enjoying the things that give us pleasure. Since we believe that God made the physical world, and God loves the physical world, isn't it possible that God tells us to fast so that we can enjoy His world more at the right time? People who overindulge eventually hate the thing that they use. Isn't it possible that God tells us to fast so that we can love His beautiful world instead of hating it?

+Kurt Burnette



### FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

**Msgr. T. Mark Condon, J.C.D.**, a priest of the Diocese of Paterson, is appointed Judicial Vicar effective January 25th.

### MOTHER MARIJA VISITS THE CHANCERY

Special visitors to the Chancery in January included (pictured with Bishop Kurt, from left to right) Sister Andreja, Sister Mary and Mother Marija Shields, all from Holy Annunciation Monastery, Sugarloaf, PA. Holy Annunciation Monastery belongs to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, whose contemplative charism is the legacy of its founders, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross. This Order is dedicated to a life of prayer.



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## +MONSIGNOR JOHN TIMOTHY SEKELICK, LONGTIME PASTOR, EPARCHIAL JUDICIAL VICAR, AND ECL COLUMNIST, REPOSES IN THE LORD

+Reverend Monsignor John T. Sekellick, JCL, a priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, Judicial Vicar, and pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Jessup, PA and Administrator of Saint John the Baptist Church in Forest City, PA, and longtime ECL columnist, fell asleep in the Lord about 5:15 a.m. (EST) on Friday, January 20, 2017, in Scranton, PA, at the age of 73. He was diagnosed with

metastatic cancer on January 11. He was born on September 18, 1943 in Philadelphia. He attended Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, the Pontifical Oriental Institute, and Catholic University of America. He was ordained to the priesthood on July 13, 1969, at Saint Michael Cathedral in Passaic by Bishop Michael. He is survived by his mother, Veronica, and his sisters, Irene and Therese.

Funeral Arrangements were as follows:

Monday, January 23, 2017:  
2:00 p.m. Panachida and Reception

of the body at: Holy Ghost Church, 313 First Avenue, Jessup, PA  
3:00 – 6:30 p.m. Visitation at Holy Ghost Church, Jessup, PA  
6:30 p.m. Funeral for a Priest, Part One

Tuesday, January 24, 2017:  
10:00 a.m. Funeral Divine Liturgy at: Holy Ghost Church, 313 First Avenue, Jessup, PA  
4:00 – 6:30 p.m. Visitation at Saints Peter and Paul Church, 107 South Fourth Street, Minersville, PA  
6:30 p.m. Funeral for a Priest, Part Two

Wednesday, January 25, 2017:  
10:00 a.m. Funeral Divine Liturgy

at: Saints Peter and Paul Church, 107 South Fourth Street, Minersville, Pennsylvania  
Interment: Immediately following at Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery, Minersville, PA.

In Blessed Repose, Grant O Lord Eternal Rest to the Soul of Your Servant, the priest +John, and render eternal his memory!

*An in-depth article about Msgr. Sekellick, with personal remembrances, will appear in the next issue.*

## 2017 PROGRAMS AT HOLY DORMITION FRIARY, SYBERTSVILLE, PA

### Month of January:

The icon Mary, Helper of Mothers, is on display in our friary chapel. This icon is associated with miraculous assistance in difficulty with conception, pregnancy, or giving birth.

For more information on this icon, see the story in the \*Standard Speaker\* at <http://standardspeaker.com/community/copy-of-miraculous-icon-on-display-at-city-church-through-december-1.2129030>

### Saturday February 25, 9:30am-3pm: Quiet Heart, A Day of Recollection for Women

The rush of life can make it difficult to relax, let alone relax with God. Enter the Poustinia, spend a quiet day with God at our friary, with private and semi-private space to enter into quiet prayer. Father Jerome, OFM, will give a brief introduction to the poustinia at 9:30am. Optional Divine Liturgy at 8am; continental breakfast, 9-9:30am. Registration fee: \$25 includes a simple lunch.

### Sunday, February 26, at 5pm: Forgiveness Vespers

Prepare for the Great Fast with the mutual forgiveness that helps us become more open to our Merciful God.

### Saturday, March 4, 9:30am-2pm: Strive! A Day of Recollection for Men

Father Scott Boghossian offers his reflections to men, to help us to strive to enter by the narrow gate (Luke 13:24). Presentations 9:30am-2pm. Confession will be available. Optional Divine Liturgy at 8am; quiet prayer after 2pm. Cost: \$30 includes continental breakfast and a simple lunch.

### March 23-26: Mary, Untier of Knots — An Icon Retreat with Peter Pearson

Thursday 6-9pm, Friday & Saturday 10am-4pm, Sunday 1-4pm. Cost: \$300 (\$320 after March 10) includes all materials and Friday & Saturday lunch; room/board available at additional cost.

### Holy Week Services

Monday-Saturday at 7am: Matins

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday at 5pm: Divine Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts

Thursday at 5pm: Vespers with Divine Liturgy for Great and Holy Thursday

Friday at 3pm: Vespers for Great and Holy Friday with Burial Shroud Procession

Saturday, April 15 at 5pm: Vespers with Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil – vigil of the Resurrection

Sunday, April 16 at 8am: Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom – the Resurrection of our Lord

### Pilgrimage for Peace: Sunday, August 6, 2017: Transfigured by Peace

Retreats and programs listed here are co-sponsored by the Bishop Michael Dudick Center, supporting awareness of the Byzantine traditions that bolster our Christian faith.

For more information, or to register for any of our programs, please contact [holydormition@gmail.com](mailto:holydormition@gmail.com) or call Father Jerome, OFM, at 570-788-1212 ext 402.

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON DIVINE LITURGY IN BAYONNE PARISH SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

15 EAST 26TH STREET, BAYONNE, NJ  
All Welcome to Attend!

For the convenience of the area faithful, Bishop Kurt has introduced the celebration of a Sunday afternoon Divine Liturgy at Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, Sundays at 4 PM

Father Marcel Szabo, Pastor, together with Byzantine Catholic clergy from Northern and Central New Jersey, will provide a weekly schedule of service which will include:

- The Holy Mystery of Reconciliation prior to services
- 3:30 PM - Prayer Service (Moleben) to Blessed Miriam Teresa
- 4:00 PM - Celebration of the Sunday Divine Liturgy.

**Saint John Church is the baptismal parish of Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich.**



# PEOPLE YOU KNOW

## IN HARRISBURG...



*Saint Nicholas Day*

The Saint Ann Parish family celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas and the Feast of the Conception of Saint Ann on Sunday, December 11. Following the Divine Liturgy, parishioners and guests enjoyed a brunch at the parish center. The highlight of the event was a visit from Saint Nicholas. Father Michael Popson is the pastor of Saint Ann Church in Harrisburg, PA.



*Nativity of Our Lord*

On Christmas Eve, the children at Saint Ann Church in Harrisburg, PA, recreated the Icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. At 9 PM, before the Compline Services, the children portraying Mary, Joseph, the angels, the Three Kings, the shepherds, cows, and sheep walked to their places in the "Living Icon." Baby Jesus (one of the 6-month-old Sedun twins) was given to Mary to hold. The church choir and the parishioners joined them in singing "Silent Night" and other carols. Father Michael Popson, pastor of Saint Ann Church, thanked the children for helping us experience the true meaning of Christmas.

## IN PASSAIC...



*Saint Michael Cathedral Celebrates Patronal Feast*

On Sunday, November 6, parishioners and guests of Saint Michael Cathedral, Passaic, marked their patronal feast with a Divine Liturgy celebrated by Bishop Kurt with Fr. Jack Custer, Cathedral Rector, and Canon Felix Marciniak of Most Sacred Heart R.C. Church, Wallington, concelebrating. A banquet luncheon followed in Saint Michael Hall with the participation of local officials and area clergy. Parishioner Walter Zielonka was honored by Saint Michael Holy Name Society as "Man of the Year."

*Faith Formation Gathering*

The children of Saint Michael Cathedral a Faith Formation Gathering on Saturday, November 19, to learn about Saint Michael and the Holy Angels. While studying the Scriptures, the holy icons, liturgical chant and playing a lively game of "Slay the Dragon," they discovered angels as warriors, messengers, guardians and guides to worship.



*Theophany of Our Lord*

On Friday, January 6, 2017, the Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel marked the feast of the Theophany by blessing the Passaic River following the Divine Liturgy. Father Jack Custer, Cantor John Klapko, altar server, Samuel Strawhand, and some thirty parishioners were joined by civic officials, police and fire personnel of the Town of Garfield. The blessing was celebrated just below the Dundee Dam on the newly-designated Thomas Duch River Walk, named in honor of the Garfield Town Manager, a lifelong parishioner of the Cathedral.



# AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN ORMOND BEACH...

*Holy Dormition Church in Ormond Beach, FL, celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas, honored jubilarian couple for sixty-five years of marriage*

On Sunday, December 4th, Holy Dormition Church, Ormond Beach, FL, celebrated the Feast of Saint Nicholas with a formal dinner dance after their Sunday Divine Liturgy, at which time the parish honored Mr. and Mrs. John and Olga Motuz from Port Orange as they celebrated their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary.

A special blessing for their marriage had been bestowed on the jubilarians by Father Vincent Brady, parish priest, on Nov. 20th. Symbolic of their selfless love for one another, Mr. and Mrs. Motuz cut out a piece of their anniversary cake, and fed it to each other, just as they did sixty-five years ago on their wedding day. Afterwards, they were presented with a certificate of blessing from Bishop Kurt.

Mid-way through the celebration, the parish was graced by a visit from Saint Nicholas (played by Mark Ndrejaj), who had special packages for the children present, and gold chocolate coins for everyone.



*Father Vince presents certificate from Bishop Kurt to the jubilarian couple*

*Right: Parishioners enjoying food and each other's company at Saint Nicholas Dinner Dance*

The parish center was festively decorated for the Christmas holidays. The people danced to music from provided by a DJ, with a polka playing every now and then. There were door prizes and raffles and fun for everyone. The dinner closed with Father Vince and Robert Shihinski, parish cantor, of Ocala, leading in some traditional (Ruthenian) Christmas carols. After all was said and done, a parishioner, Anna May Janicky, was heard saying, "We had a wonderful time."

Sadly, Mr. Motuz was suddenly and unexpectedly called home to be with God on Wed., Dec. 14th. His funeral services took place at Holy Dormition Church on Wed., Dec. 21st, with Fathers Sal Pignator, Administrator of Holy Dormition, and Father Vince Brady, Assistant Pastor, con-celebrating.



*Saint Nicholas poses with Father Vince and some guests at dinner*



## IN HILLSBOROUGH...

On Sunday, December 4, 2016, Saint Mary Parish in Hillsborough, NJ, celebrated Saint Nicholas Day with a festive banquet. The highlight of the occasion was the visit of Saint Nicholas with the children of the parish. The pastor of Saint Mary Parish is Father James Badeaux.



*Some of the children of the ECF Program, with the direction of ECF Coordinator Julie Klikus, and Assistant Cantor Glenn Sedar, performed the traditional "Bethlehem Carolers" play to the delight of everyone present*



*Some of the children of the ECF Program congregate around Saint Nicholas*



*Saint Nicholas holding the newly-enlightened servant of God, Charlotte Redler, who received the Holy Mysteries of Initiation only the day before. Flanking them are her parents, Keith and Lisa Redler, and big sister, Leila*



# FAITH AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

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

## THE NATURE OF JOY

### *Of what does Joy Consist?*

Having briefly looked at a definition of happiness, joy itself comes under scrutiny. Researching J. Meyendorff (*Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1974), Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (*God and Man with Marghanita Laski*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1971), M. V. Lodyzhenskii (*Light Invisible: Satisfying the Thirst for Happiness*, Holy Trinity Publications, Jordanville, NY, 2011) and the work of C.S. Lewis (*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, Mariner Books: Houghton-Mifflin-Harcourt Press, Boston, MA, 1955), various understandings of joy are revealed to the reader. These experiences will give the reader the opportunity to arrive at an answer to the question of what joy is and how is it perceived and appreciated in daily life.

### *Saint Gregory Palamas, et al., experiences of Joy*

Meyendorff's text (1974, *Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY) begins with Eastern Monastic Spiritual Tradition in the pursuit of Joy, beginning with Evagrius of Pontus (+399). Evagrius, a contemporary of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory Palamas, addresses the concept of joy in his *Doctrine of Prayer* in which Evagrius lists in #15 of his chapters: "Prayer is the fruit of joy and thanksgiving" (1974, Meyendorff, SVS Press, p. 15). He also states elsewhere: "When you give yourself to prayer, rise above every other joy—then you will find true prayer" (1974, Meyendorff, # 153, p. 16). What is implied here is that an experience of joy is found in true prayer, the prayer of the heart where the focus is upon the eternal mystery of God. Communion with God, intimate conversation during which the human engages in an eternal moment with the Divine in a realm beyond thought and sensible perception,

bears fruit which is experienced in this realm as joy.

One goal of Evagrius was to develop a prayer of the heart that was unending so that the Divine Presence is fully experienced at all times in all places. According to Meyendorff (p. 31), Orthodox monastic tradition transformed this prayer of the heart into what we know today as the "Jesus" Prayer or the "Hesychastic" Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner*. The endless repetition of this phrase awakens in the conscious mind the realization of the real Presence of Christ within the Hesychast him/herself. This Presence is described as a Theophany and in the words of Meyendorff, "a Theophany as true as that on Mt. Tabor since it is a manifestation of the same deified Body of Christ" (Meyendorff, 1974, p. 33). Herein is the key to the relationship of monasticism and the theology of deification found throughout the Eastern Christian Traditions. The fruit of this journey into profound understanding and recognition of the Holy Presence is experienced as joy.

### *Joy in the teachings of Symeon the New Theologian.*

Symeon (949-1022), a Studite monk and Archimandrite of the Monastery of Saint Mammars in Constantinople, according to Meyendorff, is unique among the Orthodox Monastics in that he does not fear relating his personal experiences in prayer and mysticism in opposition to the traditional experiences of some of the more traditional Church institutions (p. 44).

The uniqueness of Symeon is the stance he takes theologically in dealing with the experience of God. In Meyendorff's words, "the fact of a personal encounter with God is so overwhelming to him he troubles less than others to put his writings in traditional form . . . Two elements of

Symeon's works are of capital importance:

1. His affirmation of the primacy of the spiritual experience especially when he describes his own conversion.
2. The intense realism of his Christocentric mysticism, especially his sacramental realism.

For Symeon it is the matter of seeking God above all and hearing from God himself the words Meyendorff has transcribed as Symeon's description of his own conversion experience: "You said to me: 'I am the God who became man for love of you. You have desired me and sought me with your whole soul, therefore, henceforth, you shall be my brother, my friend, the co-heir of my glory . . .'" (1974 Meyendorff, p. 47). The response to such an encounter is deemed joy.

In the instalment, we will continue the monastic experience of joy and its consequences as experienced by Symeon the New Theologian and move into Saint Gregory Palamas, directly beginning to look at Gregory's experience of Christ and the consequence of that encounter: joy. **ECL**



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4. "Traditional Byzantine Carols" – Collection of Christmas Music in Slavonic, Hungarian and English.
5. "Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in English"
6. "Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in Church Slavonic" – Original Soundtrack from the 50th Anniversary Commemorative Video
7. "Passion and Resurrection of Christ" – Traditional Byzantine Lenten and Eastern hymns in Slavonic and English
8. "Marian and Eucharistic Songs of Praise" – Collection of Byzantine BVM and Communion Hymns in Slavonic and English
9. DVD Video "Gubi – Jaslickari" – Male Chorus presentation of The Bethlehem Carolers in Slavonic – Carpatho Rusyn. (\$16.95 each DVD).
10. DVD Video "The Byzantine Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom in Church Slavonic" church Slavonic Commemorative Production with Four Concelebrants (English Liturgical subtitles included), 90 minutes (\$21.95 each DVD)

Listen to samples of each at <http://holyghostphila.byzath.org/recordings.php>

*In celebration of our parish's 125th anniversary year, there is no additional costs for shipping and handling. Items 1 through 8 are offered in digitally re-mastered \$12.95 CD format. Make checks payable to: Holy Ghost Choir, 2310 South 24th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19145-3207.*

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



## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

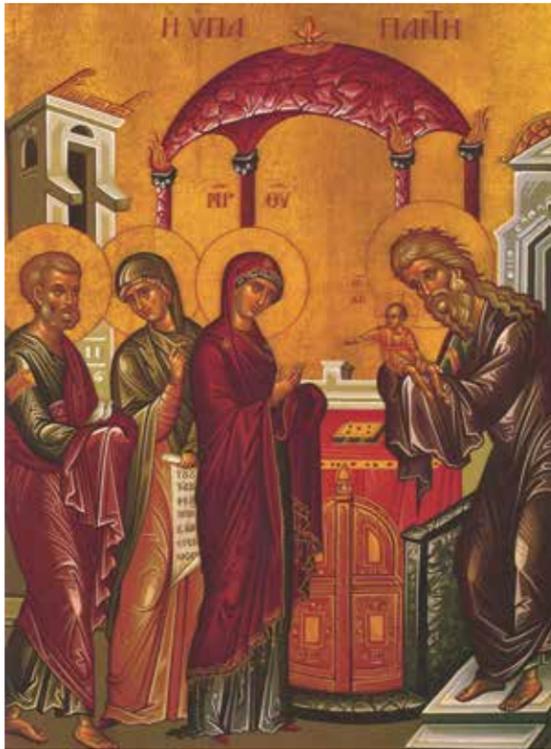
### THE ENCOUNTER OF THE LORD WITH SIMEON IN THE TEMPLE

The events we celebrate today are reported by Saint Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:22-40). The Holy Family celebrated two distinct rituals at the Temple. One was the "ransom" of the first-born son. The other was the "purification" of the mother after childbirth. Saint Luke stresses that Mary and Joseph observed these customs as pious Jews.

Other ancient and primitive cultures actually sacrificed children. (Occasionally Israelites were tempted to do the same! See Leviticus 18:21; Judges 11:29-40; 2 Kings 23:10). The Old Testament Law (Exodus 12-13; Numbers 8:16-17) marks a huge advance by making this sacrifice symbolic: an animal was sacrificed instead. The birth of the first son was an occasion for every family to remember the Exodus and God's plague on the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12), which made their own inheritance of the Holy Land possible. We would hear these texts read at Vespers for the Feast of the Holy Encounter.

Notice how Moses teaches parents how to pass their faith and traditions along to their children: "And when your son asks you later on, 'What does this mean?' you will tell him, 'With a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of a house of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, the firstborn of human being and beast alike. That is why I sacrifice to the LORD every male that opens the womb, and why I ransom every firstborn of my sons' (Exodus 13:14-15).

The Old Testament Law sought to make Israel a "holy nation" (Exodus 19:6; Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 7:6), "set apart" from others. Saint



Icon of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

Peter (1 Peter 2:9) says the same is true for us. Keeping physically pure was an important part of that Old Testament idea. Every time blood or semen was shed (two bodily fluids associated with life), a purification was required. This is why a new mother had to be "purified" (Leviticus 12). Of course, in the case of the Theotokos, there had been no blood and no damage to physical virginity. Mary observes the Law out of respect, not out of need.

Note that the elder Simeon is not a priest and he does not perform any of these ceremonies. The Gospel describes him as a pious Jew who sincerely longed for the coming of the Messiah. He was moved by the Holy Spirit to recognize that

this little child brought by a poor couple was in fact that Messiah. In contrast, many of the adult Jesus' contemporaries saw nothing special in Him, and many despised Him outright (Mark 3:21; 6:3; John 6:66). Simeon and Anna represent prayerful, hopeful, faithful Israel. They are "true Israelites" (John 1:47) who could recognize their Messiah when they saw Him. They teach us how prayer, fasting, and a firm faith in God's plan can sharpen our spiritual sight.

The prophecy that a "sword" would pierce Mary's soul (Luke 2:35) is traditionally understood to refer to her emotional turmoil at Jesus' crucifixion and death. You will hear this interpretation repeatedly in the hymns of the Triodion during the Great Fast. The second half of Simeon's prophecy is more puzzling. How would this piercing of Mary's soul cause "the thoughts of many hearts" to be "revealed" (Luke 2:35)? In general, the Fathers of our Church understand that Mary's readiness to believe the Good News of Christ's Resurrection after the horrors of Good Friday provide an example for the healing of others' "thoughts" such as Peter's denial and Thomas' doubt.

Saint Ephrem the Syrian understands one Greek word a little differently and arrives at a beautiful conclusion. Ephrem sees Mary "removing" the sword. What sword? Ephrem connects it with the fiery sword of the cherubim which had guarded the gates of Paradise ever since the sin of Eve (Genesis 3:24). Now, through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Mary's Son, the curse of Eve has been overturned. Which is why, next month, the Archangel Gabriel's first word to the girl who would become the Theotokos will be "Rejoice!" (Luke 1:28) **ECL**



## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

### YOU SAY YOU WANT A RESOLUTION

Now that we have one month of the new year under our belts, it's time to take stock of where we are and where we're going. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day are party and feasting seasons, filled with joy - and the inevitable overindulgence. Our national food hangover leads to resolutions to eat better, hit the gym, and tackle our vices: smoking, social media overload, throwing out junk we don't need, and the like. We start with the best of intentions, but often lose our resolve within the first few weeks (or hours!) of January. This year the Great Fast

begins a bit later, so that extra incentive toward moderation is delayed. In the midst of our winter doldrums, sometimes we have to rely on the sheer force of our willpower - and avoiding the junk food aisle at the market.

The kinds of resolutions we make at the start of the year are important for our health and well-being, and our perseverance in them is beneficial beyond the immediate effects. They teach us discipline and the lesson that setbacks don't have to mean abandoning our goal. We can learn to

regroup, look for new strategies to accomplish our goal, and take the opportunity to welcome the support and help of others. If we commit to working on these resolutions (not giving up if we don't achieve absolute success), the benefits will exceed our expectations, and go beyond losing a few pounds or forgoing smoke breaks. New Year's resolutions are good for us, if we approach them with the right attitude. Similarly, "spiritual new year's resolutions" are opportunities to exercise our faith, trim excessive attachments from our lives, and instead "overindulge" in God's love and

grace.

New Year's resolutions for our health and well-being are personal decisions requiring thought – and the prudence not to make more resolutions than we can reasonably manage. Similarly, spiritual resolutions that help us maintain a healthy soul and a good relationship with God are personal, and require discernment. I can't tell you which spiritual resolutions to make; you must examine your heart and your conscience, spending quality time with the Lord to discern where He's leading you. You don't have to wait until next January, or for the Fast, to get started. Making spiritual resolutions is an ongoing process, and every day is like a "new year." Though my resolution is personal to me, and what I think the Lord is calling me to now because I need it, I'd like to share it with you. Maybe it'll resonate, or be a starting point in your own discernment of where God is leading you.

My spiritual resolution for 2017 is to see Jesus in everybody. Maybe that sounds simplistic, but it's something I feel the Lord is calling me to do. I became convicted of this with some recent encounters with strangers in which I became annoyed,

and (I'm ashamed to say) looked at them disdainfully. In the midst of one such episode I stopped in my tracks, recognizing that my thoughts were incompatible with my polite smile. I looked at the person before me and searched the face for some trace of Jesus. He was there, though I could only see Him when I dropped my egotism and looked with my heart – not with eyes that too often see only what I want them to see. I said a silent prayer for this person and went on my way. That encounter was a revelation, and a catalyst to more deeply examine my thoughts and actions. I realized how often I'm distracted by superficial nonsense. My pre-conceived notions, biases, and even my fears can prevent opportunities for meaningful connection with another. At the very least, I miss the chance to be kind to someone, and to receive kindness in return.

Finding Jesus in someone is particularly hard when they're unpleasant or rude. Can Jesus really be present in that person with whom I so vehemently disagree politically, or in some other matter? I sometimes wish Jesus were not found in the people I don't like – but He's there, even if it seems like He's really good at hiding! When

Christ walked this earth, He sought out the unpleasant people. He ate – and sometimes tussled – with people who disagreed with Him, and those who'd eventually kill Him. Jesus touched those people whom others avoided as ugly and repulsive. Our Lord stood face to face with terrible sinners, the physically, mentally and spiritually sick – even the one who would betray him – and He loved every one of them. Jesus looked at all of them – looks at each of us – and saw Himself. None were perfect (oh, how the Lord knows I am not!), some rejected Him, but in everyone He saw His image and invited them to love and be loved.

As with our resolutions to eat better, exercise and get organized, there will be times when spiritual resolutions are easy – and times when our resolve is shaky. I've already failed a few times. While it's true that Jesus said we're to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, He also said there are lots of things impossible for us to accomplish on our own. But with God, all things are possible. Maybe my perfection, and yours, is not "success" as the world defines it, but the willingness to be shaped anew, again and again, by Jesus. **ECL**



## UNDERSTANDING ICONS

Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.

### VISIT THE SICK: CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

Illustrated by the Parable of the Good Samaritan: *The one who showed mercy on him!*

We normally associate this corporal work of mercy with tending to or visiting the sick, the infirm, or those in nursing homes. This wonderful act of visiting those who are hospitalized, home bound, or otherwise unable to attend church services, is certainly praiseworthy; the spiritual dimension to this work of mercy entails the tending, providing, and visitation of sick souls, those who are bereft of the healing mercies of God.

The spiritual aspect of the word *visitation* becomes evident when we examine both its Greek original and its context in sacred scripture. The word for "visitation" in Greek is some variant of *episcopethai*, meaning alternately visit, watch over, tend, or provide for. From this word, we derive the English word "episcopacy," the Office of Bishop. In this deeper level, *visitation* takes on the profound meaning of redeeming, healing, anointing.



Icon of the Priest Zachary and his wife Elizabeth

Two instances, among others in Sacred Scripture, employ the word "visitation" quite dramatically. First, the Virgin Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth after the Annunciation. This event, commemorated in the fifth *oikos* (house) of the Akathist Hymn, is referred to as the Visitation. Secondly, and three months afterwards, this word is employed by Zachary (whose name means "God remembers"), the Prophet John the Baptist's father, as his mouth is opened at the circumcision of his son. He proclaims the ninth canticle of Matins found in Luke 1:63: "Blessed be the God of Israel, for He has visited his people, He has wrought salvation."

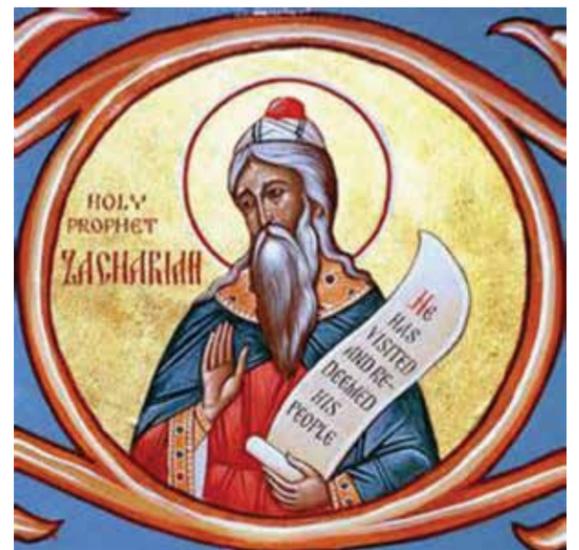
Two icons selected for this particular work of mercy show the priest Zachary and his wife, Elizabeth. Zachary is shown dressed with a mitre on his head designating his role as high priest. He wears the Jewish priestly vestments indicating his role as mercy-giver and father of the prophet. A box called a phylactery, which contains the laws of God, is tethered to the crown of his head. He holds a scroll with the text from his canticle (which is prayed daily in the Liturgy of the Hours) called the *Benedictus* from the first word of the prayer, "Blessed"!

Elizabeth, his wife, is shown veiled with deeply-cut tear channels in her cheeks. By her tears of joy at the visitation, she exclaims what has become part of the "Hail Mary:" Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Both parents not only acknowledge the visitation which is occurring in their lifetimes; they voice the blissful news that the Messiah is near and that He is going to bring reconciliation and consolation to His people through the forgiveness of sins. How this coincides with the role of

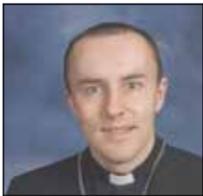
the Bishop is interesting. The chief shepherd of the eparchy is obliged to visit, tend, and provide for his flock with God's endless mercies.

The practice of this work of mercy, visitation, entails prayer, reconciliation, rejoicing, and the opening of our sometimes muted mouths. Some-



Icon of the Holy Prophet Zachariah

times our remaining mute when we should speak during our family visitations, especially around holyday gatherings, reflects the all too weak human nature of the Prophet Zachary as he first hears the words of the Archangel Gabriel while he offers the mercy incensing at the altar. We can overcome this handicap by our proclamation of the wonderful canticle of Zachary, who, after nine months of not uttering words, has his tongue unloosed and proclaims the glory of God's presence, visit, and redemption, which will be proclaimed by his new-born son, John. We, too, must visit the ill among us and proclaim the visitation of Jesus the Messiah, Lord, and Redeemer. **ECL**



## ASK A PRIEST A QUESTION

Father Vasyl Chepelskyy

### BYZANTINE LITURGICAL CHANT AND THE TONAL SYSTEM

Hello Father Chepelskyy, I think it's wonderful that you're starting the "Ask a Priest a Question" section in the ECL. I think it's an excellent opportunity for our people to get an "official" answer to their spiritual and Byzantine questions. I may have more questions for you in the future, but for now maybe you can answer the following. Thank you for your response.

Questions: There are eight "Tones" for the troparia and kontakia. Someone asked me "why" and I didn't have an answer for him. Can you explain any of the history on why there are eight different tones? Referring to church music, I heard the terms "Samohlasi" and "Podoben" but I don't really know what they mean. Please explain these two terms. After Holy Communion, when the priest goes to the side altar, we sing "May our mouth be filled". Unless we are referring to a "collective" mouth, the correct English should be "mouths", not "mouth". Is this a typographical error, or does the music commission that approved the wording in the new green Divine Liturgy pew book really want us to use the singular "mouth" instead of the plural "mouths"?

Mike Komishock, Cantor, Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Beaver Meadows, PA.

One can easily admit that music has a powerful effect on our lives as humans. It transcends our finite minds and appeals to depths of our nature. It always reflects life. Through music we enter into contact with God. Music helps to take part in life, to communicate. It is important to sing in order to express. Singing is an adequate and traditional form of liturgical language. It is an effective means of liturgical so-communion of the community. It expresses unspoken. Singing and music are inspired by the Spirit, so they are a feature of a presence of the Spirit. They are eschatological signs, which connect heaven and earth, time and eternity. Saint Augustine said, "he who sings – prays twice."

Music and liturgical singing play an important part in our worship as Byzantine Catholics. While respecting all others, we recognize that we possess a unique way of approaching the Mystery of God and of expressing the joy of His presence through what is described as "a sacrifice of praise" (cf. Hebrews 13:15), that is, our liturgical singing.

The traditional music of our Church is called *Byzantine* or *Sub-Carpathian Plainchant* or *Prostopinije* (Slav. *prostopinije*, "simple chant"). It is the traditional liturgical chant of the Rusyn peoples of the Carpathian Mountains, and of their descendants who emigrated to other parts of the world. This chant is sung in the parishes and monasteries of the Byzantine (Ruthenian) Catholic Church and the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church in the United States, and in the Ruthenian Catholic eparchies of Mukačevo (Ukraine); Prešov, Kosice, and Bratislava (Slovakia); Hajdudorog, Miskolc, and Nyiregyhaza (Hungary); Krisevtsi (Croatia); and Ruski Kerestur (Serbia) in Europe.

It is called *Byzantine* because it was developed during the Byzantine Empire, which was founded when the capital of the Roman Empire was

transferred from Rome to Constantinople in 324. The Empire existed in the eastern Mediterranean area until the fifteenth century. The music of this "New Rome" in many ways was based on late Greco-Roman musical traditions. Subsequently, it played a major role in shaping the musical traditions of the Latin West, manifesting various degrees of influence.

In his article, "Beginning to Learn the Byzantine Musical System," Stanley J. Takis explains that the Byzantine chant is meant to highlight and enhance the liturgical texts of the Church, and therefore weds itself to language using a strict set of rules, and yet at the same time employs a wide range of modes and styles. The many services of the Church consist of a vast catalogue of lyric poetry, which exists in many forms for many different purposes. There are thousands of hymns, each with its own prescribed place in the yearly calendar of the Church. The most common hymns are of the Divine Liturgy, the Church's central service, which holds the Sacrament of Holy Communion. However, there are several daily services, which include Vespers, Matins and Compline, and every day has a different celebration with a unique set of hymns. There are also services for the other Sacraments and for various occasions. All of these services and their texts are designated to be chanted in the various modes of Byzantine music.

So, where do the eight tones come from? In the early eighth century, Saint John of Damascus (676-749) codified a system of eight musical styles appropriate to Christian worship. This system is called the *Octoechos* (eight tones). Over the centuries, the performance practices of this music were most likely influenced by various historical and cultural changes. Each echos of the Octoechos is a family of modes. A mode is a musical system that relies on a fundamental tone and a set of melodic formulas built around it. These formulas are made from a defined set of scale steps that have uniquely tuned intervals. Byzantine chant, being modal, is basically a melodic system that does not lend itself to modern harmonization.

Byzantine chant has a lexicon of melodic formulas for every mode in the system. Byzantine ecclesiastical music is divided into groups of hymns according to rhythmic style. The nature of the liturgical music corresponds to the rhythm of the liturgical year and the rhythm of human life.

As stated by our Metropolitan Cantor Institute, in the Byzantine liturgical system, each week is assigned to one of the eight tones. The week begins with Sunday - and more particularly, with the service of Vespers on Saturday evening. So each Saturday, we begin singing the hymns in a new tone, in order: tone 1 for a whole week, followed by tone 2 for the next week, and so on. Within each tone, there are hymns for each day of the week, corresponding to the traditional liturgical theme for the day, for example, the hymns for Sunday always focus on the Resurrection, and those for Thursday on the apostles.

The assignment of tones to specific weeks begins on Pascha, the greatest feast of the liturgical

year. At Vespers on Great and Holy Saturday, at the Lamp-lighting Psalms, we sing the Sunday hymns of Vespers in Tone 1, before continuing with the hymns proper to Great Saturday itself. Then, at Matins for Pascha, we sing the Sunday Matins hymns in Tone 1.

Bright Week, the week following Pascha, is the most joyous of the year, and to emphasize the universal nature of the Resurrection, we sing through the Sunday (Resurrection) hymns in all eight tones, one tone per day. Thus, for Bright Monday, we sing the Sunday hymns in Tone 2; on Bright Tuesday, the Sunday hymns in Tone 3; and so on, ending with Tone 8 on Saturday. (Tone 7, traditionally considered the most somber of the tones, is omitted in order to fit the eight tones into seven days.)

On the Sunday after Pascha (Thomas Sunday), we come back to Tone 1, beginning with Vespers on Saturday evening. For the rest of the liturgical year, the tones follow one another in regular procession.

Around the 32nd week after Pentecost, we begin preparing for the coming celebration of Pascha. For the preliminary Sundays of the *Triodion*, and the Sundays and weekdays of the Great Fast, we combine the hymns of the *Triodion* with those of the eight tones. Each week keeps the tone it would have based on the number of weeks since the previous Pentecost. For this reason, the hymns actually sung during the Great Fast are arranged slightly differently from year to year.

The cycle of the eight tones comes to an end with the conclusion of the Great Fast. For the Great and Holy Week of the Lord's suffering and Resurrection, from Lazarus Saturday to Great and Holy Saturday, the hymns of the Octoechos are completely replaced with those of Great Week. Only on Pascha do we begin again - with the Sunday hymns in Tone 1.

The hymns of the Octoechos are combined with hymns from the Menaion, Triodion, and Pentecostarion, according to the rules given in the Typikon. In general, the greater the feast, the more material is taken from the other liturgical books, and the less of the Octoechos is used. For great feasts, the hymns of the eight tones are entirely supplanted by hymns for the feast.

In our Byzantine Catholic Church, the chant provides melodies for stichera, troparia, kontakia, prokeimena and alleluia in the eight tones, as well as special melodies (*podobny*) which supplement the basic melodies of the eight-tone system. In general, all of these are "pattern melodies" which can be applied to any text. The pattern melodies, along with the special melodies for canons and other particular hymns, are collected in a chant book called the *Irmologion*.

The Menaion or "Book of Months" contains all of the liturgical texts needed to sing the service of each day. Assigned to each commemoration of the year is a Troparion and Kontakion. Troparion - literally means "refrain", at the Divine Liturgy, is a hymn that concludes the Third Antiphon; the hymn expresses the theme of the day's commemoration.

oration; it is also sung at Vespers and Matins.

A Troparion is a “song of praise” extolling the Feast, while a Kontakion summarizes the “purpose” of the Feast, and is a hymn sung after the troparion or troparia of the Divine Liturgy; this hymn is taken from the Canon of Matins and expresses poetically the theme of the day’s commemoration.

While each of these hymns is a paragraph long, they represent only a fraction of the rich liturgical hymnology of the day. The proper plural rendering for each term is: Troparia and Kontakia.

Podoben – literally means “special melody”, a term indicating that a hymn is sung to a special melody, not one of the eight Samohlasen tones. Each podoben is identified by a tone marker (e. g. Tone 8) and the first Slavonic words of the original melody (e. g. *Udivisja Josif*).

*Samohlasen* – literally “same tone,” the name is given to the musical family of eight tones used to sing certain texts in Vespers, Matins, and other liturgical services. As explained by the Metropolitan Cantor Institute, the *prostopinije* chant provides several melodies in each tone for responsorial psalmody: A *pripiv* melody for singing psalm verses. It consists of a single melodic phrase with a reciting tone (a fixed note on which a varying amount of text can be sung). A *sticheron* melody for singing stichera when no special melody is indicated. Each *samohlasen* melody consists of several phrases, which are repeated in order to match the phrases of the text being sung. A *bolhar* (Bulgarian) melody, used at festal Vespers and in the funeral service. Special *sticheron* melodies called *podobny*, used when the liturgical books call for them, and named after the first words of the model text in the chant books. A *podoben* may sometimes have its own *pripiv* melody. The standard *pripiv* and *sticheron* melodies, taken together, are referred to as the *samohlasen* melodies.

In answering the last question, we should keep in mind all the difficulties the translators encounter due to the many nuances of a specific word or term and that is why we have so many different translations of the same texts, which are similar

but not literally exact, each aiming to provide a better understanding of what the original author meant when he used a specific word or phrase. Every effort is made to be as close to the original text as possible, and still there are cases when some translations are being revised and the changes occur.

So, the word “mouth” does not represent a typographical error, and I believe, was used by the liturgical commission intentionally, since we know that this specific phrase is coming from Psalm, 71(70):8 “My mouth shall be filled with your praise, shall sing your glory every day.” Since it is a part of the Psalm, it is taken literally from the Bible the way it appears there, similarly to many other phrases of the Liturgy. The word “lips” (Slav. “usta”) does not exist in a singular form, as “usta” would be always used in plural (literally “lips”). It would be my guess that the previous version of the translation in the old Liturgy book was a direct literal translation from the Slavonic which would make sense in that case to use “lips” in plural, but a new translation was done as an effort to be as close to the original text as possible, which is reflected now by using the word “mouth” the way it appears in the original Bible phrase.

That also makes sense from a theological point of view to express our oneness in worship: we gather in one place and one time for the service, we are the one Mystical Body of Christ. We profess our Symbol of Faith as one. Our liturgical worship is a communal act in which we approach the “Throne of the Lamb” with “one voice and one heart.” The conclusion of the Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer) of the Divine Liturgy is sealed with this doxology: “And grant that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and praise Your most-honored and magnificent Name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever.” Here we (Church on Earth) proclaim our oneness with the saints (Church in Heaven) by affirming “Amen.”

We now thank Him for His most-pure Mysteries as one. This is the nature of corporate worship. This post-communion hymn expresses this oneness as: “May our mouth be filled with Your praise, O Lord, so that we may sing of Your glory.

For You have deemed us worthy to partake of Your holy, divine, immortal, pure and life-creating Mysteries. Keep us in Your holiness, so that all the day long we may live according to Your truth. Alleluia!”

This “Hymn of Thanksgiving” can be called in a sense a Troparion for “departing into the world in peace,” where our Liturgy continues. Through the blessing of our celebrant, we are dismissed to enter into the world renewed and strengthened as God’s witnesses living a life of praise, thanksgiving, humility and holiness and serving others.

I am very thankful to Mr. Raymond J. Mastroberte, cantor at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Wilkes-Barre, PA, for his time, valuable advice, and kind assistance while answering these questions.

I would like to kindly thank Mr. Mike Komishock for asking these questions and to encourage all the readers of the ECL to use this opportunity to ask the questions you have.

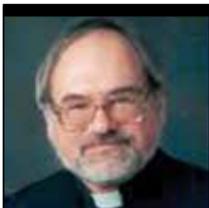
We will respond to your questions on subjects such as theology, spirituality, the sacraments, morality, church history, and the lives of the saints. You may submit your questions to the email: [sjpastor@ptd.net](mailto:sjpastor@ptd.net) or on the wall or by private message at the Facebook page: SaintJohntheBaptistByzantineCatholicChurch

Answers to some of your questions may also be published in the ECL.

If you have ever wondered what Catholics really believe or just questioned “why is that” about a certain topic, you now have the opportunity to find out.

This is also another attempt to reach out to our youth who are studying, working or are away from our parishes for a longer time, which will give them an opportunity to ask the questions they may have and to help them in strengthening their faith and growing closer to God.

We look forward to your many questions....so ask away! **ECL**



## THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

### ONE GOD, ONE IN THE HOLY TRINITY

In the feasts just celebrated, the Troparion begins, “At your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, worship of the Trinity was revealed.” There are three great world religions that believe in the one and same God: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These faiths believe in the God who called Abraham to “Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)” and “Abram put his faith in the Lord, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)” Though each of the three faiths believe in the God of Abraham, they may have different concepts of God. To be honest, faith in God is not usually the problem, but the concepts we try to make of Him in our human limitations. It is also likely, I believe, that among the billions that do not believe in the God of Abraham, there is more of a faith in one God

than of many. In the Christian faith, of the heritage of Abraham, there is the faith also that God as Trinity was also revealed to Abraham. “The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and (he bowed) to the ground. (Genesis 18:2)” The Jews and Muslims interpret the three men as “angels,” “messengers of God.” The Christians interpret this as a manifestation of the Trinity, and therefore, the only icon that is allowed of the Trinity is that of the three men who appeared to Abraham (the most important is Saint Andrei Rublev’s *Trinity*). In the Old Testament, whenever angels appear, there is some ambiguity as to whether they are “angels” as such, or the presence

(Hebrew “shekinah”) of God.

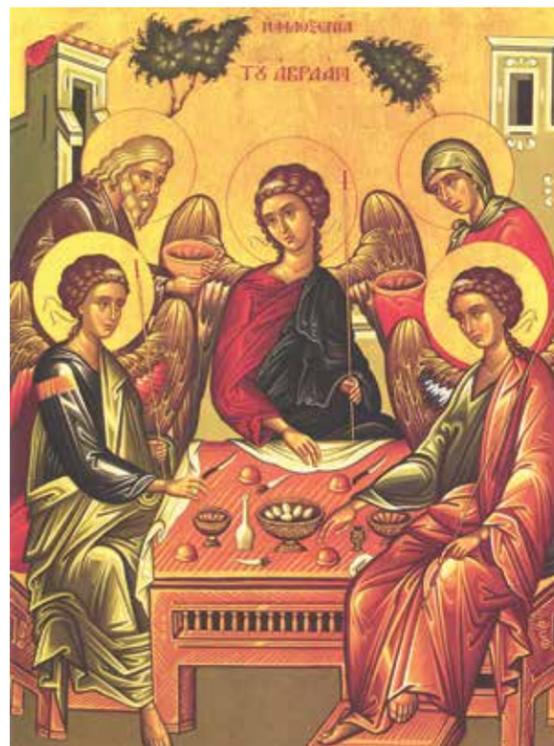
In the Gospels, faith in the Trinity becomes very clear. Sometimes people look at the Gospels only superficially, and say that of the four Gospels, only Saint John teaches clearly that Jesus is God. However, John does not retell the story of Jesus’ baptism, nor of the Transfiguration. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have both these stories which clearly manifest Jesus as the only Son of God. In his baptism in the Jordan, the Father’s voice is heard, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 13:17), and the Spirit descends in the form of a dove. Therefore, in icons of the Baptism of our Lord, the Spirit may be depicted as a dove. On Mount Tabor, when Jesus’ glory was made manifest, the Father’s voice again says, ““This is My beloved Son, with whom I am

well pleased; listen to Him, (Matthew 17:5)” and the Spirit appears in the form of a cloud, for it was a cloud that led the chosen people through the desert to the promised land. While the Gospel of John does not have an account of the Baptism or the Transfiguration, the same reality is present. Before His passion, in the presence of the crowd, Jesus calls out: “Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again. (John 12:28)” Jesus also promises us another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, “when He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth. (John 16:13)” It is in the Christian Gospels, therefore, that we find the definite affirmation of faith in one God, unity in the Holy Trinity, into which we are baptized, according to the Lord’s command, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)”

It is undeniable that this revealed concept of God as Trinity, is a point of divergence between Christians, on the one side, and Jews and Muslims, on the other. Christians consider themselves to be strict monotheists, and accept the Jewish formulation, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole

strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)” The Christian Creed begins, “I believe in one God.” However, it is difficult for Jews and Muslims to accept how Christians say that the one God is Father, Son and Spirit. Perhaps the great Teacher on the Trinity was Saint Gregory the Theologian who said, “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. (Homily 40.41)”

I would hold that faith in the Trinity actually leads us to a stronger faith in God as one. The mystery of the Son and Word of God taking human nature is the exact center point of our relationship with God. The story of Creation in the book of Genesis tells us, in God’s words, “Then God said: Let Us make human beings in Our image, after Our likeness. (Genesis 1:26)” He has made us to be community, because the one God, the only God, is community of Persons (*hypostases* in Greek). For the Jew and the Muslim, community among human beings is a gracious gift of God for the sake of peace and unity. For the Christian, it is how we become like God, as Jesus prayed, “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (John



Icon of the Holy Trinity

17:20-21)” Deniers of the Trinity may think it is easy to refute this faith, but the reality is that only in faith in God as one in the Trinity is it possible to find unity in God for ourselves and unity with one another, for only in this way can we become “God-like.” **ECL**



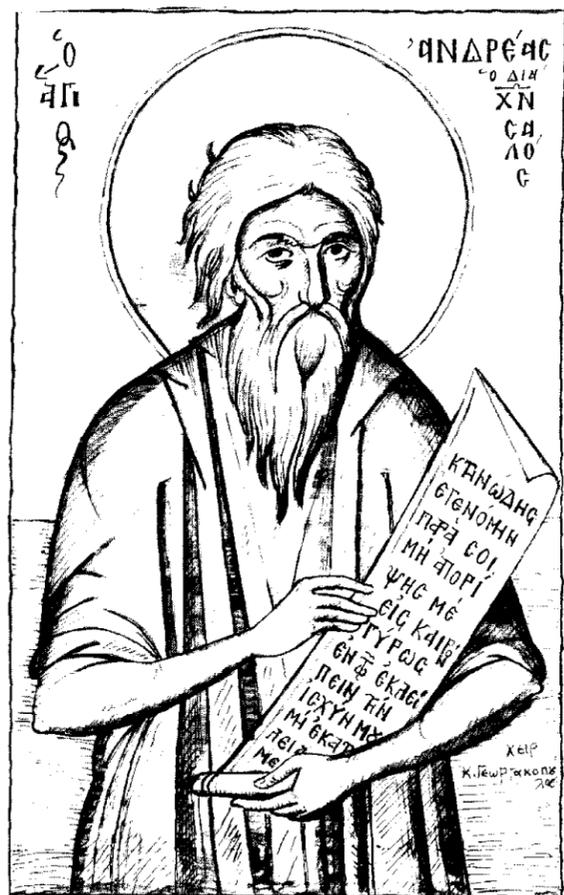
## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

### PRAYER FOR PERFECTION

“Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord and Savior calls us to perfection. The thought of perfection provokes anxiety. We object, “We cannot be perfect;” “only God is perfect;” and “to err is human, to forgive is divine.” It’s true. The word that Jesus uses here is in

just as easily be stated as ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’ (Lev. 19:2, 1 Pt. 1:16). After heartfelt conversion, we strive to become like Christ (1 Jn. 2:6). We want to seek first the kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33), and to be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3). The perfection God wants from us is to love the Lord our Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself (Lk. 10:27).



Icon of Saint Andrew

Terms like sanctity, holiness, and perfection seem abstract and imprecise, but Scripture gives us more detail. Call to mind the fruit of the Spirit listed by Saint Paul in Galatians 5. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Are these character traits evident in your life? What about Saint Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, “Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy; it does not boast; it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” Do you demonstrate this kind of love? What about the Ten Commandments, and the Seven Cardinal Virtues? Have you read through the Sermon on the Mount lately (Mt. 5, 6, 7)?

the original Greek New Testament is *teleioi*, could easily be translated “mature,” or “full grown.” In short, Jesus’ command for us to be perfect could

To live as a Christian is no easy task. In our human strength, it is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Mk. 10:27). Without God’s grace we cannot make the first step toward perfection. But through prayer and the sacramental life, moral transformation is possible (Rm. 12:2).

There is no doubt that God promises to hear and answer our prayers. And it is good for us to

pray for the things that we need, “our daily bread.” God accomplishes his plans through our prayers so why don’t we pray more frequently and more fervently for perfection, for virtue, for conformity to Christ?

“I just have a bad temper.” Conquer that temper by the grace of God. Contend in prayer to overcome your anger. So many of our faults are rooted in impatience. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit and the master virtue of the Christian life. Pray for patience. If you say the beads or use the prayer rope, say not one, but hundreds of prayers for the grace of patience. If you pray the Divine Office or the Psalms, pray for the intention of growing in love for God, love for neighbor, purity in thought and word. Pride and egoism make us sensitive to the smallest perceived insults and worried about what people think of us. Pray for humility. Don’t settle for remaining a spiritual infant. Seek to grow in holiness by fervent and insistent prayer.

When an unbeliever or a non-Catholic meets us, do they see Jesus, or do they see our faults? Could it be said of us what Saint Paul said of the Jews during his day, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rm. 2:24)? Do we turn people off and give Jesus a bad name by our lack of virtue?

We must strive for holiness as our first priority because to do so is to obey and honor God. We must strive for perfection because how we live as Christians impacts how our neighbors view God and is a testimony to the truth of our Faith. The power to grow in sanctity is found in the power of prayer. Use the prayer of faith-filled and persistent petition to acquire the grace to live a supernatural life of virtue. **ECL**



# SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

Father Lewis Rabayda

## THE HOPE OF OUR FAITH: FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Too often Catholics come under fire for their over-emphasis on guilt and penance. Some wrongly argue that our actions should not be constantly fixed on what we have done wrong or be focused on the sorrow we have for the sins we committed. This accusation against us is only partially correct. Indeed, we do place great emphasis on being sorry for the sins we commit, and the need for us to repent of these sins, so that our Baptismal Garment can be washed clean again and we can return to the full grace of God. But our emphasis on this would be well balanced by our understanding of our faith in Christ.

All through the New Testament we are encouraged to have faith in Jesus Christ and that, if we do have this faith, we will be found worthy of the kingdom of heaven and we will have passed from death into life (Jn. 19-29). But what exactly does it mean to have this faith? Faith in Jesus Christ is not simply a passing comment of acknowledgment that we agree the historical person of Jesus existed and that He was a teacher. Faith itself is not passive, but a very active decision we make to believe in something more than what is easily observable. The faith we have in the Holy Trinity is a belief that the transcendent God—Who first

created the world and then intervened throughout the history of that world—is real and that He continues to act in each of our lives to bring about the salvation of all of mankind. This same faith will then lead us to understand the world in a way that non-believers cannot comprehend.

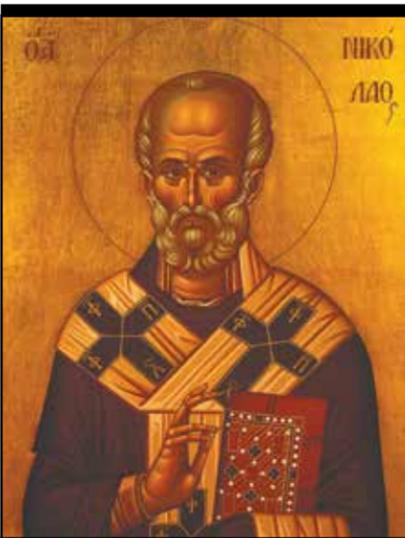
We believe and know that we were all dead in sin because we were born into a world that has fallen from paradise through the sin of Adam and Eve. But at our Baptism we have been washed anew, we have died with Christ to the powers of this world, so that we may rise with Him in His resurrection. This is indeed our hope, and this is indeed the joy that we can experience in our daily lives if we affirm our baptismal promises with a faith, not only expressed by our intellectual ascent, but also by the fruit of that knowledge which is our actions.

Faith in Christ is not left to linger only in our minds, but the mind is where the seeds of faith are planted to grow into the fruits of good works. James says that faith without works is dead and works without faith is dead. If we have a great faith, it will be that faith which compels us to perform good works. This is the living out of our

faith, and these are the actions that will give us joy and hope for our daily lives instead of constantly focusing on guilt and sorrow. It is also by this practice of our faith that we will pass from death in sin to life in Christ, and we will be found worthy of resurrection to eternal life. **ECL**



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### Mark Your Calendars!

The Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage at Carpathian Village Cresco, PA is returning on **July 9, 2017**



The Altar Server Camp at Carpathian Village Cresco, PA, will be on **August 5-9, 2017**  
**Boys ages 7-17 welcome!**

## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

**Eastern Catholic Life**

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- FEBRUARY**
- 2 Encounter of Our Lord with Simeon  
*Solemn HolyDay \* Chancery closed*
  - 5 Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee  
*Pre-Lenten Sunday*
  - 12 Sunday of the Prodigal Son  
*Pre-Lenten Sunday*
  - 19 Meatfare Sunday  
*Pre-Lenten Sunday*
  - 20 Presidents' Day  
*Civic Holiday \* Chancery closed*
  - 25 Quiet Heart, A Day of Recollection For Women  
*9:30AM-3PM Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
  - 26 Cheesefare Sunday  
*Pre-Lenten Sunday*
- MARCH**
- 4 Strive! A Day of Recollection for Men  
*Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
  - 23-26 Mary, Untier of Knots Icon Retreat  
*Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
- JULY**
- 9 Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage  
*at Carpathian Village, Cresco, PA*
- AUGUST**
- 5-9 Altar Server Camp  
*at Carpathian Village, Cresco, PA*
- Forgiveness Vespers**  
*5PM Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
- 27 First Day of the Great Fast  
*Day of strict fast \* No meat or dairy products*