

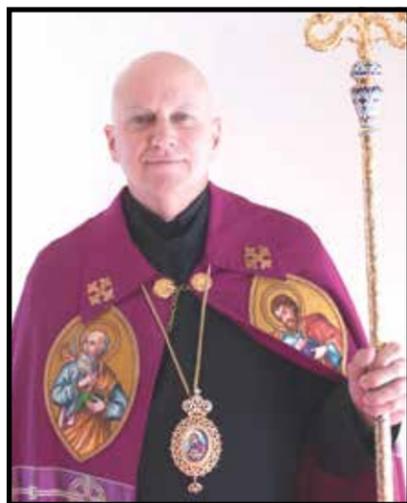


# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

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## LIVING WATERS Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Feast of the Theophany of Our Lord

If you have ever gotten really dirty, or if you've ever gone for a long time without a bath or a shower, then you know what a pleasure it is to wash up under those circumstances. When I was in high school I took advantage of a special course on automechanics. We met for four hours every day for six weeks. On the days that we worked under the hood, we got incredibly dirty, and I remember cleaning up our hands and forearms with a special soap for mechanics. My skin always seemed like it was brand new after the grease and grime were cleaned off.

God uses simple everyday things to bring us His highest spiritual blessings. Throughout salvation history, God has used bathing in

water to symbolize His spiritual activity in our lives. When His chosen people were corrupted by rich living in Egypt, and then enslaved by the owners of the country, God led his people through the Sea "as if on dry land", and used the waters to drown Pharaoh and his armies. For the chosen people, life in Egypt was slavery and symbolized sin which is also slavery. The prototype of Baptism was the journey through the Sea, and the slavery of Egypt was washed away as the slave masters were drowned. Remember, a few weeks ago, Saint Paul told the Colossians to "put to death" everything that is earthly, and then he listed many sins. During the Exodus, the slave masters, were literally put to death. In another place, Saint Paul says, "never let anyone take away your freedom".

As an aside, many people in our Church might relate to the slavery of the Chosen People. Their ancestors came to this country for a better life and were virtually enslaved by

the mine owners. I've heard many times about the men who came out of the mines covered with black soot deep into their skin, and I've heard stories about the lengths that they went to clean up. The cantor in my first church said he made a little money as a boy scrubbing the men in the shower. I've heard there was a ritual at the bar of using a shot of whiskey to clean the filth out the lungs and stomach. I expect those men might understand Baptism better than any theologian. And indeed, sin is very much like the filth of a coal mine, both dirty and bearing death,



Icon of the Theophany of Our Lord

even while it might make someone wealthy. How comforting was the Christian faith for those miners, and how terrifying death must have

*Continued on page 2*



### Thursday, January 26, 2017

**5:30 - 7:30 PM** Opening Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC Great Upper Church  
Principal Celebrant and Homilist: Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, Archbishop of New York and Chairman, USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities

**10:00 - 11:00 PM** Night Prayer (Byzantine Rite) - Crypt Church  
Celebrant: Bishop Kurt; Homilist: Rev. Elias Carr, Canon of Kloosternauberg, Austria

## NATIONAL PRAYER VIGIL FOR LIFE January 26-27, 2017

### Friday, January 27, 2017

**10:00 AM** Bishop Kurt will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at Epiphany of Our Lord in Annandale, VA.

**12:00 NOON** The March for Life Rally will take place at noon on the grounds of the Washington Monument, near the corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue.

**1:00PM** The March For Life will begin on Constitution Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets.

<http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/national-prayer-vigil-for-life-schedule.cfm>

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## LIVING WATERS

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been for those mine owners! As it says in the Psalms, no man has enough money to ransom his very life.

Another famous bath that occurred in the Old Testament was the al fresco bath of Bathsheba. That one led to the great sin of King David. You might not consider that a bath of salvation, but it was the great sin of King David that led to his repentance, and God used his repentance to teach repentance to all of us. God brought good out of evil, and after the child of his sin died, God blessed David and Bathsheba with another son, King Solomon, and from King Solomon was descended our Lord Jesus.

The largest bath in salvation history (after the Exodus) must be in the prophecy of Ezekiel. The prophet has a vision of the restoration of the Temple after the Babylonian exile. (Remember that Babylon like Egypt symbolizes the slavery of sin.) In one of the longest and most elaborate descriptions in the Scriptures, Ezekiel describes the restored Temple in intricate detail: its structure, its dimensions, its many jewels and ornaments,



followed by the entrance into the Temple of the Glory of God Himself from the east. The east gate through which “the Lord the God of Israel” passes is sealed for all time, and no one may pass through it. The sealed door of the temple is a prefiguring of the virginity of Mary, and we read that passage at Vespers before every feast of the Mother of God. At the end of the vision of the temple, Ezekiel sees a stream of water coming out of the temple. It comes out of the east side of the temple, through which the Glory of God passed, and comes from the right side as if from the pierced side of Christ. As Ezekiel is led through the wa-

ter it gets deeper and deeper, from ankle deep, to thigh deep, to loin deep, to over his head, and becomes a deep river that cannot be passed. This river is life entering into the world, bringing to life trees and aquatic creatures and making stagnant and dirty water fresh and clean on its way to the sea. The river in Ezekiel is a great prefiguring of all of the saving work of Christ, from baptism, to the streams of living water, to the water pouring forth from this side, to the life of the Spirit renewing the face of the earth.

The culmination of baths in the Scriptures is the Baptism of Our Lord in the Jordan River. We call this event the Theophany, that is, the *Manifestation of God*. For the first time, the Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are shown to everyone. There were revelations before this to individuals, but today it is public. As Saint Paul says, “the mystery hidden from all eternity in God.” People ask, “Why did Jesus have to be baptized?” The answer is pretty simple. Jesus did not have to be baptized. Jesus humbly chose to be baptized. When we are baptized, we believe that our sins are washed away. As Saint Peter says in his first epistle, “Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” So when Jesus was baptized, his Divine flesh touched the water, and gave to the water a new property, the power to wash away sin in the Sacrament of Baptism. The water did not cleanse Jesus, but rather Jesus cleansed the water, just as Ezekiel foresaw.

Jesus was also baptized as an example to us of humility and submission to the law of God. More and more people today are choosing not to baptize their children. One of the reasons for this is that these people simply do not believe in sin. They believe that all unhappiness can be explained by psychology or other material pathologies. And so they conclude that their children can save themselves if they make the right choices, based of course on the surpassing wisdom and spotless example of their parents. Bishop Fulton Sheen joked that, “It used to be that only Catholics believed in the Immaculate Conception. Now everyone believes in it. Every man believes that he was immaculately conceived.” Recently I was reading a fundamentalist preacher online. It was rather refreshing. People ask him moral questions, and he challenges them with God’s law... no excuses. People ask about sex outside of marriage, and he tells them flat out: Scripture says, “Do not be deceived: Neither the fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” People get quite offended and call him judgmental, and he tells them: I’m not judging you, it’s not my law, I’m only telling you

God’s law. Then a woman wrote to him and said that she and her boyfriend cohabit and are both on social security, and if they get married they will lose one of their checks. He responded, “Do you believe God will not take care of you if you follow His law?” He even defends Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage—something most Protestants have rejected and even many Catholics nowadays. If Jesus Himself submitted to the Law of God as an example to us, shouldn’t we take His Law seriously as well?

My favorite bath in the Old Testament is the one about Naaman the Syrian general afflicted with leprosy. I hope you will read the whole story for yourself in 2 Kings 5; it’s very entertaining and I have to shorten it here. Naaman’s wife had a Hebrew maid who said to her, “Why doesn’t your husband go down to Israel and have the prophet cure him?” So Naaman heads for Israel with gifts and the permission of the King of Syria. The King of Israel is frightened by his request and believes that it is a trick to provoke a war, but the Prophet Elisha sends a messenger saying, “Let him come to me now that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.” So Naaman and his entourage go to the tent of Elisha, but Elisha doesn’t even come out of the tent to meet this powerful general, showing the superiority of God over the earthly powers. Elisha tells him through a messenger to bathe seven times in the Jordan river. Naaman is so insulted that he departs with his entourage. Syria has great rivers and the Jordan is just a muddy creek. Naaman’s servant has some common sense and talks him into trying it out. After all, they traveled all this way. So the servant says to him, “If the prophet asked you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Why not do something easy?” So Naaman washed seven times in the Jordan and was cured of leprosy.

The reason this is my favorite story is because of the words of the servant, “If you were asked to do something difficult, you would have done it. Why not do something easy?” The fact is that God offers us love and remission of sin with things that are very simple: accepting baptism, trust, humility, listening to His beautiful words, praying to God, confessing our sins, and receiving the Eucharist. Our faith is accessible even to children and simple people. And yet people can’t be bothered to do these simple things. They see no value in them. People go to great lengths and travel long distances and borrow large amounts of money to learn and to see and to do earthly things that have no eternal value. But because they believe they have no sins, they don’t take the time to come to God for healing and forgiveness. “Truly I tell you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

+Kurt Burnette

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Most Reverend Bishop Kurt Burnette  
President and Publisher

Father James Badeaux, *Editor*  
Father Ronald Hatton, *Associate Editor*  
Father Lewis Rabayda, *Layout Editor*  
Mrs. Diane Rabiej, *Copy Editor*  
Mrs. Maureen French, *Circulation Editor*  
(mfrench@eparchyofpassaic.com)

E-Mail us at:

**ECL@eparchyofpassaic.com**

Eparchial Website:

**www.EparchyofPassaic.com**

# WHAT THE PRO-LIFECOMMUNITY WANTS FROM THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

By Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, Article courtesy of Catholic News Service, Photo by Gregory Shemitz

The last several years have clearly been challenging for the pro-life movement. The abortion industry, exposing its false rhetoric of choice, increasingly seeks to coerce Americans to be complicit with abortion, even insisting that abortion is a social good to be celebrated, subsidized and uncontrolled.

Its coercive agenda seeks to force taxpayer funding of abortion by repealing the popular, long-standing and bipartisan federal policy known as the Hyde Amendment. It includes a campaign to force health care providers and plans to participate in or pay for abortion.

The abortion industry even succeeded in getting the Supreme Court to invalidate common-sense abortion clinic regulations that protect the health and safety of women seeking abortion.

Sadly, the Obama administration has been an ally to abortion advocates in advancing such oppressive policies. It imposed the so-called HHS mandate forcing even religious organizations to cover contraceptives, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs in their health insurance plans.

It refused to enforce federal con-

science protections on abortion and it is currently proposing regulations intended to prohibit states from denying funding to Planned Parenthood through the Title X family planning program.

Given all of this, it is fair to say that the presidential election offers the pro-life movement some cautious optimism. At least at the level of rhetoric, President-elect Donald Trump indicated support for renewed opportunities to protect women and children from abortion and to protect pro-life Americans from forced complicity in it.

The president-elect said he would make the Hyde Amendment permanent law, would sign a ban on late-term abortions, would defund Planned Parenthood and would nominate pro-life justices to the Supreme Court.

On his transition page, [www.greatagain.gov](http://www.greatagain.gov), he promises to “protect individual conscience in health care” and “protect innocent human life from conception to natural death, including the most defenseless and those Americans with disabilities.”

We certainly hope that the policies pursued by the president-elect and his administration will match



New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan and Donald Trump, the then Republicans' nominee for U.S. president, smile during the 71st annual Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City Oct. 20.

these promises. In particular, we are eager to see immediate enforcement of federal conscience protections on abortion and elimination of the contraceptive mandate.

We also hope to see progress toward a majority of Supreme Court justices who will reform the injustice and travesty of *Roe v. Wade*.

Pro-life Americans cannot be complacent in the months and years to come. It will be essential that we hold our new president and his administration accountable to the pro-life promises they've made.

As for Congress, it appears that the election left intact a pro-life majority (at least with regard to abortion) in both the House and Senate (albeit a somewhat slimmer majority).

The House has a solid pro-life majority and, as in recent years, should be able to advance pro-life policies. The Senate will continue

to be a challenge for advancing pro-life legislation because of its 60-vote threshold for overcoming a filibuster.

Unfortunately, one tragic outcome of the Nov. 8 election was the legalization of doctor-prescribed suicide by the voters in Colorado, making it the fifth state to formally legalize the practice. And just one week after the election, the District of Columbia became the next jurisdiction to embrace assisted suicide.

Proponents have made no secret of their strategy to advance assisted suicide one state at a time. They are well-funded, persistent and working in every state to advance their deadly agenda.

The pro-life movement must match or exceed their efforts and put a stop to this encroachment of the culture of death, offering in its place a renewed commitment to real compassion and solidarity through quality end-of-life care.



## FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP CLERGY APPOINTMENTS EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 14, 2016

**Rev. George Bujnak** is relieved of the pastoral care of Saint Michael Parish in McAdoo, Pennsylvania, effective November 30, 2016.

**Rev. Gregory Hosler** is relieved of his pastoral duties in Nativity of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey, and appointed Pastor of Saint Michael the Archangel Byzantine Catholic Church in McAdoo, Pennsylvania, effective November 30, 2016.

**Rev. Iaroslav Korostil** is relieved as Parochial Vicar at Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in Jessup, Pennsylvania, and is appointed Administrator of Nativity of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in East Brunswick, New Jersey, effective November 30, 2016.

**Dcn. Nicholas Sotack** is assigned to Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Hillsborough, New Jersey, effective November 18, 2016.

**Rev. Ronald Hatton** is relieved as Administrator of Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in White Plains, New York, effective December 7, 2016.

**Rev. Ihor Vorontsov** is appointed Administrator of Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in White Plains, New York, effective December 7, 2016.

**Rev. Steven Galuschik** is relieved as Administrator of Saint Basil the Great Byzantine Catholic Church in Miami, Florida, effective January 3, 2017.

**Rev. Michael Kane** is appointed Administrator of Saint Basil the Great Byzantine Catholic Church in Miami, Florida, effective January 3, 2017.



# PEOPLE YOU KNOW

## IN BELTSVILLE...

The parishioners of Saint Gregory of Nyssa Parish in Beltsville, MD, had their annual Saint Nicholas pot luck dinner. All parishioners made their specialties to share with each-other and had a wonderful time. Then, a special guest, Saint Nicholas, arrived and greeted everyone with cheer and blessings. Saint Nicholas then gave out goody bags to children both young and old. It was an especially joyous occasion because the parishioners celebrated the 95th birthday of Anna Wroblewski, our wisest parishioner. Father Lewis Rabayda is Parochial Vicar of Saint Gregory of Nyssa in Beltsville, MD.



*Saint Nicholas with assistentia, Father Lewis, and the children of Saint Gregory of Nyssa*



*Parishioners enjoy their desserts*



*Saint Nicholas with assistentia, Father Lewis, and the young at heart of Saint Gregory of Nyssa*



*Anna Wroblewski blows out the candles on her 95th birthday cake*



*Saint Nicholas blesses the parishioners*



*A work of confectionary art*

# AROUND THE EPARCHY



## IN NESQUEHONING...

Saint Mary Parish, Nesquehoning, PA, hosted its Annual Saint Nicholas Bazaar on December 3.

The aroma of ethnic foods, the tables of baked goods, a wonderful array of silent auction items, and a fun grab gag were the components of a wonderful bazaar. The sound of carols and favorite tunes were played on accordion and harmonica by parishioner Ed Kusko.

The children attending were thrilled to see Saint Nicholas portrayed by Ted Dacey as he strolled through the hall handing out candy canes.

Father Vasyl Chepelskyy attended with his family. He serves both Saint Mary Parish and Saint John the Baptist in Lansford. Every year, they generously donates the pirohi for our kitchen. We want to thank everyone who made it another successful event by being a worker or attending our fun annual bazaar.



Saint Nicholas with a young parishioner



Saint Nicholas with the children of Saint Mary Parish



Parishioners of Saint Mary Parish talk with Father Vasyl



The wonderful parishioners who allow such great events to happen, the kitchen crew



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## SUNDAY AFTERNOON DIVINE LITURGY IN BAYONNE PARISH

### SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

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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.**



# FAITH AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

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

## JOY IN OUR LIVES

### What is it? From where does it come?

One of the virtues often misunderstood is joy. Happiness is the experience we confuse as joy but they are two different entities. So what then is Joy? From where does it come? How does it differ from happiness and what role does it have in our lives?

### What is Joy?

The journey begins in the Holy Scriptures. There are over 165 citations which contain the word “joy” in them (2007, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*) in both the New and Old Testaments, 63 of them found in the books of the New Testament. It is in the Letter of Paul to the Galatians, Chapter 5 verse 22 that a focused definition of joy is found. The context of the passage has Paul discussing the qualities of living in the Flesh and in the Spirit. Paul speaks of the “Fruits of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22) “In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5: 22-23).

From these words of Paul, it can be surmised that Joy is an operation of the Holy Spirit; first within the All-Holy Trinity and then overflowing, through the act of creation into our lives. Since it is from the Holy Spirit, it can also be surmised that there is an eternal quality about it, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. The origins of joy are found within the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, an intrinsic part of the essential nature of God. Joy can be seen as the Fruit of the interaction among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit defining a quality of the relationship among them that exists from all Eternity.

### The Roles of Joy and Happiness in Human Living

If joy is found as part of the Trinitarian Experience and existence, what then comprises happiness and how does it differ from joy? Susan Kraus Whitbourne, Ph.D. a psychologist, writing in *Psychology Today*, speaks of happiness as “Psychological researchers have, for years, distinguished between ‘life satisfaction,’ or the overall assessment of your feelings and attitudes about your life at a particular point in time, from ‘subjective well-being,’ which captures the actual feelings of happiness you have at the moment” (Taken from: [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness) website, December 2016).

Dr. Whitbourne speaks of a paradox of well-being which addresses the experience of elders expressing more happiness: “older people express higher levels of subjective well-being despite the fact that, objectively, their life circumstances are less positive than are those of younger but often, unhappier, people” (Taken from: [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness) website, December 2016). For Dr. Whitbourne, research points to the overall picture of one’s life experiences as the lenses through which the average person defines happiness in their lives rather than the present fleeting moment which may or may not be a fulfillment moment. There is an implication here that happiness is transitory, one moment we may feel a sense of life fulfillment the next we may not. In the elderly, it is the life lived in its fullness that allows the individual to achieve a perspective of life being worth living in the long run.

In terms of material benefits bringing about the experience of happiness Dr. Whitbourne states:

“It’s also important to realize that, all other things being equal, claims that money can’t buy you happiness fail to recognize that there are real benefits to having, if not higher income, then higher levels of education and freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and class. Although money and status cannot guarantee happiness, they can help to resolve many of the real-life challenges that people at the lower end of the income spectrum experience (Deacon, 2008) (Taken from: [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness) website, December 2016).

The experience of happiness depends upon many factors in the right place at the right moments for happiness to occur in the life of an individual. Anything at any particular time that is contrary to the needed combination of factors can upset the acquisition and maintenance of happiness in anyone’s life at any particular moment. For Dr. Whitbourne the essential nature of happiness and the maintenance of happiness is stated thus: “At the end of the day, what’s going to matter more for your long-term feelings of well-being will not be how happy you were on a given Monday or Friday, but whether you see yourself as making a difference in improving the well-being of others. Focus on what you’re doing with your life, and your feelings of well-being will eventually fall into place (Taken from: [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201405/how-should-psychology-define-happiness) website, December 2016).

The next installment will look at the nature of joy and what constitutes joy in the life of the human individual and how it differs from happiness in both duration and condition. **ECL**

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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.

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## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD

Every major feast on our calendar is celebrated for eight days. This is a custom we have inherited from the Law of the Old Testament (Leviticus 23). In the case of Christmas, the Bible actually tells us what happened eight days later: Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:21).

The liturgical texts for this feast invite us to see three important truths. (1.) Jesus Christ, Son of God, is truly and completely human. In His human body, He was marked by circumcision as a member of God's chosen people, Israel. At the same time, He remains God from all eternity. (2.) Jesus accepted circumcision as an act of "condescension." This word sounds negative in ordinary speech, but it is absolutely positive in its theological meaning. Everything God experienced in becoming man He did for us, not for Himself. He accepted suffering, death and all the limits of human nature for our sake (Philippians 2:5-8). (3.) The bloodshed involved in the circumcision hints at the sacrifice of His blood which Jesus will offer on the Cross (just like the swaddling clothes in the manger in the cave hint at His burial shroud and His tomb).

At Vespers for this feast, the Church reads Genesis 17:1-14, where God commands circumcision of Abraham and his sons five hundred years before the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai. Circumcision is the visible sign of the special relationship between the Lord and Abraham's descendants, the Israelites. It is a visible, undeniable sign of belonging in a special way to God (verses 10-14). Like the kosher laws revealed on Sinai, circumcision is a way of being "set apart" from other nations and a way of expressing a special purity of life. Jews remained faithful to the com-

mandment of circumcision even when the Greek and Roman Empires tried to ban the practice. Circumcision marked Jewish men for slaughter by the Nazis during the Second World War.

Hiding in God's promise to Abraham for many descendants is the promise that "kings" will descend from him and that he will be the "father of many nations" (verses 4 and 6). That promise points to David and Solomon but especially to the "King of Kings" (Revelation 19:16) Jesus Christ. We also see the hints of God's plan extending beyond one particular nation to embrace "many nations." Jesus, Abraham's descendent (Matthew 1:2-16) commanded the Apostles to "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).

Most icons of the Circumcision are patterned after the Encounter of the Lord with Simeon, an event which took place in the Temple 40 days after Jesus' birth (February 2). But this is not an accurate depiction of how Jesus was circumcised. Circumcisions were not performed in the Temple and they were not performed by priests. The original practice would have been for the boy's father to do at home what Abraham did for his own sons (Genesis 17:26 and Genesis 21:4). Saint Matthew (2:11) says the Holy Family was already in a house by the time the Magi arrived.

Every year, we hear a few Sunday Epistles in which Saint Paul brings up circumcision (for example Galatians 6:11-18 on the Sunday before Holy Cross). Why all this talk of circumcision anyway? The first generation of Christians had to make a decision about who could join the



Icon of the Circumcision of Our Lord

Church. Some (including Saints Peter and James originally; see Galatians 2) believed that people had to become Jews first, in order to claim a share in the salvation offered by Jesus the Jewish Messiah. Others, especially Saint Paul, saw no reason to make people who had never been Jews accept circumcision and kosher laws in order to be united with Christ. Saint Paul's view prevailed (see Acts 15).

Both the Old and the New Testaments also use circumcision as a symbol for purifying ourselves of sin and opening ourselves up to accept the Lord. So the Bible can talk about "circumcising your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Jeremiah 9:26 and also Romans 2:29). The Kontakion for the Feast also speaks this way: "The Lord of all endures circumcision and, being good, he cuts away the sins of mortals." Notice that the Bible and the Liturgy are innocently untroubled by such graphic physical images, rather unlike our supposedly "liberated" culture. **ECL**



## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

### THREE WAYS TO BE PRO-LIFE

January always signals a fresh start: a new year, with its resolutions and the reminder that we can begin again. In much of the country it's bitterly cold, and still dark when most folks are leaving work. But daylight is slowly extending its stay, and spring will return. The image of cold darkness, with the promise of light and life just ahead, is apropos of the shameful anniversary we should do anything but celebrate on January 22: the forty-four years since abortion was legalized in the United States, until (at least theoretically) just before birth. Abortion is a tragedy,

made more so because so many women feel it's their only choice. Fear, abuse, age, and lack of resources and support are factors leading a woman to make a choice that ends the life of a child, and wounds her physically, emotionally and spiritually. Yet, as sure as day follows night, shining the light on abortion and other attacks on human life and dignity is a step toward establishing a Culture of Life. Here are three ways you can be that "light" by being pro-life:

1. March with your feet – and your prayers! Each year the March for Life in Washington

attracts nearly half a million people. Some are religious, others not, but they all come together to raise awareness among legislators and fellow citizens alike about the reality of abortion and its toll – currently almost sixty million performed since 1973. If you have the stamina for all the walking, join a carpool or local church's bus trip and make each step count for women and babies. Though it's not physically or financially possible for everyone to march, we can all pray! This January 22, pray for the women whose desperation drives them to this terrible choice, that God would

touch their hearts, and put people in their lives to offer them support, good counsel, and love. Pray that YOU might be that someone to offer kindness and hope to a woman in need.

2. Educate yourself – then act! Abortion – and its evil twin, euthanasia – top the list of priorities in Catholic social teaching because they attack that which is essential to the enjoyment of all human rights: Life! But being “pro-life” means safeguarding human life and dignity in every regard. It’s essential to know the facts about abortion and euthanasia so that we can take positive steps to help people who feel compelled to make these choices. We must also recognize that accepting these “evil twins” (in law and practice) inevitably leads to a general devaluation of human persons. If babies, the elderly, or the sick can be so devalued, what’s to stop us from doing the same to anyone? Don’t view pornography in print or online. Be careful of the music you listen to and the novels you read. It’s not about being a prude; it’s guarding your heart and your thoughts. The messy, even ugly aspects of life can be beautifully portrayed in art and offer valuable lessons. What’s not beautiful is anything that portrays women or

men as objects. Being “pro-life” means respecting the dignity of all persons, refusing to reduce them to “things” for use or pleasure, and rejecting judgments based on education, status or capability. Keep up on current events so you’re aware of the attacks on human life and dignity, and speak up and step up when you can. Disagreeing on policy regarding things like immigration and the plight of refugees is OK, but we must never reduce persons to “problems.” Being pro-life means fighting for the dignity of all human persons in every situation; and loving those with whom we disagree.

3. Be a Christian – even in private. Don’t let that saying about “knowing Christians by the way they love” become a cliché. Live it! Act like a Christian – a follower of Jesus Christ – in public life, and when no one is looking. Let your conscience guide you – but make sure it’s properly formed. Conscience isn’t what makes us comfortable, or how we “feel.” Conscience is that place where we meet God and He leads us to the Good. Form your conscience by learning and abiding by what the Church teaches, obeying the Commandments, and following Jesus’ example – even (and especially) when it’s hard. If every one of us

truly lived our Christianity – “embodied Christ” in our words, our actions, and our love for everyone we encounter – there’d be no need for the term “pro-life.” To be a Christian is to be pro-life!

Politics seems to taint everything it touches, and any mention of “pro-life” is no exception. For some it’s worn as a badge of self-righteousness and arrogance; for others, it’s proof that one lacks compassion, tolerance, and disdains freedom. Perhaps it’s time for this term to be reclaimed and re-imagined – not as a political stance or religious crusade. What if each one of us lived our Christian faith full-on and with boldness? What if we decided to feed the poor, not only with donations but through personal contact? How would the world be changed if we visited the sick and homebound, and if we spent time with each other without looking at a cell phone? Wouldn’t marriages be stronger if spouses regarded each other with respect and gratitude?

Being fully, authentically and boldly pro-life isn’t always the easiest choice – but if we do it right, we know it’s the way Christ is leading us. It’s the way that YOU can change the world. **ECL**



## UNDERSTANDING ICONS

Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.

### CONSOLATION OF THE AFFLICTED: CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY Illustrated by the Parable of the Good Samaritan: *The one who showed mercy on him!*

In the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Saint Luke’s Gospel 10: 25-37 (read on the 25th Sunday after Pentecost) a lawyer puts Our Lord to the test: “Teacher (Rabbi) what should I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” And Jesus answered: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” He has the audacity to tell our Lord that he has answered correctly! Then steps into a trap of faith set by the Lord, he smugly asks, and who is my neighbor? Not the priest nor the Levite, (both orthodox Jews), but the despised Samaritan!

The Messiah, the consummate High Priest and teacher poses the ultimate tongue suspending question: “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He (the lawyer) said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.”

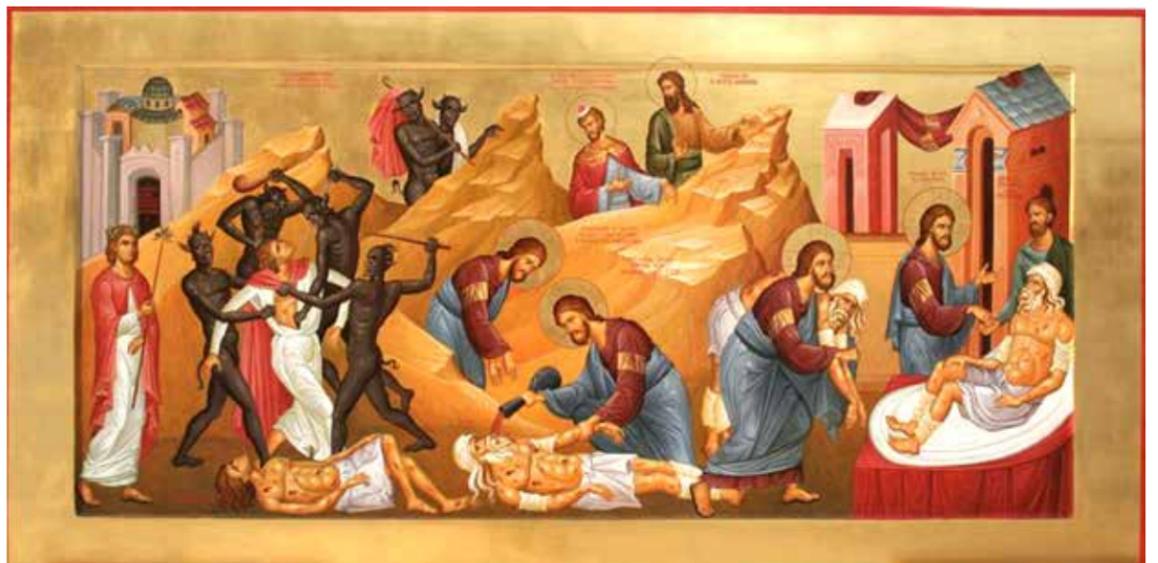
Recently (within the last several decades) in icons painted of this parable we see Our Lord visualized as the Good Samaritan, while the victim of the robbers (devils) is none other than old man Adam laying prone and naked waiting to be recreated by the new or second Adam Christ. This iconographic interpretation is drawn from Saint Augustine’s sermon on this parable in which he clearly describes this allegory present in the famous parable of Christ. It certainly illustrates the wonderful mercy of God bestowed on sinful humanity. Let us examine some of the scriptural hints which underpin Augustine’s description and its illustration in icons.

Illustrating the conflict between justice and mercy with a Jewish lawyer our Lord beautifully

illustrates the New Covenant that God has made in order to redeem creation, and how mercy triumphs over justice. The poor individual leaving Jerusalem (the Heavenly Paradise) on his journey to Jericho, the lowest place on earth parallels the journey of our original parents Adam and Eve as they are dismissed from paradise because of their sin of disobedience. As they descend into this world they are robbed by sinfulness until they become completely disabled and helpless, awaiting rescue from a Merciful Redeemer. Along comes some classified as an alien or a stranger, the Son of God, who comes to the rescue, anoints with overflowing mercy (oil) a symbol of repentance and forgiveness of sins, and pays the ransom money, the silver coins to shelter the injured and to nurse him back into health and redemption. The inn becomes the symbol of the Church, while the sacraments are denoted by the nourishment which restore us to life, while the Savior pays the ransom for sinners by his death on this cross.

How can we console the afflicted? Our Blessed

Savior once again teaches us how in this parable. As we go about our daily lives, refreshed after our attendance and reception of the Holy Mysteries on the Sabbath at the New Jerusalem (our local Church), we need to open our eyes to the world we live in, especially to people who are afflicted by sin, like ourselves. Sometimes we have to rescue those who have fallen so deep into sin that paralysis has set in and they are close to losing their faith altogether. We can pour in the oil of God’s mercy into their wounds by bringing them to God’s mercy in the sacrament of reconciliation, by ourselves partaking of this life renewing sacrament. Our words of invitation overflow with God’s abundant never ending mercy! We can carry them on the shoulders of Christ’s cross (our back, our own beast of burden) to the Church, where we can pay the ransom for our and their transgressions. We can be nourished back to life and resurrect the dead in sin back to new life in Christ our Savior. Act like the one who showed him mercy and go and do likewise! **ECL**



Icon of The One Who Showed Mercy on Him

# CATECHETICAL REFLECTIONS

Father Robert F. Slesinski, Ph.D.



## MAN BEFORE GOD

*The Immortality of the Soul. Installment 18*

In the process of arguing for the spiritual substantiality of the human mind, Saint Augustine identifies the mind with the rational soul. In this he is only following the lead of the pagan Greek philosopher Plato, himself an *anima naturaliter Christiana* (a naturally Christian soul) to use the term coined by Tertullian. In availing himself of Platonic thought, Plato's dialogue *Phaedo* immediately comes to mind. This intense work specifically deals with the immortality of the human soul against the backdrop of Socrates' last day on earth at the end of which he was condemned to drink a poisonous cup of hemlock having unjustly been found guilty by an Athenian jury of corrupting youth and committing the crime of impiety (failure to acknowledge Athenian gods and the introduction of new ones). In this dialogue, his devoted pupil Phaedo recounts the events and conversation of this tragic day.

As for Socrates himself, we find him surprisingly at peace. He is not at all anxious about his imminent death nor does he bemoan the fate before him. To the contrary, for reasons that soon will become apparent, we see Socrates forthrightly embracing his fate with full knowledge of his situation. Not surprisingly, we find him, along with his pupils and admirers, probing the liberating message the mystery of the immortality of the soul proffers for mankind. As is clear to Socrates this truth bespeaks *life* and not death. To his mind, whatever comes with the decay of the mortal body, the immortal soul, in his view, is freed from its captivity in the body and lives on forever.

As an important side note, it is in the precise context of his impending death that Socrates reiterates his conviction that suicide is a moral wrong that can never be legitimated. As Socrates puts it, "I believe that this much is true, that the gods are our keepers, and we men are one of their posses-

sions" (62b), thus proclaiming that life is truly a trust bestowed upon man by the gods themselves that cannot be usurped by him.

Socrates then expounds upon another side note, namely, the *vocation* of a philosopher is exactly one *preparing for death*. Quoting Socrates directly as presented by Plato (64a), we read:

*Ordinary people seem not to realize that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death.*

Why, we may ask? Because *true* philosophers realize that they are not condemned to death simply because their souls, as *spiritual* entities, are *immortal*, and, thus, *live* on in *abundance* freed from their mortal bodies. Thus, in *Phaedo*, which, again, relates Socrates' last day on earth, we are presented with his *musings* on the thoughts of mortals about death and the apparent end of all life in the act of dying. Socrates *the philosopher*, on the other hand, pursues another course of reasoning. To him, the very *act* of dying is precisely an *act of the living*, albeit one of a *dying* human being, but, ultimately, contrary to death, an *act of life*, the last word belonging to the rational soul affirming life over death.

Stressing the soul's utter simplicity, Socrates asks (78c), contrasting composite bodies like our bodies to incomposite ones like our souls:

*Would you not expect a composite object or a natural compound to be liable to break up where it was put together? And ought not anything which is really incomposite to be the one thing of all others which is not affected in this way?*

He only goes on, addressing the dynamics of a living versus a dead body (105c-e):

*Then tell me, what must be present in a body to make it alive? Soul... So whenever soul takes possession of a body, it always brings life with it?...Does it not follow, then, from our earlier agreement, that soul will never admit the opposite of that which accompanies it?... And what do we call that which does not admit death? Immortal. And soul does not admit death? No. So soul is immortal. Yes, it is immortal.*

*Phaedo* ends on a curious, *positive* note. In accordance with ancient Athenian custom, after a person recovered from an illness, an offering was to be made to the divine healer Asclepius. Having drunk the hemlock potion, Socrates proclaims his recovery—from death to eternal life (118): "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget."

In modern times, Socrates insight was equally appropriated by the great Russian novelist Count Leo Tolstoy, who in his dramatic short story *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (*Smert' Ivana Il'icha*) (1881–1886) recounts the impending end of a thoughtless, conventional, bourgeois dying man, who admits to having lived an utterly banal life. Given his impending fate, he tries to console himself with an old school-learned syllogism: "Caius is a man. Men are mortal. Therefore, Caius is mortal." Its *dissonance* is what strikes Ivan Ilych. Caius is only a man "in general," whereas *he*, Ivan Ilych, was a *concrete, human* individual—one with a real *protesting* soul that, alas, in face of death, rendered a previous amorphous life, one replete with meaning. In sum, *his* life in face of death was to be a *life* defying death. "O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting" (1 Cor 15:55)? **ECL**



## ASK A PRIEST A QUESTION

Father Vasyl Chepelskyy

### INTRODUCTION

As human beings, we are constantly searching, our minds always wondering about things, trying to find explanations and understanding. The quest for integral human fulfillment, our own destiny, and other more or less important matters, can leave us with many questions. In our lives, it is very important to find the right answers to all the questions we have. It is especially important when it concerns our faith and our spiritual journey. Finding the truth and getting a right answer is always liberating and helps us to make better choices; it brings us inner peace. It can be life-changing.

With the blessing of the Bishop Kurt, we are starting a new project: "Ask a Priest a Question."

This project will be directed by Father Vasyl Chepelskyy, Parish Administrator of Saint John Church in Lansford, PA, and Saint Mary Church in Nesquehoning, PA, who has a Pontifical Doctorate in Moral Theology, and who, depending on the type of question, will answer your inquiries or will involve the clergy of our Eparchy or other experts to provide you with the best answer.

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**

# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Monsignor John. T. Sekellick, JCL



## HOLY THEOPHANY

tized at the hand of the servant in order to grant us the cleansing through water. Therefore, let us cry out to Him, “O God Who have appeared to us, glory to You.”

Then, at Matins, we find this hymn: “As the prophet foretold, a great Light, Christ, has shone upon Galilee of the Gentiles, upon the land of Zebulun and the land of Nephtali. A people living in darkness have seen a great light shining from Bethlehem. The Sun of Righteousness, the Lord born of Mary, casts His rays upon all those who dwell on earth. Come then, O naked children of Adam, and let us clothe ourselves in Him that we may warm ourselves. For the Light that no one can approach, the One Who is a protection and a mantle for the naked, the Light to those in darkness, has appeared and revealed Himself today.”

These two selections, among many others, help us understand God’s plan now beginning to unfold as Jesus begins His public ministry there on the shores of the Jordan River. The Gospel accounts identify Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah when a voice from heaven reveals Who Jesus is: “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.”

Herein is the glory of Theophany, the deepest and most intimate in the mystery of Jesus. Although the redemptive mystery of Christ toward us is truly beyond human comprehension, the life of intimacy of the Son with the Father and the Spirit becomes evident at Theophany and is a far greater reality. God in the Person of His Son having become one of us, begins His ministry in

a very public way baptized in the water of the Jordan bringing us not only the grace of purification but more importantly the grace of spiritual illumination.

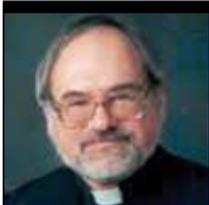
The light of Christ at Christmas, recently celebrated, was a bright star in a dark night. At Theophany, that light becomes the rising sun which will spread and shine only to be eclipsed on Good Friday, bursting forth from its tomb three days later on the glorious morning of Easter. It will beam with fiery tongues on Pentecost, guiding us with that inner life of saving grace.

With Theophany, Jesus is proclaimed and identified as the long-awaited Messiah Who would establish not an earthly Kingdom as many thought would happen to overthrow the oppressive yoke of Roman rule, but to re-open for us the kingdom of heaven through His very life among us, His death and Resurrection. Jesus makes it possible for us to enter that Kingdom through baptism as He commanded before His Ascension into heaven when He instructed His disciples to go out into the world among people, make them His disciple and proclaim His teachings.

As we celebrate this important feast, may we renew our own commitment to Christ and give thanks for the life of grace begun for us when we were baptized in the hope of everlasting life provided we faithfully follow His teachings. **ECL**

To help us celebrate and properly observe the liturgical feasts, our Church provides meaningful instruction not only through the Divine Liturgy with its readings and special proper prayers, but also with the texts of the beautiful hymns found in the morning and evening Services, namely, our Vespers and Matins. Added to those for the great feast of Holy Theophany is the lengthy ritual of the solemn blessing of water which calls to our mind the baptism of our Lord and our own.

For example, one of the concluding hymns at Vespers tells us: “Today the Creator of heaven and earth approaches the Jordan River in the flesh; the One Who is free from sin seeks to be baptized in order to cleanse the human race from the error of the enemy; the Master of all is bap-



## THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

### THE FEAST OF LIGHT

Saint Gregory the Theologian’s Homily 38 was on the feast of Christmas. His opening words are: “Christ is born, glorify Him.” These became the opening words of Ode 1 of the Canon of Christmas, and, moreover, have become the words with which we greet each other on Christmas. In Gregory’s time, Christmas was called the “Feast of Light.” In his second paragraph, Saint Gregory proclaims, “Again the darkness is past; again Light is made .... The people that sat in the darkness of ignorance, let it see the Great Light of full knowledge.” Christmas comes on the shortest day of the year (at least in the Northern hemisphere), and the days begin to be longer, so that the natural rhythms of nature witness to the spiritual Light of Christmas. In the Christmas troparion, we sing, “Your birth, O Christ our God, has shed upon the world the light of knowledge.”

In the time of Saint Gregory, the Feast of Light was a double feast of the coming of God into the world, the revelation of the Son of God taking on

human nature at Christmas, and the revelation of the Trinity at Theophany (January 6) at the baptism of Jesus, when the Father’s voice was heard, “This is my beloved Son,” and the Spirit came upon Jesus in the form of a dove, for He brings God’s peace. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)” From Christmas Day, December 25 to the Vigil of Theophany there are twelve days. The feast of Light, then, is a twelve day feast, which we still remember in the

“twelve days of Christmas.” The American secular culture, however, has inverted the celebration, so that most people now think that the twelve



Icon of the Adoration of the Magi

days are from December 13th to the 25th, before the day of Christ's birth. There is nothing special about the twelve days before Christmas, indeed, in the Church tradition they are days of fasting, but it is important for business to make us happy and buy more gifts.

Christmas is a feast of Light that is not completed until the revelation of Theophany. The gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint Luke begin with the birth of Christ, but the gospel of Saint Mark with the baptism of Jesus, the Theophany. The Gospel of Saint John, though, begins with light, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it .... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world .... And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:5,9, 14)" Saint Gregory continues in his homily, "Christ from heaven, go out to meet him," also a part of Ode 1 at Matins. This is his challenge to his flock and, indeed, to all of us at all times. Christmas is not worth celebrating unless we make the effort to meet him. Christmas and the twelve days subsequent until Theophany are a time to know and understand Christ and His

message better, to "follow the light." And what this light tells us is that by baptism, we clothe ourselves in Christ, that we humble ourselves before him, as did the shepherds and the Magi, for those who humble themselves will be exalted. So Saint Gregory continues, "Christ on earth; be exalted."

Christmas is also the feast of peace. "For a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us; upon His shoulder dominion rests. They name Him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:5)" This is explicitly proclaimed in the readings of the Christmas Vigil. The fourth reading paints a glorious vision of how the Child will bring about peace as He lies in the manger for beasts in the cave of Bethlehem, "Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. (Isaiah 11:6-7)" This is a message from God, who sends the angels to announce Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests. (Luke 2:14)"

Every Christmas is a time of hope for peace, but there is still war and hatred in our hearts. Every time we come to church for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we pray for peace. In the opening litany, the deacon prays for three kinds of peace, for peace in our church, "In peace let us pray to the Lord;" for peace in the world, freedom from wars, "For peace in the whole world," and especially for spiritual peace in faith in our Lord, "For peace from on high and for the salvation of our souls." This is the peace promised by our Lord, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. (John 14:27)" Individually, we may not be able to change the whole world, but we can begin making peace a priority in our own lives, with those whom we love and with those who are our neighbor. The most important reality, however, is that we do not make peace a celebration of only one day. In Christmas, God comes to be with us, and when He was glorified after His resurrection, he said, "I am with you always. (Matthew 28:20)" Christmas, then, is not simply a pretty, sentimental feast, but the transformation of our lives for all our days. **ECL**



## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

### UNANSWERED PRAYER

It is the devil who tells you, "God never answers your prayers." In reality, God is continually answering our prayers. If we stopped to take careful note of the things for which we ask daily, perhaps by using a prayer list, it would become obvious that prayer works.

But there are times when our prayers go unanswered. In Sacred Scripture, and in the tradition of the Church, we find reasons for why this might be.

First, there is the problem of unbelief. In eight different miracles that Jesus Christ performed in the Gospels, He states that the recipient received their miracle because of the faith they exercised in Him. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus returns to his hometown, where He "could do no mighty work, except that He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief." Lord, increase our faith (Lk. 17:5)!

Second, often prayer requires unrelenting persistence. The Parables of the Unjust Judge (Lk. 18:1-8) and the Friend at Night (Lk. 11:5-8) teach that we must pray and keep praying and not give up. Saint Monica prayed for her son, Saint Augustine, for over fifteen years before she witnessed his conversion to Christ. Most of us give up on our prayers after fifteen minutes. Let us always pray and never give up (Lk. 18:1).

Third, our prayers may go unanswered because we are not faithfully living out our baptismal promises, not making our personal relationship with God our priority, and not carefully observing the commandments of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ our Lord teaches us "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need" (Mt. 6:33 NLT).

Having a guilty conscience can hinder our prayers from being answered. In the words of Scripture, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do what pleases him" (1 Jn. 3:21-22). Do we have a guilty conscience, does our "heart condemn us"? Then let's repent and get to the Sacrament of Confession.

Fifth, our prayer is not in accord with the Will of God. Is the favor for which we ask in line with the revealed Will of God? We can't ask for something that would be contrary to the love of God and neighbor, contrary to Christian virtue, or the Ten Commandments. "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him" (1 Jn. 5:14-15). Sometimes the thing for which we ask may be good in itself, but what motivates our request is the fallen nature, ungodly passions, and concupiscence. Saint James writes, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (Js. 4:3).

Finally, we often don't use the means that God has designated for our success in prayer. There is no more powerful way to pray for an intention than to have the Divine Liturgy offered

for that end. God wills that we pray through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints. Do we pray to our patron Saint, to our Guardian Angel? What about the devout use of relics, of icons, of holy water? If we neglect these time tested and Church endorsed methods of prayer found in Holy Tradition, we will not receive all that God has for us. Let us learn about and make use of the riches of our Byzantine Catholic tradition.

Yes, there are times when God does not answer our prayers. It may be because of our lack of faith, persistence, personal holiness, and wisdom. It may be because we don't make use of the prayer tools that God has provided for us. Or it might simply be that God has something much better in store for us than that for which we ask. Nevertheless, we are confident that God hears and answers our prayers when we pray according to His will. **ECL**





# SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

Father Lewis Rabayda

## KEEPING THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT GOING

Every year we experience this long lasting joy of celebrating the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. It begins with the celebration of the Phillips Fast, and if we are blessed enough to be in a parish that celebrates the Emmanuel Moleben, then we begin to anticipate the Birth of Our Lord with reading the Prophets and first narratives of the Gospels which herald the way for the Son of Man. But in reality, for those whose lives are lived less in the Church and are more severely influenced by the commercial aspect of Christmas, we begin to anticipate Christmas on Black Friday.

The commercialization of Christmas is not all a bad thing. One of the prevailing reasons we anticipate the Feast so much is all of the "good feelings" that we associate with Christmas. We love to receive gifts; it is a symbol of the love that our friends and family have for us. And we love to give gifts, because we want to be able to give to others and make them happy as well. The shopping season is also permeated

by those who are seeking financial relief and we feel that we are doing the right thing by generously offering to those in need. It just so happens that our fiscal year is coming to a close as well, and people often use this as a last minute opportunity to give to others, while obtaining an important income tax deduction.

Another often overlooked positive aspect of the commercialization of Christmas is that for one month straight we are bombarded with Christmas music everywhere we go. To some, this may be too much to bear, but what we are experiencing is a month of uplifting and joyful music. There are innate aspects to music. Secular Christmas music such as "Frosty the Snowman" and "White Christmas" mimic Sacred Music in that the keys and chords used produce an uplifting effect. Contrast this with the average pop song and the difference is clear. And in addition to the secular Christmas music there are of course official legitimate Christian Christmas songs being played at most public places.

The majority of these hymns are of a Protestant origin, but one that sticks out with excellent theology is "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"

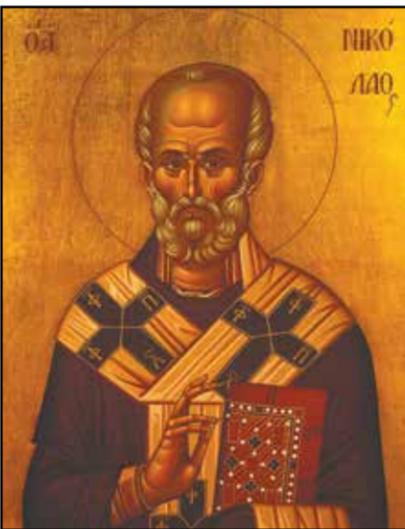
*God rest ye merry, gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
Remember, Christ, our Saviour  
Was born on Christmas day  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray  
O tidings of comfort and joy,  
Comfort and joy  
O tidings of comfort and joy*

To have this tenet of the faith being proclaimed to the whole western world is uplifting indeed. Christ is born to save us from the power of Satan and the sin that he persuades us to commit. This should bring to us great tidings of comfort and of great experiences of joy, knowing that even though we have this Great Adversary, we have an even greater Savior, the Son of God. It is this joy, this great knowledge of salvation, this uplifting sensation that does not have to flee from us so quickly with the pulling of the Christmas-music-

plug. We would do better to not forget this saving power that is actively at work in our lives to protect us from the temptations of Satan, and that God will forgive us when we confess and repent.

Catholics place an appropriate emphasis on the guilt that our sin produces, and no one does fasting more intensely than Eastern Catholics. These methods of sacrifice and of acknowledging our sins help to keep us focused on the reality of our faith, that even though we have been saved by our Baptism, and that we physically partake of our Savior bodily in the Eucharist, that we are still subject to this fallen world. But, indeed it is these very sacraments along with Penance (confession) that should not bring such a somber face to us, but should continue this positive joy we experience through the Christmas season. Christmas in July, Christmas in October or April, Christ always invites us to live in the joy that His birth, and death on the cross, has mercifully given to us.

ECL



### Mark Your Calendars!

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

### Are you anticipating Marriage in 2017?

Regional Pre-Cana program in NJ

The Byzantine Catholic parishes of the New Jersey Syncellate are hosting a Marriage Preparation (Pre-Cana) program on Saturday January 14, 2017, from 10 AM to 4 PM at Saint Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church, 1400 Church St., Rahway, NJ.

Please arrive 30 minutes early for registration.

**January 14, 2017**

Snow date will be January 21st.

## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

### Eastern Catholic Life

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### JANUARY

- 1 Sunday before Theophany \*  
Circumcision of Our Lord \* Our Holy Father Basil the Great
- 2 New Year's Holiday (observed)  
*Chancery closed \* Happy New Year!*
- 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord  
*Holy Day of Obligation \* Chancery closed*
- 14 Pre-Cana Class NJ Syncellate  
*10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Saint Thomas Church, 1400 Church St., Rahway, NJ*
- 26-27 National Prayer Vigil for Life  
*Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C.*
- 30 Three Holy Hierarchs  
*Simple Holyday*

### JULY

- 9 Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage  
*at Carpathian Village, Cresco PA*