

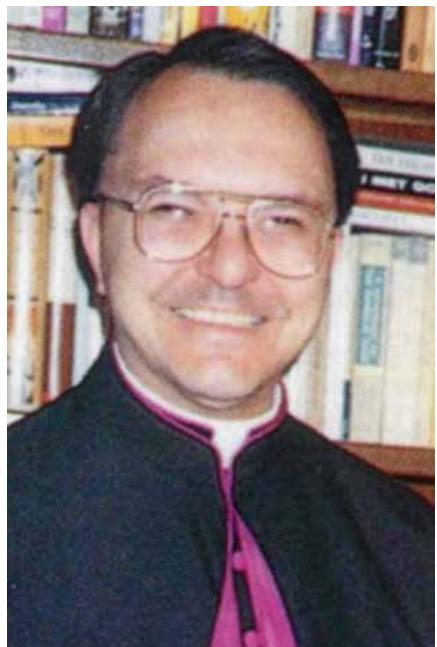


# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LIII, NO. 3

MARCH 2017



## MONSIGNOR JOHN T. SEKELICK An Appreciation

By Father Jack Custer

serious matters. He liked order and expected of himself and of others that work should be done well and on time. Those standards ruled in the office and on the altar: "Only the best for God."

Music certainly softened the rigors of his seminary years. Gifted with a fine voice, Slava participated enthusiastically in the Byzantine Catholic Seminary Choir, and went on to shine in the renowned choir of the Pontifical Russian College in Rome. Sometimes, after Vespers and dinner on a Saturday night, he might get nostalgic and play Russian folk songs on the piano. He would bravely try to start singalongs, strumming his guitar to predictable classics like "Kumbaya"

dent priest or newly-ordained deacon in his rectory. I was blessed to be one of them for seven summers. After the fall of Communism, Slava was quick to welcome young seminarians from Transcarpathia to live and work in his parish. Among ourselves, we joke about being alumni of "Sekellick University." We learned what we saw: order, neatness, timeliness, respect for the sacred, respect for coworkers and parishioners, respect for the Liturgy, and respect above all for the Church and the priesthood.

We also saw Slava's mannered and kind pastoral style, his availability for people, his devotion to the sick, the housebound and the grieving, his active participation in the wider

dued and would remark over dinner about how terribly someone had suffered. He used his expertise in Canon Law to help ease that suffering wherever he could.

There was a plaque on the wall that moved with Slava from Elizabeth to Wilkes Barre and on to Jessup. It read: "Home for Unwed Fathers." Slava's love for priesthood expressed itself in a love for priests. He delighted in hosting brother priests whether for a meal or for months. For years, he made a home for his own mentor, Monsignor Joseph Jackanich, who spent his long retirement with Slava in Elizabeth and in Wilkes Barre. Seminarians barely out of their teens, a priest in his prime, and a venerable



Bishop Kurt offers the Cross for veneration by the family of Monsignor John T. Sekellick during the final farewell.  
Mrs. Sekellick, Monsignor's mother, kisses the cross.

at Altar Boys' Camps in the 1970's and '80's. He loved his Ruthenian plainchant too, and could gently fine-tune the cantors, seminarians, and student priests who served with him over the years, if need be. I have never celebrated a funeral without recalling his patient insistence that I get all the special melodies and even the "bolhar" tones just right.

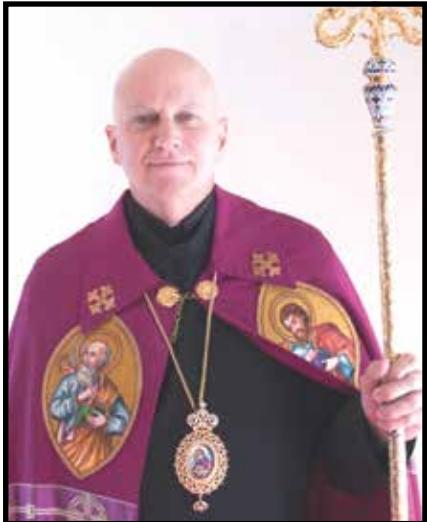
For most of his priestly life, Slava's parishes were in fact "singing schools" such as the poet Yeats imagines. There was almost always a seminarian, stu-

community, in ecumenical activities, and his willingness to accept any number of extra assignments. We saw him preparing his homilies carefully and praying privately every day. We browsed his large library from which he continued his own theological education.

We also saw Slava's compassion for the many people he encountered through the Marriage Tribunal. He never mentioned names or details, but he would often come home from the Tribunal on Thursdays more sub-

elder whose own seminary years in Prešov were complicated by the First World War surely made an unusual household, but "Home" it was, thanks to Slava's warm hearted hospitality. The lesson about priests caring for each other was taught without words. Fittingly, a few younger priests were there to minister generously to Slava in his own last weeks.

And the final lesson was patience in suffering, acceptance of God's will, and graciousness to the end. *Vičnaja jemu pamjat!* **ECL**



## WHO AM I TO JUDGE SOMEONE ELSE'S SERVANT? Bishop Kurt's Reflection on the Great Fast

In our Church, it seems we like Lent so much that we don't just have Lenten Sundays, we have pre-Lenten Sundays, as well. Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert, but we try to stretch the season out to twice that. On the pre-Lenten Sundays, we hear some of our favorite Gospels and some of the most challenging: the story of short Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree to get a look at the Son of David, the moving story of the Prodigal Son, the thought provoking Publican and the Pharisee, the terrifying Last Judgment, and finally a passage from the Sermon on the Mount to start the Great Fast.

In contrast to this kaleidoscopic collection of passages from the Gospels, our epistle readings seem to be all about one theme: fasting. Even more surprising, they don't seem to encourage fasting, but rather say in many different ways that it doesn't really matter what you eat. In a church that promotes fasting so boldly, why do we keep reading that it doesn't matter what we eat? As a matter of fact, although all of these readings talk about diet, the real point of each reading is about another subject entirely: charity, that is to say, love. The discussion about food is just a means to an end.

Saint Paul goes to a lot of trouble to tell us that as Christians we are liberated from the dietary laws of the Old Covenant, but as he discusses different situations, he says that there are many reasons that we might restrict what we eat out of charity. One of the more interesting moral problems that we read about is the subject of eating at pagan banquets. Sometimes the food was considered consecrated to a pagan god. Well, Saint Paul says that we Christians know that these pagan

gods don't really exist. If food has been offered to a statue of a god, and we know that the statue of the god is just a piece of rock, then we know that the food isn't really consecrated to anything—it's just food. But Saint Paul asks, what happens if someone sees you eating the food who doesn't have your faith? Saint Paul says that you may be a "stumbling block" or "scandal" to someone else. (Many people believe a "scandal" means something shocking—front page news, but it doesn't. A "scandal" is a stumbling block, that is, something that makes someone else trip and fall.) So, Saint Paul doesn't care about the food, but he cares very much that you might lead someone else to sin. As he puts it in shocking terms, "and so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, your brother for whom Christ died."

Another point that Saint Paul makes in the passage about idols is about the dangers of knowledge. Knowledge is a good thing. In fact, our saving faith is based on knowledge. But if our knowledge leads to pride, then it can be a danger. As Saint Paul says, "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up". What a delightful saying! If knowledge makes me proud, it hurts me, but if I use my knowledge to build up other people, then that is love. If one reads the news about educated leaders in the Church, it is easy to find ones who are puffed up but don't build up. How many experts have used their knowledge to lead others into sin or keep them in their sins? On the other hand, how many experts used their knowledge to drive sinners out of the church? We've seen both of these in modern times, haven't we?

The theme of our readings on fasting before the Great Lent is not food, but rather charity. And so, another problem that Saint Paul confronts is the problem of Christians judging each other. Oddly enough, in the same epistle, Saint Paul says we should judge each other's legal cases rather than take them to court, but when it comes to judging each other's faith, he warns us to back off. In fact, he uses one of the most striking images for this admonition; he

says, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" Well, when he puts it that way, it does make you think. If someone is working for your neighbor, and you start criticizing, your neighbor is likely to say, "Mind your own business. I'm paying him, not you." In our church, when we go up to communion, the priest calls each of us, "The Servant of God". (He even calls himself that when he goes to communion, by the way.) If each one of us is identified as the "Servant of God" at Holy Communion, we should be very afraid to judge each other, indeed! What if the Pantocrator on the ceiling decides to start talking, and says "Mind your own business"? Wouldn't that be embarrassing? As a matter of fact, there is a popular



Apostle Paul

didn't." So, as Saint Paul warns us, don't judge God's servant, unless you are God.

When it comes to judging each other, It's not just Saint Paul who warns us, but also Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus on the other hand doesn't just warn us, he gives us a positive reason. He says, "Judge not that you not be judged." It's not just a warning, but also an offer to avoid judgment. Jesus promises us a reward, a sort of get-out-of-jail-free card. If it seems like I am reading too much into that short sentence, Jesus actually says it three times in three different ways. First, He says, "Judge not that you not be judged." Then He says, "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged." As if that isn't clear enough He says, "The measure you use will be measured to you." I know people who always see the best in others. When I talk to someone like that, I am always inspired and uplifted. I want to be like them. Jesus seems to go so far as to say this: if you always see the worst in others, God will see the worst in you; if you always see the best in others, God will see the best in you.

To wrap up what we learned in these pre-Lenten readings, fasting is a good thing because the body is important and food is important. However, Saint Paul warns us that fasting should not be self-centered. First, we must consider how our actions affect others—do our words and actions hurt someone else, "your brother for whom Christ died"? Secondly, we must consider whether our knowledge makes us puffed up, or does it build up others. Finally, we must avoid judging other people. These are the three extra themes in our readings about fasting. As usual, Our Lord completes these admonitions with good news. He tells us wonderful news: if we see the best in others, God will see the best in us. And our best must be very good indeed, for God made us, and Jesus thought we were worth dying for.

*+Kurt Burnette*

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# DIRECTIVES FOR THE GREAT FAST

*From the Office of the Bishop*



## FASTING REGULATIONS

- †All who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
- †All adults who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products on the first day of Lent, Monday, February 27, and on Great and Holy Friday, April 14.
- †These are the minimum requirements; however, the faithful are encouraged to do more.

### Dispensation

- †Pastors and Administrators may, for a just cause, grant to the individual faithful and to individual families, dispensations or commutations of the fasting rules into other pious practices.

## LITURGICAL DIRECTIVES

### Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

- †All Pastors and Administrators are encouraged to celebrate the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.

- †A liturgical service at which Holy Communion is distributed may be celebrated on the other weekdays of the Great Fast.

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

## SCHEDULE OF LENTEN VESPERS AND CONFESSION

### WYOMING VALLEY

Sunday, March 5	Saint Michael—Pittston
Sunday, March 12	Saint John—Wilkes-Barre Twp
Sunday, March 19	Saint Nicholas—Swoyersville
Sunday, March 26	Saint Mary—Wilkes-Barre
Sunday, April 2	Saint Mary—Kingston

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



### CHESTER AND MONTGOMERY COUNTIES

Sunday, March 5	Blessed Virgin Mary—Coatesville
Sunday, March 12	Saint John the Baptist—Pottstown
Sunday, March 19	Saint Michael—Mont Clare
Sunday, March 26	Saint Michael Ukrainian—Stowe
Sunday, April 2	Saints Peter & Paul Ukrainian—Phoenixville

All Services begin at 3:00 p.m. followed by opportunity for Confession and Lenten social. Dates subject to change. Please confirm with parish bulletin.

## 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 DUNELLEN...

*Bishop Visits Saint Nicholas*  
By Andrew Galida

Sunday, February 12, 2017, the parishioners of Saint Nicholas of Myra, Dunellen, NJ, were treated to a surprise visitor. Bishop Kurt concelebrated Sunday liturgy with Father Michael Yurista.

Following Liturgy, all of the faithful gathered in the social hall to share conversation, morning coffee, and a bagel with Bishop Kurt and Father Michael.



*May the Lord God remember in His Kingdom...*



*Bishop Kurt smiles and gestures during the homily*

## IN ANNANDALE AND BELTSVILLE...

*Eparchy Parishioners Gather for the March For Life*

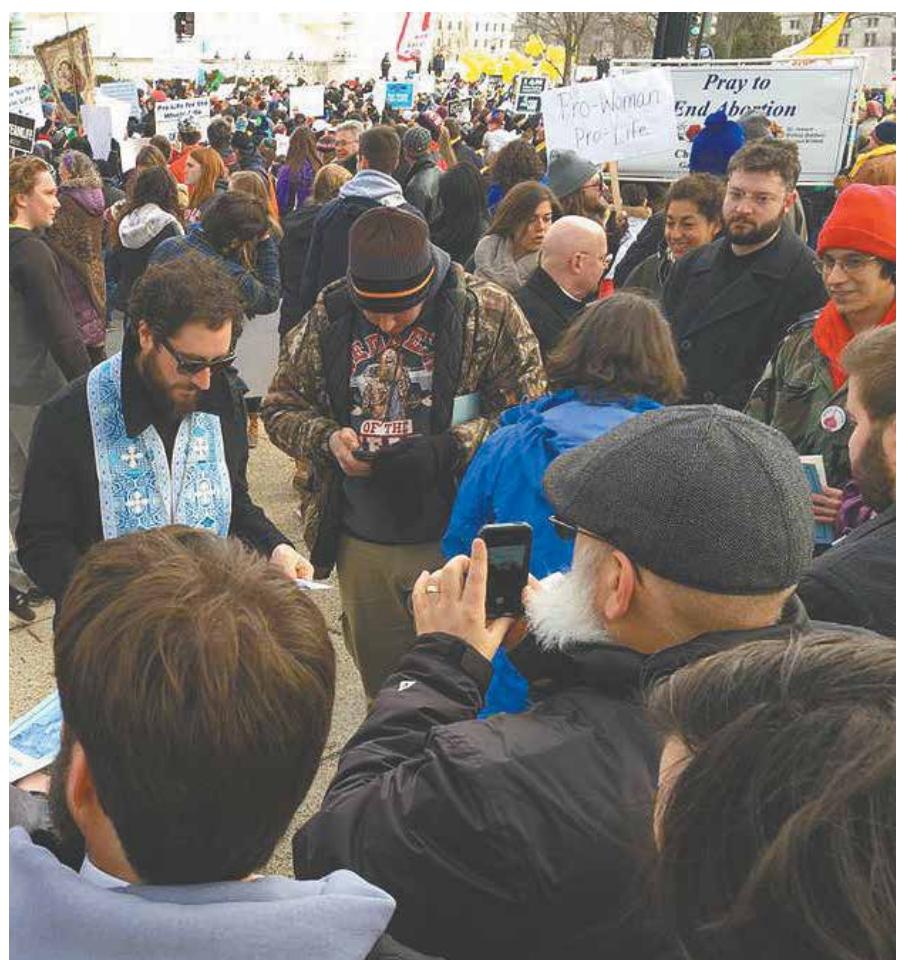
On Friday, January 27, 2017, parishioners from Epiphany of Our Lord in Annandale, VA; Saint Gregory of Nyssa in Beltsville, MD; and a few other churches from the Eparchy gathered at Epiphany of Our Lord to celebrate the Divine Liturgy with Bishop Kurt, Father John G. Basarab, Monsignor George Dobes, Father Frank Hanincik, Father G. Scott Boghossian, and Father Lewis Rabayda. After a luncheon supplied by the parishioners of Epiphany of Our Lord, some clergy and parishioners went to the March For Life on the Mall in Washington, DC.

While at the March, some faithful and Father Lewis Rabayda met up with the seminarians from Saints Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh and prayed the *Akathist to the Theotokos* across the street from the Supreme Court. Many marchers were taken in by the beauty of the service, and we were able to share some of our Marian Hymnals with those interested.

*Photos courtesy of Seminarian Miron Jr. Kerul-Kmec and Father Lewis Rabayda*



*Marchers hold a banner*



*Father Lewis Rabayda celebrates the Akathist with members of the Metropolia*

# AROUND THE EPARCHY



*Marchers arriving at the Supreme Court*



*The Akathist group: clergy, seminarians, and parishioners of the Metropolia*



*Right: Subdeacon Bryan Scotton of Parma chants a Marian Hymn*



*The beginning of the March For Life*



## PILGRIMAGE TO SPAIN WITH FATIMA & LOURDES 11 DAYS: November 1 - 11, 2017

*HOSTED BY*  
**Rev. Fr. Charles M. Yastishock**

*Visiting Fatima, Salamanca, Avila, Madrid,  
Lourdes,Montserrat and Barcelona!*

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**TOUR PRICE INCLUDES:** Roundtrip Air from Newark, First Class/  
Select Hotels, Most Meals, Comprehensive Sightseeing with a  
Professional Tour Director, Entrance Fees, Portage and Much More!!

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Tel: (732) 255-6272 OR Email: [czarcmy@comcast.net](mailto:czarcmy@comcast.net)

**COME CELEBRATE THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE APPARITIONS IN FATIMA!!**

## Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate Celebrate 125 Years of Blessings

### March Intention:

Heavenly Father, in this year of jubilee as we reflect on our many blessings, we remember all the communities of men and women religious whom we have worked closely with in building up the Kingdom of God. Through your intercession Blessed Josaphata, may we continue this journey of faith together bringing glory to God, and honor to Mary Immaculate patroness of our country.



### Please Join Us as We Pray:

Blessed Josaphata, you are crowned in heaven with the praise of the Blessed, intercede for us before God for the grace we so ardently plead for the greater glory of God, honor to Mary and peace throughout the world.



## THE CARPATHO-RUSYN SOCIETY IN THE SOUTH

The Carpatho-Rusyn Society ([c-rs.org](http://c-rs.org)) is reaching out to Carpatho-Rusyns in the South by forming branches where we can learn more about our heritage, traditions and customs. Branches have been formed in Georgia, North and South Carolina and Florida. Upcoming events are as follows:

### C-RS Southern Coastal, Saturday, March 11, 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. (Hilton Head, SC)

A "Meet and Greet" and lunch will be held at a member's home at 8 Sedgewick Ave. in Bluffton, SC. After lunch, there will be a presentation on Rusyn historical sites in Slovakia and Poland by Bonnie Kocab Burke. Guests are welcome and the event is free. Please contact [bb@c-rs.org](mailto:bb@c-rs.org) for reservations or for more information.

### C-RS Eastern NC Branch, Saturday, March 18, 1:30- p.m. 3:30 p.m. (Fort Mill, SC)

Classes on "Pysanky for Children" and "Pysanky for Adults" will take place at St. Philip Neri Church in the Ministry Center, 292 Munn Road East, Fort Mill, SC (30 minutes from Charlotte, NC). Everyone is welcome including those who are familiar with the techniques.

Please bring your pysanky to share. The adult class is \$10 for supplies and the children's class is free. Number is limited, so please call 440 729-2045 for reservations.

### C-RS Western NC Branch, Saturday, March 25, 1:30-p.m. 4:00 p.m. (Asheville, NC)

"Winter in the Carpathians" will be presented in the mountains of Asheville, NC. What did our ancestors do during the very long, very cold winter months in the Carpathian Mountains? How did they stay warm, what did they wear, what did they eat, how did they prepare the foods and what activities kept them busy? Reservations are needed due to limited space. Afterwards, we will meet for dinner at a nearby restaurant. For reservations and directions, contact Andrea Robel at: [Carpatho.rus.avl@gmail.com](mailto:Carpatho.rus.avl@gmail.com) or call 828 713-7845.



**St. Mary  
Byzantine Catholic Church**  
1900 Brooks Boulevard \* Hillsborough, New Jersey 08844  
**908-725-0615 - [www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org](http://www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org)**

## Lenten "Munching & Learning"

**Fridays - March 3, 10, 17, 24**  
**Noon and 7:00 PM**

On the first four Fridays of the Great Fast 2017 (March 3, 10, 17, 24) a short Lenten Service will be celebrated at Noon and 7:00 PM in Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church. The service will be followed by a Lenten fasting meal with a series of guest speakers in the Saint Mary Parish Center. The service, program and meal are scheduled to last 90 minutes. Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church is located at 1900 Brooks Boulevard, Hillsborough, New Jersey. For more information call 908-725-0615 or go to the parish website - [www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org](http://www.stmaryhillsboroughnj.org). There is no cost for this event.



### Blessed Josaphata, SSMI - A Witness for Our Times, P.S. A Life of Prayer & Service

March 3 – Noon and 7:00 PM  
Presented by Sister Kathleen Hutsko, SSMI

### The Great Fast: Time to Become God-Like

March 10 - Noon and 7:00 PM  
Presented by Marie C. Nester, M.Ed, author & educator



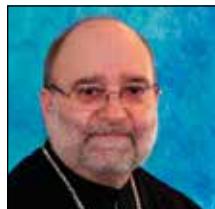
### Thirsting for Christ in the Fast

March 17 - Noon and 7:00 PM  
Presented by Ann M. Koshute, M.T.S. – Theologian



### Holy Week: Accompanying Jesus to the Cross & Beyond

March 24 - Noon and 7:00 PM  
Presented by Father Frank Hanincik, Pastor of Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church, Allentown, PA & Administrator of Saints Peter & Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Palmerton, PA



# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton

## THE PRAYER OF SAINT EPHREM THE SYRIAN: A PRAYER FOR ALL SEASONS

**A**s we enter into the time of the Great Fast, our prayers take a more penitential turn. Our liturgical cycle becomes more penitential, as we anticipate the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil on Sundays, Presanctified Liturgies during the week, with other services such as Lenten Moleben, Paraklesis, and other prayers that help our focus to stay on Lenten disciplines. One of my favorite prayers during this season is the Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian:

*Lord and Master of my life, spare me from the spirit of indifference, despair, lust for power, and idle chatter. (Prostration)*

*Instead, bestow on me, Your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience, and love. (Prostration)*

*Yes, O Lord and King, let me see my own sins and not judge my brothers and sisters; for You are blessed forever and ever. Amen. (Prostration)*

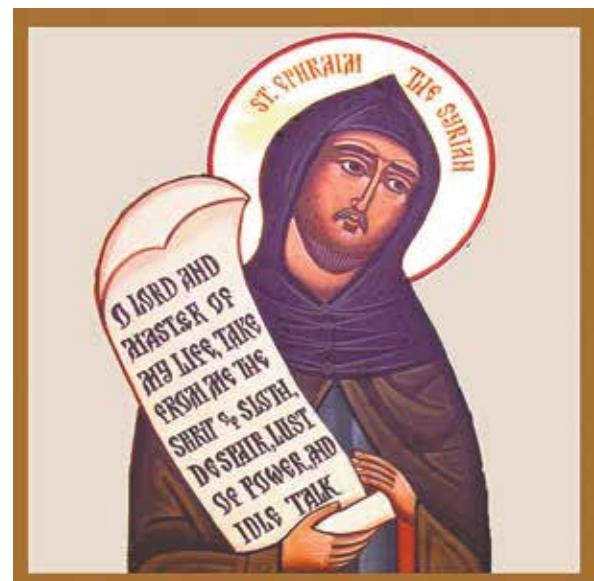
It is a corporate prayer of the Presanctified Liturgy, yet it is a deeply personal and individual prayer. And although it is one confined to the Lenten season, it should be a prayer that we keep on our lips and in our hearts at all times and in all places. Each line serves to teach us, to humble us, and to lead us to a closer walk with God. The main point of this prayer is to focus on our own sins, our own shortcomings, and our own spiritual walk. Each sentence is accompanied by a prostration, as we totally humble ourselves before God.

First, seeing how broken we are as human be-

ings as we stand before God, we ask Him to spare us from the sins of indifference to our spiritual state as well as in our relationships with one another. This is followed by a petition that we not despair as we try to more closely imitate our Lord Jesus Christ and His saints. Next we ask that we not be blinded by a desire for earthly acclaim, or for temporal riches and honors. Lastly, we ask for the grace to keep us from gossip and talk that serves no heavenly purpose.

In place of all these, we ask our Lord for personal integrity in what we say and do; that our actions mirror our words. We know it when we say that someone doesn't "practice what he preaches," but do we apply that to ourselves as well? We ask for humility, which washes away all pride. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he encourages us to "[d]o nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:3,4) To the Romans he writes, "...love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor." (Rom. 12:10) In just these two passages, we can see the practical application of how to have the spirit of humility.

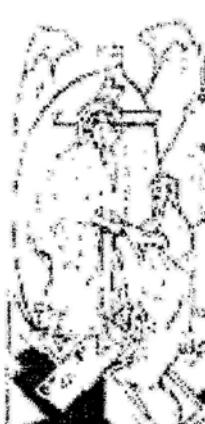
Ephrem further exhorts us to pray to God for the spirit of patience, one of the Seven Spiritual Virtues. With humility, patience can follow, patience in situations, patience in dealing with others. It is easy to see how patience stems from pride and self-centeredness, because we are thinking of ourselves, our desires, our expectations, and putting ourselves before others. And ultimately, if we are humble and patient, it is then that we can



Icon of Ephrem the Syrian  
truly love others.

In the last sentence of this simple prayer, we find the fruit of all that has come before. "Let me see my own sins, and not judge my brothers and sisters." In our spiritual life, nothing can be more important in seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ. If we are so caught up in looking at what bad sinners other people are, if we are constantly comparing ourselves to others like the Pharisee in the parable: "God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector," (Luke 18:11), then we will be unable to attain our salvation.

So, the Prayer of Saint Ephrem is not merely a prayer for the Lenten Season, but a prayer for all seasons. May it always be in our hearts and on our lips. **ECL**



## Jersey City Choir Offers CD's and Cassettes

Saint Mary Choir announces the sale of their four Compact Disc (CD) recordings and their four stereo cassette recordings. Compact Discs are \$12.00 each, or any four for \$43.95. Stereo cassette recordings are \$7.95 each or any four for \$29.95. All orders are postage and handling free.

Select from: Great Fast and Resurrection;  
Divine Liturgy in Old Slavonic;  
Divine Liturgy in English; or Christmas caroling.

To order, contact: Saint Mary Choir, 231 Pacific Ave., Jersey City, NJ 07304

## Lenten Day of Renewal for Men and Women

# "Taking the Fast from Routine to Relationship"

presented by Ann Hanincik • Saturday, April 1

at Saint Michael Cathedral Chapel  
445 Lackawanna Avenue, Woodland Park, NJ

The day will begin with the Akathist Hymn at 9:30 a.m. followed by two presentations with opportunity for discussion and questions. A Lenten luncheon will be served. The day will conclude with the celebration of Vespers at 3:30 p.m. There will be opportunity for the Sacrament of Repentance after Vespers, and Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 5:00pm. There is no charge for this event. For information call 973-777-2553 or email [passaiccathedral@gmail.com](mailto:passaiccathedral@gmail.com).



## TRIBUTES TO MONSIGNOR JOHN T. SEKELICK

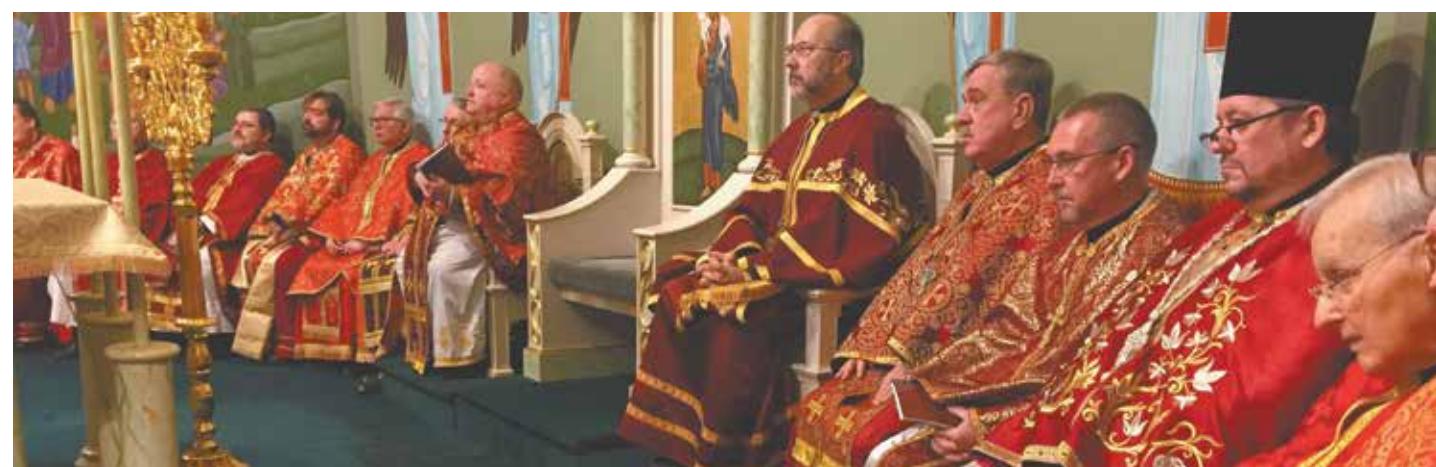
**M**y adjectives of praise fail me now regarding Monsignor John--the kindest of friends, always a consummate host, a very dear and pious and holy priest... May he rest in peace. My sincerest condolences to his mother and sisters and their families. My life was engraced with his presence like the lives of so many others. His pasto-

ral ministries in Mahwah and Elizabeth, NJ, and then in Wilkes-Barre, Jessup, and Forest City, PA, will long linger in parishioner memories. At the same time, his work on the Eparchial Marriage Tribunal and then as Judicial Vicar earned him the respect of his fellow priests as canonical issues can be most complicated and not for the faint

of heart. Another facet of his life needs special mention, namely, his enduring friendship with that "old" stalwart, the Rev. Msgr. Joseph Jackanich, whom he first served as an assistant, but in later life, he was to welcome into retirement at his rectories in Elizabeth and Wilkes-Barre, assuring him a long and healthy retirement. In spite of

his last physical sufferings, Monsignor John truly ended his stay on earth with a "happy death"-- one crowned with the sacraments, the holy mysteries of the Catholic Church. May his memory be eternal.

*By Father Robert F. Slesinski, Ph.D.*



Last month, the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in America and the Carpatho-Rusyn community in the United States lost one of its most loyal sons and dedicated, though quiet, proponents.

The Rev. Monsignor John T. Sekellick went to the embrace of his Creator on Friday, January 20, 2017.

In the earliest days of the work that would become the future book on the Carpatho-Rusyns of Pennsylvania, I wrote a letter to the pastor of the historic Saint Mary of the Assumption Byzantine

Catholic Church of Wilkes-Barre, PA, asking for a copy of the recently-published centennial anniversary book.

The pastor of Saint Mary Parish, Monsignor John Sekellick, sent me not only the book I requested, but a kind letter of encouragement; an invitation to visit any time; and a personal check for some seed money to support what neither he nor I knew would be a decades-long quest to tell the story of a people in one state whose heritage he and I shared.

Eventually I met him in person, and he was as welcoming and accommodating as

anyone could have wished for. Quickly we became friends, but also, he would be for me a mentor, confidant, and patron for nearly 30 years. Whenever I found the time to come to northeastern Pennsylvania for research, usually but not only during Memorial Day weekends, I would always have a welcome place to stay and time to share meals, small talk, and the deepest questions of life with a gentle yet strong soul and advocate. He was a patriot of his people -- 100% Carpatho-Rusyn of grandparents from Subcarpathian Rus' and Lemkovyna -- and a stalwart defender and caretaker of the people of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in the

United States and the European homeland.

A finer priest and finer human being you could have never met. I simply don't know what I will do without him, except with the faith that he will still be present but in a different way. Вѣчнаѧ тѣбѣ памѧть, dear priest of Jesus Christ, Msgr. John.

*By Richard Custer*



Above and Left Page: Funeral at Holy Ghost Church in Jessup, PA. Below: Funeral at Saints Peter and Paul Church in Minersville, PA.



## OBITUARY

**T**he Reverend Monsignor John T. Sekellick JCL, a priest of the Eparchy of Passaic, NJ, Judicial Vicar and pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Jessup, PA, and administrator of Saint John the Baptist Church in Forest City, PA, fell asleep in the Lord about 5:15 a.m. (EST) on Friday, January 20, 2017, in Scranton after a brief illness at the age of 73.

He was born Sept. 18, 1943, in Philadelphia to John D. Sekellick and Veronica Verbosh Sekellick. He was baptized and chrismated at Saint Nicholas in Minersville, PA, on Oct. 10, 1943. He served as an altar boy at his hometown parish Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Minersville, PA. Monsignor attended Cass Twp. Schools and Nativity B.V.M High School, Pottsville.

He graduated in 1965 from Duquesne University and Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Pittsburgh where he was awarded his BA degree. He lived at the *Russicum* (Russian College) in Rome, Italy, and received his theological training at the Gregorian University, Rome, Italy. He was granted a Bachelor of Sacred Theology Degree from the Gregorian in 1969. He received an advanced graduate degree, the Licentiate in Canon Law (JCL), at the Catholic University in Washington, DC, in 1978.

He was ordained to the priesthood July 13, 1969, at the Cathedral of Saint Michael in Passaic, NJ, by Bishop Michael J. Dudick. His first pastoral assignment was as assistant pastor of Saint John the Baptist Church in Hazleton, PA, July 30, 1969. Other pastoral assignments included: Holy Spirit Church, Mahwah, NJ (1973-1976); studies at Catholic University in

Washington, D.C. (1976-1978), where he was awarded the Licentiate Degree in Canon Law in 1978; pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Church in Elizabeth, NJ (1978- 1987); Saint Mary Church in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and administrator of Saint Michael in Glen Lyon, PA (1987- 1999). His Solemn Investiture as Chaplain to His Holiness, Pope John Paul II (which carries the title of Reverend Monsignor), took place on Sunday, Nov. 6, 1988, at Saint Michael Cathedral in Passaic, NJ, by Bishop Michael Dudick; pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Jessup and administrator of Saint John the Baptist, Forest City (1999-2017).

He was active in youth ministry, serving as youth director in the Hazleton Deanery; Vicariate Director for Youth Activities in New Jersey/Passaic District; Dean of the Northeast Pennsylvania Deanery; judge on the Matrimonial Tribunal of the

Eparchy of Passaic; Judicial Vicar for the Eparchy of Passaic; and Diocesan Director of Family Life.

Monsignor wrote a column titled "Seasonal Reflections" published regularly in the eparchical newspaper, *Eastern Catholic Life*. He was an active member of the Knights of Columbus, where he had been State Chaplain; the Canon Law Society of America (CLSA); the Eastern Regional Conference of Canonists; and served as the chaplain to the Pennsylvania State Sheriffs Association in Jessup.

Monsignor Sekellick was predeceased by his father, John D. Sekellick. He is survived by his mother, Veronica Verbosh Sekellick; sister, Irene, and her husband, John D. Gombola, of Chantilly, VA; sister, Therese, and her husband, Bret Bennett, and their two children, RJ and Valerie, of Dallas, TX; and numerous aunts, an uncle, and an abundance of cousins.





# FAITH AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

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

## SYMEON AND ONE-ON-ONE WITH GOD

### *The “God Experience” is Joy Experience*

According to Meyendorff (*Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 1974, p. 44), “Symeon was a Studite monk, later abbot of the monastery of Saint Mamas in Constantinople, who holds a unique place in the history of Eastern Christianity.” According to Meyendorff, Symeon had a unique idiosyncratic method of spirituality; whereas the other mystics and theologians would speak in a third person point-of-view, like a teacher expounding on a point of knowledge or law, Symeon used the first person singular. Unusual as it may be, it does give the reader a glimpse into the mystical experience from first-hand point of view. For Symeon, according to Meyendorff, the radical experience of God’s presence was so completely encompassing that Symeon took a direct route to express what happened.

According to Meyendorff (1974), there are two concepts of Symeon’s work that are key to understanding his experience of God they are:

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 (p. 45).

The familiarity that Symeon experiences in his encounter with Christ on this level, the invitation to intimacy offered by Christ and the immediacy of the encounter does engender in Symeon an intense feeling that can be described as ecstatic joy. Again, it appears that true joy is experienced when one is in communion with the Living God revealed by the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus Christ. In Symeon’s own words:

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 ...’ (Meyendorff, 1974, p. 47).

Symeon’s response to this epiphany is described as trembling and amazement there is then, the element of awe in the presence of the Most High and overwhelming feeling in being invited into so intimate and familiar a relationship as extended to Symeon, the Mysterium tremendum et fascinans of Rudolph Otto. It is becoming apparent that true joy is experienced only within the context of some type of epiphany, an experience of God in some way, and the more direct the more intense the joy.

### *The role of the Mysteries in facilitating the Holy Encounter with God*

For Symeon, participating in the Mysteries of the Church “Were an integral part of his spiri-

tual universe...” (Meyendorff, 1974, p. 48), and it is in participation in these experiences that the foundation is set for a radical encounter with the Living God that is radically transformational. (Meyendorff 1974, p. 51) In quoting from the *Vie Spirituelle* (XXI, 1931, p. 309) has Symeon relating the consequence of the radical experience of the All Holy:

*Thy Holy Body, pure and divine, blazes with the fire of Thy Divinity, ineffably united to it. Thou hast granted, Lord, that this corruptible temple —my human flesh—be united to Thy Holy Flesh, that my blood mingle with Thine; from henceforth I am a transparent and translucent member of Thy body...*

*O Christ, Thou triply-radiant light ... A wonder strange—I am refreshed with dew, beyond all speech to tell (A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers, New York, Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991, p.72-74).*

It is within the mystical encounter with Christ the unitive experience that one finds overflowing fulfillment and the fullness of joy. In the next installment Saint Gregory of Palamas’ insights will be investigated to find how Saint Gregory experienced joy and its relationship with Christ and mankind. **ECL**

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

### Saturday February 25, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.:

#### **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 9:30 a.m. Optional Divine Liturgy at 8am; continental breakfast, 9-9:30 a.m. Registration fee: \$25 includes a simple lunch.

### Sunday, February 26, at 5 p.m.:

#### **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-2p.m.:

#### **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-2 p.m. Confession will be available. Optional Divine Liturgy at 8am; quiet prayer after 2 p.m. Cost: \$30 includes continental breakfast and a simple lunch.

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

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

### **Holy Week Services**

*Monday-Saturday at 7a.m.: Matins*

*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday at 5 p.m.: Divine Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts*

*Thursday at 5 p.m.: Vespers with Divine Liturgy for Great and Holy Thursday*

*Friday at 3 p.m.: Vespers for Great and Holy Friday with Burial Shroud Procession*

*Saturday, April 15 at 5 p.m.: Vespers with Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil – vigil of the Resurrection*

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

### **Sunday, August 6, 2017**

#### **Pilgrimage for Peace: 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.

## 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.*

### A PATH THROUGH PROVERBS

The Triodion is the book that leads our Church through the season of the Great Fast. It is the work of saints, primarily Saint Theodore the Studite, who led the great urban monastery called the Studion, in Constantinople, in the 9th century. Saint Theodore and his collaborators collected, composed, and arranged poetic prayers for each day of the Fast. They also organized a cycle of daily Scripture reading that take us through the entire books of Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms and Proverbs in the course of the Fast.

You hear selections from the Triodion at the Liturgy of the Presanctified along with readings from Genesis and Proverbs. The family stories in Genesis are often gripping and memorable. The readings from Proverbs can be harder to follow. What we hear is usually just a collection of pithy one-liners, moving from subject to subject without any obvious connection. If we explore Proverbs carefully, however (maybe a chapter a day for a month), we will discover more.

Proverbs presents itself as the wise words of a father (and occasionally a mother: chapter 31) to his adolescent or young adult son. The father, King Solomon, gives some very practical advice about how to behave at table, in friendship, in love, in business, and in politics. He warns of the dangers involved in sex, alcohol, power, money, pride and too much talk. He is so frank that we may be surprised to hear some of what he says being chanted in Church! Like Aesop's Fables, he sometimes uses examples from the animal world to help us see things about ourselves. In Solomon's view there are wise men and fools and, without firm guidance and discipline, most people are likely to stay childish fools their whole life long.

God speaks to us here in stark and simple terms, in a parent's voice, because He's starting from the beginning. The moral lessons taught in Proverbs reflect the facts on the ground after Adam and Eve's sin. We live in a fallen world and we need to learn self-control or we will repeat Adam and Eve's mistake.

Self-control begins with the attitude that Proverbs calls "fear of the Lord" (1:7). A lot of people bristle at that expression in the Bible and in the Liturgy and maybe that just proves we need the lesson Proverbs teaches. "Fear of the Lord" is the sober realization that God is God and I am not; that I depend on Him and that He can make demands on me. It is expressed in worship of God and in respect for the fact that God has created human beings a certain way (in His image; Genesis 1:27) and built a particular order into the world around us. That order, what theologians call "natural law," is the basis for the moral rules Proverbs proposes. The "secret" to success and happiness in life lies in making choices that respect the way God created us and the world around us.

Occasionally, another viewpoint peeks through all this sober sermonizing and another figure appears. "Wisdom," depicted as a beautiful woman (1:20), invites the young man to discover the meaning of life and the secret of happiness. In Chapter 8, Wisdom speaks as only the Son of God can speak, eternally begotten of the Father (vv.22-23) and His "craftsman" in the work of creation (vv.24-31). When Wisdom builds a house with seven pillars, prepares a meal and invites us in, our Tradition sees an image of Christ's self-sacrifice for our salvation and the ongoing availability of that gift in the sacraments of the Church (Proverbs 9:1-6). Saint Paul makes this



*Icon of Ephrem the Syrian*

connection clear when He calls Christ "the Wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

The lessons of Proverbs begin with accepting God's authority, gaining control over selfishness, impulsiveness, and immoderation. They trace a path for success through family life and productive labor—the path from which Adam and Eve fell and the rest of Genesis shows humanity struggling to regain. Proverbs invites us to find God's plan in nature, in human relations, and in our own deepest selves. In a word, Proverbs shows us how to grow into integrity, the very quality that the Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian encourages us to strive for every day of the Great Fast. **ECL**



## LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

*By Ann M. Koshute, MTS*

### COMING CLEAN

Several years ago, I took my first trip to Europe. Playing it safe, I went to England to escape any potential language barriers. Taking in the London sights in a red double-decker bus was a thrill, and our guide's commentary offered the perfect combination of history and humor. His description of life in Elizabethan England was filled with interesting facts, including everyday hygiene. "Queen Elizabeth I," he said dramatically, "took a bath once a year – whether she needed it, or not." I have no idea if that's true, but my fellow tourists and I gasped, then burst out

laughing. With all our primping and perfuming we found the idea of once-a-year bathing pretty gross. All kidding aside, it's important for us to care for our bodies by properly fueling them on the inside, and keeping the surface clean, too. Keeping our bodies clean is part of maintaining good health, and good relationships. Who wants to spend time with an otherwise healthy person who refuses to bathe?

I recalled this story as I thought about the ways I'd like to engage with the Great Fast, spiritually

and in my daily activities. What if my last shower was today, and I didn't bathe again until this time next year? People would stay away from me! But I'd experience physical effects too. My overall health and well-being would suffer and harmful bacteria that can make me sick would flourish. Keeping clean isn't vanity; it's vital to good, healthy life. It would follow, then, that not keeping our soul clean has ill effects on our spiritual health and well-being. In fact, because human persons are a unity of body and spiritual soul – both equally making us who we are – a

soul “caked with the grime of sin” negatively impacts our spiritual and physical health, too. We’re blessed as Catholic (and Orthodox) Christians that our Lord has provided us with the soul-cleansing Mystery of Penance – better known as confession.

In an age of reality TV the idea of confession is tantalizing – provided it’s we who are privy to someone else’s “dirty laundry.” We watch with morbid curiosity, or to make ourselves feel morally superior. The people on these shows have their motives, too: they seek fame, or revenge on someone who hurt them. But all of them, deep inside, probably long to be “known,” to be heard, and perhaps justified in their actions. Reality TV isn’t the proper forum for confession, but it does show our underlying need to be unburdened, and to emerge from the experience transformed.

The Mystery of Confession isn’t TV, but the “reality” of its effects are beyond anything offered on this earth. It’s not a “Mystery” because we can’t figure it out. Rather, “Mystery” refers to something so rich in meaning that we can’t possibly get to the bottom of it; we’re always discovering there’s more to it. I certainly feel that way about Confession. Each time I receive this Holy Mystery I’m overwhelmed again by God’s love

for me. How can this be, when I keep disappointing Him, keep sinning over and over? God’s love and capacity for mercy is indeed “mysterious,” because it is so generously offered to me regardless of how often I need to ask for more. Confession does a lot for us, but there are three things we should keep in mind: confession draws us out of ourselves, draws us closer to God, and offers protection and fortification against temptation and sin.

Confession draws us out of ourselves by making us less self-centered. Once I was making my confession and the priest stopped me and said, “Stop talking about yourself!” I needed that, since I recounted my sins as they related to me, explaining myself and my sins. When examining our consciences, we shouldn’t try to make ourselves look good, but honestly search our hearts and admit our faults.

Confession draws us closer to God – and others. God doesn’t want us to uncover our faults so that He can destroy us. To the contrary: surfacing our sins and scrubbing them off in Confession keeps our souls healthy, making us more open to others. Letting go of sin makes more space in us for God. The less room there is for anger, self-centeredness – and our “favorite sins” – the more room there is

for God to work on us and through us. When we let go the burdens of sin we’re more compassionate and merciful, and better able to help shoulder the burdens of others. Finally, Confession offers us protection against temptation and further sin. Requesting and accepting the grace (God’s self-gift) offered in this Holy Mystery is a kind of “inoculation” against sin, building up our resistance to it. Confession strengthens our resolve to love God and others more perfectly, and to work harder at avoiding sin.

The Church recommends the faithful receive the Mystery of Penance at least once a year – but unlike Queen Elizabeth I’s yearly bath, we need this soul-cleansing more often than we’re likely willing to admit. God is offering to meet us at our worst, to forgive us, and invite us to share in His Life. Why wouldn’t we jump at the chance to be washed clean by His mercy and forgiveness more often?

And now, I have a confession to make. Oh, I’m not telling you. I’m off to receive the Holy Mystery of Penance. Won’t you join me in line? **ECL**



## UNDERSTANDING ICONS

*Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.*

### CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY: BURY THE DEAD

Burying the dead is one of the most solemn corporal works of mercy. In order to practice this deed of mercy we must prepare the body, purchase a burial plot, and arrange for a church service. Often times we must do this work quickly and in an economy of time.

We commemorate this work of mercy by Joseph of Arimathea as we celebrate Solemn Vespers on Great and Holy Friday. The entire Troparion is repeatedly sung as the shroud is processed around the church and then placed in the tomb. This hymn honors Joseph’s corporal work of mercy: “The noble Joseph took down your most pure body from the Cross,/ wrapped it in a linen shroud,/and placed it in a newly hewn tomb.”

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, provides this work of mercy most solemnly and reverently at the end of our Lord’s life on earth. He spares no expense in providing a tomb hewn from the rock, and shrouds Our Lord in a linen cloth, the most expensive type of material, appropriate prescribed by God as priestly garb.

The icon which depicts this work of mercy is twofold, the taking down from the cross and the wrapping in the burial shroud, or *plaščanitsa*, of our Lord. The icon may take the form of the burial shroud of Our Lord, also it may be the antimission, the altar cloth which is unfolded on the altar during the Divine Liturgy. The Eucharistic gifts are placed and consecrated upon this linen cloth.

In the icon we see several key figures present at the foot of the cross. The holy Theotokos is depicted embracing the lifeless head of her Son and Savior, while Saint John the Beloved Apostle, raises his hands to his cheek in anguish, while

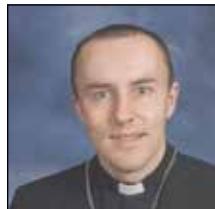
Joseph of Arimathea clasps the feet of the Lord. Behind this trio Mary Magdalene is shown with arms stretched out heavenward in the deepest grief and sorrow. Her gesticulation together with the raised hands of John the Beloved are among the most poignant emotional expressions found in Byzantine icons.

When we practice this deed of mercy at someone’s death, we must also be in control of our emotions. Out of our great reverence for the dead, and filled with petitions for their eternal

repose, we too must offer proper burial for the deceased. Recalling full well that the body was the dwelling place of the eternal soul here on the face of the earth, this final act of mercy must be enacted in order to ensure proper care for the departed. Attendance at funeral services held at the funeral home, parish church and cemetery all comprise this work of mercy. By our participation in them we solemnly proclaim God’s mercy in this world, and by burying the dead leads us into life everlasting. **ECL**



Icon of Joseph of Arimathea



# ASK A PRIEST A QUESTION

Father Vasyl Chepelsky

## GOD'S CREATION IN TIME

*Question: "What is the Church's teaching on this issue: If we were created at the moment of conception, did we exist previously as a "thought" in the mind of God? If so, did we "always" exist in that state? If this is true, would it be safe to say that we have an eternal existence in the mind of God? -DJ*

What a great question is being asked! For a long time, I have been thinking about it myself. I will go into a deeper explanation which will lead us to the answer. It will be based on the reflections of this topic by many great theologians of the past.

The world tracks time starting with the birth of Jesus, with His entering into human history and entering the time. Not often do we think about this. We can say that Jesus reset our clock and our time. That is why we use the terms A. D. (*Anno Domini*, which means "*in the year of our Lord*", and B. C.—"*before Christ*").

Before creation there was no time. Time is a measure of change on a scale of *before* and *after* (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 4:11). Time is a restless continuous set of changes. When we look at the clock, the arrows continue to run forward, each moment which was in the future is changed by another—it becomes present and then it becomes past so quickly. Those moments are not possible to recover; they become past. We can hold on to them in our memories and thoughts, but are unable to enter them again, to change anything or to live them again. That is why the ancient philosopher Heraclius said his famous phrase: πάντα ρεῖ (panta rhei) "everything flows" and "you cannot step twice into the same river." How true is that? Each second of our life which was just in the future becomes our present and, before we know it, becomes past. Our life is a constant change.

What is God's relation to time and to us? Very often we hear phrases like "timeless God" or "eternal God." From Augustine through Aquinas, the major thinkers argued that God was not in time at all. They thought of God as eternal, in the sense that He is timeless or a-temporal. By some philosophers, His eternal nature is sometimes thought of as being everlasting rather than timeless. God created the universe and He sustains it in existence. God's sustaining the universe in its existence at each moment is what keeps the universe existing from moment to moment. If, at any instant, it were not sustained, it would cease to exist.

Many philosophers are careful with this concept, and they think God is timeless without creation and *temporal* (or better to say—in time) with creation, and this thought differs from a theological point of view as stated above. It still does not mean He is subjected to time as He is the Creator of time and exists outside of time. C. S. Lewis helps us with the understanding of this concept and clarifies it by stating: "Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow. But if He knows I am going to do so-and-so, how can I be free to do otherwise? Well, here once again, the difficulty comes from thinking that God is progressing along the time line like us: the only difference being that He can see ahead and we cannot. Well,

if that were true, if God foresaw our acts, it would be very hard to understand how we could be free not to do them. But suppose God is outside and above the time-line. In that case, what we call 'tomorrow' is visible to Him in just the same way as what we call 'today'. All the days are 'Now' for Him.

"He does not remember you doing things yesterday; He simply sees you doing them, because, though you have lost yesterday, He has not. He does not 'foresee' you doing things tomorrow; He simply sees you doing them: because, though tomorrow is not yet there for you, it is for Him. You never supposed that your actions at this moment were any less free because God knows what you are doing. Well, He knows your tomorrow's actions in just the same way—because He is already in tomorrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, He does not know your action till you have done it: but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'Now' for Him.

"This idea has helped me a good deal. If it does not help you, leave it alone. It is a 'Christian idea' in the sense that great and wise Christians have held it and there is nothing in it contrary to Christianity. But it is not in the Bible or any of the creeds. You can be a perfectly good Christian without accepting it, or indeed without thinking of the matter at all." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (1952; Harper Collins: 2001) pp. 170-171).

We can surely say that there *was a time* when *time* did not exist. God created time. He chose to create a world with a beginning—a time "before" which there was nothing. The Book of Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." And Christ told His Father: "You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). St. Thomas Aquinas, in his famous *Summa Theologiae* in Q. 46, Article 3, explains: "Things are said to be created in the beginning of time, not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because, together with time, heaven and earth were created." So, time was created by God.

In one of his radio talks, C. S. Lewis explains this concept to us: "Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this time series—this arrangement of past, present and future—isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that.

"Almost certainly God is not in time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call "ten-thirty." Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in

flames.

"That's difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it? Suppose I'm writing a novel. I write "Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door." For Mary, who's got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour's walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary. I know that's not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention, infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to take us in the line. You're as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He'd ever created."

So, answering the question, we started our physical existence at the moment of conception, but we did always exist in the mind of God, as for Him there is no *before* and *after*, *past* or *future*, but everything is *now*. We can say that we have eternal existence in the mind of God, as long as we remember that our physical existence begins at the moment of conception. God Himself knew from eternity which creatures He would give existence in time. Therefore, in God's wisdom and love we were conceived from eternity (cf. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." Jeremiah, 1:5).

*I would like to kindly thank DJ 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 or on the wall or by private message at the Facebook page: SaintJohntheBaptistByzantineCatholic-Church*

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

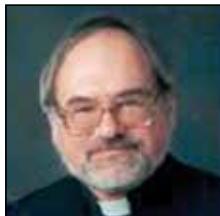
*If you have ever wondered what Catholics really believe or just questioned "why is that" about a certain topic, you now have the opportunity to find out.*

*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!*

Father Vasyl Chepelsky **ECL**





# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

*By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD*

## GOD AND HUMAN REASON

For the last months, I've done a series of articles on how we think about God. There always has been a movement in human society towards "rationalism," using the gift of human intelligence to understand the created universe. Sometimes this leads to a denial of spiritual reality in favor of a materialistic point of view, that reality is only what can be perceived by our physical senses. This leads to atheistic and agnostic philosophies that are very common in the present. The question I have been addressing is how do we, as a people of faith, deal with these philosophies.

We should not start by denying the gift of reason. Faith, as the Letter to the Hebrews defines it, is "the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) This means that faith goes beyond what we can grasp by our physical senses, but it does not mean that it is "irrational." Saint Paul wrote, "What can be known about God is evident to them (those who suppress the truth), because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what "He has made." (Romans 1:19-20) We may not be able to prove the existence of God by scientific experiment, but His reality is not opposed to reason, and can be inferred by our experience of the manifestation of the created universe. This we do through reason, for animals cannot speculate about the meaning of existence; it is an exclusive human ability.

How important is reason in our knowledge of God? We can come to a rational conclusion from the nature of creation that there is a Creator. However, this does not in itself give us a personal relationship with God. Much depends on our presuppositions. If we say that there is a reason for the existence of the universe, then our minds will be led to God. Therefore, a real atheist will have to make the presupposition that there is no

reason for the universe as it is. It simply has happened by chance, though even then they will try to justify it by some physical process. Another presupposition that may be made is the Deist option. There is a creator, or creating force, at least, but it is incredibly distant from us, and we cannot have a personal relationship with it. We can't even know if it is "personal" in any way meaningful to us. In faith, though, we can make another reasonable presupposition, that there is ground for all created being, and that this "ground" is also a personal being, since he has placed personhood in his creation. This creator we call God, professing, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible."

The question, then, is not in our ability to reason, which is a part of our being, our very soul, nor in the credibility of our physical senses, but in presuppositions we make before we even begin to think. Another problem for faith becomes our pre-conceptions about God. Atheists, those who claim that the universe is only here by chance, will form concepts of God that are ridiculous. In logical argumentation, this is called creating a "straw man," a figment of one's own imagination that should be reasonably rejected. Therefore, their concept of God is an old man with a white beard, residing in heavenly clouds well above the surface of the earth. Such a god obviously does not exist. Yet many believers fall into this trap of creating a false concept of God. How many times have I heard people who come to church and worship God refer to Him as "the man upstairs," though He is neither a "man" nor is He "upstairs."

As limited and time-locked creatures, we cannot form adequate concepts of an infinite and eternal God. In fact, what we know of God comes only from what God has chosen to reveal to us. This is crucially important, for it is in this way that we have a real personal relationship with God, Who, the Fathers have told us, is closer to us

than we are to ourselves. Thus, the holy apostle and evangelist John wrote, "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed Him," (John 1:18) and "no one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us." (1 John 4:12) Jesus, the Son and Word of God, Whose image we see in icons and Whose words we hear in the gospel, and Whom we receive in Holy Communion, reveals God to us, and teaches us to pray to Him, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." The only real concept we can have of God is what the Lord tells us. Our bare reason, without the help of this grace, can form inadequate ideas of God that will mislead us.

We come to know God not only through reason, for as human beings we are more than just reason. We relate to God by our whole being, body and soul. The letter of Saint James tells us, "You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble." (James 2:19) As we make our journey through life, there is only one thing that matters to a person of faith, that we always grow closer to God. In this life, we will not know God perfectly, as Saint Paul cautions, "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present, I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) Our whole life is only the beginning of our relationship with God, and again, Saint Paul comforts us, "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love Him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 2:9-10) We must always give thanks to God, Who has revealed Himself to us through our reasoning faculty, but Whom we shall know with our whole heart and mind and soul, "So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)" **ECL**

## 2017 PROGRAMS AT MOUNT SAINT MACRINA UNIONTOWN, PA

### March 2, 9, 16, 30: Lenten Reading Series

From 10:30-11:30 a.m. with Sister Barbara Jean Mihalchick, OSBM. Free Will Offering. The book is *Making Sense of Suffering* by Peter Kreef.

### March 18 Lenten Morning of Prayer: Grace, Forgiveness and Groaning

With Father Joseph Raptosh, Pastor, Saint Michael Byzantine Catholic Church, Canonsburg, PA, and Professor at Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary. Saturday, March 18, 2017, 9:15 a.m.—1:00 p.m. (Includes lunch). Offering: \$35. Registration Due: Mar. 14. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be offered.

### March 19: Lenten Day of Prayer: The Feast and Fasting

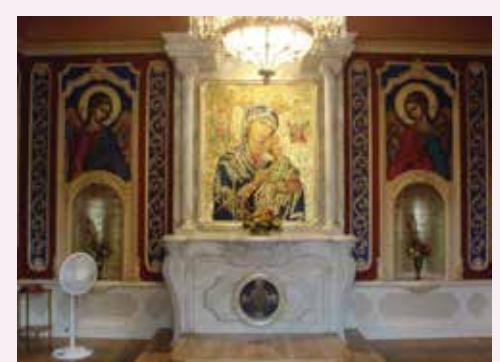
With Helen Anne Hochendorfer, Bible Study Leader, Saint Pius X Byzantine Catholic Church, Pittsburgh, PA. Sunday, March 19, 2017, 1:15 p.m.—5:00 p.m. (Includes Supper). Offering: \$35. Registration Due: March 15. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be offered.

### March 25: Healing Retreat

With Father William Kiel, a retired priest of the Greensburg Catholic Diocese who has a healing ministry in the greater Greensburg, PA, and Pittsburgh, PA areas. Saturday, March 25, 2017, 9:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m. (Includes Lunch). Offering: \$35. Registration Due: March 20. The afternoon will conclude with a Liturgy for Healing.

### March 28: Men's Evening Out

With Father Don Bolts, Pastor, Church of the Resurrection Byzantine Catholic Church, Monroeville, PA. Tuesday, March 28, 2017, 7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m. Offering: \$20. Registration Due: March 24. A time for men to gather, enjoy fellowship, and be encouraged in their faith and daily living.





# SCHOOL OF PRAYER

*Father G. Scott Boghossian*

## WORRY IS A SIN

**A**mole burrowing in the earth is blind and cannot see the stars; and he who does not trust God in temporal things will not trust Him in eternal things." - Saint Mark the Ascetic

Worrying is a sin. Prayer is the antidote to worry. In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord says, "Do not worry!" He says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, drink, or wear...." He goes on to say that if the heavenly Father takes care of the birds and the flowers, He will take care of us. "Don't worry about tomorrow," He says. Yet we continue to worry about everything. There are even people who are proud of how much they worry. "I am a great worrier. I worry; that's just what I do." This is not God's best for you. One might object, "I'm not worried about my life or my needs, but I am worried about my son serving in the military, or my elderly and infirm parents, or my friend who is traveling overseas." Again, God says, "Do not worry. Trust me" (Mt. 6:30).

Worry offends God. It insults Him. It says, "God, You aren't powerful enough or loving enough, to keep me safe and take care of me." Worry is a form of doubt and unbelief. Worry is a denial that God works all things together for

good (Rm. 8:28). In Luke 9, when the disciples were not able to cast out an evil spirit due to their unbelief, Jesus said, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?" When Jesus was on the boat with his disciples, He spoke to the wind and the waves saying, "Peace, be still!" He turned to the disciples and said, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" When Saint Peter was walking on water and started to sink, Jesus said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 14:31). Doubt, unbelief, fear, and worry seem to irritate the Lord. (Read Numbers 13 and 14 to see how God struck down ten men because they failed to trust.) Let us pray, "Lord, forgive me if I have offended you with doubt, unbelief, and worry. From now on I will trust in you."

So how do we deal with worry? Pray! Listen to Saint Paul. He writes, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). In other words, don't worry, pray about it, and thank God that He will work it all out. The result? "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will

guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). What an encouraging promise! If we pray and trust, then God will give us peace. And not just any peace, but the kind of peace that's hard to explain or understand, the peace "which surpasses all understanding!"

Prayer is talking to God. Listen to King David: "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us (Ps. 62:8)." Pour out your heart to God. Carry your worries to Him in prayer. "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pt. 5:7).

What are you giving up for Lent? Why not give up worry? Write down all of the different things about which you are worried. In the church, or in your home icon corner, read through your list of worries in the presence of God. Tell God that you are entrusting these concerns to Him and thank Him for taking care of them, and then receive God's peace that surpasses all understanding. Repeat as necessary. Saint Padre Pio often said, "Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer." Worrying is a sin! Prayer is the antidote to worry.

**ECL**



## SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

*Father Lewis Rabayda*

## THE EMPTYING OF OURSELVES TO RECEIVE CHRIST

**A**s Saint John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). Saint John said this after Jesus had successfully begun His ministry and was surpassing John in quantity of baptisms. But it also shows John's humility and realization of his role of being the precursor of Christ and not Christ Himself. John knew that his only role was to "make straight the way of the Lord" and that when the Christ came, his ministry would come to an end because of its fulfillment (Jn.1:23). But John knew well the necessity of Christ growing in people's hearts. John came to pave the way for the Savior, and when the Savior appeared, his ministry would cease.

During this Great Fast, we have a tremendous task ahead of us, one as large and as important as John's. John was chosen out of the world to be a herald for the coming Messiah. He encountered all trials and lived a righteous ascetic life. It was by his asceticism, devotion, and prayer that John was able to humble himself, to give way to Christ, the true Savior. John knew that it was not by his own power that people would be saved from their sins, that their repentance would be accepted by God, but that it was properly the task of the Christ. So too, we are not the source of salvation for others, but we must be the ones who lead others to Christ; we must be the ones who show the path of repentance to those who have fallen away from the Grace of God.

So how can we be the guidepost, how can we be the ones who allow others to see and recog-

nize Christ? As The Baptist said, Christ must increase, and we must decrease. The more of the outside world that is in us, the less Christ is in us. John the Evangelist tells us in his first Epistle, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world" (1Jn. 2:15-16). There are many distractions in the world that seem to appeal to our temporal needs and desires, but usually these things cannot bring us true happiness nor can they affirm our salvation.

Today, we have so many temptations for the lust of the eyes, and for the pride of life and the desire for information, that it can overtake our very intellect if we are not careful. Our constant consumption of media and information both good or bad leaves us full of things that do not bring us closer to Christ. But rather, this immersion, this complete surrender of our wills to our phones, computers, cable programming, and constant radio bombardment does not allow Christ to increase in us. In order for us to surrender to Christ and to allow Him into our hearts, we need to resist these temptations of constant distraction and curiosity.

It is through the virtue of humility that we can submit ourselves to Christ and to His teaching. It is through our recognition of the worldliness, the business, and the divergent nature of all the

information and entertainment we consume, that we can instead choose to fill ourselves up with the peace that is given by Christ. In order for us to allow ourselves to decrease, our desires and curiosities to decrease, our own fallen wills to decrease, we must humbly open ourselves up to the healing power and correction of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ can increase in us by our severely cutting back on our consumption of worldly material and by our reading of Scripture and other Christian books. The more we learn about Christ and how His sacrifice on the cross has been for our sakes, the more we have an innate desire to pray; we have a more constant joy in knowing who God is and the peace that comes from that intimate relationship with Him. This better understanding of Christ will also lead us to a more full participation in the life of the Church, Her Liturgy, and Her Sacraments.

"And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever." (1Jn. 2:17) When we do the will of God by submitting ourselves to Him, He will rush towards us like the Father did to the Prodigal Son, and when He sees us coming towards Him on the road, He will fill us with every good thing. If we are filled with the knowledge and love of Christ, then it will be clear to all those we encounter who the true Savior is, and they too will want to know about Him and to worship Him. **ECL**



# SEMINARIAN REFLECTIONS

Seminarian Paul Varchola West

## DISCERNING FOR TWO

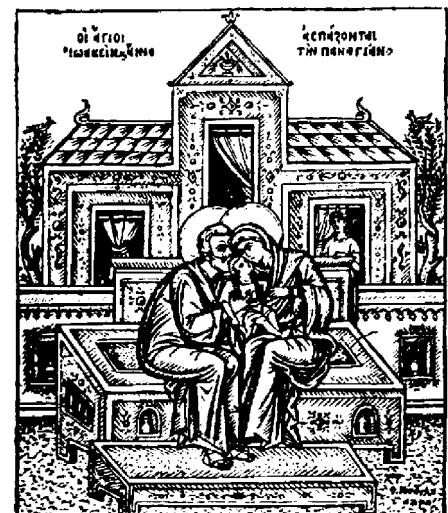
We may hear, at times, a pregnant woman joyfully exclaim, "Sure, I'll have an extra little sliver of pie...after all...I am eating for two!" What a joyous feeling! To know that one is nourishing creation within oneself brings awe and wonder, but also a sense of responsibility. "Eating for two" also means that whatever food one eats, the other is eating as well. The same can be said for a man discerning a married vocation to the priesthood.

Discerning a vocation to ordained ministry is serious business, regardless of whether this discernment involves marriage or celibacy; however, what the married man—or the to-be-married man—must keep in mind is that he is, knowingly or not, "discerning for two." During the discernment process, a man's wife is discerning the vocation in the same manner he is. The road to a married priestly vocation is not one that is walked alone. Every step of the way—from the realization that the Holy Spirit is calling, through

seminary and throughout priestly ministry—the couple is discerning together. The discerning man must keep constant vigilance in regard to the spiritual food of which he partakes, as his wife and children also partake of the same. It is not a reality and life of one-sided decrees and demands, requirements and edicts, concessions, and sacrifices. The couple, married or engaged, must be in a continuous physical and spiritual dialogue in order that the vocation be nurtured and bear its true fruit. It is not about me. It is not about you. There is no I... only us. As the man grows in his vocation, so does his wife and family. Their concerns belong to each other, as do their prayers, sacrifices, joy, and sorrow. The idea that the couple's discernment is not mutually exclusive to its individual members affords the couple strength and support, while enlightening all of us to the realization: it is not all about me!

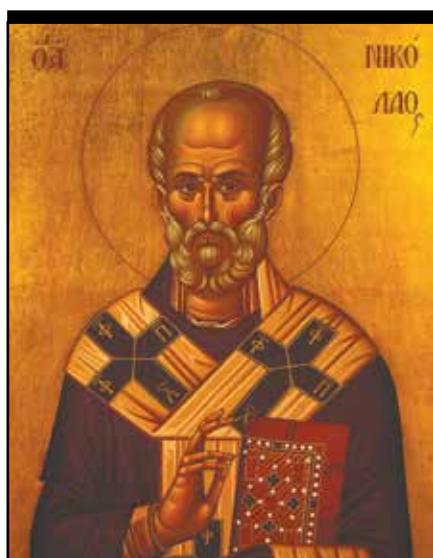
As Christians, we are a people of discernment. What does God want

from my life? Do I want to be married or pursue the Christian vocation of a single person? Am I being called to a life of celibacy? Perhaps a monastic calling is where the Holy Spirit is guiding me? Am I living a truly Christian life? These are all questions that have crossed our minds at some point in time. Regardless of how these questions are answered, we must be aware that the Holy Spirit is working within each and every one of us. Bringing our thoughts of discernment from "how does this affect me?" to a broader sense of how our individual life affects the greater community around us gives a new perspective. By expanding our thoughts, we help to keep that ever-pesky ego in check. Married or celibate, young or old, it is always positive to reflect upon the following: am I pursuing this because this is what "I WANT" or am I truly opening myself to the Holy Spirit? Just as the married couple supports one another in the discernment of a priestly vocation,



Icon of Joachim and Anna

Christ supports us all as we discern how we can best live a life suited to His teaching. Be comforted to know that none of us walk the road of discernment alone. If we keep Christ at the center of our discernment, nourishing the seeds that the Holy Spirit cultivates, we are all "discerning for two." **ECL**



### 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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### MARCH

- 3,10,17, 24 Lenten Days of Reflection "Munching and Learning"  
*Lenten talks with meatless lunch or supper. 12 NOON and 7 p.m. Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, Hillsborough, NJ*
- 4 Strive! A Day of Recollection for Men  
*Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
- 5 First Sunday of the Great Fast  
*Sunday of Orthodoxy*
- 12 Second Sunday of the Great Fast
- 19 Third Sunday of the Great Fast  
*Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross*
- 23-26 Mary, Untier of Knots Icon Retreat  
*Holy Dormition Friary, Sybertsville, PA*
- 25 Annunciation of the Virgin Theotokos  
*Solemn Holy Day*

- 26 Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast  
*Sunday of the Ladder of Divine Ascent \**  
*Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel*

### APRIL

- 24-27 Annual Presbyteral Days

### MAY

- 8-10 Eastern Regional Conference of Canonists  
*Hilton Meadowlands, East Rutherford, NJ*  
*Hosted by the Eparchy of Passaic*

### JULY

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

### AUGUST

- 5-9 Altar Server Camp  
*at Carpathian Village, Cresco, PA*