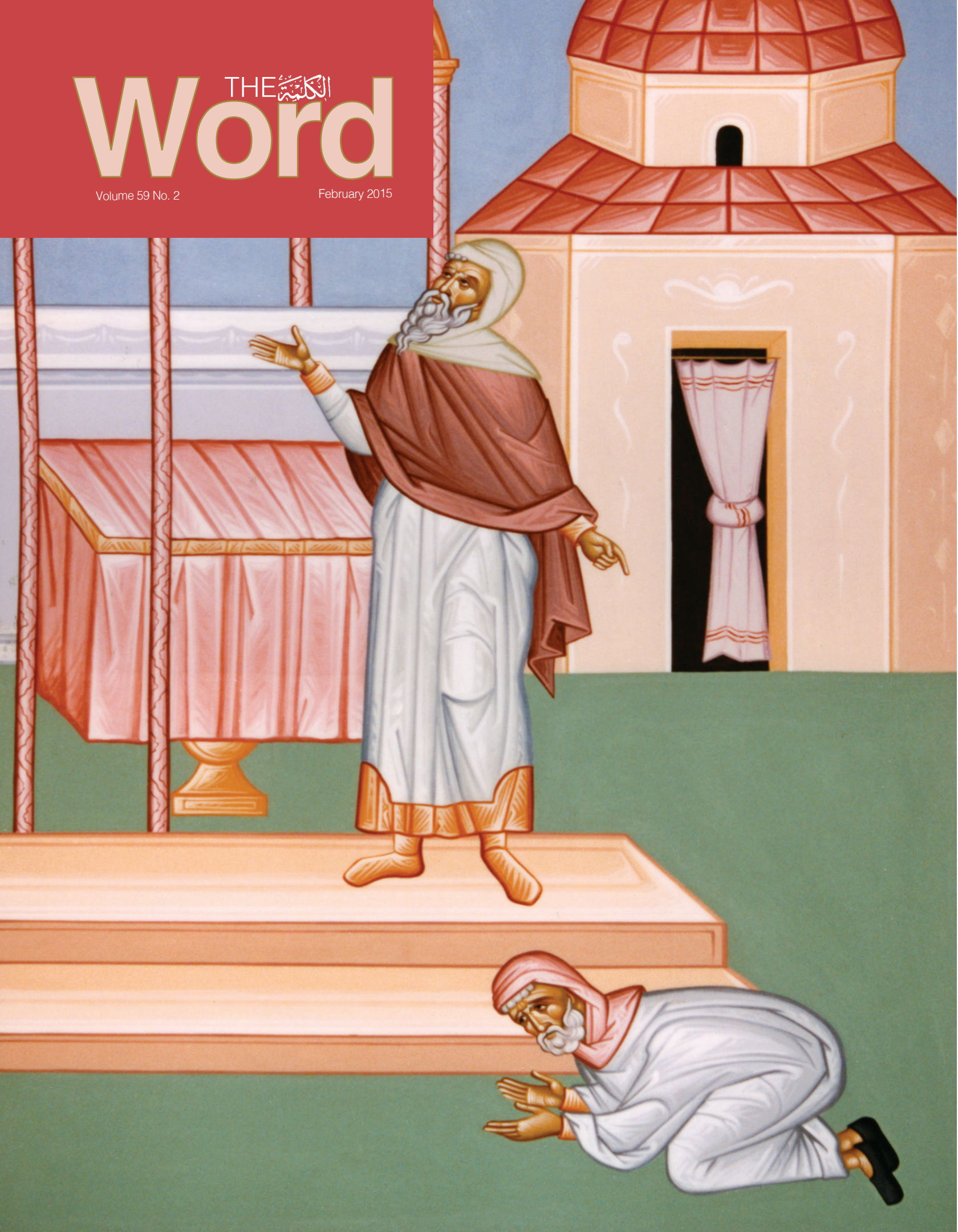


THE الكلمة Word

Volume 59 No. 2

February 2015



contents



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Founded in Arabic as Al Kalimat in 1905 by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)
Founded in English as The WORD in 1957 by Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir)

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Member
The Associated Church Press
Conciliar Press
Ecumenical News International
Orthodox Press Service
Editorial Office:
The WORD
2 Lydia's Path
Westborough, MA 01581-1841
e-mail: WORDMAG@AOL.COM
Subscription Office:
358 Mountain Road
PO Box 5238
Englewood, NJ 07631-5238



Letters to the editor are welcome and should include the author's full name and parish. Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions, in hard copy, on disk or e-mailed, should be double-spaced for editing purposes and provided as a Microsoft Word text.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:
U.S.A. and Canada, \$20.00
Foreign Countries, \$26.00
Single Copies, \$3.00

The WORD (USPS626-260) is published monthly, except July and August, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238; periodicals postage paid at Englewood, New Jersey 07631-5238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to: The WORD, 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
ISSN 0043-7964 www.antiochian.org.

Canada Post Publication Agreement No. 40043404
Return Canada address to:
American International Mail, STN A – BOX 697, Windsor ON N9A 6N4, Canada

COVER: THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE
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3 EDITORIAL
by Bishop JOHN

5 LEARNING FROM MARY,
THE BIRTH-GIVER OF GOD
by Garrett "Justin" Brannon

8 ST. JOHN CLIMACUS:
THE FORGOTTEN SAINT
by Father Athanasios Papagiannis

10 DAILY DEVOTIONS

11 THE GIFTS OF THE EVANGELIST LUKE
by Edith Humphrey, Ph.D.

15 ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

16 THE DEPARTMENT OF
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

21 IOCC PROVIDES VITAL
WINTER RELIEF IN SYRIA

24 ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

26 COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

EDITORIAL

Christianity does not allow us to develop our own religious system

Bishop JOHN



Reflections on my discussion with the Orthodox Christian Fellowship

Between Christmas and New Year, at the invitation of the Orthodox Christian (Campus) Fellowship, I talked with over 300 O.C.F. men and women at the Antiochian Village about the Royal Priesthood into which we were baptized, issues of power in the Church and the world, as well as our Christian vocations. Our discussions, which also involved Bishop GREGORY of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese, and clergy and faithful of the various Orthodox jurisdictions in America, were inspiring. Our Church is blessed with many faithful and Spirit-filled young leaders, willing and able to witness to Christ in the Orthodox way to a post-Christian and post-modern world. I learned a bit about an OCF "app" (application) for smart phones, as well as the ministries our own youth are providing through the use of social media. I was entertained by the Be the Bee You-Tube videos and impressed with the depth of knowledge and commitment of our youth.

I believe that Americans have been taught to value diversity and tolerance to such a degree that it actually preempts an Orthodox understanding and acceptance of God's Revelation through His Church. For many in American society, Christianity is just one of many faith-systems, from which each individual may pick and choose concepts to develop his or her own personal religious system. Religion in modern times is com-

monly understood as any collection of beliefs, cultural system or world-view. While this notion is admittedly seductive, and may be preferable at times to prejudice and discrimination, it nonetheless contradicts a proper understanding of our sharing in the Royal Priesthood of Christ through His Church. Our Orthodox Church calls our youth to witness to the people around them, most of whom treat Christianity with contempt or



For many in American society, Christianity is just one of many faith-systems, from which each individual may pick and choose concepts to develop his or her own personal religious system. Religion in modern times is commonly understood as any collection of beliefs, cultural system or world-view.

indifference. Our conviction is that God revealed Himself in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Word took on flesh to share His life with us, granting us participation in His priesthood; bringing man to God and God to man. He gives us access to the Father through Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ took on flesh to transform humanity and complete our personhood. The Incarnation of Christ cannot be reduced to a collection of beliefs, cultural systems and world-views, from which one makes selections as though at a religious salad-bar.

God is active in our lives, but we need to pause in order to notice. We further need to develop our relationships with Him as we develop our relationships with each other. We need to share ourselves with God through prayer and with our pastors and other Christians through self-disclosure. We need to listen to God through our time with God in the Scriptures, liturgy and fellowship with others. We need to make prayer time a time of encountering God and observing, not just a time of talking. We need to come to know God as we share in His work, both liturgically and in the care of others who need mercy and encouragement. It is in exercising our Christianity that we develop our relationship with God. It is not enough to *attend* the worship; we must indeed gather to *do* the worship. It is not enough to be entertained by sermons and classes; we need to participate in the sermons and discussion through active listening and sharing of ourselves. We don't gather to *get something* from the gathering; we gather to *be* the gathering, and to encourage each other as we worship God.

Orthodoxy is a way of life, and God reveals Himself in all aspects of our life. He is with us as we suffer. He is with us as we relieve the suffering of others, through His presence and our presence. He is with us as we celebrate. He is with us when we help others see how we care about them and each other. He is with us as we work and de-

light in that work, knowing that God has accomplished everything for us and cares about every aspect of our lives. He knows every hair on our heads and He knew us from our mother's womb.

The authority we have to lead comes from God, from whom comes all authority. This is true even of those ungodly leaders who don't know God. Christ told Pilate that he would have no authority unless it were granted from above. All authority belongs to God and is exercised on His behalf. All who exercise authority will be held accountable for this stewardship. In the Church as well as the family, and, by extension, at every level of organization, power is exercised on behalf of God and through service and example. Christ Himself washed the feet of the Apostles. In the Church, men and women exercise authority by serving tables, caring for the poor, teaching, singing, cleaning, ushering, accounting for the gifts, maintaining the properties and supporting the clergy. God gives us authority to work. Working in the Church and for God's people allows us to participate in Christ's own ministry. This is how we develop our relationship with Him. How magnificent it is to see, up close, God healing, loving and comforting His people. How beautiful to watch epiphanies before our eyes, as people discover God's forgiveness and compassion.

Not everyone is called to serve the Church as a bishop or presbyter, but all Christians share in Christ's priesthood. In Christ's priesthood, we stand with our family, friends, co-workers, customers, fellow students, and so forth, before God, and with God before them. We show the joy we have from being Christians in our daily tasks, bearing witness and, when invited, we share who is the source of this joy and life. Our stewardship is to do whatever we do well, and to do it all with joy and love. This is the beginning of our Christian witness.

Some are called to give their whole lives to the Church. If you feel so called, prepare yourself and then submit yourself to your Church leaders to figure out how your ministry is to be served. No Church calls leader himself. God and the Church calls, and we respond. The apostles, teachers, deacons, and bishops were sent. They did not send themselves. To allow yourself to be sent takes trust in God and the Church. I am the first to admit that we all can make mistakes. If we make mistakes, we can work to discern and correct ourselves. God is merciful.

My time with the Orthodox Christian Fellowship was very rewarding for me. I hope that it will prove to be of benefit to them and to the Church as well.

Bishop JOHN

Learning from Mary, the Birth-giver of God

Garrett "Justin" Brannon



Icon by Randi Sider-Rose
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My hands shook as my finger and thumb moved down the chain, one bead at a time, my mind focusing on the crucifixion of my Lord Jesus Christ. "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." I had mocked this short Catholic prayer for years, as both a non-Christian, and as a Christian. Never did it occur to me that it was actually just a few Scripture quotations. Neither did it occur to me



that, though the petition is addressed to Mary, its center is Jesus. My heart was torn: was I committing an act of great sin, or was I standing on holy ground? My lips quivered as I continued, "Hail Mary, full of grace"

I was also confused: why was I thinking about different times in the life of Jesus, but praying to Mary. Praying? Was that the right word? Surely I was not *praying* to Mary, was I? For some reason, however, I felt that it would be disrespectful to stop. I continued to work my way around the Rosary.

I left the chapel at St. Joseph's Parish with two real-

izations, the first being that Roman Catholics cherish Mary. The second was that I was clueless as to why. I spent a few months considering the Roman Catholic faith before deciding against it, and during that time, I learned that I had been robbed of an important and rich tradition of the Church. In fact, growing up, I had never heard one sermon about Mary, though I had heard sermons on King David *ad nauseam*. I was almost entirely ignorant of Mary. In this article, I hope to show something of Mary's character and highlight her importance to the Christian tradition.

Mary was called of God when the Angel Gabriel appeared to her. He said, "Hail! Full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed art thou among women!" (Luke 1:28). This greeting was confusing to Mary, and she wondered what the Angel was talking about. As Gabriel revealed the plan of God to her, she was stunned. The Messiah would come from *her*? But she was a virgin. Mary then said, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Metropolitan Kalistos Ware writes,

At the Annunciation the Father sends the Holy Spirit upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she conceives the eternal

Son of God. So God's taking of our humanity is a Trinitarian work. The Spirit is sent down from the Father, to effect the Son's presence within the womb of the Virgin. The Incarnation, it should be added, is not only the work of the Trinity but also the work of Mary's free will. God waited for her voluntary consent ... and had this consent been withheld, Mary would not have become God's Mother (K. Ware 35).

Mary made a very bold decision, and consented



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Hail! Full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed art thou among women!

(Luke 1:28)

to the plan of God for her life. It is because of this consent that she takes that place in the Church and in the creation that she does. Mary, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied about herself, saying, “From now on all generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, also prophesied about Mary,

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Luke 1:42-45).

It is therefore a work of the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth and the Angel declared the blessedness of the Virgin, a task that all Christians should continue to do, without fear.

The significance of this calling cannot be overemphasized. God did not simply call Mary to be an incubator for the Son of God, but when He chose her, He put the salvation of the world in her virgin womb, and in her care. She bore, nursed, and raised the Son of God. Because of this profound obedience, the Church Fathers referred to Mary as “the New Eve.” Concerning this, Justin Martyr writes,

He became man by the Virgin, in order that the

disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy, when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her, and the power of the Highest would overshadow her: wherefore also the Holy Thing begotten of her is the Son of God ... And by her has He been born, to whom we have proved so many Scriptures refer, and by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him; but works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness and believe upon Him (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, Chapter 100).

Not only was this a calling of immense honor, it was also a calling to sacrifice. Like her Son after her, this high calling of God brought her rejection, fear, and pain. While she was still pregnant, her husband Joseph protected her by making a long trip to Egypt, because King Herod’s jealousy drove him to attempt to kill her baby. Then, when Jesus was born, Mary brought her baby to the prophet Simeon, who said to her, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword

will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34–35). She was well aware that her child would be rejected. She also knew that this would pierce her soul in a way that nobody could comfort her. Her calling was not one of great glory, but it was to share in the suffering of her son.

Her acceptance of this life is an example for all Christians everywhere, showing that a true call of God will require personal sacrifice. Just as Mary suffered with Christ, so we must also learn to suffer with Christ. We must learn to put aside our foolish and shallow notions of glory and blessing, and learn that Christian glory and blessing leads to the cross. Mary never forsook Jesus. She was with Him even as He was being crucified, when His disciples had all fled, and, when they nailed Christ to the cross and stabbed him in the side, they pierced Mary’s soul as the prophet Simeon had predicted.

The Mother of God was an orthodox woman. Her worship of God recorded in Luke shows some of the most important doctrines in the Jewish tradition. Almost immediately, Mary speaks of the might of God and the holiness of His name (Luke 1:49). This recalls the beginning of the “Our Father,” and shows her devotion to the Ten Commandments, the first of which forbade idolatry. Also, covenantal themes run throughout the prayer. She begins to speak of the perpetual covenantal mercies of God in Luke 1:50, when she says, “His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” The phrase “for those who fear him” appears only in the Psalms, and only four times within them, each time pointing to the covenant that God has established with Israel. She continues to draw from one biblical passage to another, highlighting the major themes of Scripture. It is in this way that our Mother teaches us to pray.

Mary not only had a correct view of God and His covenantal relationship with her, but she had a correct view of herself. Mary responds to the Angel in an attitude of submission to God. She says to him “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), and in her Magnificat she refers to herself as the servant of the Lord (Luke 1:48).

Throughout her life, Mary submitted to the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit overshadowed her, because of her consent to the Father’s divine plan; even during the life of Christ, Mary pointed to Jesus. At a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee, there was a shortage of wine. Mary informed Jesus of the shortage, to which he responded, “Oh woman, what have you to do with me” (John 2:4). She then turned to the servants and said to them, “Whatsoever He tells you to do, do it.” The servants

obeyed Mary, and in turn obeyed Christ. This can be compared to the Apostle Paul, who says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). “For two thousand years the Church has preserved the memory of the Virgin Mary as the prototype of all Christians – the model of what we are to become in Christ. Mary was truly pure, and unconditionally obedient to God Mary’s spiritual purity, her wholehearted devotion to God, is certainly to be emulated” (Orthodox Study Bible, 1361). Christians, then, should follow Mary’s example, submitting to the Trinity.

Though Mary was never ordained to a position of leadership in the Church, she is a gift from God and Jesus to the whole Church. When Jesus was dying on the cross, the Scripture records, “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:25–27).

As John’s goal is not primarily and simply to provide a historical narrative, but to provide spiritual and theological truths, one must ask, Why did John include this material in his Gospel? Ireneaus, who was a successor to the Apostle John, described what Jesus had done in Mary. He then identified the Church with Mary in metaphor. Here is the earliest recorded reference to Mary as not only the mother of Christ, but of all Christians: “the pure One [Jesus Christ] opening purely that pure womb [a reference to Mary’s virginity] which regenerates men unto God, and which He Himself made pure.” The Apostolic Tradition, which traces its roots to Irenaeus, sees Mary as a gift from God to the Church. So Mary is not simply the Mother of Jesus, and then the Mother of John the Apostle: Mary is the Mother of the Church, and a type of the Church.

So Mary is a leader and a role model for the whole Church. From her we learn to submit to God, even if what He asks of us will lead to pain. We learn from her that personal sacrifice is necessary for the salvation of souls. She teaches us to pray using the richness of our common tradition, and shows that our relationship with God is not just personal, but corporal and covenantal. She leads not through delegated authority, like the Apostles, but she is a leader nonetheless, for she leads by example. Finally and most importantly, we learn from Mary that “whatsoever He tells you to do, do it.” Mary teaches us that our primary goal in life is to be servants of God and His Christ, in the unity and power of the Holy Spirit.

St. John Climacus: The Forgotten Saint

Fr. Athanasios Papagiannis

Whenever I think of Great Lent, I make it a point to remember a meaningful conversation I had just a few years ago. I was on a pilgrimage in Greece, visiting a centuries-old church, when an old priest sat down next to me and struck up a conversation. At one point he observed that the Christians in America make Christianity look easy.

I sat in silence for a moment because I was surprised by his bold statement. “Why do you say that?” I asked.

“Because you have forgotten about John,” he replied as he let out a grin.

“John who?” I responded, knowing full well that Orthodoxy has a lot of special people named John. “Are you talking about St. John the Baptist or St. John Chrysostom?” I asked.

“Neither,” the old priest replied. “I’m speaking of Saint John, the one with the ladder.”

St. John Climacus is one of the great saints of our Church. He so special that the Church remembers St. John, not once, as we do with most saints, but twice a year. His feast day is always celebrated on March 30th, but the Church also devotes the fourth Sunday of Great Lent to this majestic church father.

The early life of St. John is shrouded in mystery. While we know that he was born in Palestine in the year 579 A.D., not much is known of his parents or of the days of his youth. All we know is that St. John received a general education and that he entered into the monastic ranks at the age of sixteen. From that early age, St. John embraced the life of solitude and *asceticism*, as he progressed greatly in the spiritual life.

To really understand what St. John represents, one has to be familiar with the Book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible. Understanding Exodus is important, because the people of his day revered St. John so much that they saw in him another Moses. Like Moses, St. John spent forty years in the desert. Not only that, but St. John even ascended the same mountain as Moses, Mt. Sinai. He was likened to Moses because, like the great prophet of old who brought down the tablets of the Law, he too brought down a gift to share with the

people. That gift, a book called *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, is still being read by Orthodox Christians today. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a book that describes how man can ascend to God, like the Ten Commandments tells the faithful how they will find order and harmony in their lives.

The comparisons to Moses don’t stop there. Orthodox tradition states that on the very day St. John became the Abbot of the monastery on Mt. Sinai, a miracle took place: while six hundred people were sitting and eating, St. John noticed a man dressed like a Hebrew, wearing a white tunic. He observed this man walking around like a manager, giving instructions to the cooks, servers, and volunteers. When all the pilgrims departed, the servants were sitting by a table wondering where the stranger went. St. John addressed the group and, being full of the Holy Spirit, he informed them that the man in the white tunic was none other than Moses himself.

Moses and St. John had a shared interest: they both sought to deliver their people out of slavery. What Moses did in the past, St. John does eternally by his theology. To this day, people are still being freed by his wisdom.

The writing of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* took place at the end of St. John’s life. Our tradition says that a certain monk begged St. John to write a book that would help Christians progress in the spiritual life. That monk asked St. John to write such an authoritative book because he, like others, observed that the people of the day were losing touch with the tradition that was handed down to them.

Thankfully, a wonderful tradition developed with respect to St. John’s book. Generation after generation, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* has been passed down in many Orthodox families. In fact, over the course of many cen-

turies *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* maintained its popularity among the people. To this day, St. John’s work is a best-seller among Orthodox people. A few decades ago an anthropologist in the Orthodox country of Romania was astonished when he observed that almost every household of Romania – over 95 percent – contained both the Holy Bible and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Many years ago, St. John’s majestic work even migrated to this country with the Orthodox faithful who moved here. As a matter of fact, when the printing press was developed, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* was one of the first books ever published in America. This is how revered his work was.

St. John’s was without question the most loved and read Christian book on spirituality. Times have changed, however. For some reason, American culture has not embraced this wonderful work. There is something about the way we think and live that makes *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* controversial, or perhaps insignificant. This neglect can be observed on many different levels. In academia, for example, Western theologians often remark on how little research has been done with St. John, considering the great impact of his work on the Christian faith. The number of scholars who have written about St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom are many, but the number of Climacan scholars is few for some reason. Even in the Church itself we can see this type of neglect. How many Churches across America are named after St. John? How many icons of St. John are visible in our Churches?

Moreover, it is not a stretch to state that there is a movement in our Church to assume that what St. John writes is only for the monks of Mt. Athos. In Orthodox circles, many people have been turned away from *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The common response to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* today is, “That’s a book that’s too spiritual for you. It’s only to be read by monks.” We say these things and we wonder why our youth leave the Church in search of the spirituality St. John represents.

Indeed, for many modern people what St. John says is too demanding or perhaps too radical for the American way of life. St. John speaks of finding silence; he speaks of fasting and finding deep moments of prayer; he speaks of withdrawing from the world we live in, and even of dying to its wisdom. St. John speaks about turning our back on pleasure and comfort. He speaks against gluttony and self-indulgence. In short he speaks of so many things the world is promoting in our days.

While he may be found to be too radical for today’s Orthodox faithful, the tradition of the Church tells a



different story. Clearly, the Orthodox tradition has always been for monk and layperson alike: to spend Great Lent reading St. John’s majestic work and applying his ideas, according to our situation in life, and then to pass this tradition on to those who follow. Our neglect of St. John has created a great paradox in Christian circles today. Protestant scholars who have focused on studying early Christianity have noticed that the early Christians lived radically. That is to say, they prayed radically, fasted radically and lived out radically simplistic lives. And this astute observation has led many denominations to reevaluate how they do their theology. In short, these Protestants in many respects are thankfully starting to think like Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Christians of past centuries, that is!

This raises an important question: Can the paradox of our time be that these Protestants are becoming more Orthodox by embracing what St. John teaches, while the Orthodox are becoming more Protestant in their

DAILY DEVOTIONS

MARCH 2015
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

1. HEBREWS 11:24–26, 32–12:2; JOHN 1:43–51 (FAST)
2. ISAIAH 4:2–5:7; GENESIS 3:21–4:7; PROVERBS 3:34–4:22 (FAST)
3. ISAIAH 5:7–16; GENESIS 4:8–15; PROVERBS 5:1–15 (FAST)
4. ISAIAH 5:16–25; GENESIS 4:16–26; PROVERBS 5:15–6:3 (FAST)
5. ISAIAH 6:1–12; GENESIS 5:1–24; PROVERBS 6:3–20 (FAST)
6. ISAIAH 7:1–15; GENESIS 5:32–6:8; PROVERBS 6:20–7:1 (FAST)
7. HEBREWS 3:12–16; MARK 1:35–44 (FAST)
8. HEBREWS 1:10–2:3; MARK 2:1–12 (FAST)
9. ISAIAH 8:13–9:7; GENESIS 6:9–22; PROVERBS 8:1–21 (FAST)
10. ISAIAH 9:9–10:4; GENESIS 7:1–5; PROVERBS 8:32–9:11 (FAST)
11. ISAIAH 10:12–20; GENESIS 7:6–9; PROVERBS 9:12–18 (FAST)
12. ISAIAH 11:10–12:2; GENESIS 7:11–8:3; PROVERBS 10:1–22 (FAST)
13. ISAIAH 13:2–13; GENESIS 8:4–22; PROVERBS 10:31–11:12 (FAST)
14. HEBREWS 10:32–38; MARK 2:14–17 (FAST)
15. HEBREWS 4:14–5:8; MARK 8:34–9:1 (FAST)
16. ISAIAH 14:24–32; GENESIS 8:21–9:7; PROVERBS 11:19–12:6 (FAST)
17. ISAIAH 25:1–9; GENESIS 9:8–17; PROVERBS 12:8–22 (FAST)
18. ISAIAH 26:21–27:9; GENESIS 9:18–10:1; PROVERBS 12:23–13:9 (FAST)
19. ISAIAH 28:14–22; GENESIS 10:32–11:9; PROVERBS 13:19–14:6 (FAST)
20. ISAIAH 29:13–23; GENESIS 12:1–7; PROVERBS 14:15–26 (FAST)
21. HEBREWS 6:9–12; MARK 7:31–37 (FAST)
22. HEBREWS 6:13–20; MARK 9:17–31 (FAST)
23. ISAIAH 37:33–38:6; GENESIS 13:12–18; PROVERBS 14:27–15:4 (FAST)
24. ISAIAH 40:18–31; GENESIS 15:1–15; PROVERBS 15:7–19 (FAST)
25. HEBREWS 2:11–18; LUKE 1:24–38 (FAST)
FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION
26. ISAIAH 42:5–16; GENESIS 18:20–33; PROVERBS 16:17–17:17 (FAST)
27. ISAIAH 45:11–17; GENESIS 22:1–18; PROVERBS 17:17–18:5 (FAST)
28. HEBREWS 9:24–28; MARK 8:27–31 (FAST)
29. HEBREWS 9:11–14; MARK 10:32–45 (FAST)
30. ISAIAH 48:17–49:4; GENESIS 27:1–41; PROVERBS 19:16–25 (FAST)
31. ISAIAH 49:6–10; GENESIS 31:3–16; PROVERBS 21:3–21 (FAST)

St. John Climacus

comfortable way of life, by neglecting this important father and relegating him to the monasteries?

Without question the greatest contribution to the Orthodox faith that St. John has made is that his theology takes one from slavery, to the desert, to the Promised Land. He is like Moses in this respect, as he leads one from bondage to freedom.

As we live in a society that promotes comfort and minimizes the Christian faith, we have to recognize the modern heresies would convince good Orthodox Christians that they can progress from slavery to the Promised Land without venturing into the metaphorical desert by embracing the radical lifestyle St. John speaks of and lived by. The hard interior work that St. John speaks of in the Ladder of Divine Ascent is meant for every single Orthodox Christian. It’s meant directly for the monk, but indirectly for the layperson in a modified form.

As we continue to struggle to live the Christian life in America, let us take seriously what that old priest once said about the state of Christianity in America. Maybe we are making living the Christian life look easy. More importantly, let us remember the life of St. John Climacus and cling to the old Orthodox tradition of reading his majestic work.

For, as St. John himself teaches, no one can ascend to the Kingdom without first using a ladder.

Fr. Papagiannis is a Greek Orthodox priest serving at Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in Chicago. He is a former teacher and licensed social worker who lives in the Chicago suburbs with his presbyteria Katerina.



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The Gifts of the Evangelist Luke

Edith Humphrey, Ph.D.

“With Sacred Songs, let us praise the holy Apostle, the Narrator of the Acts of the Apostles, and Author of the Bright Gospel of Christ, the All-Hymned Luke, Whose Fame is not confined to Christ’s Church, for He is the Physician who heals men’s ills, Nature’s frailties, and the soul’s injuries, and he prays unceasingly, for our souls.”

+ Troparion of St. Luke the Evangelist, Tone 5

“The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Luke 10:16–24

The Seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!”

And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to Me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Then turning to the disciples He said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

Luke 10:16-24

The name Luke has become more popular in the last 30 years, moving up to number 28 among boy’s names. This may be due to the long-lasting popularity of Star Wars, and that heart-throb, Luke, who used “the Force!” Our Evangelist Luke, however, did not manipulate divine power, but rather put himself at the service of the holy and personal God. The third Gospel and Acts of the Apostles,

ascribed to him very early in the tradition of the Church, are marked by careful scholarship, exquisite writing, lively imagination and remarkable forthrightness.

In these books we find both a concern for detail, including the timely unfolding of God’s plan in history, the great divine drama. Yet Luke was no bystander, no scholar in an ivory tower writing down all the stories that

others relayed to him. No, he himself was a participant in the actions of the Triune God, and encourages us to be the same. One ancient tradition counts him among the Seventy who announced the coming King from town to town; another says that he met and worked with St. Paul. This is suggested in the Scriptures themselves, for the Acts relates the journeys of the Apostle in terms of “us” (Luke being the implied partner), while Colossians 4:14 mentions the doctor Luke, who accompanied St. Paul, staying with him until the very end of the Apostle’s life (2 Timothy 4:11; Philippians 1:24). Because of the Evangelist’s consistent and self-sacrificial service, our Gospel reading for his feast day is completely appropriate! Like his emblematic symbol, the ox, he was a persistent “beast of burden,” carrying Christ on the way to others in history, and so to us today. For the Evangelist is among those faithful who heard and transmitted the Gospel, and who, by his holy narratives, showed the dramatic coming of the King. Through St. Luke, the window is open so that we, too, can see God the Son and His life among us more clearly.

So let us consider this luminous passage in his Gospel:

“The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” The Seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to Me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.”

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Luke 10:16-24

There is so much in this passage that is shiny, strik-

ing and enlightening. Here our Lord relates a vision – a vision of Satan falling from heaven!

You’d think that St. Luke would make much of this, giving us a blow-by-blow of the heavenly battle. After all, he is the most descriptive of all the evangelists when he depicts the great vision of the Transfiguration, and it is by him that we hear about the drama of Pentecost, and St. Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus (which he relates three times, with increasing detail). But here he lets Jesus’ startling revelation float rather free. Is “I saw Satan fall from heaven” intended as the *interpretation* of what the disciples have been doing – that is, in the actions of the Seventy, Jesus has vanquished the evil one? Or is it the *cause*? – because of Satan’s fall, they are empowered? Or is it a “one-upmanship” of wonder, as though Jesus were implying, “You are amazed because demons are cast out of human hearts? Why, that’s nothing! I have seen the head of them ejected from heaven!” Each one of these interpretations is possible, and they are not mutually exclusive.

Yet to get stalled here, worrying about what precisely Jesus intends by speaking of Satan’s fall, is a distraction from the real brilliance, the very center of the episode. The central light here is not the vision *per se*, but the One who relates it. In the verses just prior to our reading, Jesus has sent out the Seventy, saying that those who receive them will be receiving Himself, and then also the Father who sent Him. Jesus, then, is the central link in this story.

In speaking of Satan’s fall, our Lord directs the attention of the disciples away from their own exultation. He pulls them away from any kind of triumphalism to a sober place: “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” The joy should not come in their prowess, not even in the great downfall of the enemy, but in their being *named* by God. They have nothing to boast about, since they are “simple children” who will be filled through and through with the glory and knowledge that rightfully belongs to Jesus.

The shininess of this episode event is not located in Satan’s dramatic fall from heaven, nor in the status and success of the Seventy, but in the One who has sent them, who reveals mysteries to them, and who speaks to them a word of blessing. They are tempted to be distracted, and we may be tempted by similar distractions, yet Jesus calls them and calls us back to true identity – a name conferred upon them and us by the Father because of the Son, who has made Himself our brother.

It is odd how privilege and humility come together

here. There are very few privileged places that breed humility in us, for the privileged must battle pride or lack of concern for others. The disease of “entitlement” sets in. The disciples, however, are privileged to be *in the presence of Jesus* and to be part of His ministry: their true identity is found as they follow His lead, turning their eyes away from their own situation, and towards God instead. Jesus models this orientation towards God for them, of course, for, as the fourth Gospel puts it, “The Word was *towards* God.”¹ And so our Lord, true to His character, sets His face towards heaven, rejoicing in what the Father has done and is doing: “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will.” It is a true privilege to be joined in name to the Son of Man who suffered, who reigns from the cross, who delights to do the Father’s will, who eats with those on the margin of society, who calls those who know that they need a doctor, who went not only into Jerusalem, but into the little towns in Galilee and even into Samaria, seeking sheep outside the usual fold. We find ourselves united to the One who became a zygote in the womb of a young woman, whose body He had made; who submitted to His parents at age 12, though He could teach the rabbis; who asked a woman for water at a well, though He is the giver of living water; who “learned obedience,” as the author of Hebrews put it – and this is the gift that He passes to us, if we become, like the Seventy, His apprentices.

A humble character is the potent sign of true blessing that Jesus confers upon His own. Consider how much more has been given to us than was given to the Prophets and Kings of Israel! They saw through a glass darkly, but we see that mirror unveiled. Through the Scriptures, through living in the Church, through even our contemplation of the world around, we see so much more than they could, for all is now illumined by the One who sent the Seventy, who cast Satan from heaven, and who gives authority that comes from the Father.

Do we see in those around us in worship saints-in-the-making, in the process of *theosis*? Perhaps so, though only on occasion, because our eyes are dull, and we are, after all, only *on the way* in our transformation. May we truly see the character of the living God, for we all are being changed into the likeness of Jesus. We have it on the greatest authority that we are blessed, because we *know* the One who has changed the whole of history by being plunged deep into the elements of the world, by taking on human flesh, by dying our death: we have

finally glimpsed the main character of the divine story. Nothing will ever be the same!

So let us go back to Jesus’ first words: “The one who hears You hears Me, and the one who rejects You rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.” Perhaps they startle us in our egalitarian age, with what looks to be a chain of command – from the Almighty One, to Jesus, to the Twelve (whom He has appointed in the previous chapter) with the Seventy, to us. No doubt we have much to learn from the Scriptures about the gift of authority in the Church! Let us remember, however, that only a few chapters before our chapter, Jesus has spoken about a different “chain of links” to His gathered Apostles: “Whoever receives this child in my name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For the one who is least among you all is the one who is great” (9:48). Clearly, the Apostles and the Seventy have given great gifts to the Church, and we have need of them, but it is also the case that every humble member of Christ’s body brings a gift to the leadership of the Church. Indeed, he or she brings a gift to the Church as a whole, because he or she bears the image of Christ. The gifts go from the top down, but also from the bottom up – as St. Paul reminds us, the foot and the hand need each other.

Here is the wonder of it all: Jesus assumes a radical solidarity between Himself and those who have been in His presence, whom He sends out. How remarkable! Despite our tendency to fail, we who are *persons* are commissioned to communicate the *person* Jesus, who communicates God the Father. Our faith is, from beginning to end, personal. It is not simply a body of teaching that can be deposited without remainder in a book, or a series of practices that could be learned from a manual, or a philosophy or an ethic. It is a call to communion: our communion with each other, but first with God the Son, directed towards the Father whom Jesus makes known, and in the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps those Seventy were tempted to receive the Lord’s commission as a *carte blanche* of authority, or merely as a theological truth. They were about to learn, on the ground, that this commission was not for their benefit alone, nor was it mere theory. Rather, Jesus was drawing them into *God’s way of acting*!

God had entrusted to them a delivery blessed above all other things, a message concerning the gift of His own self to the world in Jesus. As they continued in mission, as they saw what would happen, these missionaries would come to understand more deeply what it meant to deliver God’s gift. The delivery begins by entering into

homes, healing the sick, and announcing the nearness of God. It may involve rejection, and eventually, for some, the harsh enactment of it by their own martyrdom. (Remember Proto-Martyr Stephen, who was one of the Seventy!) God does not simply give information, He does not simply give a new law, He does not simply bestow authority, or simply grace, but He gives *Himself*.

The God-Man Jesus has come among us. God gives Himself personally to human persons, who in turn represent, as far as they are able, this holy God: “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who hears Me hears the One who sent Me.” It is this thoroughly personal aspect that separates our Christian Way from all the other ways and -isms and philosophies of the world.

When I was a young mother with three children, I would meet another young mother, a Jehovah’s Witness, regularly in the playground near our home in an old neighborhood in Montreal. We agreed on many things, but not on the nature of the faith, nor on the identity of Jesus. These things were connected, I think. To her, the faith was a set of morals and doctrines to pass on to her children: “Good things in, good things out; junk in, junk out,” she would say. For her, Jesus was the Teacher, above everything else. Of course, this was not entirely wrong, but she had missed the mystery: she did not see Jesus as a Person who could be known. Because of this, she also could not appreciate fully the mystery of her children’s own personhood. They were more like pets to be trained than like tiny miniature images of God, with wills and hearts and minds that could be reached only by the Holy Spirit.

When people encounter us, we want to be transpar-

ent enough and vibrant enough that, with all our faults, they can see through us to the living Christ. For this is the light that the Evangelist Luke shines into our lives: he directs us to the *person* Jesus.

Perhaps I can draw a mental diagram of the action in this story, complete with arrows. In the center is Jesus: an arrow from Jesus has sent out the Seventy into the villages to bring light and healing. As the disciples return to their center, they are tempted to dwell on something less worthy, and Jesus, by His words and prayer redirects them: here is an arrow from Jesus to the Father, inviting us to see where true glory lies. Then there is the arrow from Jesus back to the Law and the Prophets, reminding the Seventy and us to see ourselves in continuity with a story that is fulfilled in Him. We have seen Him, and so are blessed! Jesus’ actions and words are arrows pointing out, backwards and up. We, too, are meant to point away from ourselves, directing the gaze of others towards God’s activity in our world. Yet despite this model of redirection – or perhaps because of it – in the end we find our gaze fixed on Jesus. For we know that He Himself is that great mystery: “All things have been handed over to Me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” We are blessed because it is His words that we have heard, and His face that we have seen. He speaks and shows Himself in many ways, in the written Word, in the sacraments, in the world at large, and in the brothers and sisters whom He has given to us. Thanks be to God, who has given us the Evangelist Luke, and thanks be for the gifts that St. Luke gives to us, by the grace of God!

Dr. Humphrey teaches New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

1. The first verse of the Gospel of John can be translated, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God, and the Word was God.”

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

ABDEL-KARIM, Walid, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on June 8, 2014, at All Saints Church in Chicago, Illinois. He is attached to that parish.

BARDWELL, Andrew, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 26, 2014, at All Saints of North America Church in Homer, Alaska. He is assigned to that parish.

CHILDS, James, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on May 11, 2014, at St. George Church, Fishers, Indiana. He is attached to that parish.

COOK, Michael, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on June 29, 2014, at the Parish Life Conference hosted by St. John Chrysostom Church. He is attached to Holy Cross Church, Dorr, Michigan.

DOUGHTERY, Kevin, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 25, 2014, at St. John Cathedral in Eagle River, Alaska. He is assigned to that parish.

GLEASON, Deacon Joseph, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on December 21, 2014, at Christ the King Mission Station in Omaha, Illinois. He is attached to Christ the King Mission Station.

HANNA, Samer, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on April 4, 2014, at St. Mary’s Basilica. He is attached to that parish.

TRANT, Samuel, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on January 12, 2015, at Christ the Saviour Mission in Jacksonville, Texas. He is attached to that parish.

ELEVATED

SANDERS, Deacon Niketas, to the rank and dignity of Archdeacon by Bishop BASIL on January 11, 2015.

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SHARING THE FAITH

Department of Christian Education



BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

Great Lent is upon us. Are you fasting well? Would it help to know why we fast?

Many are the reasons for fasting; it is never an end in itself. Recently, I came across the idea, new to me, that we fast to *humble* ourselves. A person who is hungry is in a weakened position – a humbled position – especially if that hunger is extreme. Our self-imposed hunger, to the degree that we engage in the fast, humbles us before God. We often take God for granted. The Great Fast is a call to remember the God of the Pantocrator icon.

A leader of a community asked Abba Poemen: “How can I gain the fear of God?” Abba Poemen replied: “How indeed can we gain the fear of God when we have bellies full of cheese and jars of salted fish?” Abba Poemen thus teaches us that the ultimate goal of fasting is to help lead us, or to open us, to the fear of God.

The essay offered at the conclusion is a very good summary of fasting, and includes the idea of fasting for humility.

Blessed Lent,

Carole A. Buleza

DEPARTMENTAL NOTES

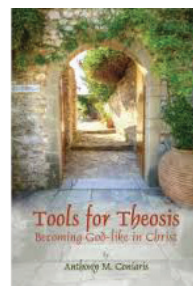
Church School Directors. Join us on Facebook! Leslee Abud is monitoring the page, Orthodox Christian Church School Directors. Share your ideas; ask questions; get inspiration. News from the wider Orthodox world is usually posted on this page as well. Leslee has also opened a page for “Creative Festivals.”

List-Serve. With the part-time help at the office of Kristina and Leslie, I will attempt to maintain a list-serve for e-mail notices of web postings and news. Church School Directors, Teachers and all who are interested, please submit your names to aodce@aol.com. Subject: list-serve.

Department to Fund Training Sessions Now. If your parish needs a training event, or wants to host a training event for the 2015–2016 school year, now is the time to put in your request. Please contact your Diocesan Christian Education Coordinator *before the end of this Church School year* so funds can be budgeted. The cost of the events will be covered by registration fees and any monies the host parish can contribute, with the Department funding the remainder. If the host parish cannot make a contribution, the Department will cover the costs.

We work with the OCEC to staff training events for Church School Directors and Teachers. Starting this year, in addition to working with the OCEC, our Coordinators and Associates will be available to present workshops based on the sessions of previous Orthodox Institutes. These are listed on our website.

Parish Life Conferences. Along with an update on the work of the Department, we will be presenting the keynote session from the 2014 Orthodox Institute, “Tools for *Theosis*,” which is based on the recently released book of the same name by Fr. Anthony Coniaris.



Internet Ministry Preview

The Department’s internet presence includes two Facebook pages: the “Orthodox Christian Parenting” page and the “Orthodox Christian Church School Teachers” page, which are duplicated in the form of blogs on WordPress. In addition, we post on Pinterest. Both the Facebook pages and the WordPress entries offer weekly notes (brief articles). Facebook and WordPress followers are invited to comment with their own ideas, and/or stories. We also welcome suggestions and ideas for notes. Here is a peek at what is coming.



Parents: Great Lent Ideas and Book Club.

In the months of February and March, the parenting page and blog will feature family ideas for Great Lent. Our goal is to become more Christ-centered. One way to achieve this is with a calendar that suggests family activities for each day. Watch for news of the calendar on the parenting pages.

The parenting page and blog will also feature a Lenten book club. Join us as we read together *Meditations for Great Lent: Reflections on the Triodion*, by Vassilios Papavassiliou. All who wish to participate will read a few of the meditations each week, and share their take on those meditations with other parents. The Orthodox Facebook and WordPress Parenting community can share the Lenten journey in this way.

Church School Teachers: Great Lent Resources.

The Facebook and WordPress pages will provide a Lenten knowledge base for our Church School Teachers. Brief readings from important Orthodox authors will be offered to clarify, for example, the Presanctified Liturgy, or the term *Triodion*. In addition, the pages will be a source of ideas and resources that will be a springboard for lesson planning and will inspire creativity.



We welcome your presence in our social media communities. We would love to hear what you are learning and discovering as you raise and/or teach children in your care. May God bless us all this Great Lent,

Kristina Wenger

At Facebook.com

Orthodoxchristianparenting
Orthodoxchristiansundaychurchschoolteachers
Orthodoxchristianchurchschoolteachers
Creative Festivals

At WordPress.com

Orthodoxchristianparenting
Orthodoxchristianchurchschoolteachers
www.pinterest.com/aodce



The 2015 Orthodox Institute for Continuing Education in the Faith will address two aspects of adult education. First, programs that are successful at the parish level, and are “ready-to-use,” will be presented by their authors. These programs can be a few weeks to a few months long. Second, on the individual level, books that have self-study guides will be shown, and self-study programs will be available for viewing. In addition, literature on special diploma programs and institute programs will be available and explained in an expository Orthodox educational session. Mark your calendars for November 5–8, 2015.



it is clear that fasting existed before the “original sin” of Adam and Eve, and it was not ordered as a cure for their sin. Fasting in Paradise was abstaining from certain food – namely, “the fruit of the tree.” The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as well as all other trees in Paradise, were created by God and, as such, preceded Satan’s sinful machinations. God’s commandment to Adam and Eve not to eat of the particular fruit was given to teach humankind discipline, self-control and spiritual growth. This means that the first man in Paradise was not perfect, but was good, and able to improve and develop spiritually and morally.

Fasting understood in this way was practiced both in the Old and New Testament and throughout the entire history of the Church. Noted Orthodox theologian Father Alexander Schmemmann, speaking about fasting in the Old and New Testament, saw a great similarity and interdependence between two events in the Bible – one at the beginning of the Old Testament and the other at the beginning of the New Testament. He writes:

The first is the ‘breaking of the fast’ by Adam in Paradise. He ate of the forbidden fruit. This is how

of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free...? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him... then shall your light break forth like the dawn ... (Isaiah 58).

In the Old Testament fasting is sometimes preparation for the Feast days, but more generally it is a sign of humility before God. Fasting accompanied mourning and repentance. In time of necessity or danger, it was appropriate for an individual or the whole community to fast. Fasting, so to speak, reinforced urgent prayer. How seriously it might be taken up, to the extent that an earnest man of prayer might become weak and thin through lack of nourishment, is shown by Psalm 109:24: “My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh faileth of fatness.”

Fasting in the New Testament was introduced by our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave us a great example of fasting. After His Baptism in the river of Jordan He withdrew into the wilderness, where He spent forty days and forty nights in prayer and fasting in preparation for His sacred ministry. Jesus taught His disciples and followers to fast.

God. It is to give power to the soul so that it will not yield to temptation and sin. According to St. Seraphim, fasting is an “indispensable means” of gaining the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, and Jesus Himself taught that some forms of evil cannot be conquered without it. When the Apostles failed to heal a sick and suffering child, Christ explained that “this kind [meaning this kind of devil] can come out only by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 12:21). Commenting on this, St. John Chrysostom said, “These are like two wings that carry a person to the heights of God.”

The Apostles of Christ continued in prayer and fasting, and commanded others to do the same. They fasted also as they accomplished their ministries by the power of the Holy Spirit and by prayer, as we reads in the Acts:

Now in the church at Antioch ... while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off (Acts. 13:-13).

Today, I think it is safe to say, the practice and idea of

THE MEANING OF FASTING

THE MEANING OF FASTING IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

by Fr. Milan Savich

Fasting is as old as the human race. Fasting was practiced by pagan religions, Judaism and Christianity, and it was generally considered an important element of religious life, although with different practices and understanding. In the ancient religions of the East fasting meant a complete abstention from food for a certain period of time – one day or more. The origin of fasting as a moral discipline, especially among the old pagan religions, is very obscure, just as their understanding of God was inadequate and vague.

The monotheistic, God-revealed religion of the Chosen People knew about fasting. From the Old Testament we learn that God instituted fasting in Paradise when He said: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). From this

man’s original sin is revealed to us. Christ, the new Adam – and this is the second event – begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and succumbed to temptation. The result of Adam’s failure is expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruit of Christ’s victory is the destruction of death and return to Paradise. It is clear, that in this perspective, fasting is revealed to us as something decisive and ultimate in importance. It is not mere ‘obligation,’ a custom; it is connected with the very mystery of life and death, of salvation and damnation.”

St. Basil the Great confirms the above statement by saying, “Because we did not fast, we were chased out of Paradise; let us fast now, so that someday we return there.”

We have many shining examples of fasting in the Old and New Testament. Moses fasted forty days before receiving from God the Ten Commandments. The prophet Isaiah wrote about fasting centuries before Christ’s coming:

Is not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds

He told them not to fast like the Pharisees, but when they fast bodily they should be completely natural in their behavior – humble and penitent.

“And when ye fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by men, but by your Father Who is in secret. And your Father Who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16–18).

Here we should mention that fasting in the Orthodox Church has two aspects: physical and spiritual. The first one implies abstinence from rich food, such as dairy products, eggs and all kinds of meat. Spiritual fasting consists in abstinence from evil thoughts, desires, and deeds. The main purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate oneself from dependence on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of

fasting is largely ignored. Some people say that God’s people need not fast since we are saved by grace and not by works, and that fasting can easily become hypocritical, done merely for show and for the condemnation of others. Many others generally dismiss fasting as something old-fashioned, simple and naïve. “This is the twentieth century; those rules were made for the past and simpler days.”

Nonetheless, in spite of the present practice of many people, we must take the practice of fasting seriously, if for no other reason, then out of respect for other people, throughout Christian history, who have taken it seriously. We all need to develop the habit of saying No to our carnal passions and desires. What we need is self-discipline and self-control. These are acquired only through regular spiritual exercise – namely, fasting.

Fasting is not at all an act of mortification for mortification’s sake. It is not a “little suffering” which is somehow pleasing to God. It is not a punishment which is

to be sorrowfully endured in payment for sins. On the contrary, fasting for a Christian, should be a joyful experience, because fasting is a discipline which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves in order to become better persons and better Christians. The sin of not fasting is the sin of failing to employ a practice which is absolutely necessary to a sinful person in his struggle to overcome his sins and to gain the love and communion of God.

Fasting is an art mastered by the Saints. These holy men and women, who have taken their religion and fasting seriously, can be of great help to us. They offer a number of recommendations for fasting.



Fr. Stavrofor fell asleep in the Lord in the year 2010 at age 90. The article is reprinted with permission of the Diocese of New Gracanica and Mid-western America of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

1. Fasting is essential to regain control over our bodies.

We live in a pluralistic and secularistic society where the biblical idea of fasting is completely ignored and forgotten. “Gluttony has become a way of life for a fallen man and, it affects every area of life, leaving us wide open to all types of temptation. We all eat too much, and fasting is the only way to end this unnatural obsession with food. Fasting puts food into its proper perspective. We must eat in order to live, but we shouldn’t live simply to eat.” St. Isaac of Syria said: “The first commandment given to our nature in the beginning was the fasting from food and in this the head of our race (Adam) fell. Those who wish to attain the fear of God, therefore, should begin to build where the building was first fallen. They should begin with the commandment to fast.”

2. Fasting simplifies our lives.

“By eating less, we can pay attention to more important matters, such as our relationship with God.” Fasting is part of the spiritual life without which the soul perishes, suffocated by the flesh and choked by carnal pleasures. The effort enlightens the mind, strengthens the spirit,

controls the emotions and tames the passions. Thus “a man who strives for salvation... must not allow himself to eat to fullness ...” says St. Gregory of Sinai. St. Isaac of Syria says, “Meager food at the table of the pure cleanses the soul of those who partake from all passion ... for the work of fasting and vigil is the beginning of every effort against sin and lust ... almost all passionate drives decrease through fasting.” An old man in the desert was asked why he was so severe on his body. He answered simply, “If I don’t kill it, it kills me.” By this the holy fathers taught us to be killers of passions and not killers of the body. Partake of everything that is permissible with thanksgiving, to the glory of God and avoid boastful arrogance; but refrain from every excess (the monks Callistus and Ignatius, *Directions to Hesychasts*, 14c.).

3. Fasting “lightens our load” and makes it easier to pray.

“For many people the refusal to fast is just one more excuse to cut themselves off from God. The person who wants to pray better should eat less. This makes the mind and the spirit less sluggish. We are then more capable of lifting our minds and hearts to God.” St. Isaac of Syria says: “As long as man’s mouth is sealed by fasting his mind will meditate on the repentance of his soul.” Even the old Latins knew that *plenus veter non studet libenter* (“a full belly doesn’t like studying”).

4. Fasting restores discipline to our lives.

“How many of us can honestly say that we are disciplined in spiritual matters as we should be? Fasting may just be the beginning of our journey toward spiritual seriousness, but we all have to start somewhere. We can all see what the lack of real discipline has done to American moral life. The same happens to our own spiritual lives without discipline. Fasting is the beginning of this discipline.” That is why the Canons of the Church Councils – Trullo, Gangra and Laodicia, as well as the rules and regulations of Sts. Dionisius, Peter and Timothy of Alexandria – order us to fast. According to Milas, “The Church has introduced fasting in the life of a Christian in order to enable man to live a life of piety and repentance. This regulation is based on the practice of the Church in the Old Testament and the examples of its Founder and the Apostles in the New Testament. The fast days which we must observe are ordered by the Church authorities and, therefore, are obligatory for all, except the sick; if a clergyman disobeys this rule he shall be deposed, and a layman excommunicated.”

[The article continues with four additional points. It may be found in its entirety on the Church School Directors page at www.antician.org/christianeducation]

IOCC Provides Vital Winter Relief in Syria

Freezing temperatures, heavy snow and chilling winds sweeping across Syria are putting thousands of young lives in jeopardy, as displaced mothers struggle to keep their small children warm and sheltered from the harsh winter conditions. In the frigid weather, many live in shelled-out buildings with no doors or windows, or in temporary shelters with no heat. There is a great need for warm clothing.

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is responding with the distribution of handmade sweater sets for 600 children, crafted last summer by 34 displaced Syrian women taught to knit through a cash-for-work program. IOCC and its church partner in Syria, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOPA), offered the one-month training as a way to help Syria’s most vulnerable families achieve some financial independence. The new skills help provide vital income for the women and their families, while displaced Syrian children benefit by receiving warm clothes.

Along with the training, IOCC/GOPA also provides the wool and needles used to craft hand-knit sweaters and leggings for displaced infants and toddlers. Many of the knitters, unemployed and displaced widows with no means of financial support, are especially grateful for the new skills that allow them to work where they live and remain with their own children.

“Thanks to this program, people who are able to work and have some experience can earn a living without asking for help from anyone,” said Shahira, an elderly widow who has spent the past three years living in a Damascus shelter with her three children. “With the money we make we can provide for our personal needs, from clothing to medicine.”

The cash-for-work program established in 2013 by IOCC/GOPA, in cooperation with local community leaders, has provided an essential source of income to more than 1,500 jobless Syrians who have struggled to provide for their families through four years of conflict. Besides teaching knitting, the program gives displaced Syria women and men new skills like sewing



As thousands of Syrian mothers struggle to keep their small children warm during Syria’s harsh winter, IOCC/GOPA is responding with sweater sets made by displaced Syrian women taught to knit through a cash-for-work program. The new skills help provide vital income and displaced Syrian children benefit by receiving warm clothes to protect them against bitter cold. photo: GOPA

school uniforms, and harnesses skilled manpower for community projects like cleaning up and restoring public spaces.

Beyond the immediate benefits of providing income and bringing comfort to Syria's most vulnerable, the program helps displaced people by giving them productive things to do. For families like Shahira's, whose lives have been devastated by the civil strife in Syria, the psychological benefits of the work may be as beneficial as the economic impact. "This program has helped a lot of women earn the money they needed," said Shahira. "It also helps needy children and displaced families like mine by providing them with winter clothes they could not buy themselves. Knowing that we can help others makes us work even harder."

Since 2012, IOCC, an ACT Alliance member, has been addressing the well-being of Syria's most vulnerable people by providing urgently needed humanitarian relief and self-help programs to 2.4 million people inside Syria affected by the crisis. In addition to its work inside Syria, IOCC staff is working regionally to address the growing needs of refugees and inhabitants of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Armenia.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can help the victims of poverty and conflicts around the world by making a financial gift to the **International Emergency Response Fund** which will provide immediate relief, as well as long-term support through the provision of emergency aid, recovery assistance and other support. To make a gift, please visit www.iocc.org or call toll-free at 1-877-803-IOCC (4622), or mail a check or money order payable to IOCC, P.O. Box 17398, Baltimore, MD 21297.

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

IOCC is the official humanitarian aid agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America. Since its inception in 1992, IOCC has delivered \$488 million in relief and development programs to families and communities in more than 50 countries. IOCC is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of more than 140 churches and agencies engaged in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy, and a member of InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based secular and faith-based organizations working to improve the lives of the world's most poor and vulnerable populations. To learn more about IOCC, visit www.iocc.org.

Media contact: Rada K. Tierney, IOCC Media Relations, 443-823-3489, rtierney@iocc.org



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Oratorical Festival Loving God and Others

Irene Snyder

Ever since I was a little girl, my parents would emphasize to my siblings and me the importance of loving “the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” just as Jesus taught in Luke 10:27. Although, as a child I didn’t understand how I could possibly be expected

to love God, someone that I couldn’t even see, more than my own parents and family. However, I was even more perplexed by the second verse that my mom would frequently quote, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). While teaching that the concept of our “neighbor” included everyone around us, she instructed us to both love and pray for the kids who would swear and basically mock the presence of God. This commandment to love one another with Agape love, involves ultimately desiring good for others, and it pertains to all aspects of our lives as Orthodox Christians — to bear witness to the love of Christ, while also genuinely showing kindness toward our countless neighbors. As Saint John Chrysostom stated in *The Love Chapter*, “All things in the eyes of God are second to love” (77). This afternoon it is my hope to share with you what I believe it is to truly love the Lord my God and my neighbor as myself, while also sharing stories of my own life experiences and lessons learned.

First, I would like to begin with the idea of love itself, which is considered to be the greatest of virtues, as written in First Corinthians: “faith, hope, and love abides, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). This verse mentions the term “love,” although it is not referring to sentimental and superficial love. While these two lesser forms are not necessarily evil or wrong, they can be temporary and fleeting, not inherently seeking the betterment of others. However, Agape love is different from these two, being wholly unselfish, even to the extent of self-sacrifice. As stated in the Gospel of John “Greater love has

no one than this, to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus Christ ultimately exhibited this idea of self-sacrifice and Agape when he gave His life as “a ransom for many,” (Matthew 20:28) due to his great love for us. As Father Harakas stated, “Agape love is God, acting in a way that looks out for our benefit — even though He has nothing to gain from it for Himself” (Harakas 192). It is through agape love that we’re able to give of ourselves as well.

Since Christ sacrificed His life for us, it is imperative that we love Him while also bearing witness to His word. St. Nikon of Optina remarked, “If we will always be with Christ and in Christ, then we will have power and might to bear witness of Him; and we will have courage, firmness, and strength to confess Him, and confess, not only with the tongue, but [also] with our very life.” In accordance with this concept of bearing witness to God, I would like to share a story with you today from my freshman year in college. On my first day of English class, the professor instructed us to “go around the room and tell everyone the following: your name, your major, and your favorite swear word.” Every student then proceeded to do as they were told, reciting several vulgar words, leaving the rest of the class, as well as the professor, laughing and smiling. However, when my turn came to answer his questions, I stated my name and my major, but then remarked that I don’t swear — much to the surprise of my professor and classmates.

Correspondingly, in order to truly love God, we must also fear Him and strive to follow His word throughout life, without fearing what others may think. As Elder Thaddeus declared, “The fear of God is when you love Him, when you truly love Him with all your heart and you strive never to offend or sadden Him — not only with your deeds, actions, and words, but also with your thoughts” (“Daily Lives of Saints”). This is a principal aspect of life, especially as a teenager in either high school or college when there are others who often stray from the narrow path and reject our beliefs. During this past school year I would often go to lunch with friends, and several times they would make very crude remarks. They all laughed together at these stories that were shared, but I refused to take part in it. Similarly, I was not ashamed to make the sign of the cross before each meal, regardless of what they may have been thinking. Although I certainly would

not judge those students who chose to speak in such a manner, I would also like to bear witness of Christ to the best of my ability in whatever I do, thereby refusing to adjust to the social norms in society. Elder Paisios the Athonite stated, “Regardless of the reason that someone does something, you must put a good thought in your mind. A good thought contains love; it disarms the other person and makes him behave properly” (“Daily Lives of Saints”). I believe that instead of judging others for their deeds, we can keep God’s commandments in our hearts, striving to please Him as opposed to our friends and classmates. As proclaimed at each Divine Liturgy, “With the fear of God, faith, and love draw near” (“Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom” 32).

Regarding the love of God and the keeping of His will, our Lord’s second commandment is that “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27), and in order to truly love God we must also love our neighbor, because God created all of us in His image. As Saint John Climacus wrote in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, “He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, because the second is a proof of the first.” Our neighbor is the man who just cut ahead of us in line at the theatre, as well as the person we see walking around with a scowl on their face. The lives of these supposed strangers that we see each day are unknown to us, and we cannot know what their story is, or what they may be going through at the time that prompts their positive or negative behavior. For example, a couple years ago, I was a pediatric assistant at the local hospital, and one day I was assigned to discharge a young girl by wheelchair, who the nurses deemed unfriendly, as she refused to smile or even speak. She was initially very quiet; however, after some time I began talking with her, asking questions, and giving her big smiles. Consequently, by the time we reached the drop off area, she was smiling and laughing. I may not have understood her story, but I learned that just taking the time to care, smile, and love can make someone’s day. Jesus stated in the Gospel of John, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 15:13). Therefore, it is important to serve others with love and joy. Furthermore, Saint John Chrysostom states in *The Love Chapter*, “Don’t seek your own good that you may find your own good, for your own profit lies in the profit of your neighbor and his in yours” (46). This also involves not simply tolerating our neighbor or helping them out of obligation, but truly loving and living by God’s commandments. It may have been my duty as a volunteer to transport this girl, but I was not obligated to carry on a long conversation. However, by doing so I not only made her happy, but I myself received much

more back than I gave — learning this valuable lesson of love toward others.

Subsequently, Jesus also instructed us to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27-28). Although it is certainly important to love those who love us, it is usually much more difficult to love those who are unkind and hateful. For instance, I recently saw a news story about a woman whose twenty-year-old son had been murdered in 1993. Despite losing her only son, this woman chose not to be bitter or vengeful toward the murderer, rather visiting and talking with him before his release from prison. Currently, the two are neighbors, literally living right next door to each other as close friends. The former murderer’s life was changed as a result of the woman’s kindness, forgiveness, and love, as he now sings praises to God in both churches and prisons. This story really exemplifies the power of forgiveness, and has also helped me to realize that if this woman was able to forgive and then love the man who murdered her son, I certainly should be able to love those who are merely unkind to me. Being home schooled, I was often excluded and teased, as I’m sure countless other teenagers have been; however, that is no excuse not to forgive and love as Christ teaches. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote, “[love] puts up with everything: since, come what may, he who loves can never hate. This then is the greatest of virtues” (53).

In conclusion, love is an imperative aspect of our lives as Orthodox Christians, having the power to extinguish hatred and evil. James wrote in his Epistle “Grass would more easily endure a scorching fire than the devil the flame of love” (James 1:11). In the midst of love, evil cannot endure, and if we truly have love in our hearts, as God commanded us, we cannot hate or have ill will toward those who are unkind. Our Lord commands us to love those who do evil to us, and as Saint Maximus the Confessor stated, “Christ’s friends are not loved by all, but they sincerely love all” (“Daily Lives of Saints”). We are all children of God regardless of race, background or beliefs, and it is pivotal to refrain from judging those who are different, instead witnessing to the love of Christ. As Saint John Chrysostom wrote in the Love Chapter, “All things in the eyes of God are second to love” (77). Therefore, it is necessary to love Him, and our neighbor as ourselves, exhibiting kindness even to unfriendly strangers, while also attaining the willingness to sacrifice ourselves for our neighbor, as well for our faith, just as Christ died to save our sins. This is Agape love.

Irene Snyder, 18, is a member of St. John Chrysostom Church in York, Pennsylvania.

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Oratorical
Contest
Judges’ Choice
from the
Dioceses of
the East

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Archdeacon Elias Hamaty Reposes

We regret to announce the repose of the soul of the servant of God and Archdeacon Elias “Ely” Hamaty. Deacon Ely fell asleep in the Lord on Sunday afternoon, December 28th, at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Brockton Massachusetts, surrounded by his devoted family.

Deacon Ely was born in 1934 and raised in the “Syrian Colony” of Boston’s South End. His parents, Mousa and Nour Hamaty were among the early members of St. George Orthodox Church of Boston. The Hamaty family emigrated from the village of Aafsdig, Al-Koura, near the

Balamand Monastery, where Mousa attended school and later worked as a cook. Fr. Ely’s grandparents, Simon and Mariana, also worked at the Balamand Monastery. After arriving in Boston, his parents operated a successful family-owned restaurant in the South End. Fr. Ely entered the family business and operated the restaurant before opening his own electronics firm. ELCO Electronics specialized in marine electronics and communications. Fr. Ely was an avid yachtsman and sports angler who fished the waters from Alaska to the Caribbean.

Growing up, Fr. Ely attended St. George Church where his uncle, Archimandrite Elias Hamaty once

served as pastor. Deacon Ely assisted his uncle as an acolyte, reader and chanter, and he was active in the parish youth organization. He served on several parish committees and was a past-president of the parish council. Father was also an active member of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. In 1988 he was ordained a sub-deacon. He later he enrolled in the St. Stephens Course at the Antiochian House of Studies. His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP, ordained Deacon Ely to the diaconate at St. George Church on April 30th, 1995, during the St. George Feast Day celebrations. Deacon Ely developed a regular visitation ministry to the elderly and shut-ins, as well as to hospitalized parishioners. Father also developed an effective outreach ministry for the bereaved. On November 24th, 2012, he was elevated to the rank of Archdeacon in recognition of his exemplary and dedicated service. Deacon Ely and his beloved wife Millie maintained a winter home in Punta Gorda, Florida; while there, he served at St. Paul’s Antiochian Orthodox Church in nearby Naples.

In addition to his beloved wife, Millie, Deacon Ely is survived by his son Richard and his wife Rhoda, and his daughter Deborah and her husband Daniel Galambos. He was preceded in death by his sons Stephen and David. Deacon Ely was the grandfather of Susan O’Toole, Richard Hamaty, and Adam, David and Stephen Galambos. He was also the great-grandfather of Sofia, Joseph, Sasha and Nadia.

Bishop ANTHONY Dedicates Church in Bowling Green

During the weekend of June 13–15, 2014, the Holy Apostles Mission parish in Bowling Green, Kentucky, joyfully welcomed Bishop ANTHONY and other honored guests to their hometown for a very special occasion: the dedication of their church building and grounds. It was an exciting and busy weekend for everyone involved!

Bishop ANTHONY arrived on Friday and shared a meal with Fr. Michael Nasser, the priest of Holy Apostles Mission, his wife, and members of the Parish Council. On Saturday, he attended a special (and delicious!) lunch with the Ladies Society of Holy Apostles. While there, he offered an impromptu talk about the death of loved ones and our continuing relationships with them, which was very meaningful to all present. That evening, the parish celebrated Vespers, following which Sayidna gave an address entitled, “The American Experience: The Cost of Freedom Is the Cross of Christ.” Afterwards, Bishop ANTHONY answered many questions from the audience, which included community members of different faiths who had been invited to the event.

Sunday, the day of the dedication, included a visit by Sayidna with the church school children, Orthros, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy (the first to be held in Bowling Green), and the induction of three members of Holy Apostles into the Order of St. Ignatius. (Anna Norris and Michael Trivizadakis joined the Order, and



Fr. Michael was a surprise inductee, sponsored by an anonymous donor as a Life Member.) Dan Abraham, past Chair of the Order, was present for the weekend, and in a particularly touching moment for Fr. Michael, Dan gave him his own cross and ribbon to wear. Finally, Bishop ANTHONY asked God’s blessings on the new facility and our community, blessing and dedicating us to the service of God and to His Glory.

Later that afternoon Fr. Michael, parish members, and guests from the community and from sister parishes in Louisville, Lexington, and Nicholasville, Kentucky, as well as from Evansville, Indiana, and Franklin, Tennessee, attended a

banquet with Bishop ANTHONY at the Holiday Inn Convention Center. Here, Fr. Michael and parish members spoke of the founding and the growth of the mission, including a slideshow of photos showing the parish over the years and all the work that has been done to make the parish building and grounds what they are today. A very special part of the banquet was the awarding of Certificates of Meritorious Service to Anna Norris, and Kevin and Jeanette Burt, all founding members of the parish who have been instrumental in its establishment. These awards are believed to be the last two awards of this type signed by our late Metropolitan PHILIP, making them, of course, even more special. Before depart-

ing, Bishop ANTHONY blessed all present with one last talk, encouraging us to continue to sacrifice and serve our God.

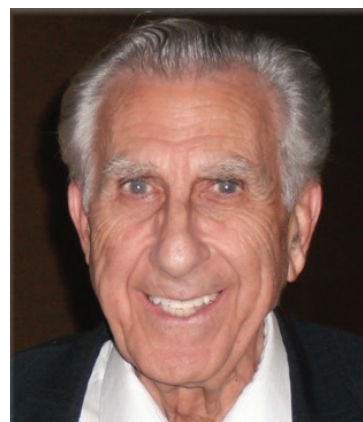
The dedication was a long-anticipated event for the faithful of Bowling Green, especially since it had been planned originally for the weekend after the sad passing of our Metropolitan PHILIP and had to be postponed. All felt blessed by it. The group that became Holy Apostles Mission started meeting in 2006, had its first Orthodox service in April 2008 (served by the beloved, late Fr. Alexander Atty from Louisville, Kentucky), and since then has experienced amazing growth in size and scope. After holding services in various rental locations, including

a funeral home and a storefront space behind a tattoo parlor, Fr. Michael and members of the parish decided, with the blessing of Bishop ANTHONY, to buy a house with over nine acres of land close to the commercial center of Bowling Green and convert it into a church



in the spring of 2012. Since then, substantial work has been done almost entirely on a volunteer basis by members and friends of the church to convert the inside of the house into a nave, sanctuary, and office space for Fr Michael. What had been the garage was doubled in size and has also been beautifully renovated to be a parish hall. Holy Apostles Mission currently has approximately a hundred members, including many children of all ages, and is growing everyday. We thank Sayidna ANTHONY for the inspiration he brought during his visit and hope we are up for the challenging path he has set before us.

Sally Anna Boyle



Philip Holway

The death of the servant of God Philip Holway has left an empty spot in the lives of many church members. They appreciated the friendship and many talents of this special person. In every service,

Lenten obligations, Evening Divine Liturgies, and Sunday Matins and Divine Liturgy, the late Philip Holway was there, as a Senior Chanter, musician, and choir member. When he put his choir robe on he knew the special responsibilities that were laid on his shoulders. Every Sunday morning, after he had offered his prayers before the *proskomedia* table (the table of the Preparation), he greeted me and said: "Every day is a bonus."

If you ask parishioners after thirty years of prayer, how they feel about church life, they will say that the chanting was fine, and the church was all right. All such answers have some "Christian touch." They are like the cloth that we wear, which may hide the human person behind them. Philip Holway was interested in something beyond appearances and means; his goal was the essence of the prayer.

We shall remember fondly the discipline that Philip Holway instilled in those who chanted along with him. He encouraged new talent. He wanted chanters and choir members to know that the presence of Christ is the goal and final purpose of what we read, say, and do during liturgical and non-liturgical services.

Philip means "horseman" in Greek, and we now can say that the horseman has dismounted, for he is on his way to the Kingdom of God. This is the destination for which he lived and which he anticipated faithfully. We who are left behind will definitely miss him, and he will not be forgotten. *Holway* in Arabic is "sweet," and Philip gave a sweet touch to our lives. We pray that others, too, will be inspired to offer their talents and gifts in the choir or in learning to chant.



May Philip rest in peace and may our God remember him in His kingdom. Philip Holway has joined "the choir of the saints who have found the fountain of life and the door of paradise." May we also, through faith and repentance, find our way to salvation. Memory Eternal!

Saint Mary in Wilkes-Barre Celebrates 110 Years

The people of St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church celebrated the Church's 100th Anniversary over the weekend of October 10-12, 2014. The Anniversary Committee, chaired by Suanne Moses, had prepared special events all year, leading up to our weekend of cele-

bration. On Palm Sunday, we took a group picture of parishioners, followed for the first time by family photos for the anniversary book. Bishop THOMAS presided over the events. On Friday morning, the parish had the funeral of the oldest parishioner, Lorraine George, who was 98. Bishop THOMAS arrived earlier to be able to serve her funeral.

On Friday evening parishioners brought many different kinds of delicious fast-day foods for a potluck dinner. The hall was decorated according to a beautiful fall theme, adding to the festive and joyous atmosphere.

On Saturday, Bishop THOMAS went to visit his family's restaurant

in Wilkes-Barre, and enjoyed hot dogs and hamburgers from Abe's Restaurant on Main Street. He reminisced there about his family during the meal.

On Saturday evening Bishop THOMAS presided over Great Vespers and several seminary students from St. Tikhon's Seminary chanted. Two of the former pastors of St. Mary's, Father Mark Sahady and his family, and Father John Winfrey, arrived for the occasion and also joined in the chanting. On Sunday another former pastor, Father Thomas Zain, with his family, joined the celebration at the Banquet. Vespers was followed by a dinner of kibbee iros and other Arabic foods prepared by our



parishioners. Drew Mamary Jr., served as our DJ for the night, and provided American music, while Riad Attar, John Hyder, Christopher Kerlish and John Kerlish also played Arabic musical instruments. They provided the music for dancing during the Hafli.

On Sunday morning Bishop THOMAS, Father David Hester, pastor of St. Mary's, and Fathers Mark Sahady and John Winfrey, as well as Deacon John Karam, and several subdeacons served Orthros and the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Bishop THOMAS spoke in his sermon about the Gospel passage of the day, reminding the parishioners of the importance of their service to Christ in his Holy Church.

During the grand banquet in the afternoon, another parishioner, David Abraham, along with his acoustic trio, played music of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, which was enjoyed by all. Bishop THOMAS spoke at the banquet of his many memories of visiting St. Mary's in

his youth, when he came to visit his grandparents and his relatives in Wilkes-Barre. Father David spoke of the many contributions of the parishioners and the hard, constant work that they do for the parish. Suanne Moses, the chair of the Parish Council, thanked the many people who put in countless hours to prepare for the weekend celebration. Nancy Tenneriello led those in attendance in "God Bless America," while one of our oldest parishioners, George Morrash, led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Andrew Kuhl, another parishioner and Superintendent of Hanover Area Schools, was our Toast Master for the evening. Subdeacon Norm Namey was Banquet Chair. John Moses did a fantastic job on our Anniversary Banquet book and donated each book in memory of his daughter, Rachel Hebda. The Anniversary book included stories from our Senior Parishioners, family pictures taken by photographer John Kasko, who also took the

group picture, and the beautiful photo of our inside Dome of Icons.

It was a weekend that all appreciated and that will be remembered for years to come. We had a good time and we all enjoyed sharing the memories.

A Busy October in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania

During the weekend of October 3-5, 2014, the faithful of St. George, Upper Darby, were blessed with the annual pastoral visit of His Grace Bishop THOMAS. The weekend's events began on Friday evening with the local Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) chapters gathering for a falafel dinner and discussion with Bishop THOMAS. Students came from three of the Philadelphia area OCFs: Drexel/UPenn, Eastern, and Temple. After a delicious meal, the students talked with His Grace about his own travels and work as the chair of the Assembly



of Bishops' Committee on Youth, as well as the particular struggles facing young people today with the increasing impact of media and technology on life.

On Saturday morning, Bishop THOMAS said the morning prayers with the Sunday School. Then he had a light breakfast with them as they asked him a series of questions that they had prepared with their teachers. Some parents asked His Grace questions, too. Later that day, the Ladies Society had lunch with His Grace as they discussed the continuing ministry and philanthropy of the AOCWNA. After Vespers on Saturday evening, the Parish Council and members of the Order of St. Ignatius hosted His Grace to a wonderful Middle Eastern meal.

Sunday saw our parish community gathered around Bishop THOMAS as he presided over Orthros and the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. During his homily, His Grace spoke

of our need to submit in love to Christ and each other, and indeed to all who seek Christ, and that this submissive love didn't take away our freedom, but guaranteed it. At the end of Liturgy, the parish sang "God grant you many years" in honor of his impending patronal name day, which is celebrated on October 6th, the feast of St. Thomas. Following the Liturgy, a bountiful luncheon was offered by the community on the occasion of the Bishop's visit.

Then, on October 18th the community of St. George hosted a Choir Workshop, lead by Nadeen Nerenberg. This event, a project of the Eastern PA clergy, was a chance to bring a small taste of the Sacred Music Institute to those of our parishioners who are unable to attend the regular SMI. Nadeen was a great fit for this program, because she was once the Choir Director for St. George under Fr. Anthony Bassoline. The day began with the 15-plus participants chant-

ing the Supplication Service of St. Raphael of Brooklyn. This was followed by a light meal and some fellowship. The first session of Nadeen's presentation was the reading of an article by Bishop BASIL that addressed the solemnity of the choir ministry. It truly helped to set a worshipful tone. Following this consideration of the spiritual side of singing in the Church, the second session was dedicated to understanding our physical space and preparation for singing the services. Nadeen covered such things as basic breathing exercises, how to look at the director and not always the book, and how to listen to those around us. The attendees took a break for lunch and more fellowship, enjoying the learning experience and getting to know each other. The final workshop session had the participants look at music from different Orthodox traditions and practice them. The goal was to show how each tradition spoke of the same faith while

using different melodies; the belief is the same even if the music is a little different. The day ended with the chanters and combined choir singing the Vespers service. Our hope is that this event can become an annual gathering here in eastern Pennsylvania.

Securing a Dream: Endowment Honors Dr. George J. Farha

Dr. George J. Farha didn't like big events. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, people listened. So when the idea of forming the first Orthodox day school in Kansas was presented to Dr. George and a group of his peers

in 2009, he listened quietly, looked around the room and then proclaimed, "This school must happen. I'm going to support it, and I want each of you to support it, too."

It is fitting, then, that five years later, the Dr. George J. Farha Endowment for Christ the Savior Academy is being established on the one-year anniversary of his passing. The goal of the endowment is to raise \$1 million, and the Trustees of the Endowment Board are asking Dr. George's friends and colleagues to join the family in raising the funds.

"It is my desire to secure his dream over the long-term for the

Academy," said Brenda Farha, Dr. George's wife. "I believe with all of my heart that my husband would be so pleased, you see: this school was his dream."

Christ the Savior Academy, a project of all three Orthodox Churches in Wichita, Kansas, opened its doors in the fall of 2012 in the educational facility of St. George Orthodox Cathedral. What began with 18 children from junior kindergartners to second graders nearly tripled in three years, and is growing a grade a year. It presents the very best of academic training through a rigorous classical curriculum. Studies are rich in classical literature, math and science, along

with Greek, Latin, Icon studies and violin (an instrument Dr. George always loved). The emphasis of the curriculum is on forming the child's soul through the teachings of the Orthodox Church. In short, the Academy combines Dr. George's two passions in life: education and the Orthodox faith.

Dr. George lived the American dream, but few people knew the obstacles he had to overcome in order to obtain success. He was the first in his family to leave Lebanon and pursue a baccalaureate degree (at West Virginia University) and a doctorate of medicine (at Tulane University Medical School).

His father sold off part of his business to put him and his brother Jim through medical school. "Try to become doctors, and be the best you can be," his father said to him as he told him goodbye. With a laser-like focus, he never forgot that advice.

Dr. George moved to Wichita, Kansas, where he met his wife Brenda. In 1963, he began what would become the largest independently owned surgical team in the nation: Wichita Surgical Specialists, P.A. He was also instrumental in starting the KU School of Medicine in Wichita, and was Chairman of the Surgery Department for 24 years. Faith was central to Dr. George's life. He attended an Orthodox school in Lebanon and served as chanter in the Church. In America he served on the Board of Trustees of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America and was Vice-Chair for twelve years. He was also a life-long member of The Order of St. Ignatius and a Board member of International Orthodox Christian Charities. He served on the original steering committee,

which formed Christ the Savior Academy.

Last Christmas, while in the final stages of his disease, the Christ the Savior Academy students came – in their ties and plaid jumpers – and caroled at Dr. George's house. He was in a wheelchair in the living room and listened intently to the children singing.

"He just had the biggest smile on his face the whole time," recalls Brenda. "He was so very proud that the school was thriving."

Donations can be sent to the Dr. George J. Farha Endowment, c/o Christ the Savior Academy, 7515 E. 13th St., Wichita, KS 67206. For more information, please contact Gayle Malone at dgjmmalone@gmail.com.

Axios! Mustahaq!
He Is Worthy!

The first weekend of November always comes with blessings. In addition to great blessings, an even greater blessing has come to us this year, in that the Church has received a son into the Holy Priesthood.

On Sunday, November 2, a son not

only of our parish, St. Anthony the Great Orthodox Church in Spring, Texas, but a son of our Archdiocese, was ordained a priest. Many people would know him as Jab Tanous. A native of Pennsylvania, he served as a counselor at the Antiochian Village for many years and attended College Conferences. When he moved to Texas, he didn't stop serving. He picked up in the life of the Church right where he left off: helping and chanting the divine services. He quickly became involved in the events of our diocese's Camp St. Raphael (YaBoy!); he taught our High School class; he worked as the Youth Advisor; and he led our kids on various retreats. "Jab", as His Grace Bishop BASIL relayed in his homily, still looks like the Jab we know, but he's not. "Don't let your eyes fool you," His Grace said, "because the man we formally know as 'Jab' is now Father Gabriel, a priest of the Most High God."

We have been blessed in our Church as an Archdiocese to gain a devout young man who has the heart of a servant and sincere love for God. May God protect him and grant him to serve many years in the Lord's Holy Vineyard.



Bishop NICHOLAS Visits
St. Ignatius,
Florida, New York

This past Sunday we had the pleasure of having His Grace Bishop Nicholas visit our parish. He taught on prayer and faith. It was a beautiful Hierarchal Liturgy, and during coffee hour we were blessed as he sat with children from our Sunday School and youth and spoke to them about the importance of fasting, prayer and attending church every Sunday. In addition to our visit with His Grace, we took our youth to St. George in Little Falls, PA, the day before for a retreat on the subject of miracles. Our small parish raised \$220 during youth month, and each of our kids participated in the readings, offering and greeting for Special Olympics. Although we are a small parish, we are doing great things in and around our community. From collecting food for the local food pantry, to serving at the food kitchen, our kids and congregation as a whole have a heart for our neighbors.



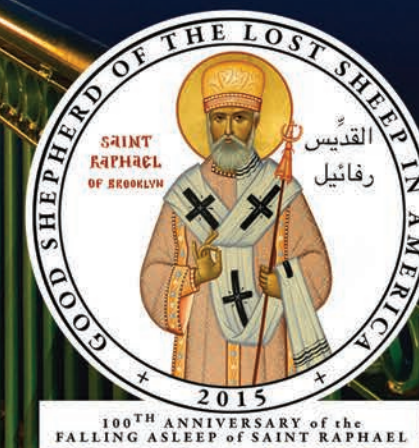
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St. Mary, Cambridge MA invites you
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Boston 52ND
ANTIOCHIAN
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2015

July 20-26
Sheraton Boston Hotel



Go to www.acboston2015.com for more information and to register

Shh,

there's a whisper in winter's silence—
Listen to your heart

Heart health is physical, emotional and spiritual.
Take care of your heart.

Listen to God's command to care for one another.

The Order supports IOCC, Project Mexico,
and other ministries outside our
Archdiocese, as well as
Christian education,
our married seminarians, and our youth (through
Antiochian camping programs,
leadership training, and more).

For more information call 201-871-1355,
or e-mail theorder@antiochian.org
or visit www.orderofstignatius.org.

