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# The Word

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# The Word



COVER: KH. ERIN KIMMETT wrote and installed the Pantocrator icon in the dome of St. Anthony the Great Orthodox Church, Spring, Texas.

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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 e-mailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

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## RESPONDING TO GOD WITH THOSE WHO ARE JOINING US

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS HAVE BEEN TELLING US THAT PEOPLE ARE MORE AND MORE INTERESTED IN BEING SPIRITUAL, AND LESS AND LESS INTERESTED IN FOLLOWING ORGANIZED RELIGION. MANY WANT TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, BUT ON THEIR OWN TERMS. THEY WANT LOTS OF NICE FEELINGS, ASSURANCE OF SOME KIND OF SALVATION AND A COMFORT IN AN ENLIGHTENMENT THAT THEY CAN CONTROL. IN SUCH A SYSTEM, EVERY ONE CHOOSES HOW TO BE SPIRITUAL AND MAKES UP THE RULES.

Christian societies seem to have begun with a faith tradition based on Christ's Incarnation, which joined God and man, and developed into fractured and multiple churches with choices, and then to an individualized religion, in which everyone picks and chooses what to believe. At this stage, human beings attempt to dictate to God the "rules of engagement." How ironic it is that this development brought people back to what Christians call the original sin of Adam: that is, Adam choosing to be equal to God and needing no one greater than himself! From my vantage point, this is no development, but a great regression.

Like Adam Roberts and those who have been working on our Archdiocese's "Becoming Truly Human" ministry project, I have been paying attention to those who have been finding Orthodoxy. I say *finding*, because most have found us, rather than coming as a result of our meager efforts to evangelize. In listening to their stories, it seems that they have followed the world through the so-called "development" described above, which left their hearts wanting more. They have

been looking for God, His message of love and abundant life, and service through caring for their neighbors. According to their own accounts, unable to find this authentically in the denominations or in Eastern religions, they have discovered Orthodoxy either through study of the early Church, stumbling upon it at an ethnic food festival, being invited by a co-worker or neighbor to a wedding or



baptism, or perhaps just by walking past an odd-looking building and taking a peak in.

What does this say to our Church as we experience some of the same exodus from our churches as



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our heterodox neighbors? Is it possible that somehow people who are in our church school programs, our SOYOs and camps miss the point that the Church is about joining us to God? Could it be that we haven't learned ourselves, and subsequently didn't teach our children, to pray as a dialogue with God which joins us to His very being? Have we forgotten that the Church is made up of relationships that let us encounter God, who is in our gatherings and midst? Could it be that our human fears bring us to worry more about recipes and the positioning of booths at the food festival, rather than doing what God calls us to do for the Kingdom? He calls us to live abundantly and to baptize all of the people of the world. He calls us to bring the world to God and God to the world. He calls us to show the world now the Kingdom to come! *Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:9).

Adam Roberts shared with me a screen copy of the *Becoming Truly Human* DVD, which should be available through Ancient Faith Ministries of our Archdiocese before the printing of this editorial. This DVD highlights the journey of a family that was once among those who had left organized religion and then found in Orthodoxy a way home. Parishes will be able to use this DVD as a discussion-starter with people who are seeking to understand what it means to be whole. These people will hear the stories of others whose search for meaning in life has brought them to the Orthodox faith. The DVD will come with a workbook. People from most of the Archdiocese's parishes have already been exposed to the project. They have been schooled in how to present this material and conduct this ministry through guided listening and support, rather than by teaching or preaching. People that God is calling are already being guided by Him and we need to be supportive of *His* ministry, and not try to lead the process ourselves. God calls some people through beauty. We can do our part by getting rid of whatever in us is less than beautiful – that is, sin. Without an agenda, we can help others discover what God has delivered to us.

Those seeking God through beauty, understanding, or love, are all seeking union with God, a desire that God Himself has planted in every human heart. When we are at peace, we breathe God in and become able to listen. We hear His voice in the Scriptures and liturgy, and through people with whom we are in holy relationships. We as a church, and each of us as persons in the Church, are mystically wed to God, sharing time and perspectives, hardships and joys together. St. Paul says that Christ has espoused us, the Church, to be His bride. We, the Church members, know Him to be our Bridegroom.

How do we communicate these messages through all the noise and distractions of our modern world? How do we show one another that the perceived Christian messages that the world is rejecting are most often not our messages at all? How do we get the attention of those who have already been baptized, and those whom God is calling home, so that we can share the Gospel, that is, the Good News?

Certainly I have more questions than answers. Yet as we begin a new year, it is my hope that these questions might lead to discussions that, in turn, would help us minister in a more deliberate way. I hope, too, that we can contribute together to building up the Holy Church, given and sanctified by Christ our Lord. In the recent Feast of the Nativity, God joined Himself to mankind. By acting with deliberation, and paying attention to our God, may we resolve this year to be attuned to God in us: Christ in us and us in Christ. This is who we were baptized and anointed to be.

Bishop JOHN

# FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT IN THE CHURCH

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

ICONOGRAPHERS PROGRESS FROM DARK TO LIGHT, SUPERIMPOSING LIGHTER COLORS OVER DARKER ONES, AND FINISHING WITH INCREASINGLY LIGHT-TONED TOUCHES. I'M NO ICONOGRAPHER, YET I HOPE THE LETTER BELOW WILL BE VIEWED AS A STARTING POINT TOWARDS THE LIGHT. IT WAS SENT IN REPLY TO A FRUSTRATED ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMAN WHO HAD WRITTEN ME WITH THOUGHTS OF LEAVING THE CHURCH. I PUBLISH IT HERE FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS WHO MAY FIND THEMSELVES IN A SPIRITUAL FUNK. FORGIVE ME.

Dear —,

First off, please forgive the delay in my reply. I have no excuse, save fear of failing you in my answer.

I was once in a similar state as you now find yourself. Though I found comfort in praying the services and serving as pastor, I got to the point at which I hated everything "Orthodox." A magazine would arrive with a picture of a priest in his vestments – a service, baptism, or some such – and I would look at the picture with loathing and cast it aside in anger.

I hated all things that looked and smelled of "Orthodoxy" – all the while trying to lead a small community. It was awful. I won't go into the details of how I got to that point, but (forgive me here, please) I remember walking into the church early one morning and cursing myself before all the saints portrayed on the icons. It was a horrible two years.

That said, it was years ago, and here I am ... still.

Back in 2006, I was hearing confessions at St. George, Houston, during one of the Presanctified Liturgies. The church was dark and full, lots of confessions, the choir was singing beautifully. I wept. It occurred to me that that very moment, when I felt close to God and heaven, would not have been possible if I had not held on during those terrible years. You might not be able to hear this in your current state but, really, it's all – all of it – worth it.

During those years of struggle I tried everything – confession, counseling, crying, cussing, prostrations, Jesus Prayer, gossip – everything! What can I say? I'm a poor priest and a great sinner. Like you, however, I truly believe that the Orthodox Church is the fullness of Christ in the world. Honestly, in hindsight, I thank God that I was ordained; otherwise, in my weakness, I might surely have left the Church.

Now, years later, things are drastically different. Oh, I'm still worthless, if you scratch me hard enough. Yet I look back on those bad years in awe. My life, ministry and outlook are so much – so vastly – different now, through no feat of my own, save "hanging in there."

Oh sure, there was God's mercy, yada, yada, yada, but, spoiled as I am, I expected that. Besides, some things sound trite when you're in a funk. God is, after all, God; of that I had no doubt. Though unconscious of it, I had plenty of doubts about me.

What is remarkable is that I stayed. That has made all the difference. The problem wasn't the Church, Orthodoxy, or mercy, you see: it was me. I needed the Church.

With love in Christ,  
Fr. Joseph

That letter was written many years after my serving small missions, but once a mission priest, always a mission priest. Like dark to light, that period was not a bad thing. After all, all things are redeemable in Christ.

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the*

*Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

Mission work is hard; for some, it's unbearable. For most, it is hidden from view. Honestly, much of the above pertains only to those who have "read their way into the Church" (that is, adult converts). I suspect that those who've worked in missions – clergy and laity –

view these examples from a lighter place than those uninitiated in the struggles of the American mission field.

Oftentimes, especially pastors in missions, we tend to place our hopes on every warm body that darkens the door of our church. Time has proven that doing so can lead to continual discouragement. Yet we must stay the course! Sow seed. Be faithful. God will provide the increase. Fr. Alexander Elchaninov writes:

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not notice that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely fastened bag.

Constantly, each day, each hour, God is sending us people, circumstances, tasks, which should mark the beginning of our renewal; yet we pay them no attention, and thus continually we resist God’s will for us. Indeed, how can God help us? Only by sending us in our daily life certain people, and certain coincidences of circumstance. If we accepted every hour of our life as the hour of God’s will for us, as the decisive, most important, unique hour of our life – what sources of joy, love, strength, as yet hidden from us, would spring from the depths of our soul!

Let us then be serious in our attitude towards each person we meet in our life, towards every opportunity of performing a good deed; be sure that you will then fulfill God’s will for you in these very circumstances, on that very day, in that very hour.<sup>1</sup>

Otherwise, it all makes for good fiction. Yet our salvation is based in Reality. We all fall short. We all miss the mark. This does not mean that we are defeated. We are however, handicapped. We need each other in Christ. It is the very reason for the Church, the Ark of our Salvation. One has to *live* the Orthodox Christian faith. It is not found in books, gurus, or exotic places. Like the Kingdom of God, it is found within the heart. We have to make room! For dragons and slithery passions are also found therein, whose goal it is to smother the light with their darkness. It is their goal to blind us. This is spiritual warfare. It begins with you, directed toward God, working out your salvation with your neighbor.

I once had a well-loved parishioner who suddenly quit the parish. There were a few who thought, “Father ran him off!” Such talk usually dies down as the griev-

ing process proceeds, but this went on for some time. Mature Christians know better. Oftentimes they know better than the priest and help to remind him that “God prunes His Church.”

After a while, the priest gets used to it. He never likes it. He suffers for it. Still, he reaches an understanding with himself that, for the sake of his sanity and that of his family and his flock, he’s just going to keep struggling toward the Kingdom as best as he’s able.

At a candid clergy gathering where the topic was *Antagonists in the Church*, an experienced priest told of an early trial in his ministry. Someone in his parish had started a rumor about his wife. It became a scandal. Like all such devilry, it snowballed. At one point the wife asked her husband: “Why? Why keep on? Why not leave and go to another parish? Why not give up the nonsense and get a ‘real job?’” The priest, with tears in his eyes, told the rest of us what he had told his wife: “Honey, you don’t understand. I get to stand at the altar of the Most High and touch the precious Body of our Lord at every Liturgy.” We all understood.

Ask any priest: Standing before the altar, celebrating the Mysteries of the Church, is an experience incomparable to any this side of the grave. No man should ever take it lightly. Few are they who remain unchanged by this awesome and sacred duty. For lack of better wording, it makes it all worth it.

Our imperfect world, outside Paradise, ruled by the Enemy, has taught us to question all authority, and has denigrated fatherhood. But as Christians, we know that all fatherhood flows from the Father. It is His Fatherhood that should be the model, the ideal, for earthly fathers. We should not judge fatherhood according to the ways of the world. Rather, the changeless Fatherhood of God is known through the Church. St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote: “No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother.” And somewhere along the line, God willing, we children all fit in.

Most of the time your priest is just a man struggling toward salvation, bowed a little lower each year with the weight of his sins, the burden of fatherhood, and the glory of the Cross. Standing at the altar, it’s all worth it. All of it.<sup>2</sup>

Pray for your priest. Especially, dear brothers and sisters, pray for your co-laborers in our mission parishes and the seekers who darken their doors so desperately in need of the Light of Christ and the Ark of Salvation.

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt  
Vice-Chairman, Department of Missions and Evangelism

# WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR? (AND WHO DID THEY VOTE FOR?)



Gregory Abdalah

**O**n the Wednesday morning following the election, I woke up with a great sense of hope ... a feeling of excitement. Election commercials were over!

I figured accusations would stop being hurled back and forth between friends, lumping each other into groups. I guessed that my friends would stop arguing with each other – and with complete strangers – on Facebook. I hoped that friendships could start being healed and the arguments could return to important matters – like football. I could not have been more wrong.

Election night, one of the CNN pundits spoke of the anger expressed by both sides. In a very Yoda-like fashion, he pointed out that anger comes from fear, fear comes from pain. I was initially taken aback by his openness in discussing these feelings as part of his political analysis. I was completely floored when he offered a solution: focus on healing. We need to heal this pain-filled chasm that divides our nation, working towards *unity*.

Giving us exactly what we needed the following Sunday, the Gospel was Christ’s encounter with a young lawyer found in the tenth chapter of Luke. This Gospel shows us this path, a path towards unity followed by loving one another.

So, what does unity through love look like? A young lawyer comes to challenge Christ, and asks: “What are the rules?” Christ puts it back to him and asks: “What do you read in scripture?” The man was educated, so he knew the scripture. The man says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Christ says: “Do this.” The young lawyer then seeks to justify himself and asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Christ goes on to tell the story we all know: the Good Samaritan. A man gets beaten up by robbers while walking down the road and he’s left for dead. Both a priest and a Levite – someone who assisted the priests in worship – saw the man and avoided him. Finally, a Samaritan saw him and took care of him ...

going out of his way to make sure the man was cared for. Hearing this would be scandalous to the young lawyer. The Samaritans and the Jews didn’t talk to each other; the Jews saw them as inferior. For Christ to use a Samaritan as the example of love would be a difficult thing to hear. It is precisely because of that difficulty that this Gospel shows us a model for unity through love.

It comes down to three things: 1. Respect; 2. Trust; and 3. Self-emptying Love.

The first step is *respect*. The young lawyer enters into his relationship with Christ with the intention of “putting Jesus to the test” – he wanted to challenge Christ. We don’t know his intentions, but I imagine him to be like that kid in class who would raise his hand pretending to ask a question, when he really wants to show everyone how smart he is. In reality, he is not showing Christ respect ... and without respect, how can there ever be love?

As respect grows, *trust* can be established. The young lawyer clearly doesn’t trust Christ; otherwise he would have accepted the answer to his question and not continued challenging Him. Perhaps he had been let down at some point in his life, maybe he felt disenfranchised – whatever his reasoning, he does not trust Christ in this encounter. Yet in Christ is precisely where we place our trust. In Psalm 146, we hear: “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no help ... Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” This is driven home in this Gospel parable in the example of the priest and the Levite, people who are set apart to take care of the community, and who completely abandon their responsibility. As Christ shows, when we place our hope in the Lord, we are not let down by the princes of this world. Trust can then be rebuilt in ways we never imagined possible – for example, between a Jew and a Samaritan.

Respect and Trust come together to form *love*. This is not the sappy love we see in romantic comedies and Disney movies, but a *self-emptying love* modeled after Christ

It comes down to three things:  
1. Respect;  
2. Trust; and  
3. Self-emptying Love.

1. Alexander Elchaninov, *The Diary of a Russian Priest* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), p. 157.  
2. Excerpted from *One Flew Over the Onion Dome – Orthodox Converts, Retreads, and Reverts* (Regina Orthodox Press, 2006), pp. 107–109.





“Our country is more divided than we thought, but it is time to protect and love everyone in this country.... What changed is that we have a new president. What did not change are the American ideals that so many have fought to uphold.”

on the cross. The young lawyer in the story knew what this love meant; he defined it clearly when he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” That kind of love, however, isn’t easy. It’s uncomfortable and often takes us far outside our comfort zone. Like the young lawyer, we often try and *justify* ourselves. My friends call it “Greg Logic” when I do it. For example, I had Pennsylvania license plates while in seminary, but lived in New York ... therefore, the canon about not fasting while traveling applied because I was in a constant state of travel. Right? Wrong. At judgment, I will not be able to show The Judge where Pennsylvania is in comparison to New York on a map; I will be judged based on what I *did*, not why I did it.

Justifying ourselves simply maintains our comfort zone. It doesn’t allow for growth or change. Most importantly, it doesn’t allow for Christ to empower us to “go and do likewise,” as Christ tells the young lawyer to do. In the same way, when we learn to love others, based on trust and built on respect, we can allow ourselves to step outside of our comfort zone. The Samaritan went outside his comfort zone, crossing a chasm of pain and anger to take care of someone who didn’t know him, but would hate him based on an assumption of who he was. The Samaritan still reached out and went out of his way to care for this man, empowered.

So where do we go from here? This movement is the goal for each and every one of us at each liturgy. We come together and are then taught, fed, and sent back out into the world, transformed by Christ. We hear the Word of God to teach us, showing us how to love others. A few moments later, we are fed with the Body of Christ, strengthened as the Body of Christ, uniting us in a place where we are all respected, where there is no

distinction based on age, race, ethnicity or gender – we are all together in our communion. A few moments later, we hear the words: “Let us depart in peace.” Having been taught and fed, we are then sent out to do the business of loving others the way that Christ has shown us to love at the time of Jesus – by emptying ourselves – so that we can show others how to love each other through respect and trust.

The day after the election, a good friend wrote on Facebook: “Our country is more divided than we thought, but it is time to protect and love everyone in this country.... What changed is that we have a new president. What did not change are the American ideals that so many have fought to uphold.” Taking this a step further, what most certainly did not change is Christ’s self-emptying love that holds us together, united to be the Body of Christ, something that goes beyond our citizenship to this country or our citizenship in this world.

We are called to a greater purpose, then. It falls to us to treat those we encounter with respect, trust, and love, beginning the process of healing the divisions of this world, calling others to unity. This means removing our trust in “princes, in the sons of men” and putting it back in Christ.

Gregory Abdalah, M.Div., Youth Pastor  
St. George Church, Phoenix, Arizona



Icon by Billie Oldzley

# Who Is Worthy of God’s Love?

THE TRUE SPIRIT OF THE HISTORIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. George H. Shalhoub

For more than 2,000 years, ever since the day when Christ founded the Holy Church, it has faced conflicts, disagreements, and heresies. By the power of the Holy Spirit, however, her ship kept sailing, and wherever the faithful preached the Gospel, the Church remained united and expanded. Today’s Orthodox Church is a testament to the timelessness of Christ’s message and mission to mankind.



Since the day of Pentecost, apostolic teaching by the Holy Spirit has preserved the Christian faith. Everyone ran the race, and the Church gathered those whom God called to be saved.

So that servant came, and reported these things to his Master. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind.” And the servant said, “Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.” And then

the Master said unto the servant, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you, that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper” (Luke 14:21–24).

Today, some parishioners and clergy at first joyfully and often with great humility accepted the Lord’s invitation to join Him in His banquet hall, but they stumbled or fell away through their own sins, their abuse of alcohol or drugs, or by committing misdemeanors or more serious crimes. A few even went to prison.



WHO IS WORTHY OF GOD'S LOVE?

By definition, *worthy* means “to have sufficient or great merit, character or value”; to *deserve*, as in being a worthy advocate or opponent. Yet no one can judge the worthiness of another. Who can approach the chalice, saying he is the first among sinners? Christ calls, welcomes home, saves, or deems worthy not only the elite, but the powerful, and also those who were born saints. The Holy Scriptures – the Old and the New Testaments – the Church’s time-honored traditions and the liturgical hymns in liturgical and prayers all reveal who is worthy to God.

Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to troubled people. Those who were weak, He made strong. Those who were unwise, He made wise. Those often sinful and corrupt, He called to be leaders. Moses was privileged to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and yet we know he murdered an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11–12). We commemorate his Feast Day on September 4. Joshua, whom we commemorate on September 1, conquered Jericho and killed every living being (Joshua 6:1–27). King David, whom the Church calls a prophet, gave us the Scripture and prayers in the Book of Psalms. Yet he also committed adultery and murdered Uriah, husband of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:14–15). David’s son, King Solomon, was the most corrupt of all, yet God made him the most wise (1 King 11). Abraham was called by God to father a nation, yet he whored out his wife Sarai (Genesis 12). The most criminal of all was King Manasseh, who wrote:

You, O Lord, according to your great goodness  
Have promised repentance and forgiveness  
To those who have sinned against you;  
And in the multitude of your mercies  
You have appointed repentance for sinners, that they  
may be saved.  
Therefore you, O Lord, God of the righteous,  
Have not appointed repentance for the righteous,  
For Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin  
against you  
But you have appointed repentance for me, who am  
a sinner.  
For the sins I have committed are more in number  
than the sand of the sea;  
My transgressions are multiplied, O Lord, they are  
multiplied!

They all served as symbols of repentance and righteousness.

The New Testament – proclaiming the Good News – show the foundation of salvation: God’s desire, through

His Son, Jesus Christ, to save the entire world because of His love for the world, not because of His condemnation of it. His loving forgiveness overcame the guilt of man’s sins.

REPENTANCE: THE HOPE OF SALVATION

Repentance, according to the Fathers of the Church, including St. John Chrysostom, is certainly one of the basic foundations of Church membership and practice. Without repentance, there is no membership in the Church.

Why repentance? Christ commissioned the Apostles, and they advanced the Holy Church. St. John Chrysostom defined repentance as “a weapon against the devil, medicine for spiritual wounds, a hospital cure for sins. It is destruction of lawlessness and an end to tears. It is the hope of salvation.” He concluded that the Church and repentance are inseparable. Salvation comes not by repentance, but by the philanthropy of God.<sup>1</sup> “For His love is inseparable...ineffable. It surpasses our wickedness. For God’s philanthropy is unlimited. Sin is a wound. Repentance is a medicine.” He continues, “After we repent, we should not feel shame.” “Sin has the shame. Repentance possesses courage. For in the wounds, there is rottenness. Repentance is the medicine that cleans the decay.”

The road leading toward repentance is paved, according to St. John Chrysostom, with fasting, crying bitterly for one’s sins, mourning for one’s sins, humility, almsgiving, prayer, and going to church. St. Paul also tells the sinner to mourn for others who have sinned, “because we are all joined to one another in the same manner as the body with its members.” He further said, “If you are indifferent about the sin because it was committed in another body, this is very bad, because the one who sinned is a member of the whole body.”

Surprisingly, the devil makes the sinful feel ashamed about his repentance. His greatest weapon is discouragement, so Chrysostom cautions those who sin never to lose hope or give the devil any pleasure by showing discouragement.<sup>2</sup> “Love the sinner” is the core of St. Paul’s message, so “reaffirm your love for him, lest such a one should be swallowed up by excessive sorrow.”<sup>2</sup>

THE PROMISES IN CHRIST’S PARABLES

Many times the Lord told his disciples to avoid the attitude of the Pharisees because, as stated, God did not receive or accept the prayers of the spiritually proud, as written in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–14). Matthew 24 details the confrontation of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were actually

condemned.

The Lord’s greatest teaching in the parables is that God seeks the repentance of all, including the most sinful. God does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather for that person to be saved and to live, and to have again, or for the first time, a place at His table. The Gospel’s message of joy encourages the rescue of those who have fallen into the cracks of life. In this parable, the Pharisees complained, “This person welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus spoke to them about the parable of the Lost Sheep. ‘I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven at one sinners’ repentance than at ninety-nine righteous people who do not need repentance’” (Luke 15:17). In another parable Jesus told, the woman who found the coin that she had lost said, “Rejoice with me! I have found my lost coin” (Luke 15:9–10).

Before the start of Great Lent, the most famous parable of all – the parable of the lost son, the Prodigal Son – comes to mind. Here, the father’s wait for the return of his lost son reflects God’s patience, his waiting for all to return. While the son was still far away, his father saw him and felt compassion. He ran to him, embraced and kissed him and adorned him with a new robe, a ring, and sandals for his feet (Luke 15:20–23). Moreover, he urged his faithful older son to rejoice in the return of his brother; who was thought dead and was now alive.

These parables tell us that no one is beyond redemption. Therefore, the question to ponder is what would have happened if our Lord had given up on Peter? To whom, then, would God have given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (John 18:15–17, Mark 14:66–72, Luke 22:54–62)? What would have happened if Christ had joined the group that stoned the adulterous woman (John 8:1–11)? What would have happened if He had refused to enter Zacchaeus’s house and eat with the sinners (Luke 19:1–10)? On Holy Wednesday in the Church prayers there is the story of the harlot washing Jesus’ feet. When Judas protested, Jesus said, “**Let her alone. She is worthy.**”

God’s love is shown most dramatically to the thief who was crucified on the right side of Jesus. Both would have been in great pain, dripping with blood. In his very last breath, the thief, who had admitted to his guilt, repented before Jesus. Then in the blink of an eye, the Lord rewarded the thief by promising him, that day, that he would go to paradise with Him (Luke 23:9–43).

The daily prayers of the Church repeat this event: “Of thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant: for I will not speak of thy Mystery to thine enemies, neither will I give thee a kiss as did Ju-

das; but like the thief will I confess thee: Remember me, O Lord, in thy Kingdom. Not unto judgment nor unto condemnation be my partaking of thy Holy Mysteries, O Lord, but unto the healing of soul and body.”

This prayer teaches us how God’s grace and forgiveness work; the thief on the cross is a role model for everyone. Also, at the celebration of funeral services, the Church remembers the thief: “A citizen of Paradise, O Christ, thou didst make of the Thief, who, because of his repentance, upon the cross cried unto thee: Remember me! Make thou me, a sinner, worthy also of the same.”

So, who can deny grace and forgiveness to a penitent? Throughout history, the Church never did. She always welcomed sinners to the house of faith. If there are “throw-away” people in the eyes of the clergy and followers of His name, they fail to understand their own calling. This attitude may come from those who found the faith through books, and not experience.

WHO THEN IS WORTHY?

Consider a man without whose missionary efforts Christianity would not be what it is today –Saul, whose name Christ changed to Paul. His icon graces every wall of every Orthodox Church. Three times in the Book of Acts, Paul confessed his crimes against other Christians. In his own words, he stated how he persecuted the Church, not only in Damascus (Acts 9:1–10) but in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3–21) and elsewhere. He even participated in the murder of St. Stephen (Acts 7:52). God called Paul to be His Apostle on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:11–20), which Paul recalled when he addressed King Agrippa (Acts 26:4–19). He was full of zeal to manifest what he received from his ancestors – to keep the law (Torah) – but Christ showed him mercy. “The righteous will fall seven times and the Lord will raise them up” (Proverbs 24:16).

St. Paul confessed and stated that while all have sinned, they have been made worthy and righteous by the free gift of God poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings us justification apart from the law. Therefore, no one can boast of his/her status before God. All become worthy by God’s grace.

The Church places mercy before justice, and reminds us, for example, that the Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). St. Paul, the greatest messenger and preacher of all time, expounded on this in his letter to Romans after his conversion: “Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in



death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:20–21).

By grace, God chooses people, not only for their own sake, but that they too become like Ss. Paul, Peter, James, Thomas or Mary of Egypt, and that they might become ministers of the Gospel by the way others welcome them into the community of faith. Orthodox spirituality makes one aware, on a daily basis, firstly, of the absolute gift of salvation, and, secondly, of every person’s enjoyment of the same opportunity and relationship with God.

“In the mercy of God, the little things done with humility will enable us to be found in the same place as the saints who have labored much and been true servants of God,” wrote St. Dorotheos of Gaza.<sup>3</sup>

St. John Chrysostom reiterated St. Paul’s instructions, and underlined one of the most important implications of the Gospel: “Let us bear each other’s burdens.” The Church calls upon its members to carry each others’ crosses, as St. Paul urged the community of the Galatians: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1–2).

St. John Chrysostom asked what Christ intends the Church to be, and offered an answer:

For what harbor is like the Church? What paradise is like your congregation? Here lurks no malevolent snake, rather, Christ the Initiator. Here there is no Eve who trips up and casts down, but rather, the Church who raises up. Here no leaves of trees exist, rather the fruit of the Spirit. Here there is no partition with thorns, rather a vineyard that flourishes. And if I find a thorn, I change it into an olive branch, because the things here do not possess the poverty of nature but are honored with the freedom of choice. If I find a wolf, I make him into a sheep without changing nature, rather altering the choice.

For this reason, one would not make a mistake to call the Church superior to the ark of Noah. The ark received the animals and preserved them as animals. However, the Church receives the animals and changes them. For example, a hawk entered the ark and a hawk left. A wolf entered and a wolf left. Here in the Church, one enters as a hawk and exits as a dove. A wolf enters, and leaves as a sheep. A snake comes in and leaves as a lamb, not because nature is

altered, but because wickedness is expelled. That is why I frequently discourse on repentance.<sup>4</sup>

We are not saved alone or in isolation. Salvation means immersion into the Body of Christ because it is there, in the community, that members encounter the Death and Resurrection of the Lord. They meet Him precisely in the “wounds” of the community and in all its frailty. This is the way the Mystery of Salvation unfolds each day, through the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and at every Sacrament.

As the priest prepares the Holy Eucharist, he prays, “Sacrificed is the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world; for the life of the world and for its salvation,”<sup>5</sup> alluding to Christ’s death on the cross for the salvation of the world.

Scripture goes even further and emphasizes the need to pray for those who are condemned and who go to prison: “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Hebrews 13:3).

One of St. Basil’s famous characteristics was his awareness of his own imperfection and sinfulness. His only means of overcoming this sinfulness was to know the grace of God in company with others: as he said, “If I live alone, whose feet will I wash?”

Many complain that when they pray, they feel God is not listening. “Why doesn’t He answer?” they cry out in quiet anguish. Why is this complaint a common ailment? Elder Porphyrios tells us it is because we are not worthy. “We must become worthy in order to pray. We are not worthy because we do not love our neighbor as ourselves,” he said.<sup>6</sup> He then quotes Jesus, who says, “If you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that your brother holds something against you, leave there your gift before the altar and go first be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23–4).

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH?**

The purpose of the Holy Orthodox Church, according to Scripture, Holy Tradition, and worship, is to pursue the sinner. Neglecting to pursue the sinner is to abandon the call of Christ to be His disciple, to be a healer, to transform society, and to be a light in the world today.

**OIKONOMIA IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION**

The Holy Orthodox Church does well to follow the commands that are gifts to protect its faithful, as expressed in the Scriptures, prayers, canons, and creeds.

Members recite these every Sunday before entering into the most awesome mystery: communion with Christ through the Body and Blood of the Lord. Of course, the Church must have canons or standards that govern her life, as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

While the canons are standards that govern the Church, their provisions do not always cover every situation that might come up. Thus, their application may at times need to be modified. This is why the Church today is often called upon to uphold the spirit of canons, rather than the precise letters of canons, many times understood only in their historical contexts. The Orthodox Christians believe that Christ gave His Apostles the power to bind and loose sins (Matthew 16:19). This authority, in turn, transferred to the bishops who came after the Apostles.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, bishops can apply the canons in two ways. The first is known as *akriveia* (Greek: ἀκρίβεια) or strictness, which can be characterized by stringent adherence to the letter of the Church’s legislation. The second is *oikonomia* (Greek: οἰκονομία) or *economy*, a discretionary deviation from the letter of the legislation in order to adhere to the spirit of the legislation. In its deeper meaning, however, *economy* means management and stewardship, that is, the exercise of the bishop’s pastoral office to give direction guided by the Holy Spirit and to work toward the wider salvation of souls by the extension of God’s mercy.

Bishops often exercise economy when arranging or managing the reconciliation of the repentant, receiving those separated from the Church’s life by schism or heresy, and when restoring repentant clergy. When a bishop applies economy without arbitrariness or capriciousness in regard to a particular person, he is exercising his apostolic ministry responsibly, and no priest or layman has the right to object. In applying economy, the bishop is the “faithful and wise steward, whom His Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion in due season” (Luke 12:42).

In no other worship service throughout the Christian world are the words, “Lord have Mercy” uttered more than in the Orthodox Church. This is to remind the clergy and faithful that all are sinners and can effectively, as ministers of God’s mercy, ask, “Who are we to judge?” All are in need of God’s mercy. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, “Since it is likely that, being men, they would sin every day, St. Paul consoles his hearers by saying ‘renew yourselves’ from day to day. This is what

we do with houses: we keep constantly repairing them as they wear old. You should do the same thing to yourself. Have you sinned today? Have you made your soul old? Do not despair, do not despond, but renew your soul by repentance, and tears, and Confession, and by doing good things. And never cease doing this.”<sup>7</sup>

All who have found the true faith must guard against becoming like the Pharisees, adopting an attitude of legalistic superiority, convinced of being “super Orthodox.” This attitude misses the mark. An Orthodox Christian does not need to become “super Orthodox” but to become, first, a Christian, clothed in Christ. The Orthodox complain about other churches that are legalistic, and do not realize that Orthodox actions and deeds are more legalistic than the legal code, and they forget mercy.

In the words of Max Lucado:

Legalism is joyless because legalism is endless. There is always another class to attend, person to teach, mouth to feed. Inmates incarcerated in self-salvation find work, but never joy. How could they? They never know when they are finished. Legalism leaches joy. Grace, however, dispenses peace. The Christian trusts a finished work. Gone are the exertions of law-keeping, gone the disciplines and asceticism of legalism, gone the anxiety that having done everything we might not have done enough. We reach the goal not by the stairs, but by the lift .... God pledges His promised righteousness to those who will stop trying to save themselves. Grace offers rest. Legalism never does. Then why do we embrace it?<sup>8</sup>

Those who trust in themselves are foolish. (Proverbs 26:26)

The world sets the trap of exclusivity, making one think that God chooses only those who are worthy or perfect, or who pretend to be perfect. The Lord wishes the salvation of every human being, not only a Christian. “I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not given me into the hands of the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place” (Psalm 31:7–8).

God calls the clergy and chooses them to be those members of His Body who serve by leading in His Holy Church, to draw others to communion with the Lord. The clergy does this with an attitude of open hospitality, forbearance, mercy, and forgiveness. Their role is not to reject anyone. Jesus stated in the Gospel of St. John (6:39) that He does not reject anyone who comes to Him.



Every Orthodox Christian, clergy and layman, must remind himself to be a Christian, let alone an Orthodox Christian. Standing beneath the Sign of the Cross of Christ, they all realize that none of them is worthy of so great a love, but God makes them worthy. Christ died on the Cross to make them worthy. Our Lord calls on them every day, whether in leadership of the Church, in missions or in their secular vocation, no matter what it is, to experience His mercy each day.

Their role is never to judge their own worthiness or that of other people. They trust in the mercy of God that makes everyone worthy, each in the way that God wishes. He alone is worthy and He shares the righteousness in which He died and was raised. Together, with Him and one another, the strong must bring the weak, the self-assured must bring the doubtful, and the most faithful must stand with those who are lost. Then and only then, together with Him, all are saved and made righteous in His eyes. Without acceptance and knowledge of God's mercy, the Church will be out of business, and there would be no need for it to exist.

One of the most powerful prayers of forgiveness given by bishops and priests is at the conclusion of the Mystery of Holy Unction (Healing Service):

Holy King, compassionate and most merciful Lord Jesus Christ, Son and Word of the living God, who dost not desire the death of sinners, but that they turn back and live, I do not place my sinful hand on the heads of these who have approached Thee in sins and who ask from Thee through us forgiveness of sins. But stretch out Thy mighty and powerful hand in this holy Gospel, which I hold upon the heads of Thy servants. I beg and implore Thy compassionate love for mankind which does not remember evil. O God our Savior, who through Thy Prophet Nathan granted forgiveness to David of his sins when he repented, and received Manasses' prayer of repentance, do Thou Thyself in Thy customary love for mankind accept these Thy servants who repent over their own offences, overlooking all their transgressions. For Thou art our God who commanded us to forgive those who fall into sins seventy times seven. Because as is Thy majesty, so is Thy mercy. And to Thee belong all glory, honor and worship, together with Thy Father who has no beginning, and Thine all-holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

So what is the Church to do with those who fall into crime and commit sins such as abusing drugs or alcohol,

gambling or even murder, but learn from their mistakes and failures and repent? There is very little conversation among us about successful rehabilitation and post-crisis *metanoia* (repentance). The Church teaches that when someone responds to a crisis by admitting his problems and seeks help from God and battles his spiritual and physical afflictions, slowly and steadily, even with very few supporters, he makes extraordinary progress on all fronts. This is obtaining the free gift that is the grace of God. When this happens, we say, "He is redeemed."

This is the Church that has recorded in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the teachings of Christ and the saints, that the restoration of the penitent to the community of faith should not be based on what they did. It must encompass how they respond to God's forgiveness. Who is to judge? Who is worthy? "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As St. John Chrysostom said, "Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved."

Fr. George H. Shalhoub

End Notes

1. John Chrysostom. *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, p. 6.
2. John Chrysostom. *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, Homily 1, p. 10.
3. Discourses and Sayings: Cistercian Publications, p. 95.
4. John Chrysostom. *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, Homily 8:1.
5. Preparation of the Proskomedia.
6. *Wounded by Love*, p. 116.
7. John Chrysostom. *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, Homily 8.
8. Max Lucado, *It's Not About Me*, pp. 103–104.

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE  
OF NORTH AMERICA

*"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." Is 40:8*

October 7, 2016

Rev. Fr. Hisham Nimri  
178 Spackenkill Rd  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12603-5041  
fatherHisham@yahoo.com

Dear Fr. Hisham,

Greetings in the name of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. I pray you and your family are in good health.

I am writing to inform you that effective October 7, 2016, you will be on a leave of absence. During this leave of absence, you may not serve any divine service, administer any sacrament or minister to people in any way. You are to be in the direct spiritual care of His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS. Please be assured that you are in our prayers.

I pray and hope that the Grace of God will be upon you and your family during this leave of absence. I also pray that this leave of absence will be spiritually beneficial to ponder the issue at hand.

Wishing you all of God's blessings, I remain,

Your Father In Christ,

+JOSEPH  
Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

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# Archdiocesan Office

## ORDINATIONS

BEEKMAN, Photios, to the Holy Diaconate by Bishop BASIL on November 13, 2016, at St. Anthony Church, Spring, Texas. He is assigned to that parish.

DANEVICIUS, Isaac (Brandon Solomon), to the Holy Diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on October 23, 2016, at St. George Church, Little Falls, New Jersey. He is assigned as a seminarian deacon to the parish.

GIRGIS, Paul, to the Holy Priesthood by Bishop NICHOLAS on Sunday, December 11, 2016, at St. Nicholas Church, Bridgeport, Connecticut. He remains a seminarian assigned to St. Mary's Church, Brooklyn, New York, for this year.

PHILLIPS, Jeremiah, to the Holy Diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on December 11, 2016, at St. Nicholas Church, Bridgeport, Connecticut. Dr. Jeremiah will continue his service at St. Stephen the Protomartyr Church, South Plainfield, New Jersey, as a seminarian deacon for this year.

HEFNER, James (Kurt), to the Holy Diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on December 18, 2016, at St. Ignatius Church, Twin Falls, Idaho. He is assigned to that parish.

KERR, Stephen, to the Holy Diaconate by His Grace, Bishop JOHN on December 11, 2016, at St. John the Baptist Mission, Lewistown, Maryland. He is assigned to that parish.

VALADEZ, John (Edward), to the Holy Diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on November 13, 2016, at St. John the Baptist Antiochian Orthodox Church, Levittown, New York. He continues his service at St. John the Baptist Church, Levittown, New York, as a seminarian deacon.

## ELEVATIONS

PETRANEK, Father Richard, was elevated to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop BASIL on November 6, 2016, at St. Paul Church, Katy, Texas.

## REPOSED

SHAHEEN, Sadie, 86, on November 14, 2016. Affectionately known as "Dooda," Sadie was the daughter of Fr. George and Khouria Mary Shaheen and sister of Archbishop MICHAEL. She especially loved children and was passionately supportive of three orphanages in Syria, through the Crusaders organization. On October 23, 2016, she was awarded the Antiochian Archdiocese Meritorious Service Award for her charitable works. Besides the Crusaders, she was a member of the Ladies of St. George, and the Phoenician Auxiliary.

BOULLATA, Marita Seward, 78, on August 15, 2016. Beloved wife of Dr. Issa Joseph Boullata (a graduate of the University of London, now a retired professor of Arabic Literature at McGill University in Montreal). Marita and Issa spent the earlier years of their marriage

in the 1960s in Jerusalem, where their children were born, and where they were members of the Arab Orthodox Church. In Montreal since 1968, they were members of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, where Issa sang in the Byzantine Choir and Marita taught at Sunday School.

The Right-Reverend-Protosyngellos Paul DOYLE fell asleep in the Lord on December 17, 2016. The term *protosyngellos* literally means "first cellmate." A *syngellos* is simply the cellmate of a monastic, while the cellmate of the bishop (who may often be a monastic) is styled the *protos*, or first among the *syngelloi*. In the early use of this title, it referred to a monastic who lived with the bishop and served him, often as the one who helped with hospitality and meetings. In our Archdiocese, the *protosyngellos* represents all of the clergy at the Archdiocese Board meetings and serves as dean of the clergy, mentoring and leading his brother priests. Fr. Paul served in this capacity for many years before retiring from this position and parish life, but kept this title.

His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH presented Marcia Terry, sister of the late, Sondra Murr Love, and Sondra's sister-in-law, Charlotte Murr (left), wife of the late Gary George Murr, with the Cross of the Gold Order of St. Raphael, in a posthumous honor and recognition of Sondra's "distinguished service of exceptional merit, rendered with generous and unselfish dedication..." on behalf of the Archdiocese. The Cross commemorates the 100th year of the repose of St. Raphael of Brooklyn (1915-2015), whose life exemplified tireless labor for the Church's mission in North America. Metropolitan JOSEPH visited with Marcia and Charlotte at the West Coast Chancery on Wednesday, November 23, 2016. They were accompanied by their Pastor, the V. Rev. Timothy Baclig of St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church (Van Nuys, California). Sondra Love served as a member of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees (2009-2015) and was a Lifetime Member of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. She also assisted Sayidna JOSEPH, Diocesan Bishop of Los Angeles and the West and Metropolitan of the Archdiocese, with special events honoring his episcopate. Sondra's service to St. Michael Church included fifteen years as a Parish Council member, ten of which she served as the Parish Treasurer. She held offices as a member of the Antiochian Women and did much in working on annual parish fundraisers. Sondra is surely missed by her family, parishioners, co-workers and friends. Blessed be the memory of our sister-in-Christ, Sondra, worthy of blessedness and eternal memory!

## MESSAGES

**BISHOP ANTOUN EXTENDS WARMEST WISHES TO ALL OF HIS FRIENDS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE AND EXPRESSES GRATITUDE FOR ALL OF THE HOLIDAY AND GOOD HEALTH MESSAGES SENT TO HIM.**

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA



His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph's Address  
At the Funeral of Protosyngellos +Paul Doyle  
St. Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, CA  
December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016

*"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"*

*(Psalm 109:4)*

Beloved in Christ, Respected Clergy, faithful from throughout the Diocese of the West, friends and family of +Fr. Paul,

Christ is in our Midst!

While observing these last days of the Advent season in anticipation of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are soberly reminded that the life of a Christian is filled with both joy and sorrow. Although joy is just days ahead, we must first overcome a great momentary sorrow – the loss of our dear brother in Christ and faithful friend Protosyngellos Archimandrite +Paul Doyle.

Because +Fr. Paul was a uniquely pious person, we find a wonderful description of him in the words contained in Psalm 118 where selected verses read.

"Blessed are the blameless in the way who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who search out His testimonies; they shall search for Him with their whole heart..."

...For those who work lawlessness do not walk in His ways...

...You commanded us regarding Your commandments, that we should be very diligent to keep them...

...How shall a young man keep his way straight? When he keeps Your words...

...I searched for You with my whole heart; do not drive me away from your commandments...

...I hid Your teachings in my heart so as not to sin against you...



...I shall meditate on Your commandments, and I shall understand Your ways...  
...Reward Your servant; I shall live, and keep Your words...  
...Unveil my eyes, and I shall understand the wonders in Your law...  
...My soul longs to desire Your judgments in every season...  
...For Your testimonies are my meditation. And Your ordinances are my counsels...

As I take a moment to reflect personally, I'm honored to say that my friendship with +Fr. Paul goes back almost 25 years. From the start, it was a Christian friendship – one that would flourish in love, obedience, loyalty and honesty – a friendship of honor and respect from the beginning as it was until the end. It was a precious gift of which we were both keenly aware and one which we treasured, nurtured and grew.

He served this Archdiocese and the Diocese of the West for over 42 years - honorably, piously and without any blame. At a recent retirement banquet for +Fr. Paul, I shared several stories and spoke about him openly. The most notable virtue he possessed and the one I most want people to know and remember him by, is that he was a godly priest – perhaps the only priest I know who had no personal agenda.

What does that mean – no personal agenda? It means that his focus was on God at all times and in all things.

He served the Archdiocese with love, purity and godliness. His natural humility was something we rarely see in people today. It was a gift bestowed upon him with which he touched many lives, healed many situations and with which he served his people.

He devoted his knowledge and all his resources to the Church. He traveled tirelessly and served whenever and wherever he could throughout the entire United States; from Chicago to Portland, to finally establishing the parish of St. Matthew in Torrance, California.

Until the very moment of his passing he was loved, remembered and respected. The friendships he built, with both young and old, will never die because they were established on the rock of godliness and in holy sincerity.

The impact of +Fr. Paul's life on his brother clergy is difficult to measure. One could not come in touch with him without being impacted by his goodness. Although he carried many worldly titles, such as Protosyngellos (which means senior among the clergy), Dean of Southern California Deanery, member of St. Ignatius and of the Board of Trustees, these were but only that – titles. His strength was in his love for his brother clergy, his parishioners, his fellow man, for creation and beauty and in his deep and profound faith - a faith so strong that it imbued and permeated his very essence and was the matter of which he was created. +Father Paul, we will remember your tender smile, your quiet manner and your unparalleled sense of

humor. Your service to the Church can best be compared to the way the elder Simeon carried our Lord Jesus in His arms. He lived a life of devotion and honor.

+Fr. Paul was worthy of his ministry and he kept it Holy until his last breath of life. Such a person never actually dies and his priesthood continues into eternity because it is established after the order of Melchidezek. He will be with God forever.

To the clergy I say, keep the life of +Fr. Paul ever before you as a pure example of the priesthood well-served. If you are ever in doubt, you need go no further than to reflect on his life.

To his family, I encourage you to honor him by keeping your faith strong just as he taught you to do.

To the family at St. Matthews's parish, a special thank you for taking good care of +Fr. Paul in so many ways. To the Zraick and Woolsey families, thank you for your attention and loving daily care ... a beautiful example of Christ's ministry. To each of you young people, and to the many who came on their own time, in turns, to read a psalm or two, to comfort +Fr. Paul, or to offer a consolation, remember that he will always be with you.

To me, +Fr. Paul, you were a friend, a companion and a confidant, without whom my early years here could have been challenging but instead were positive, optimistic and adventurous. I thank you for your love, your loyalty, your focus, your purity, and your example.

Rest now until we meet again my friend. May you be counted among the righteous and enjoy the place of verdure, calm and peace which we are promised in the Heavenly Kingdom. We will pray for you and we ask you to pray for us and for this Archdiocese.

On behalf of the Hierarchs, Clergy and faithful, the members of the Order of St. Ignatius, the Board of Trustees and of all the organizations in this Archdiocese, I offer all of you the blessing and joy of this holy season and extend my most heartfelt and sincere condolences.

**May his memory be eternal!  
Christ is Risen!**

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

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# My Discovery of BISHOP CONSTANTINE AT HOLY TRINITY MONASTERY

Two years ago I spent some time with the Brotherhood of Saint John of the Ladder in Atlantic Mine, Michigan. The Hieromonk who supervises the day-to-day routine of the Brotherhood is Father Alexander. Monastic life is not for the faint of heart. The days revolve around prayer, and hours of it. One day after the

prayer services for the day were done, Fr. Alexander and I sat together to have a meal. Fr. Alexander is a warm and humorous monk. He is a permanent resident from Germany who lived in Texas when he first arrived in the States, giving him a unique accent.

I could listen to him tell stories all day, but this night was special. It involved the uncovering of the incorrupt relics of Bishop CONSTANTINE (Essensky), who fell asleep in the Lord on May 31, 1996, and the role Fr. Alexander played in his reburial. It was

an amazing story about the research he did out of love, and about the efforts that he and many others made to have the body of an Orthodox bishop moved from a graveyard that once belonged to a monastery in Blanco, Texas (that is now closed), to Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York. The former Christ of the Hills Monastery was shut down after a scandal that rocked it to its core in 2006. The land was later purchased by a San Antonio man named Alfonso Salazar. Some monks from Jordanville worked with Salazar and others to have Bishop CONSTANTINE'S remains relocated, so that his grave could be cared for and people could visit and pray for him.

Bishop CONSTANTINE was born Emmanuel Essensky in 1907 in St. Petersburg, Russia. After finishing school and working, he spent some time studying iconography under Pimen Sofronov, and in 1928 received a blessing to enter seminary from the New Martyr Archbishop John of Riga. In 1932 Metropolitan EULOGIUS of Paris ordained him to the priesthood. By 1949 he joined the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and emigrated to the United States. It is said that Bishop CONSTANTINE had "a particular love for the beauty of God's house, and, with his talent for iconography and his refined artistic sensibilities, he transformed the garage, in which the church was located, into a lovely jewel, worthy of being God's temple." "He had a great love for the divine services, and his manner of serving was always dignified, never hurried, and deeply prayerful. One man, who had served as an acolyte under Vladyka, said that when he served Liturgy, 'his prayer was palpable. You could feel it!'"

In 1967, Bishop CONSTANTINE was tonsured a monk, and two months later he was consecrated Bishop of Brisbane on the Feast of the Kursk Root Icon. He

later returned to America and became the Vicar Bishop of Eastern America and New York. In 1981 he became Bishop of Richmond and Great Britain. The combination of Vladyka's ascetic life and bad climate, however, caused the further deterioration of his already poor health. Vladyka Constantine returned to New York. His bad arthritis and other health problems, however, made the winters unbearable for him, so in 1991 he moved to Texas. There, at Christ of the Hills Monastery, Vladyka became a source of joy. Like our beloved Saint John of San Francisco, he would spend his nights praying for monks while they slept in their cells. Vladyka was also known for weeping when he would receive the Holy Mysteries of the Church. After his repose, the body of this beloved man would move one last time to Jordanville.

On that momentous day, Fr. Alexander told me, they finally got the casket out of the ground after a lot of work. At this point, he smelled roses. In the morgue,

he saw the incorrupt hands and body of Bishop CONSTANTINE of blessed memory. His Gospel book and prayer rope looked almost brand new, and he still had his beard. Before this discovery, Fr. Alexander had told another priest that, after doing research about Bishop CONSTANTINE, he would not have been surprised to find him in this incorrupt condition. The man was revered as a saint by many during his life. Fr. Alexander felt the same way when he saw the incorrupt body of this beloved shepherd for the first time. All of this came about because a few monks cared for another Orthodox Christian, a bishop some did not know personally. Out of respect and love, they intended only to move his body to a monastery where he could be prayed for. It was this which led them to discover the incorrupt body of a bishop.

David Beason  
Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church, Shreveport, Louisiana



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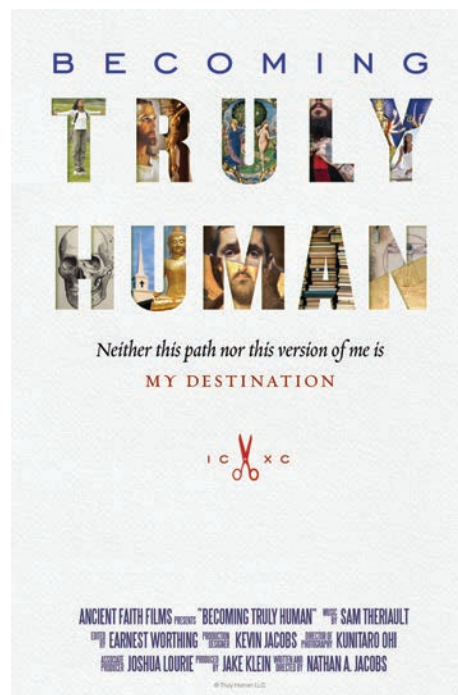
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## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE FILM-MAKER OF “BECOMING TRULY HUMAN”

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EDITED TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY FR. JOHN FINLEY, CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM FOR THE ANTIOCHIAN ARCHDIOCESE, OF NATHAN JACOBS, THE FILMMAKER OF THE NEW *BECOMING TRULY HUMAN* FEATURE FILM.

*Nathan, how are you today?*

I’m doing quite well. It’s a pleasure being here to talk with you.

*So could you tell us little bit about yourself, your background. I noticed that you have a Ph.D. next to your name.*

Yes, I have a Ph.D. in historical and systematic theology. I also have degrees in philosophy and Church history. Before transitioning into filmmaking, I was a college professor, most recently teaching philosophy at the University of Kentucky, where I’m still a visiting scholar of philosophy. I was a professor for seven years.

I started my time at art school. That’s where I became obsessed with questions about God, freedom, the soul, and the afterlife – to use Immanuel Kant’s list. And that’s what started me down a very different road than where I began in art school, the road that had me looking at philosophy and theology. When I went down that road, I had no expectation of it turning into a career, but, before I knew it, I had a Ph.D.; I was publishing; and I was working at universities in philosophy or religion departments.

*Awesome. So how did you get into filmmaking?*

In art school, I was a fine-arts major – “fine arts” being painting and drawing – but I always loved film. It was very natural for me, when I would read a scene, to visualize how I would shoot that. Camera angles just came natural to me. So I actually was involved in several small film projects while in art school, and was encouraged to go down that road by certain professors, but, at the time, I decided not to. I also worked during my grad school years for a video game company, where I did computer-generated imaging, as well as storyboard work, pre-visualization of animation sequences. But again, this was all on the side for me, nothing that I intended to actually pursue. But I kept on bumping into professional filmmakers – in Michigan, Chicago, one in Vancouver. One of the things I learned was that all of these filmmakers were eager and willing to work with me, even though I didn’t have a degree in film. As long as I had vision and creativity and motivation, they were open to working with me. There was one filmmaker in particular, Paul Engstrom of Raw Camera Company in Vancouver, which handles about 30 percent of all commercial work done there, who was a pro and saw a lot of potential in

me, enough that he was willing to work with me. Thanks to some folks who were crazy enough to partner with me – particularly Chris Firestone – we started things on a small scale, but had enough success there that both the pros we worked with were willing to take a leap on larger projects, feature-film projects, with me directing them.

Thankfully, there were other folks who also got behind us financially, such as the Michaelides family, the Lacy family, and the Baldwin family, as well as a number of professional actors, such as Matt Bush (from *The Goldbergs*), Osric Chau (from *Supernatural*), Julianna Guill (from *The Girlfriends’ Guide to Divorce*), Cyrina Fiallo (from Disney’s *Good Luck Charlie*), and Sunkrish Bala (from *Castle*). All these folks saw vision and potential in me, and decided to take risks on me as a director. Before I knew it, I was a movie director.

*You know, listening to you talk reminds me a little bit of a quality I’ve seen in my oldest son, who is a general contractor. He’s an artist, and I think one of his greatest hidden talents is that, when he goes about to do a building project, he can see it in his mind’s eye. Because he can visualize that on the front end, and then communicate that with the client, it puts him way ahead of a lot of other building contractors, who might otherwise be just a hammer and [every project] a nail. It really resonated with me when you said when you first started getting into film, you could see it on the screen before you even started. Now this particular film made for the Becoming Truly Human ministry for the Antiochian Archdiocese is not really just for the Antiochian Archdiocese, but for all Orthodox in North America and the English-speaking world. Was your meeting with the leadership team of the Becoming Truly Human ministry the first time you ever considered making an American Orthodox feature film? Or was there a time before that you were thinking about this?*

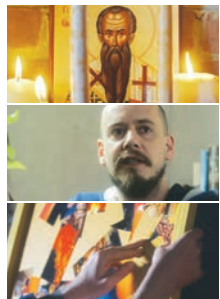
It’s a Yes and a No. I had several projects in development, scripts that were on the docket for me in terms of my long-term filmmaking vision, that were heavily influenced by my Orthodox worldview. Now, I had never embraced the title of “Orthodox filmmaker,” or thought I was making “Orthodox films,” but that wasn’t because I was opposed to that title; it’s just not the space I was thinking in. I thought of myself as a secular filmmaker, and these were secular films. So *Becoming Truly Human* was the first time I worked on a project that was explicitly Orthodox. But one of the things that clicked with me during the project is that I’m proud of Orthodoxy and I’m proud to be Orthodox; I don’t shy away from the title in academia or in my publications or even on the set

of a film. So it was quite natural for me to embrace the idea that this is an Orthodox film, and I am an Orthodox director who is directing an Orthodox film. I think in that sense, *Becoming Truly Human* really became a perspective-shift for me, because it was the first time I had really embraced the Orthodox title for me and for the project I was working on. Really, in many ways that has shaped my current trajectory. I have really embraced that title and that vision for the majority of the projects slated in my mind as the next films.

*So, let me ask you how you might distinguish what you have produced this time around with the Becoming Truly Human ministry from other forms of Christian outreach into the local community that you may have observed.*

I would say that one of the common complaints – well, there are a number of common complaints with faith-based films, and it’s one of the reasons I always refused the titled of a “Christian” director, or the claim that I was making “Christian films” or “faith-based films.” Faith-based films, I think, for a lot of folks feel like they are light on content; there’s not a tremendous amount of depth, theologically, philosophically, in terms of the human condition, or otherwise; they also often-times feel somewhat inauthentic. There’s no real sense of struggle; those outside of whatever the faith-tradition might be are rarely accurately represented. There’s also a sense of imbalance: every objection has to be defeated, there’s no real conversation to be had, and at the end of the day, there are no loose ends. Things are tied up in a nice, neat package. In many ways, this is why people feel those projects are essentially propaganda, instead of an authentic work of cinematic art.

None of that is true of *Becoming Truly Human*. The film is very content-heavy, perhaps *too* content-heavy for some folks. Some might have to watch it several times in order to find all that’s there. It’s very authentic; the “nones” (who I know we haven’t talked about yet, but these are folks who are not religiously affiliated) in the film really are religiously unaffiliated. When they talk about their journey and what they dislike about religion and why they are outside of religion, that is an authentic voice because that really is who they are. And the one story in the film that is the story of a formerly religiously unaffiliated individual, who becomes Orthodox, is the voice of a sympathizer, someone whose story really does resonate with where the other religiously unaffiliated in the film are coming from. There’s also a balance of screen time between those who are unaffiliated, and the one who becomes affiliated. There are





a lot of loose ends, too: the objections or complaints about religion aren't really answered, they're just left to sit there when people share their stories and perspectives, without any felt need to rebut them. There's no definitive conclusion offered for the viewer at the end of the film; all of the stories are put out there for the audience to do with whatever they think is best. In that sense, *Becoming Truly Human* is highly unusual for a film that is coming from any kind of a faith tradition. When we were doing this film and screening the religiously unaffiliated they found it so refreshing to have people who were willing to listen to them and let them be human and let their stories be a real story. My hope is that viewers get that same sense of refreshment from the film, that it really does create room for an open conversation about religion, precisely because it is so different from the way faith-based films typically approach a topic.

*Nathan, I certainly agree with you on this, that these are distinguishing characteristics from other forms of Christian outreach, and I did find it refreshing myself and am very optimistic about the results as this is rolled out, and begins to be used more and more in our parishes and our missions. So, would you describe this, even after having said what you said, as some sort of a marketing technique to non-Orthodox, or would you describe it in some other way?*

I recoil from the terminology of a “marketing technique.” I think the idea of starting a conversation that is open and honest is probably a better way of framing it. The film, in many ways, is conversational in the way it just allows folks to speak. So my hope is that because that is the nature of the film, it will do just that: facilitate conversation. My understanding of the vision on the part of the Archdiocese is that they want to see this film used this way, in this conversational way. I would hate to see it as a marketing technique, rather than a film aimed at creating room for an open and honest conversation about religion, with folks who are presently unaffiliated with religion of any kind.

*Well, the question was asked somewhat tongue-in-cheek, because I know it's not a marketing technique, and I want people who are reading this interview to know that we are not incorporating some type of commercial marketing technique in presenting this film. Could you be a little more specific? I mean, you are talking about an open-ended conversation. Could you describe a little more specifically how you might see this film used in a typical Orthodox mission or parish setting?*

Sure. Maybe I should say a little bit here about how the film itself is structured. The film weaves together three different components. One of those is a series of one-on-one interviews with these religiously unaffiliated, or what some call “nones,” because they check “none of the above” on religion surveys. They are “none of the above,” religiously speaking. That term started to be used as a way of identifying an entire group because of how large that group grew over the years. In the 1990s, research groups reported that “nones” were only around 5–7% of the US population, whereas in 2015 that number grew to 25% of the population. (Folks that I know who live overseas say that growth is consistent with what they are seeing outside of the U.S. as well.) And so, when these research groups asked, *What do we call these unaffiliated folks?* the title that was chosen was “nones.” So that is the title we use in the film, and that's defined early in the film so the viewer knows what we are referring to.

All of the “nones” we interviewed walked away from a religious background, but most also found various aspects of religion to be fascinating or edifying. Some certainly tend towards atheism, but maybe are agnostics, and many consider themselves spiritual in some of sort of informal sense that doesn't have any sort of formal practice with it. “Nones” are not necessarily opposed to belief in God or spirituality or karma or prayer. Here I have to thank Josh Lourie, who is the associate producer of the film and was one of the executive producers on my previous film. He pre-screened probably 50 or so “nones,” and he would find them just by going out into the highways and byways, so to speak, and asking people what their religious affiliation is. For each “none” he interviewed he would take a headshot, jot down notes on their story, and create a database for my review. I then selected viable candidates, knowing that we wanted a diversity of perspectives, race, gender, *et cetera*, to show the spectrum of the “nones.” I ended up screening probably 20 viable candidates. We narrowed it down to the seven in the film.

These “nones” share their story and explain how they went from religious affiliation to non-affiliation; they talk about where they're at now and where they see themselves in the future. That's the first component of the film. The second component is a roundtable discussion. That's where questions are posed to the “nones” about religion. For example, *When you hear the word “religion,” what comes to mind?* It's a very open-ended question and they discuss it. One of the things you see here is that not all the “nones” agree about these questions. So you start to see the dynamics of how they differ from one

another and you see their own interactions as they have a conversation among themselves. The third component of the film is actually my own story, which is the story of someone who is a former “none” who moves from being unaffiliated to being an Eastern Orthodox Christian. My story in many ways echoes all of the things the other “nones” in the film say, but at some point takes a different turn.

Those three components are woven back and forth. They are presented for the audience to do with as they see fit. Now, in terms of how the film is intended to be used in a parish context, there are certainly people better equipped to answer this than I. I am not directly involved in the Church ministry; I'm the filmmaker. But my understanding is that the intent for the film is to use it in a very conversational way, similar to what you see in the film. The film is to be watched, and I believe it is to be watched in segments, and then those segments become the occasion for having very open-ended conversations, much like what happens in the film. It's not a conversation that is meant to hear an objection and then offer a response. Like in the film, people are allowed to express what they think, and then other folks express what they think. There's an openness to hearing people. In that sense, it really is facilitating a conversation, as opposed to a rebuttal of folks who are currently standing outside of the Church doors, so to speak.

*Adam Roberts, who is doing the training for the implementation in the parish setting, is training the (lay) facilitators to lead the conversation by asking questions, not necessarily by giving answers. It's a kind of knee-jerk reaction, I think, for many Orthodox Christians, “We have the answers,” you know? We have to restrain ourselves from that and really keep the conversation in an open mode by asking people questions in which they can say whatever they want to say. With that in mind, there's still, I suppose, a question: How would you propose, or how do we propose, getting millennial “nones” to sit and to watch this film, whether it be in one sitting or whether it be in segments as it is designed?*

I will say that, even though the desire was to use the film in the *Becoming Truly Human* ministry in parishes, I really did want to make the film in such a way that it could be watched on its own. So in that sense, it is made to be the sort of thing a person could view on Amazon or Hulu, maybe they could view it alone, or view it with other people. In fact, folks could very easily share it with anyone. If there is somebody they want to start a conversation with, they can share the film; that person watching it creates the opportunity to have a conversa-

tion about religion. So the film, while it will be used in a parish context over several weeks, it's made in such a way that people can watch it on its own. I wanted to do that because I wanted to see it have a life of its own. If there are folks who aren't willing to go into a parish setting and be a part of the program, they may still watch it. From what I've seen, just from test screenings of the opening of the film with a number of “nones,” the opening of the film has always been received very positively. The opening does not make clear where this is all going, but what it does make clear is that the voices you are hearing are authentically voices of “nones.” So what I've found is that folks who are “nones” tend to really resonate with what they are hearing, and they want to watch the entire film. So I do think the film will have an effective life of its own, as well as be the sort of thing that can easily be shared – as well as, obviously, being effective in the program context of the parish.

*In the film, you talk about how large an impact St. Athanasius the Great had on your own personal journey, not only in embracing Christianity, but all the way into the Orthodox Church. This is of particular interest to me, because I am a member of St. Athanasius Orthodox Church in Santa Barbara, California. Would you mind sharing what impact St. Athanasius had on your life?*

Sure, well, . . . just as an aside, I attend St. Athanasius here in Nicholasville, Kentucky. So I talk about my journey in the film, and I explain that I was someone raised Protestant. Most of the “nones,” their stories begin with religious affiliation, and my story is no exception. I was raised Protestant. I walked away from religion as early as I could, probably the second I became a teenager. Even though I had wandered away from religion and gone on to other worldly things, I was still obsessive about religious questions. I was an artist and was particularly interested in religious art. I obsessed about the weight of free choice and a person's ability to shape themselves into something beautiful or grotesque. Related to that, I fretted about the afterlife, which many of the “nones” we interviewed also fret about. I spent a lot of time mulling over questions about the nature of God – not so much whether God existed (I was persuaded of that), but what is God like, and what does that mean for me? I was also preoccupied with questions about world religions. Can you know which world religion is correct and how would you ever determine that? Even though I had wandered away from religion, these are questions that I obsessively explored. I had an insatiable appetite for reading about these questions; I would corner, and



speak with, scholars or priest or friends, anyone I could have a conversation with about these things; and eventually that all funneled into me moving into the study of philosophy and Church history. This led me to getting a Ph.D. and becoming a college professor.

Yet in that process of searching, I never returned to religion proper. I was really crafting a secular religion of my own, one that was crafted out of the God of the philosophers. I was also fixated on ancient religious aesthetics and artifacts, things that connected with me and stirred me but were disconnected from any formal religious practice. I even had a commitment to Jesus, although the Jesus I had constructed was more of a vague ancient reconstruction than it was an Orthodox understanding of Jesus. Still, that secular religion of my own making lasted all the way into my doctoral studies. The first real turning point for me was when I read Athanasius. I had spent ample time with Western Christian writers; I actually dedicated most of my undergraduate and graduate studies to the writings of Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and other medieval scholastics on into modern philosophers, such as Leibniz and Kant. I had gotten to the point where Western systems were so familiar that when reading a figure, it was pretty easy to anticipate what school they were part of and anticipate what sort of answers they would give to various questions.

Well, with Athanasius I couldn't do that, and it was very disorienting. I couldn't put him in one of the prefabricated boxes I had developed over the course of my studies. I began to try to figure out what on earth was happening in his writings. I think crucial to the shift, for me, was realizing that his emphasis was less on a judicial framework where God is lawgiver and we have violated certain laws and have a judicial predicament and Christ comes to rectify; Athanasius was more fixated on this entire picture of the world as something that comes into existence because it somehow participated in divine life, and when creatures move away from God, we bring death on ourselves not as judicial retribution but as an inevitability because we have cut ourselves from the source of life. The incarnation is that immortal life of God reentering the world in order to heal a dying species, and that is what a person is invited into through repentance and the life of faith. That picture of the world was very stirring, very different than what I had seen. I found myself finding it persuasive, which was probably the first time that a historically orthodox Christian was persuading me. But the question for me was whether Athanasius was an anomaly or were there other

folks who also thought that way. That was when I started reading Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus.

What started to happen was that I not only gained growing clarity on what this Christianity that was alien to me looked like, but I also found this surprising unity to all of these writers, which was strange for me, because I was used to studying opposing schools of thought, opposing schools in scholasticism, post-reformation scholasticism, and so on. To see a unified perspective on what Christianity is, was strange. It eventually ended up pushing me away from many of the answers I had developed in the shaping of my secular religion toward the answers in the Eastern fathers. I won't go through the whole story, since this is what I talk about in the film, but this eventually led me to connecting these writers with the Eastern Orthodox Church. That connection led me to connect this certain way of thinking with a certain way of living – namely the life of the Eastern Orthodox Church – that years later became my religious home.

*You know, these late-fourth-century Cappadocian fathers (such as Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa), their hero was St. Athanasius. They loved him, because he really set the stage for them to make the contributions they made in the late Fourth Century. Particularly in St. Athanasius's On the Incarnation, the thing that always strikes, and I try to read it every year during the nativity fast, is that God became a man to destroy death. Coming from a Southern Baptist background, I would have answered that question previously by saying that God came to forgive us of our sins, so that we might go to heaven when we die. Of course that's true, but that's not really the fundamental reason. The fundamental reason – to destroy death – is the uniqueness you are talking about, which defies the category. What do you hope people will take away from this film?*

I think it depends on the viewer. For “nones,” I hope there are a couple of things. One of the things that I hope is clear is that I am a sympathizer. I think their experiences, their complaints, their objections are valid. In fact, that's exactly why my story is out there, because I resonate with everything they say, and really would still be a “none” without Orthodoxy. But that's where my hope is: that my story may raise a question for them, that maybe their journey isn't over. While they are currently “nones,” maybe that's not where they stay. I have encountered a lot of disaffected religious folks. They are not “nones” yet, but they are so discontent with their religious experience that they are on their way there, and many of those folks that I've met throughout the years

are folks who also resonate with the same concerns and objections the “nones” have. The difference is that they see enough value in organized religion that they can't cut themselves off from it, and my hope is that a lot of folks will also hear a validation of their experience and their desire for something more, and maybe find, in the midst of that, there is something more. They don't have to settle for the experience they are currently having.

I also think of folks who are not disaffected religious folks, but know folks who are, such as a parent of a “none” or a spouse of someone who's on their way to becoming a “none.” A lot of those folks, again in my experience, are folks who don't understand what's going on with their kids or their spouse, and my hope is that they can hear in this film, which does not silence those voices or feel a need to rebut everything they say, they can hear what's happening there and may begin to get an understanding of those voices, and begin to have a conversation about what is valid in what they are saying, in terms of the Orthodox [faith], it sort of depends. For cradle Orthodox, I really hope that any cradle Orthodox who perhaps doesn't see the grandeur of his own traditions – and I am not suggesting that all cradle Orthodox don't see the grandeur – that they start to see through the eyes of someone who journeys into it, the beauty of what they've been raised in. Anecdotally, I did a screening of the film at the St. Constantine School in Texas, and I had a cradle Orthodox girl come up to me afterwards, and she didn't know my story ended up in Orthodoxy. She told me that she had been raised Orthodox and was considering looking at other traditions, but was really affected by the fact that, after all of the searching that I did, I ended up landing in Orthodoxy. That was sort of arresting for her, and I hope there are others who have that experience. For converts, my hope is that it gives them a tool that they can use to say, “This explains me and my experience.” Maybe there are folks who don't easily share what that is. In general I hope that it awakens Orthodox believers generally to the growing body of people who maybe don't even know what Orthodoxy is, but may well have a home in the Orthodox Church.

*I'll tell you what my take away is. For me, learning and being exposed to how millennial “nones” think is of tremendous value for me, and I would hope for other people. If no one joined the Orthodox Church as a result of this – and we know there will be people who will join – just helping Orthodox Christians be exposed and see and learn about this younger generation of millennial “nones” is invaluable. So I want to thank you for that. Finally, let me ask, what's next for you, Nathan? Might we see more Orthodox feature films, or maybe a movie?*

I certainly hope so. I am currently in talks with His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH. He is very pleased with the results of *Becoming Truly Human* and so we have talked about his desire to see me do more work in service to the Church. I have also been in conversation with John Maddex at Ancient Faith Ministries, who is also very pleased with the film and wants to see more. As I mentioned, I had this change in perspective on myself and on the films I do, as a result of working on *Becoming Truly Human*. That change has really prompted me to embrace the idea of moving into a steady flow of what could be labeled “Orthodox films,” probably should be labeled “Orthodox films.” I've been working with various folks to try to come up with what would be a sustainable strategy for a steady flow of projects that are authentically Orthodox but also equally unusual in the realm of film, and specifically any sort of faith-based film, like *Becoming Truly Human*, as well as feature narrative projects. We will definitely need support, benefactors, and foundations, but I am optimistic that, with the strategy we have, we can find some support, assuming there are folks out there who are supportive with what we have done with this film. So, God willing, we will succeed.

*This is Fr. John Finley with the Department of Missions and Evangelism. We have been talking with Nathan Jacobs who has produced a documentary film entitled Becoming Truly Human. Thank you Nathan for providing this interview for us and God bless you in all you do.*

Thank you, Father. I appreciate the opportunity.





# Communities in Action

## BISHOP THOMAS VISITS ST. PAUL, EMMAUS, FOR ELEVATION

The parishioners of Saint Paul in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, had the supreme joy of combining their annual visit from their beloved father and chief-pastor, His Grace Bishop THOMAS, with the elevation of their pastor, Rev. Fr. Andrew Ste-

Dean Emeritus of Saint George Cathedral in Charleston, West Virginia, where Fr. Andrew served his first two years as a priest. Fr. Andrew was received as a convert to Orthodoxy in 1998 at All Saints Church, Raleigh. Also assisting were seminarians Marshall Goodge and Joseph Clark. Shortly before the final dismissal, Bishop THOMAS prayed

and Archpriest Andrew's father Bill Damick. The night was capped off with Archpriest Andrew's own address, in which he referred to this event as his true graduation, referring to the words of Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory. After a closing prayer by Fr. Olof, the whole assembly sang, "Many years," expressing their hope that Fr.



phen Damick, to the rank of Archpriest over the weekend of October 1–2, in recognition of his service to the parish and the Church as a whole. The pastoral visit began with Bishop THOMAS's meeting with the men of the parish for breakfast on Saturday morning, and then with the women for lunch at midday. That evening, Fr. Andrew celebrated Great Vespers as Bishop THOMAS presided from the throne.

The next morning Orthros was chanted, and Bishop THOMAS served the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, concelebrated by Fr. Andrew and the V. Rev. Archpriest Olof Scott, as well as Rev. Dn. David Keim of All Saints Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Fr. Scott is

over Fr. Andrew before giving him a pectoral cross, accompanied by shouts of "Axios! Mustahiq! He is worthy!" from the assembled congregation and visiting family. In his address following, Bishop THOMAS stressed that archpriests are meant to serve as exemplars to other clergy, and their parishes as exemplars to other parishioners throughout the Archdiocese.

That night a banquet was held in Archpriest Andrew's honor, with visiting clergy from across Pennsylvania and from several jurisdictions. Speakers included His Grace Bishop THOMAS, Parish Council President Patrick Maher, who presented Archpriest Andrew with a pectoral cross on behalf of the parish,

Andrew might continue his ministry in Emmaus for many years to come.

## ST. JOSEPH, HOUSTON, BLOWS UP SUNDAY SCHOOL

Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." With this in mind, St. Joseph Church of Houston, Texas, has blown up Church School for 2016–2017. Our theme, *BOOM!* stands for **Being Orthodox On Monday**. Our teachers have implemented a multifunctional teaching program for our children, who have been divided into families, where children pre-K through 12th Grade are clustered together. We are taking teaching out of the classroom on

most Sundays, and finding different approaches to helping our children learn their faith. Father Joseph Huneycutt offered a teaching liturgy one Sunday, where the children were free to ask questions after the Gospel and at the end of the service. More recently, we taught that "Saints Are Our Superheroes"; there was a saint scavenger hunt in the church and the family groups competed in their knowledge of saint trivia. We even had a visit from Batman. BAM! Ka-Pow! BOOM!



## ST. MICHAEL CELEBRATES 35<sup>TH</sup> PATRONAL FEAST

The patronal feast is very significant in the annual life of a parish. It reminds the parishioners that everything that they have accomplished is possible because of the dutiful and unrelenting prayers by their patron saint for God's continued grace.

As they gathered for their patronal feast, the parishioners of St. Michael's Church in Whittier, California, remembered and confirmed the aid of the consistent intercessions of St. Michael the Archangel. By his prayers, the parish celebrated their 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Western Rite Vicariate parish. By his prayers, the parish saw a fifty percent increase in

the community. By his prayers, too, the parish is energized to continue its multi-ethnic ministry.

The vibrant community gathered for a weeklong celebration of their feast, beginning on September 29. (In the Western Orthodox calendar, St. Michael the Archangel is commemorated on September 29.) The major celebration occurred the following Sunday, October 2. Nearly every current parishioner attended both the festive Mass (Divine Liturgy) as well as the catered banquet. During the Mass, they heard their pastor, V. Rev. Fr. John W. Fenton, remind them that St. Michael teaches Christians that "our life is not parts, but one whole: the complete unit of standing before God



in church while at the same time ministering to others." At the banquet, Ralph Jenney, Parish Council President, expressed his gratitude,



on behalf of the parish, for the first anniversary of Fr. Fenton's leadership as the third Pastor of the parish.

The event was also the occasion for recognizing the outstanding dedication and service of Sharon Melone, who faithfully served as the Director of the Altar Guild for 10 years. As she retired from her duties, she was given by the pastor and parish council the parish's "Good and Faithful Servant Award."

Throughout the rest of the week, the celebration continued with special services, and culminated with the Octave (Leave-taking) of the Patronal Feast on October 6.

#### GOD'S GRACE AT ST. PHILIP CHURCH, SOUDERTON

*And of His fullness we have all receive, and grace for grace.*

—John 1:16

We are always overflowing with God's grace, but sometimes we don't realize it. Recently, though, at St. Philip's in Souderton, Pennsylvania, God's generosity has been too much for even my hard heart to ignore.

First, we said goodbye to our beloved founding pastor, Fr. Boniface Black. He was a great man with a big heart and many years of pastoral and missionary success. We didn't want to say goodbye, but God planned things another way. While we are still under a cloud of mourning, we are also basking in Father's beautiful, effective, and generous servanthood, and the excellence of his administration, communication, prayer, and counseling. His funeral was truly a whiff of heavenly aroma from God, since "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 115/116). We are trying to live the simple, day-to-day life in Christ that he taught us by word and deed: "Fly under the radar..."



"Keep on smiling..." "Wait until Christmas..." May his memory be eternal, and may we have half the grace, love, and pastoral success with which God blessed him!

Secondly, our long-term deacon, Herman Acker, was ordained

to the Holy Priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on October 9. Fr. Herman has been celebrating forty days of liturgies with the solemnity, joy, focus, and calm for which we love him. It has been a joy and a blessing and an honor for me to serve with him these ten years, and then to guide him and serve him as he spreads his pastoral wings wherever God's will blows him, through the voice of our Bishop THOMAS and the confirmation of our Metropolitan JOSEPH. Fr. Herman's recent teaching to us after these liturgies has been about the reality of God's presence in our life when we receive the Holy Eucharist and also about growing in prayer by faithfully following the liturgical forms that have been handed to us. I've been reflecting on each liturgy as a celebration,



a remembrance, and a proclamation of Christ's life (1 Corinthians 11:26). May God grant him, Khouria Veronica, and their boys many blessed years of health, prosperity, spiritual vigor, and apostolic labor!

#### WHAT'S GOIN' IN SPRING – TEXAS?

What's goin' in Spring – *Spring, Texas*, that is? Spring is a land north of Houston that sits on a hill. Well, it's not really a hill, but our Church does sit on an elevated tract of land, and the beautiful gold dome can be seen literally from miles away. If only you could have seen what was happening inside! For starters, a work that has been in progress for over three years has come to fruition. In 2013, during the Archdiocese National Convention in Hous-

ton, Khouria Erin Kimmitt visited our newly constructed Temple to take a look at all the white walls that were waiting to be adorned with icons. After thirty-nine months of hard work, late nights, and installing, well into the wee hours of the morning, she and her team of helpers completed the work you see in this picture. While the photo captures much, the profundity and insight involved in the details cannot be grasped in a photo. You have to see it in person to appreciate it!

Khouria Erin had great timing, in that she finished the project one week before His Grace Bishop BASIL made his annual pastoral visit, and what a blessing that was! He was with us for Great Vespers on Saturday, and on Sunday morning he served the Hierarchal Divine Litur-

gy. His spiritually nourishing homily is still etched in the hearts and minds of everyone who was there. His Grace also ordained a young man from our parish who graduated from the St. Stephen's Program. The newly ordained Deacon Photios has







been serving our parish community in various ministries, and our parish is thankful to him and his family for the work and service they offer to God's Holy Church, especially now as his role has increased.

Several years ago, our parish community was tucked away on an old piece of farmland in a single-wide trailer. Since building our Church Temple, and adding more tempo-

rary space for our general use, there's hardly any trace of farm land on our property. The area has continued to develop and grow over these years, and through God's grace, we pray it will continue in every season, and not just in Spring, but in every city and land!

**ST. IGNATIUS OF MADISON  
HOSTS FALL CLERGY RETREAT AND  
DELEGATES MEETING**

Fr. Basil Koory and the parish members of St. Ignatius Orthodox Church, Madison, Wisconsin, hosted the 2016 Midwest Diocese Fall Clergy Retreat and Delegates Meeting (Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest), presided over by Bishop ANTHONY, from October 20 to 23.

During the clergy retreat, which started Thursday evening and ended early Friday afternoon, Bishop ANTHONY presented the topic of confession.

On Saturday, Diocesan officers Cynthia O'Connor and Sheryl Vanderwagen led a business meeting of the Diocesan Antiochian Women. Bishop ANTHONY attended the first part of the meeting and gave a short sermon about Martha and Mary, encouraging women to realize the importance of both serving others and spending time with Christ.

Also meeting over the weekend was the Diocesan Young Adult Ministry (YAM). YAM had a full weekend touring Madison. On Saturday morning they visited the State Cap-

itol and the farmer's market which occupied the four streets surrounding the Wisconsin Capitol Building. Archdeacon Saed Rihani presented a talk on the topic of death and dying – something young men and women don't often talk about. The Fall Gathering was a great opportunity for the young adults of the Midwest Diocese to meet each other. They shared ways in which YAM can be active in their home parishes. They were also blessed with a visit from Bishop ANTHONY, who encouraged them and left them with the challenge to "be the 'lonely hero' of your own life so that you can be a social magnet when your time comes."

Archpriest Fred Shaheen of Cedar Rapids, Indiana, led the SOYO delegates in a Bible study discussion. They discussed how they can live the Orthodox faith in their daily lives through worship, witness, service and fellowship. Bishop ANTHONY encouraged them to continue to follow the mission of SOYO and be fully integrated into the life of the Church. Khouria Annmarie Koory organized the SOYO Service Project in the kitchen at St. Ignatius, where they prepared 210 sack lunches that were taken to the Meadowood Neighborhood Community Center. During the week the Center distributes these lunches to children who otherwise might not have an evening meal.

On Saturday evening delegates enjoyed a picnic at the Fitchburg Community Center, with BBQ pork sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs, salads, coleslaw, beans and cookies. Afterwards, White Birch, a local Russian folk music ensemble, entertained us. This dinner provided all the delegates with a relaxing evening and a chance to get to know each other better.



Sunday was a full and joyful day, as Bp. ANTHONY presided over the Hierarchical Liturgy with Fr. Tom Begley, Fr. Basil Koory, Fr. David Moga and Archdeacon Saed Rihani assisting. At the start of the Liturgy, newly born Vera Vogel-sang and her mother Tanya were churching. Shortly after, Peter Kovacich was blessed and made a Sub-deacon. Later our own Fr. Basil Koory was elevated to Archpriest by Bp. ANTHONY. At the end of Liturgy, Mr. John Miglautsch entered the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch as a Life Member. The delightful weekend ended with Fr. Basil and Khouria Annmarie hosting a dinner for Bishop ANTHONY and the Parish Council at their house on Sunday Night.

**MALANKARA ORTHODOX  
SYRIAN CHURCH (INDIA),  
DIOCESE OF SOUTHWEST AMERICA,  
GIVES \$25,000 FOR SYRIAN RELIEF**

His Eminence Metropolitan ALEXIOS Mar Eusebius visited St. Nicholas Cathedral of Brooklyn on November 8 to present to the Archdiocese a check for \$25,000, the proceeds of collections for Syrian relief

in their Diocese. Archpriest Thomas Zain, Vicar General of the Archdiocese and Dean of St. Nicholas Cathedral, received the check on behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH. (The Metropolitan was on an archpastoral tour.) Fr. Thomas welcomed Metropolitan ALEXIOS Mar Eusebius and thanked him on behalf of those who are suffering and displaced as a result of the ongoing Syrian war. This generous gift will be used to help educate the children of those new immigrants who have arrived as a result of the war and have come with nothing, or very little. Fr. Thomas then gave the Metropolitan a tour of the Cathedral and hosted him at lunch. The Metropolitan then departed for the airport to return to his headquarters in Houston. The hierarchs, clergy and faithful of the Antiochian Archdiocese are grateful to Metropolitan ALEXIOS and the entire Malankara Diocese for their thoughtfulness and concern for the displaced people of Syria who have found their way to these blessed shores.







**METROPOLITAN JOSEPH  
HONORED AT ECUMENICAL  
GATHERING IN NEW YORK CITY**

On Tuesday, November 29, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH was honored along with the recently appointed Syriac Archbish-

op John Kawak in an ecumenical gathering hosted by His Eminence Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, the Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern), at the St. Vartan Armenian Orthodox Cathedral in New York City. The gathering was to welcome them to the community on the occasion of their enthronements, however, due to scheduling conflicts of the various guests, it had to be delayed several times.

Hierarchs and clergy from throughout the New York area were present including His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON of the Orthodox Church in America, The Papal Nuncio to the United Nations, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Maronite Bishop GREGORY Mansour and many others from various Christian faith communities. As the gathering began, Metropolitan JOSEPH presented Archbishop Khajag with an engolpion and thanked him for his hospitality. Archbishop Khajag then welcomed everyone and gave a beautiful introduction of both honorees. Metropolitan JOSEPH responded saying that he was grateful to meet everyone and to share hospitality together. He stressed that everyone here has a duty to come together as often as possible to work on common issues that our country is facing and give our input as a Christian witness to our nation in general and our government in particular. He said he hoped this would be the first of many such gatherings and invited all the attendees to the

Archdiocese headquarters in January when he will host a lunch to honor New York's Roman Catholic Cardinal Dolan.

Archbishop Khajag then presented the two honorees with beautiful icons from Armenia and proceeded to invite any of the guests to offer a few words during the remainder of the lunch.

**METROPOLITAN JOSEPH PRESIDES  
OVER THE FESTIVITIES OF  
ST. MARY'S 25TH JUBILEE**

The Montreal Orthodox community was honored by the visit of his Eminence JOSEPH, who spent ten productive days among his flock; this was the longest archpastoral visit in the history of the Diocese of Ottawa and dependencies.

The visit included St. George, St. Nicholas, St. Mary (Mississauga, Ontario) and St. Mary's (Montreal, Quebec).

A delegation of priests and their parish councils welcomed his Eminence on Friday, September 9, at Montreal International Airport. A preliminary lunch was held at St. George's Church, followed by a ceremony held under the slogan, "The Face of Syria," to help raise funds to support newcomers from Syria who escaped war.

On the second day, his Eminence, with a group of priests and followers, including Teen SOYO members, led a spiritual visit to the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, the Consolatory for the Greek nuns in Lachute.

The same evening, his Eminence presided over Great Vespers at St. George's Church in preparation for the Sunday Liturgy. The Liturgy was followed by a luncheon in honor of our guest.

A private dinner was held later that day with the Parish Council of St. George.

His Eminence continued his sched-

uled visits the next day and was greeted with a lunch prepared by the Antiochian women of all three of the Montreal Orthodox churches in his honor and completed the evening with a dinner among the Teen SOYO members of St. George's.

In tribute and to celebrate his Eminence's presence in Montreal, Lebanon's General Consul Fadi Ziadeh and his wife held a lunch on Tuesday, September 13, surrounded by Orthodox dignitaries and greeted his Eminence cordially. Metropolitan JOSEPH thanked the Consul for his generous hospitality and wished progress and prosperity to the whole community.

On the occasion of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, Metropolitan JOSEPH presided over an evening liturgy at St. Nicholas's Church with the participation of Montreal's priests including Father Paul Matar, who was accompanying his Eminence in his visit from the Archdiocese. In his sermon, Metropolitan JOSEPH focused on the importance of the Cross and the Crucifying for the salvation of mankind wishing for the parish; Priest, Parish Council and Parishioners a continuity in their mission of salvation for the glory of God. After this uplifting and glorious liturgy, all the attendees were invited by St. Nicholas Church to share a lent supper.

Wednesday, September 14, within his Eminence's pastoral visit program to churches and institutions, the Cedar's Home for the Elderly was one of his stops where he was greeted by the Montreal priests and the Board of Directors of the home. His Eminence, in a kind gesture, offered the Center a much needed donation of \$5000.00 in support of all the projects of the institution.

In the evening, the President and members of the Orthodox Union in Canada held a welcome dinner for his Eminence at Solimer restaurant in

presence of his Grace, The Right Reverend Bishop ALEXANDER of Ottawa Chancery. The President of the Union, Dr. Nadim Korban praised his Eminence's presence among the audience and listed the numerous activities completed by the union despite the short period of its existence. In return, the Metropolitan, thanked the union for their devotion and remarkable work.

Thursday, September 15, his Eminence visited St. Mary's Church in Mississauga, Ontario, to inquire on the progress of the construction work thus far. He spent the day, accompanied by Fr. Elias Ayoub (pastor), the Parish Council and parishioners encouraging them to continue their efforts to complete their dream of having their own church.

The following day, Metropolitan JOSEPH chaired a meeting in the presence of his Grace Bishop ALEXANDER and the Montreal priests reviewing their reports of activities of their respective churches. He thanked all focusing on the unity and the pursuit of their mission and care of their flock. He then visited St. George's warehouse where services and help are offered to the newcomers from Syria. His Eminence thanked and praised the work of volunteers for their humanitarian work.

**Highlights of the Visit of the  
Metropolitan and Celebrations of  
St. Mary's Jubilee**

His Eminence ended his long stay in Montreal by his first official visit to St. Mary's Church on the occasion of its 25th anniversary preceding his enthronement as Metropolitan. On Friday, September 16, the Chairman and members of the Parish Council hosted a dinner in honor of his Eminence at Daou restaurant. Discussions revolved around the church's situation after 25 years of its founding.

The Chairman, Mr. Charles Chou-



cair, mentioned the tremendous work conducted by the pastor, Fr. Michel Fawaz during the previous twenty five years and how he sought a layman to gather in the nineties believers who were key in supporting him in establishing the parish, and how he collaborated with the founding committee and all previous and subsequent councils who they managed all of the achievements made in such a short period of its life.

Metropolitan JOSEPH thanked the Council for the hospitality and yarned his knowledge of Father Fawaz when





them to continue their precious work for the glory of God.

His Eminence was received by the Vice President of the Parish Council Mr. George El Khal for a private lunch remembering the friendship when both parties met in Cyprus.

In preparation to the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy, his Eminence presided over the Vespers which was followed by the consecration of the spiritual and important iconographic project that was completed by the iconographer Camille Rahal and his assistant Ghassan Zaya two days prior to his Eminence's arrival. Upon the sight of this tremendous art work, the Metropolitan was astonished by this great achievement.

Saturday evening, a banquet was held at the Sheraton hotel in Laval, QC to celebrate St. Mary's jubilee. The event was attended by a large audience of different backgrounds. The ceremony was opened by a word from Bishop ALEXANDER followed by different dignitaries from the federal, provincial and local governments as well as the members of parishes, the boards and Parish Council. The highlight of the evening was the mention of the great work of Fr. Michel Fawaz who was hailed and praised for his achievements in founding and continuing the hard work done to build the community of the Church of the Virgin Mary. Then the floor was given to Father Fawaz, who outlined the history and progress of the church referring to the people who have volunteered to serve this parish.

One of the biggest highlights of the evening was the award presented to Fr. Fawaz from the General Consul of Lebanon in Montreal for his amazing work with his community and others. The Parish Council presented Fr. Fawaz with a souvenir gift in honor of his tireless dedication to the church and communities.

The successful evening was concluded with a word from His Eminence JOSEPH, pointing out that Churches are built on sacrifices and dedication to the glorification of the Lord Jesus. He also praised Father Michel's accomplishments and inspirations of God, praying to give him health and long life with his family and wishing success to the Church of Our Lady on the occasion of the celebration of its Silver Jubilee.

Sunday, September 18, a Hierarchal Divine Liturgy was held in celebration of the church's jubilee. His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, assisted by his Grace Bishop ALEXANDER alongside the guest priest Fr. Elias Farah, Pastor Fr. Michel Fawaz, his assistant Fr. Stephan Begham and Fr. Paul Matar from the Archdiocese. The choir was directed by Tony Fadoul who chanted byzantine hymns. The audience was transported into a heavenly atmosphere.

After reading the Gospel, the spiritual sermon of Metropolitan ZAH-LAWI focused on the Holy Elevation of the Cross and he addressed the believers by saying: "I greet you in this holy feast in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the St. Mary's Church" We prayed, sang and worshipped together in this historical event, and ask the Almighty God to protect you all and guide you into his kingdom. Before Sayedna JOSEPH departure a lunch honoring his Eminence took place in church reception hall.

After the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH inducted new members to the Order of Saint Ignatius as follow: Nicolas Bedran, Angele Azar, Michel Haydamous, Odette Khoury, Elie Chahine, Rita Youwakim Metri and Antoine Chammas. Before Sayedna JOSEPH's departure, a lunch honoring his Eminence took place in church reception hall.

# ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

## Writing in the Book of My Life

JUDGES' CHOICE FOR THE ORATORICAL CONTEST IN THE DIOCESE OF OTTAWA, EASTERN CANADA AND UPSTATE NEW YORK

**N**ow therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in justice and righteousness. Remove the foreign gods your fathers served on the other side of the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. But if it does not please you to serve the Lord, choose gods for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods of your fathers that were on the other side of the river, or gods of the Amorites, among whom you dwell in their land. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord because He is holy.

— Joshua 24:14

Joshua took the staff of Moses to continue leading the Israelites to the Promised Land; St. Basil the Great continued to explicate the doctrine of the Church with his family by his side. Joshua, a man of God and prophet of the Old Testament opened his ears to hear God; Basil of Caesarea, a man of God and father of the Orthodox faith, also opened his ears to hear God.

If my life were a book, the words of the First Chapter would be what I see on my bedroom mirror: a reflection of the words, "You cannot serve God and mammon...."

Blindly, I've become a god through my own egoism and not by divine grace. I have edged God out to serve my own desires. I have lacked faith in His promise of provision. By focusing all of my attention on details, I have become frustrated over small things, things that possess no life, things that lack virtue.

Realizing this, I look to my mother, and the quality of her self-sacrifice for the sake of her children. I look to my parish priest: the denial of himself for the sake of his

congregation. I look to monastics and their departure from the world for the sake of salvific prayer.

I believe that these precious examples reflect qualities of self-sacrifice that are embedded in each of us. Through the goodness of our Lord in His first sacrifice, we find these qualities by finding Him. Our sacrificial lamb paved the way by allowing us to also be crucified with Him for the sake of our brethren.

This is true freedom, a spirit of self-denial. I've tried explaining this many times, and failed often. People have tried to conceive of it as "giving back," or the feeling of "being rewarded" after having done something good. Freedom through sacrifice, however, can only be sincerely experienced through Christ. Let me try to put it into perspective: the Sanhedrin ordered the death penalty upon a perfect individual who freely accepted the penalty for the sake of His love for these same ones. Therefore liberty for us does not end with the pursuit of every civil right. It is not found through freedom of speech, freedom of expression, or freedom of thought. In contrast, true liberty for us Orthodox Christians is above all acquiring humility: a language that is understood between all nations. In fact, I know of a servant who exemplifies this wonderfully. He is known to us as St. Paul, a man who was glorified through his wounds. His wounds served as a reminder that his strength was not his own. Thus he would proclaim himself but a mere bondservant of Christ. The words of this mere bondservant were able to reach the four corners of the earth.

If we were to skip to the last chapter of the book of my life, we would read that our call to holiness is a call



to justice and righteousness through fear of the Lord.

Through the liturgy we are minded that “one is holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ.” Hence we are only able to become holy by partaking of the One who is holy. We call this partaking of the body and blood of Christ *communion*, because the sacrament cannot be experienced on an individual basis. Initially, we must confess, and ask forgiveness from our brothers and sisters. This is our first step in approaching the chalice, our first act of service. We then enter the liturgy by deciding together as a family

to wake up on Sunday morning and head to church: this is our second act of service, our stepping into the kingdom. Following the partaking of the Eucharist, we are faced with our third act of service. This is our charismatic waiting, or our journey on foot, until our next meeting with Christ through the Eucharist.

Yet how are we expected to be watchfully waiting until communion next Sunday? In fact, we are able to do so because the Eucharist itself is its own act of service. The Eucharist enables us to give thanks.

Personally, a spirit of thanksgiving is what nourishes and renews me. I try to give everything to the Lord during the week: in every twist, in every turn, I know that I must return the praise to Him. I simply cannot box up my Lord and tell him to stay in church until I come back. He must be following me throughout my days, because my identity as a person can only be credited to Him.

In another way, I give Him thanks by taking care of His creation that He has entrusted to me. I admire nature because it displays my Lord’s glory and teaches me His praise.

Once more, I give thanks to the Lord through my obedience. My spiritual father once told me that my



memory of God would be more vibrant through obedience to my prayer rule. When you begin your day with prayer and conclude it in the same way there grows a flow of prayer from morning to evening, just as St. Basil phrased it, “that our life may become a continual prayer.” My heart is captured by the works of Metropolitan Philaret: “O Lord, grant me to greet the coming of the day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon your holy will, in every hour of the day reveal your will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout

the day with peace of soul and with firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforeseen events let me not forget that all is sent by you. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering and embarrassing others. Give me strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day with all that it brings. Direct my will, teach me to pray and You Yourself pray in me.” I allow this prayer to guard my steps throughout the day and my will becomes fully subordinate to the Will of God. It is the peace that I choose to carry with me throughout the day which allows me to be holy in my relationships.

By bringing along with me the Eucharist of thanksgiving throughout the week, my breath is daily invigorated by the sacrament of the present moment. Until now, another Sunday, I am found in eternity once more as I hear the call, “Let us attend!”

Weeks have gone by, months, and now years. Yet between the first and last chapter of my book the pages remain blank. I must lend you my pen, because I have been called to serve, but I simply cannot respond on my own.

Melanie Thomas, 20  
St. Elias Cathedral, Ottawa, Ontario

## 2017 ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

“MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A  
HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS.”

MARK 11:17



comments on this topic



The topic is from the Gospel of Mark, in which Jesus quotes both from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:8-11 speaking in terms of what is and is not to happen in God’s House – the temple – The Church. It begins with the statement that first and foremost it is a place of prayer – a place to worship the Living God and secondly it is for all nations – all people who choose to serve the Living God. Once one chooses to serve God and to follow His way – all who do so are welcomed. As the Scripture says, “For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27-29). Paul further writes, “but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:9-1). Saint John Chrysostom in his homily on Galatians 3:27-29 clearly shares that no matter where we came from, anyone who has been baptized in Christ is no longer what he was by birth. He that was Greek, or Jew, or bond man yesterday, carries about with him the form, not of angel or archangel, but of the Lord of all, yes he displays in his own person the Christ” (Saint John Chrysostom Commentary on Galatians).



“MY HOUSE SHALL BE  
CALLED A HOUSE OF  
PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS”  
MARK 11:17

For more information and rules on the Oratorical and Bible Bowl Festival, visit [www.antiochian.org/festivals](http://www.antiochian.org/festivals)

The Oratorical Festival is run by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Youth and Parish Ministries

## DOWAMA Parish Life Conference



June 7-10, 2017

Join us in Houston, Texas, for the Parish Life Conference! Hosted by St. Anthony the Great at the Westin in Memorial City, this year’s conference is in the center of Memorial City Mall and within walking distance of shopping, dining, and many local attractions.

We’re looking forward to seeing y’all there!



[www.Spring2017.org](http://www.Spring2017.org)

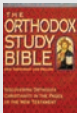
## 2017 BIBLE BOWL

### THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Join the competition in these age groups:

Pre-teens: Ages 10-12 **NEW!**  
Teens: Ages 13-19 \*  
Adults: Ages 20+

\* The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West has two teen groups: 13-15 and 16-19



All questions will come from the Gospel of Mark as found in the *Orthodox Study Bible*. Available from Ancient Faith Publishing and other fine bookstores.

Study Site and Practice Questions  
[www.orthodoxyouth.org/Mark](http://www.orthodoxyouth.org/Mark)



[www.OrthodoxYouth.org](http://www.OrthodoxYouth.org)



The Bible Bowl is run by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese Department of Youth and Parish Ministries

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[www.AC2017Miami.org](http://www.AC2017Miami.org)