TODAY, SALVATION COMES TO OUR HOUSE

Today, we have reached the time of the feast, and the rank of saints gathereth with us, and the angels celebrate with men.

Today, the grace of the Holy Spirit hath descended on the water in the likeness of a dove. Today, the Sun that setteth not, and the world is lighted by the light of the Lord.

Today, the moon shineth with the world in its radiant beams.

Today, the shining stars adorn the universe with the splendor of their radiance.

Orthodox Christians encounter God today. The God we encounter revealed Himself as a babe in the Feast of the Nativity and as a man and God in this feast of Theophany. We meet this God who comes to us who have already read The Book, or at least the Cliff Notes.

We encounter Him, knowing already the whole story of salvation. This God, born in a cavern, who lay in a manager, and now, in this feast, is experienced as a man beginning His ministry on earth, meets us in our time and place. When we meet Him, we choose how to respond to His coming to us. Do we make room for Him in our lives, accept Him as King and God, follow Him as disciples, suffer with Him in our flesh, and die with Him as faithful servants? Alternatively, do we carry on as if He has not yet come to us? This God allows us to choose how we shall respond. This God loves us and waits to hear from us.

When we celebrate each of the feasts, we meet Christ today as He came to us in history. Today He comes to us in our flesh, accept Him as King and God, follow Him as disciples, suffer with Him in our flesh, and die with Him as faithful servants. Alternatively, do we carry on as if He has not yet come to us? This God allows us to choose how we shall respond. This God loves us and waits to hear from us.

When we meet Him, we choose how to respond to His coming to us. Do we make room for Him in our lives, accept Him as King and God, follow Him as disciples, suffer with Him in our flesh, and die with Him as faithful servants? Alternatively, do we carry on as if He has not yet come to us? This God allows us to choose how we shall respond. This God loves us and waits to hear from us.

When we meet each of the feasts, we meet Christ today as He came to us in history. Today He comes to us, His creation as a babe, vulnerable and weak. Will we make room in the caverns of our soul for Him? Today He comes to us as Man and God, who is revealed in the waters of the Jordan, witnessed by John the Baptist and his disciples. Will we join ourselves to Christ and His Father and the Holy Spirit? Today He comes to us as the teacher. Will we learn Truth? Today He comes to us in miracles! Will we follow Him? Today He sends us out into His world to share His good news. Will we be His apostles? Today He is rejected by the elite and many other people. Will we stand by Him and accept their scouring? Today He is crucified. Will we die with Him? Today He Ascends, sits at the right Hand of the Father, comes in glory and judges the world. Will we stand steadfast?

Today we are called to be born anew. Again and again and again, the Church calls us to confess our sins, change our directions and accept our newness. The Church does this because she is the bride of Christ who is Her source. She is enlivened and guided by the Holy Spirit, who works in each of us. In the Church we encounter God, not just in heaven at the liturgies, not just in feeding us in our Sunday School, but also in our outreach to those in prison, the naked, the hungry, or the afflicted, but also in every encounter with Church members as we call upon God’s name. She is Holy, She is God’s, She is for us mother, and She is our source of Life in Christ.

We meet Him again today, and in every feast day. Let us receive Him, His Life, and whatever He has for us, in our worship, our learning, and our life together. And today, too, may the world “be lighted by the light of the Lord.”

Prayer for Theophany

Bishop JOHN
EXORCISM PRECEDES EVANGELISM

Fr. Joseph Hanycz

NOW THAT WE'VE CELEBRATED THE GREAT FEATS OF NATIVITY AND THEOPHANY, MOST ORTHODOX PRIESTS ARE OCCUPIED WITH EXORCISMS, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS HOUSE-BLESSINGS. BEFORE THAT AUGUST AFFAIR, HOWEVER, COMES THE ANNUAL HOUSE-BLESSING HOUSE-CLEANING.

I remember once pulling up to a house and, after gathering my house-blessing gear, was walking up the sidewalk when the lady of the house threw open the front door and exclaimed: “Boy! Am I glad you’re here – I’m tired of house cleaning!”

Following the celebration of Christ’s baptism (January 6), the faithful should schedule a visit by the priest to bless their homes. All the rooms of the house are sprinkled with holy water with the chanting of the Aplaktyron of Theophany in Tone 1.

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity was made manifest. For the voice of the Father bade witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the likeness of a dove, confirmed the truth of His word: O Christ our God, who hast appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.

The priest, sprinkling the walls with holy water in the form of a cross, says: “By the sprinkling of this holy water, may every evil action and demon be put to flight in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” After this blessing, the inhabitants are blessed with the holy water: the husband, the wife, and the children – the oldest first. Any relatives and friends present are then blessed. In the case of the foundation of a home, or the blessing of a new dwelling, the service may also include anointing the walls, censing, and other prayers. By sanctifying our homes, God’s grace is extended to our individual dwellings.

There’s more: a house-blessing, as the prayer of the priest indicates, is indeed an exorcism. I’ve often related the story of the time a TV news crew covered one of our house-blessings. While I was vesting, speaking with the cameraman while he was setting up his equipment, I spoke of how the service, especially the priest’s prayer, was an exorcism – exorcising, and other prayers. By sanctifying our homes, God’s grace is extended to our individual dwellings.

The word theophany means an appearance of God. The Feast, celebrated on January 6, reveals the Holy Trinity to the world; the Son is baptized, the Holy Spirit. And exorcism is a wood version of exorcism, where evil is glorified and the action of the holy water blessed by the Holy Spirit at theophany, are cast out! Granted, it’s not like the Hollywood version of exorcism, now is the time, as we winter toward Lent. Now is the time, as we still glow from the Babe born in a cave. Now is the time … for us to declare how much God has done for us!

As with the man now made whole, so it is with us. Whether it is the first time we have our home blessed or the annual exorcism, now is the time. Now is the time, as we winter toward Lent. Now is the time, as we still glow from the Babe born in a cave. Now is the time … for us to declare how much God has done for us!

As he was watching in the night the devil sent wild beasts against him. And almost all the heretics in that desert came forth from their dens and surrounded him; and he was in the midst, while each one threatened to bite. Seeing that it was a trick of the enemy he said to them all: “If ye have received power against me I am ready to be defended by you; but if ye were sent against me by demons, stay not, but depart, for I am a servant of Christ.” When Anthony said this they fled, driven by that word as with a whip.

Would that I had such courage, fostered by fervent prayer and spiritual warfare, when tempted, to say: “Satan, be gone! I serve the Christ.”

Over two hundred years before the birth of St. Anthony the Great, a little man in a tree, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector and rich, came down and received Jesus joyfully. All the people murmured, because Jesus was going to the home of a man known to be a sinner. During that visit, this man stood before the God-Man and said, “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I return it fivefold.” To which Jesus exclaimed: “Today salvation has come to this house, since also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”

You see that? A house-blessing, if you will, even an exorcism! This, friends, is why we have our homes blessed: to exorcise that which was against the good. Homes are blessed to expel evil – brought about by our own actions, inactions, and lukewarm faith. These, by action of the holy water blessed by the holy Spirit at Theophany, are cast out! Granted, it’s not like the Hollywood version of exorcism, where evil is glorified and the good is often downplayed. In the Church, we acknowledge the forces that war against us are very real – yet, they pale in comparison to the Good, which is the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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1. During the Theophany season (January 6 through the Leave-taking on January 14) the fixed Aplaktyron, “When Thou, O Lord wast baptized...” is chanted repeatedly throughout the house-blessing, but should the house-blessing take place after the Leave-taking, the Aplaktyron of the Cross (tak in Tone 5): “O Lord, save Thy people and blot out iniquities...” is chanted, rather than that of Theophany.
4. After the Ascension of the Lord, St. Zacchaeus accompanied St. Peter on his travels. Tradition holds that he followed St. Peter to Caesarea, where Peter appointed him Bishop of Caesarea and Palestine.
For he is our peace, who has made us one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and outsiders, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grown into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2: 14–22

I n ancient Greece, Sparta was one of the top cities, states, often the strongest city in the land. One of the kings of Sparta loved to boast to other Greeks about how strong his city walls were: no one could break through them. Once, one of the men to whom he had boasted about this was visiting the king in Sparta. The king gave his guest a tour. The guest said, “Your majesty, you always brag about the strength of your walls, but I don’t see any walls at all!” The king pointed to soldiers of his army who were standing nearby and said, “These men are the walls of Sparta—and every one of them is a brick in the wall. They are a wall that is unbreakable!” (from Father Anthony Coniaris’s The Orthodox Church, p. 8).

Are the walls of God’s Church?

This is the first time we are having our own Sunday Liturgy in our chapel since November 11. The lesson assigned for today, Ephesians 2:14–22, is incredibly appropriate. When I checked the lectionary a few days ago, and then looked up this passage, it was unbelievable— that it was the passage for today. Almost like it was planned that way . . . and I suppose it was, by the Lord. We just heard the entire passage read. Let’s look at it more closely, in particular, at Verse 19, in which the Apostle tells us that we are fellow citizens with the saints in God’s household. In Verse 20, he tells us that Christ is the chief cornerstone of that house, and that the apostles and prophets are its foundations. In Verses 21–22, he writes that you, the people of God, are built into that structure of God’s household, God’s church. You are the wall built upon the cornerstone (Christ) and the foundation (the apostles and prophets). What does it all end up being? In Verse 21: “a holy temple in the Lord,” and Verse 22: “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Sparta’s soldiers were the walls of that city. We are the walls of God’s Church, of his “holy temple.” For the first three hundred years of the history of our Orthodox Christian Church, we didn’t have church buildings. That is because our faith was illegal. Our spiritual forefathers had litanies which they could conduct—out in a field, in some one’s home, in underground hiding places. They basically had church wherever they could get away with it, wherever they could keep it secret from the government.

Once our Church, however, was legalized by St. Constantine, the Emperor in 313 A.D., we started making church buildings, right away, and everywhere. Temples to God sprang up all over. Church buildings are very important—we’ve seen that learned in the last eight days! For many reasons a building is important. Here are just a few:

• physical temples are beautiful places to do the most important thing in life: worship God;
• physical temples provide a good way for us to express our love for God, by making the place beautiful where we worship Him; and
• church buildings provide a good place for many things (parish do’s—fellowship, learning, a base for ministries to help the poor, and so forth).

A building is very important, as we’ve already mentioned. But it’s only one of the “bricks in the wall.” We are the “bricks” that make up the building. Each of us is just a part of God’s holy temple. Each of us has a role in building up the temple. Each of us is one of the bricks “joined together” by Christ. Each of us is put together by Christ to make His temple. So we need to work together, as bricks work together to make a building.

There is less and less stress on our “wall” right now, so we “bricks” have to stay united in Christ. If a hard storm hits a building, the wall can hold up because the bricks hold together and the building is unmoved by the storm. Now, we are telling us about the bricks of God’s Church, of our parish. We will stick together, pray together, and work together. With God’s help, we will be unmoved by the storm. We, however, should do more than just keep an arm’s length perspective. In Verse 21, St. Paul writes about God’s “holy temple.” Was he referring to a church building those Ephesians Christians had? No, they didn’t have any church building, and they wouldn’t have one for about another two and a half centuries. So, then, if they had no church building, what was God’s holy temple of the city of Ephesus? It was the Christians of Ephesus. So what is God’s holy temple for the Christians of St. Matthew? You are! During our current period of hardship, not having a building (which will not be brief), let us remember Verse 21 of today’s epistle reading: the structure, God’s holy temple, “is joined together” according to St. Paul. It is like bricks in a wall, joined together to make that wall stand straight and strong. Each one of us is one of the bricks “joined together” by Christ. Each of us is put together by Christ to make His temple. So we need to work together, as bricks work together to make a building.

Imagine a year or two years from now. You are going to celebrate a year or two of being a church. We will be a church, a holy temple of God, and we will be unmoved by the storm. Imagine children of God, children of our parish, a better temple of God. Imagine a year or two years from now. You are going to celebrate.

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ORTHODOX VISION FOUNDATION HOLDS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

From September 21 to 24, 2017, Orthodox Vision Foundation (OVF) sponsored an Advanced Leadership Initiative Conference entitled “For the Life of the World” at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. It has been called by many of the pre-selected 65 attendees “historic,” and “ground-breaking.” They were welcomed to the program by Co-Trustee of OVF Charles Ajalat, and Archpriest Chad Hatfield, President of St. Vladimir’s Seminary. The goals of the Conference were to advance leadership skills and deepen faith and bonding among the attendees, to improve Orthodox ministries to younger Orthodox, and to help those who someday might want to transition from the profit to the non-profit world. In a two-hour reflection session, the attendees expressed their excitement and joy with what had transpired at the Conference, and commented on how inspiring it had been.

Speakers at the Conference included committed Orthodox CEOs and current and former executives and professionals, including the President of Chick-fil-A, Inc.; the CEO of Kinder Morgan (one of North America’s largest energy infrastructure companies); one of the top ten business bloggers in the U.S. and former CEO of Thomas Nelson (the world’s largest Bible publisher); a former VP of Planning for Exxon Mobil Asia-Pacific; great theologians; major philanthropists; and heads of Orthodox schools and colleges, including a former Dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School who had been part of a $1.2 billion capital campaign and who taught fundraising at the Conference. Corporate communications was taught by the recently retired head of media, marketing, and Internet specialists; prominent lawyers from major firms; and prominent doctors, engineers, and consultants.

Attendees also viewed the screening of the Orthodox, full-length professional film, Becoming Truly Human, and heard a brief introduction of the film from its director/ star. (The film, which is directed toward millennials and “nones” was released by the Antiochian Archdiocese and was made available September 6 to Amazon’s 66 million subscribers. It is also on Time, GooglePlay, Xbox, and Vudu. A second distribution company, which distributed Scorsese’s recent film, Silence, is also distributing Becoming Truly Human in many of its one thousand venues.)

T he Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) is our Department for advanced theological education. Led since the 1970s by our President, Fr. Joseph Allen, the Department has accomplished a great deal. Its chief purpose is to train both clergy and laity in the God-bearing tradition of the Antiochian Patriarchate, so as to serve the needs of the Church in North America. This is done by focusing on the biblical and patristic ethos of the age-old tradition of the Orthodox faith.

Some of our programs focus on education for people who are not able to go to seminary for three years, but who sincerely desire an Orthodox Christian education and training. We have 37 years of experience offering distance-learning and hybrid programs in graduate theological education. The benefits to the Archdiocese of these programs are obvious, because we are sending our students back to the parishes with new energy – people who can teach church school, direct choirs, lead the youth and minister to the aged better and with more confidence than they could before.

ACCREDITATION BY THE ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS (ATS)

For a number of years now, the House of Studies’ Master’s degree in Applied Orthodox Theology has been offered jointly with the School of Theology in the University of Balamand. It is our earnest intention that this special partnership continue. With the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph, the House of Studies has begun the process of accreditation in North America, and has submitted its application for Associate Membership to the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). ATS is the leading accreditation agency for graduate theological education in North America. Accreditation will enable the House of Studies to bestow its own nationally and internationally recognized graduate theological degrees. We will then be able to offer an accredited Ph.D. degree.

Today, literally hundreds of people from all over the world (including Africa, Australia, China, and New Zealand) have benefited from a House of Studies’ education. They are now serving the Church in many and varied ways. Accreditation means official recognition from other accredited institutions of graduate theological education in North America. This status would acknowledge that the House of Studies is operating with academic, institutional, and financial integrity; and that the educational standards of AHOS are comparable to those of the best institutions of graduate theological learning.

Full accreditation, which takes about five years to attain, would raise the national and international prestige of the House of Studies, and give it a new lease on life. By its acceptance into the community of ATS-accredited schools, awareness of the presence of AHOS in North America would increase dramatically. This would attract more students and high-quality faculty and staff, and inspire all constituencies with confidence in the integrity and high standards of the School.

Furthermore, accreditation would underline the marketability of the degree programs that the School offers. It would make the School eligible, too, for State and Federal support in the form of student loans, the deferral of student loans, funding through the Veterans Administration’s GI tuition programs, research grants, and so on.

Significance of the AHOS Graduate Degree Programs

The Antiochian House of Studies currently offers two Master’s degree programs and one Ph.D. degree program. We have an M.Th. in Applied Orthodox Theology, and (more recently) an M.Th. in Pastoral Counseling. Both are excellent and successful programs.
I would like to add a special word about the House of Studies’ Ph.D. program, which I have helped to establish and develop. First of all, the Ph.D. Program in Orthodox Studies is a unique program that distinguishes us from all the other Orthodox theological schools in America, and beyond. To this day, none of our other Orthodox Schools in North America has an independent Orthodox Ph.D. program. The mission of the House of Studies Ph.D. program is as follows:

1. To emphasize the Orthodox biblical and patristic tradition, which is the only foundation that can bring stability to our Church, and to the world.

2. To emphasize the Orthodox ethos, which can only be passed on from person to person. This is achieved by forming personal relationships between instructors and students during Residential Intensives, and by means of modern technologies via the Internet.

3. To emphasize the spiritual life of the Orthodox Church, which is inextricably intertwined with the teachings of the Church, and which is in fact the source of our dogmatic consciousness.

The spiritual life of the Church is what enables us to appreciate the practical significance of her doctrines. Discovering the inner life of the Church is the only way to enter into dialogue at the highest intellectual level with people of other confessions and philosophical traditions, and to enter into dialogue with the various sections of our society.

In short, we need specialists in the Orthodox faith who will initiate others into the mysteries of God, and inspire their peers to think and value becomes more important than the void with their peers. “Peer orientation,” the term used in the book, is just what it sounds like: children become attached to their peer group and discuss their encounter: they analyze it, open it up for discussion among their fellow students, and receive direction from a clinical supervisor. A simple hospital visit becomes the object of intense scrutiny, under the microscope, in order to help seminarists enhance their pastoral care and to refine their methods of communication. (See “Defining ‘Clinical’ Pastoral Education,” by Fr. Adrian Budica.)

I went into CPE with mixed expectations, says third-year Seminarian Subdeacon Herman Fields. “I expected to be exposed to various situations – both joyous and traumatic. I found myself engendered constructive conversations within the group,” he noted. “And I learned a great deal about pastoral ministry.”

At the end of the summer, I found the work so meaningful that I was actually sad to leave the hospital!” I would walk from room to room in the ER, seeing who wanted to chat. I found it is he who is so precious to be present with those people in their time of crisis. I compare those encounters,” he remarked, “to the icon of the Mother of God holding the Christ Child. Like Mary, my task may have been ostensibly to nurture someone, but at the same time, I found Christ in the person of the patient, and I found that I walked away having been blessed by them.

I pursued a CPE Residency,” he explained, “because I wanted to become a better communicator. As a chaplain I was exposed to various situations – both joyous and traumatic. The residency program taught me how to maneuver in those events, and how to communicate effectively to family, staff, and co-workers.

“All the educational material was done in addition to our weekly patient visits,” he noted. “We worked anywhere from 40 to 48 hours a week, and one of those days was a 24-hour shift. It was an intense program, but one filled with accomplishment and growth when it was over.”

In the current student body at St. Vladimir’s, 16 Antiochian seminarians and graduates of St. Vladimir’s have completed at least one CPE unit, and many claim the experience has totally transformed their pastoral approach. That’s because CPE uses a methodology that demands a lot of self-reflection and peer group assessment. Students don’t just visit a patient in the hospital and leave; they go back to their peer group and discuss their encounter: they analyze it, open it up for discussion among their fellow students, and receive direction from a clinical supervisor. A simple hospital visit becomes the object of intense scrutiny, under the microscope, in order to help seminarists enhance their pastoral care and to refine their methods of communication. (See “Defining ‘Clinical’ Pastoral Education,” by Fr. Adrian Budica.)

“How Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Transforms Seminaris”

Since 2012, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary has required all of its Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students to go through a training program known as “Clinical Pastoral Education,” commonly known as “CPE.” So, besides learning core subjects like new testament, liturgics, and church history, seminarists are required to spend 400 hours visiting patients in a hospital and reflecting upon their experiences under the watchful eye of a certified CPE supervisor, in order to be credited with one unit of CPE.

My own program was a welcome and needed complement to the resources available here at St. Vladimir’s in pastoral education,” he concluded.”

Seminarian alumnus Rami Dabul (M.Div ’15), who is now a chaplain at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas, concurs. “Hands down,” he affirms, “the CPE program at St. Vlad’s was one of my best experiences during my studies.” Seminarian Rami completed one unit of CPE during the summer after his first year at St. Vladimir’s. He went into CPE with mixed expectations, says third-year Seminarian Subdeacon Herman Fields. “I expected to be exposed to various situations – both joyous and traumatic. I found myself engendered constructive conversations within the group,” he noted. “And I learned a great deal about pastoral ministry.”

At the end of the summer, I found the work so meaningful that I was actually sad to leave the hospital!” I would walk from room to room in the ER, seeing who wanted to chat. I found it is he who is so precious to be present with those people in their time of crisis. I compare those encounters,” he remarked, “to the icon of the Mother of God holding the Christ Child. Like Mary, my task may have been ostensibly to nurture someone, but at the same time, I found Christ in the person of the patient, and I found that I walked away having been blessed by them.

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That’s good news,” says Fr. Adrian, “because once St. Vladimir’s becomes a satellite and then a CPE center, seminarians will have the opportunity to earn up to 3 CPE units as part of their seminary degree.” Then, they will have two major advantages: one, they will have received extraordinary pastoral skills, and two, they will be on their way to becoming Board Certified Chaplains. They can use these advantages as parish priests, or as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, military installations, and so forth.

Father Andrew Honore, currently a third-year seminarian and active military chaplain, who is also assigned as interim pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church in South Glen Fall, New York, now realizes the advantage of CPE training. He was willing to openly share his recent CPE experience, completed at St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic Hospital in California. (The interview can be heard in its entirety on the Ancient Faith Radio podcast series, Wounded Healer.)

“In all honesty, I was not particularly excited about completing my first unit of CPE, because it is a very large time commitment,” said Fr. Andrew. “And, I expected the training to be ‘touchy-feely,’ without a lot of concrete things to learn as far as being a pastor. But I was proven very quickly to be very wrong.

“It ended up being boot camp for pastoral care training;” he admitted, “and the group sessions ended up being the more impactful moments for me.

“Diving deep into myself and having others do the same is a really difficult thing,” he recalled. “I had to learn about what, in my own past experience, was really keeping me from healing a patient, from giving them the space to talk about their sickness and grief. I discovered that I had to confront my own dislike of pain – which was exhausting.

“I thank God for the group that I was in,” he said. “We recognized we were there for a purpose, and we stuck to that purpose. It was an unique opportunity, a unique time in my life.”

Father Adrian added, “We not only hope, but we also know, that students transformed by CPE act as catalysts for our wider Church, inasmuch as they touch thousands of lives as church leaders.

“Echoing the Parables of the Talents and the Sower in the Gospel,” he went on, “we will continue to train our seminarians in CPE because we witness the return each investment brings: thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold.”

It is not uncommon for people to give me a blank stare when I answer their question, “What do you do at St. Vladimir’s?” with the words “Clinical Pastoral Education.” For some, those descriptive words are completely new. For others, they are confusing; zeroing in on the term clinical, they quizzically ask: “What? So now you’re training doctors at St. Vladimir’s?”

Such confusion, actually, has given me a starting point for a clarifying discussion each fall semester, as I offer my “Introduction to CPE” presentation to incoming students. I focus on each word, clinical, pastoral, education.

I ask them, “What do you think of when you hear the word clinical?” Student responses range from “best practices” to “clinical trials,” to anything relating to the medical world. Facilitating an ensuing conversation, I remind them that the clinical process can be long and can entail several stages of evaluation and re-evaluation.

I ask rhetorical questions to get them thinking, like: “When you go for a blood test, is that the end of it?” Eventually, they realize that the clinical process demands appropriate follow up and measured intervention: for example, medication given too much, too little, too often, too seldom, may slow down or even stop the healing process. To be “clinical” implies presenting a problem, diagnosing it, following up on it, troubleshooting, and eventually resolving it.

Students are always more self-assured when defining the second word, pastoral. They refer to the word’s Latin root, (pastor,-is), which means “shepherding,” or “tending.” Next, they will receive a medicinal “prescription,” or critique, from their peers in order to correct what did and did not go well during the interaction.

And finally, they will apply the suggested conversation “medicines” during their next engagement with that same, or another, patient.

Gradually, our seminarians will learn that this “Clinical Pastoral Education” model, this clinical method of learning – action, reflection, new action – will be of utmost value to them. They can apply it to any pastoral setting, from visiting patients in the hospital or nursing home, to ministering to prisoners, to coordinating a parish council meeting, to becoming an attentive Father Confessor!”
My teous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw something to drink? And when was it that we saw you I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the right-
gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the

ou hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you

Then the king will say to those at his right hand,

Matthew 25:34–40 is an eloquent account by

IT IS A BIBLICAL MANDATE.

PRISON MINISTRY?

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Prison Ministry

they can get an early parole. The thief on the cross expected Jesus to be the means through which he could escape punishment, but he was refused by the thief on the other cross: “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40–41).

St. Peter said, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:15–16 KJV). We say anyone who is truly repentant will want to pay back their debt to society, as did Zaccheus, who said, “Now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8).

It is natural for a convict to become impatient and anxious about getting out of prison. Nevertheless, we encourage such a person to trust God with their life and to patiently allow Him to direct it. We often use the examples of Joseph (Genesis 37:2–36 and 39:1 through 50:26) and Daniel (Daniel 1:4–6, 2:41–49, and 6:1–28) in counseling. They were both righteous young men who loved and served God, but ended up in prison for circumstances beyond their control. Yet when God was ready for them to get out of prison, they were not only delivered from it, but also blessed with power, riches, and influence as a result of their faith. If they were not only delivered from it, but also blessed with power, riches, and influence as a result of their faith. If they are “short-timers,” Teleios, the Department’s pre- and post-release ministry, offers intrinsic direction.

A distinction must be drawn between those who are suffering for Christ, and those who have committed awful crimes, and are paying their debt to society. We remind inmates that Peter wrote to the church, “It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God” (1 Peter 2:19–20). Therefore, those who try to use Christ as a means of escaping punishment only bring shame on Him and disgrace.

Anyone can serve Jesus when they get all they want, but the true test of a believer comes during the times of discouragement and bitter trials of faith (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:3–9). True Christianity means putting the will of God first, before our own will (Luke 22:42). That’s why we teach prisoners that God does not exist to serve the church. We exist to serve Him! Consequently, if and when the Lord is ready for an inmate to get out of prison, he or she won’t have to spend a fortune on lawyers or waste all their time writing books. The door of the prison will open for them very easily. But it is not His will for them to ever get out of prison, or if they are to face the death penalty for a vicious murder, the best testimony of their faith in Christ is to keep their eyes on Him, and live what remains of their life beyond reproach!

In that way everyone will see the difference that Jesus can make, and that even in what were once the coldest and darkest of hearts, His light can shine through with a joy and peace that the world cannot even understand (Philippians 4:7; John 14:27). As St. Paul, the Apostle stated, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21 NIV).

Paul made it clear in his letters to the church that law enforcement officials are acting as God’s emissaries when they punish those who have acted wickedly (Romans 13:4). This authority is based on the same principle as that of the parent, who becomes God’s emissary over his child. This is true even when the parent or government official is not living for God (see Matthew 24:45–51 and John 19:10–11). The Apostle Peter echoed the same sentiment regardless of whether a prisoner believes he or she is suffering fairly (1 Peter 2:21–23). From the books of Genesis to Revelation, the Bible makes it clear that God expects mankind to promote justice and fairness in all governmental decisions. There is no justice, however, when evil is easily overlooked or excused.

Therefore, we maintain that those who believe that a convict should escape just punishment for the crimes he has committed, as a reward for becoming a Christian, are not standing on firm biblical ground. Many times, those who attempt to thwart justice under the guise of Scripture, are themselves not living for God as they should (Romans 1:32). For while eternal justice lies under the jurisdiction of God (Revelation 20:11–15), a righteous and God-fearing government will not condone, excuse, or soft-pedal evil.

The Department is engaged in the lives of inmates, their families, and “at-risk” children (some who may be children of inmates). Through a ministry within the Department, Teleios Ministries, there is a focus on preparing inmates expecting to be released, and after-care, either by direct care when possible, or networking with ministries or agencies within the local areas in which an inmate may be located. The Department trains interested volunteers through a manual and direct training, in forums in various localities.

Are we overlapping with the ministry of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), the prison ministry under the direction of the Assembly of Bishops? No: As the Archdiocese has various departments, such as Education, Evangelism, Orthodox Campus Fellowship, we can nurture our respective entities by our cooperation. As the Director of the Department, I believe that we can offer each other extensive resources, training, support and encouragement.

Fr. David Randolph
Director of the Department of Prison Ministry

ECUMENISM: THE AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE IN “THE BODY OF CHRIST”

Fr. John Oliver

T
here we were, huddled with wonder in Jerusalem’s Upper Room among 120 disciples and the Son of God’s own mother. The air in the room was charged; we were still dazzled by the Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into heaven of our Master, our Teacher, our Savior. He told us to wait for “the promise of My Father” (Luke 24:49). We didn’t know precisely what He meant until shaken with the power of that mighty rushing wind of Pentecost - the descent of the Holy Spirit. This was not some created gift from a remote God, no adrenaline blast or emotional state, but the actual and defying presence of the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Spirit comes with His own gift: an incomparably greater embodiment of the Church as cohesive Christian community, as unprecedentedly material immateriality. The Church existed in the pre-Christian era of the Old Testament in the relation between the prophets and God. In the Father-originated, Christ-established, Spirit-inspired “fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23), however, the world discovers the Church to be the palpable, purifying path toward not merely a moral, but a personal, perfection. The perfect is the person of the Christ. Now, it’s possible! His life for mine, mine for His – His glory for my ashes; His anointing of gladness for my mourning; His apparel of glory for my spirit of indiffrence (Isaiah 61:3). The Church is not merely how and where we imitate Christ, but the way and the place in which we participate in Him who is “the way.” He is “the truth and the life” (John 14:6). As uncreated reality with created expression, the Church – whole, unified, and integrated, as the Christ who organically identifies with her as Head identifies with Body (Colossians 1:18) – pulsates with transfiguring grace.

Christ assured us that He would build His Church upon the Apostle’s confession of Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:13–19). St. Paul proclaimed the Church to be “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and that through the Church the wisdom of God is made known (Ephesians 3:10). (This is why the Bible comes through the Church and is rightly enthroned within it, and not above it.) He reminds us that the Church has no other head but Christ (Colossians 1:18). The Apostle John notes that the Church is guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit (Revelation 2:7).

The mystery of the Church emerges in sharper relief if we see it as the community of deification. Deification names that process of growing beyond forgiveness of sin and cleansing of conscience toward the staggering privilege of becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). That participation was exemplified on Mt. Tabor in the radiant transfiguration of Christ. Here, the “spirit and soul and body” (1 Thessalonians 5:23) of His human nature was transfigured with light, thereby revealing the purpose of our being human, and the goal of our existence. The Church, then, is a dynamic organism of the only fixed and peculiar transfiguring grace, a still place of ceaseless motion toward the singular goal of deathless life in Christ. Not a calendar item for Sundays, not a social organization, not a shop for moral tune-ups, the Church is sweet and shattering confrontation with God.
It is divinity expressed through physicality, which is why, when describing the Church, the Apostle Paul can join the corporateality of “pillar and foundation” to the incorporealit of “the truth.”

What matters in Buddhism is not the Buddha, but his teachings. In the philosophical system of Platonism, it is not its namesake, Plato, who is important, but his teachings. In Taoism, the teachings of Lao Tzu eclipse the man. Christianity’s entire structure, however, rests upon the Person of Jesus Christ, and derives its very life from Him. The Man is the message and the message is the Man. He is no less than its cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

– who is “recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”

The Temple raised upon Him cannot but bear a fully harmonized, interpenetrative unity of realities uncreated and created, divine and earthly. This unity is its healing gift to the world: Pentecost becomes personal.

ECUMENICAL AND ECUMENISM

Christians of all kinds share a common vocabulary, but often not a common dictionary. God, faith, salvation, hell, tradition, grace, theology, heart, symbol, Christ – these are among the terms begging for clarification in our perceptions of ecumenical and ecumenism.

The -ism should grab our attention immediately, for an -ism is often an ideology – a rigid vision or prescription for the way something should be, one that quarters no other mission than to perpetuate the vision. (Think of the difference between vegetarian – “I don’t eat meat” – and veganism – “no one should eat meat,” or between science – “what can be proven by observation” – and scientism – “nothing is real if it cannot be proven by observation.”)

Those who espouse ecumenism as an ideology hold that all individuals and groups that self-identify as “Christian,” or even simply “spiritual,” together make up the invisible “Body of Christ” or “the Church.” From this comes the popular Branch Theory – the presumption that though the Body of Christ may have fallen into divisions that may be out of communion with one another, and may even be incapable of conversation and cordiality with each other, each is yet a branch that diverges from the one big Tree of Jesus Christ.

To be ecumenical stands as the high calling of all who follow Christ; ecumenism may be the most dangerous of all heresies. Why?

FIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

Imagine a large round table. You sit with eleven other individuals, so that together you make twelve – a number that recalls the apostolic college, those who lived and died for the fullness of the Trinity.

You represent an Orthodoxy that professes the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: “We believe in one God, the Father…in one Lord, Jesus Christ…in the Holy Spirit…in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.”

To your right sits an individual representing a group professing a credal statement close to this, but also that God brings some souls into existence for the purpose of sending them to hell.

To his right is one representing a group teaching that God doesn’t send anyone to hell, but also that Jesus is only one way, “and not always the best way,” among many roads to heaven.

To her right is one professing that Jesus is the only way to heaven, but also that He really isn’t “God,” but only “God’s son.”

To his right is one professing that Christ shares one essence with His Father, but also that sacraments are misguided inventions of sick men inspired by demons.

To her right is one who believes that sacraments are biblical, but also that all authority over all Christians on earth is concentrated in one representative of Christ.

To his right is one who teaches that God speaks not to Christians only, but to all “spiritual” people, also that marriage and sexuality are fluid according to how one identifies oneself, and that Jesus cheerfully blesses and presides over all their “LGBTQ+” expressions.

To her right is one who teaches that marriage and sexuality are defined not by culture, but by “the Church,” but also that anyone not a member of his group is damned.

To his right is one proclaiming that salvation is open to all, but also that the Bible is an outdated relic of the past that needs filtering through modern science and common sense.

To her right is one arguing the Bible is the Good Book for today, but also that, because of “religionless spirituality,” candy and soda pop are just as valid for “the Lord’s Supper” as bread and wine.

To his right is one who teaches that Holy Communion is important, but also that physical sickness and lack of wealth are proofs of insufficient faith and God’s disfavor.

Finally, the individual to her right and to your left, closing the circle of twelve, professes a belief in the Trinity, in some sacraments, in the Bible, in apostolic succession, in traditional views on marriage and sexuality, in helping the poor, but also loudly tells the other ten that your Orthodox group is man-made tradition poisoned with anti-biblical, works-based, soul-destroying ritualism.

Here you sit, like The Fights of the Round Table – wildly conflicting beliefs, conflicting teachings, conflicting lifestyles, and not only conflicting interpretations of the Bible, but conflicting opinions about whether the Bible even matters. Now, move back and look up over the center of the table – visible to vast crowds of starving souls, contemporary and ancient, desperate for some guidance through the existential crises in life and death – hangs a wide sign that reads, The Church.

Functionally, that is ecumenism. Why may ecumenism be the most dangerous of all heresies? Because in an “interfaith” effort, it welcomes all heresies under one big tent – any proposition or lie one wants to believe about God or history or the human being. It welcomes both the Arianism of those who deny that Christ is of one essence with the Father, and the orthodoxy of those who do. It accepts the Sabellianism of those who deny that Christ is of one nature with humanity and orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can tolerate both the Nestorianism of those who reject the union of nature in Christ and the concomitant veneration of His God-bearing mother, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can harbor both the Macedonianism of those who reject the divinity and divinizing energies of the Holy Spirit, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can include both the Montanism of those who favor the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of the other two Persons, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It sees no problem with the anastomism of those who deny any moral component to salvation, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It receives both the iconoclasm of those who reject a material dimension organic to faith, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t. It can bridge, it thinks, the Gnosticism of those who reject a sacramental expression organic to the Incarnation, and the orthodoxy of those who don’t.

Then, all those sitting at the table rise and, as a capstone toast to this carnival of chaos, participate in the
Ecumenism

because of blood (1 Corinthians 11:27–29).

Because in an "interfaith" effort, it welcomes all heresies under one big tent — any proposition or lie one wants to believe about God or history or the human being.

Why may ecumenism be the most dangerous of all heresies? Because in a "divided, yet not divided" mentality, the Orthodox Christian Divine Liturgy refers to a "divided" Christ. As the celebrant parts the consecrated Lamb, he says, "Divided yet not divided is the Lamb of God, ever eaten, yet never consumed." In this act — dividing, not dissolving — the whole Church of God rests not fractured nor distinguished on the diskos, so that the particle placed in the mouth of the infant contains all the fullness, all the divinity, all the abundant life of the piece placed in the mouths of the adults. Each fullness agrees with every other fullness. On this principle, too, rests Orthodox ecclesiology: the small struggling parish contains all the fullness, all the divinity, all the abundant life of the Son and Word of God. So does the large, thriving cathedral. Each part contains the wholeness and the wholeness is present in each part. The expressions of the Church are distinct but not divided: one, not disintegrated or contradictory; holy, not psychological or man-made; catholic, not partial or fragmentary; apostolic, not changing or innovative.

The living continuity of the faith and life established by Jesus Christ, given to His apostles, described in the Bible, practiced by early believers, defended with the blood of martyrs, and passed on by those Christians associated with the ancient centers and earliest centuries of Christian history, the Church — always in her inner life if not always her outer expression — is the place of harmonized wellness.

Early Latin-speaking Christians described this as the sacramenta corporis et sanguis — the whole Christ, Head and Body. Preach Christ alone and He is reducible to the same misinterpretations that distort Holy Scripture when one preaches a churchless Bible. Preach Christ alone and it degenerates into a social club or a mechanism for the preservation of culture or a mob of shared superstitions. Preach Christ alone and it warps into a "synagogue of Satan," a system of power and of power abuse.

Preach the "total Christ — Head and Body," however, and we enter embodied healing, fullness and right order and the salvific stability of something that unstable man did not invent. Here are found the virtues of Christ-like humility and Christ-centered truth, filling every part within the whole. To preach the "total Christ — Head and Body" is to discover both who saves us and how we are saved; who died for us and how to carry our cross; who reconciled us to His Father, and how we approach for you — that reconciliation for ourselves, whose immortality we need and how to exchange our mortality for it. Anything short of the Churchful Christ and the Christful Church poisons an already parched world, like giving shipwrecked souls nothing but seawater to quench their excruciating thirst.

PROFESSING, NOT PRESUMING

This is crucial: with equal conviction we profess both the knowability of one true Church and the unknow-ability of who is safely part of it. Simple observation from history and headlines reveals that the Church stands in radiant glory, while we ragged attendants sully its reputation remain "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

With the discerning Paul, we do not presume to judge the essential condition of anyone, including ourselves: "In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." (1 Corinthians 4:3–5). A clear consciousness is a coveted thing, but it does not itself determine innocence. The field of faith cradles both wheat and tares together (Matthew 13:24–30), the dragon gathers both the good and the bad (Matthew 13:47–50), and separating one from the other will be the sole and solemn assignment of none but the angels.

Suspension of all judgment should especially frighten the Orthodox, for whom the most buoyant words in the Divine Liturgy — "We have seen the true Light; we have found the true Faith" — are also the most brutal. They are buoyant, because this really is the Ark in the storm of "the world, the flesh, and the devil" (Ephesians 2:2–3); brutal, because the Ark's Founder and Head mandates, "for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him will be asked the more" (Luke 12:48). Poor is the soul who settles into a local Orthodox parish in search of nothing more than the feeling of a psychological guarantee of salvation.

None should work out their salvation with greater "fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) than those who presume they're snuggled comfortably in the Ark: "Woe to you, Orthodox! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Genoa or Grand Rapids, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Rome and Canterbury to suffer judgment than for you." Why did Jesus tell the religious Pharisees that repentant "prostitutes and tax collectors are entering heaven before you"? (Matthew 21:31). It is because you who have much, have produced little, while they who have little, have produced much.

HOLY DESIRE

Heresies are to Christ's Church what holes are to Noah's Ark — ruptures in integrity that may appear small and inconsequential, but in fact in powerful forces of great destruction and malevolence. Deceptive is any consideration of the "size" of heresy, since hereby often hides in "personal opinion" contrary to "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Yet we must talk and reason and debate and grow, and profess only to retract and profess again. We must live. Yet when personal opinion rises from a launched pad of ego — and creates a blog or writes a book or records a podcast or ignores a history or starts a church or counsels a fragile soul — that offering can become a dish of confusion or a portal of the demonic. It is hereby's halting effect on spiritual healing that's inadmissible, and its capacity to open the way for more heresy. Christ's warning to His disciples is that they be wary not of the leaf but of the rotten heart of bad teaching (Matthew 16:12) — roughly the size of a quarter coin in the whole bread. The Orthodox, then, conclude Divine Liturgy with an appeal to God to "preserve the fullness of the Church" as Noah might appeal to God to "preserve the integrity of the Ark." If the Church allows holes or heresies, it becomes not the community of deification, but a commonwealth of the damned.

For all who shall be saved, salvation comes through the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, for "neither is there salvation in any other, no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved" (Acts 4:12); either through baptism by water — as ascetic participants in the Mysteries of the Church, baptism by blood — as martyrs or confessors for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; or baptism by desire — as good souls who would join her if they knew of her accessible existence.

For any cultural ridicule or rejection of Christianity, followers of Jesus need blame none but ourselves, really. Good intentions granted, we've such a scattered bunch — in global expression and personal example — so that "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of us" (Romans 2:24). Hiding in this disarray, however, is at least this glorious hope: many who appear lost to-day for a definitely antagonistic posture towards Christianity will be saved at the Judgment Seat because, in fact and perhaps unknowingly, they had rejected not Christ but all false Christs, not His Body but all deformed and disappointing presentations of it. For all who've endured shaming or shunning or sacrifice because they wouldn't settle for counterfeiters, how merciless is He who reward them with the real thing in His real Kingdom!
Grace through Anointing

Michael Pagani

M y life, by any standard, has been very fruitful and blessed. Ten years ago, I was moved by God to marry and start a family. With full faith that this was possible, I found my wife, (actually, she found me) and we had two beautiful children, a girl and a boy. I have been part of the Christian Church since birth, but became an Orthodox Christian only seven years ago. Since that time, I have received the holy sacraments of Chrismation, Marriage, Confession, and the Eucharist. The sacrament of Marriage was the happiest moment in my life; chrismation was the most awe-inspiring; and communion always brings fulfillment. The receiving of holy oil, however, was an experience of grace that was given during a very sacred, silent and sad time in my life.

Two years ago my family and I moved very far from our home in Florida to start a new life in Seattle, with a new job and two young children. Not long after the move I began to feel weak and tired. I attributed this sudden feeling of lethargy to the late-night calls of a baby and living in a strange new climate. The doctors I visited had no answers except for me to get more exercise. Only after the move did I feel I was in an advanced stage. Statistically, unless the last battery was dead, they were still in an advanced state. I had many great blessings in my life, and had a bright future with my wonderful wife, children, and church.

Bone cancer is extremely painful and can incapacitate you very quickly. With two beautiful children and a wonderful wife, however, I continued to move though the pain and to live, pray, and participate in life in every possible moment, because I had so few moments left. I am and always will feel grateful for having a blessed life and prayed unceasingly to God for “grace not for me, a sinner, but for them, thy children, your gift to me.” I had no fear of death, but rather great sadness in leaving my very young family so soon. The simple task of holding my child in my arms or lying down with my wife was soon out of my reach, but love was not absent from our lives during that dark time, for we had our faith at home and our church close to us. Praise be to God that we did have a church, because it was at church that God answered my unspoken prayer.

I am a recent convert to Orthodox Christianity who is still amazed at the authentic and unchanged practices that make for a powerful experience during worship. I am also strengthened in my faith by those who are able to receive the gifts of grace in the church. I know through prayer and supplication that they are moving towards rhosmos. I understand for many of us, that the sacraments and acts of grace often “feel” theoretical. The more time I spent in church, the more I felt this sense of mystery following me everywhere. At some moments, I have to admit, the pain was so distracting during my activities that the awareness of grace was lost. While being in severe pain, I understood that God was giving His grace, but I did not perceive its blessing. Only at the end of the day, after everything was said and done, could I have a sense of grace and gratitude in moments of silence.

Of course, not all experiences through my new church have been earth-moving moments, but what happened after months of pain and loss was profound and subtle at the same time. The pain rose to such a level that I could understand how death could be a welcomed gift. My primary emotion was sadness that I would not be able to raise my children as God had moved my heart. My wife’s primary emotion was un宛ted anger, yet she became more steadfast in her faith and more faithful to me. I did feel as if we were being tested like Job, but we did not know why. I found the only source of comfort to my mind and soul was constant prayer and long periods of silence. My wife and I made the necessary arrangements with wills, trust and guardianship with many tears, but never any regrets. They finally decided on and started a treatment protocol at the beginning of April 2017. I continued to pray without expectations beyond what the doctors told us.

It was then, after only two weeks of treatment, at a Wednesday service of Vespers and confession, that I received holy oil from Saint Savva Monastery in the Holy Land, in the silent sanctuary of our family church. The act of blessing performed by my priest was not theoretical but rather very visceral. Even more important was the subsequent act of grace. I told him that I needed to tell him something before my confession began. Up until then, thinking of death and my family’s future had a theoretical feel to it; however, once I began to speak about it to our priest, everything became real. The gentle demeanor of our priest allowed me to open up about everything. I said that dying was not the issue for me, for I felt close to Christ; rather, my prayers were for my children. The idea that they would be raised without a father was heartbreaking for me. My only prayer was that I could remain as long as possible for their sake.

After confession my priest and confessor asked if I was open to receiving a blessing of holy oil from the Saint Savva Monastery in the Holy Land. I said “Yes.” I spent a few moments in prayer and waited for Father to return from behind the iconostasis. As I walked forward I could see the trace around the iconostasis become light. My heart was lighter, I felt comforted even through the pain of my broken arm. I could feel a sigh of relief rising and falling from my body. It was the same lightness I felt during my chemo a few years before, but at that time, my life was filled with the happiness of a pending marriage and a new faith! This was a much different time, shrouded with the texture of death and departure. In that moment, however, the same luminescence was upon us. As Father performed the blessing and anointing with holy oil, it was a moment of stillness, and a sense of grace descended upon me. I was not aware of any words spoken, only that the sign of the cross was made. The oil that touched my skin had a weight of intent and a fragrance that transported me out of the mundane. I dared not speak because of the flood of emotional gratitude for a simple act of kindness.

As I walked away from the steps of the iconostasis, it was as if a cloud of witnesses from within the icons moved with me. In my heart I felt tenderness bestowed by the eyes of angels and the Theotokos watching in full awareness of the grace given to this servant. I was also aware that this moment of mercy was not just about me, but my family, and the church of which I had become a part, in the last days of my life.

Less than a week later I was tested to see if the medical treatments had any positive effect on the progression of the cancer. The tests could not find any trace of cancer in my blood. This was not expected by any of our physicians, but it was great news to hear at the start of the treatment protocol. We held our collective breath and finished the first series of treatments. We then waited for subsequent bone biopsies and molecular testing to confirm what each blood test showed: there was no trace of cancer in my body. Long before one complete treatment series was fully administered, the testing confirmed that I was in full remission. The top experts in the field of multiple myeloma agreed that there was only one thing that we did that was different from all other patients: the stated use of prayer and holy oil.

The results of the testing were remarkable, but what was most miraculous was the change in pain. During the long winter of physical dissolution, I had lost my left ninth rib, right twelfth rib, and my right upper arm. Within six weeks they showed remarkable signs of returning, and surgery was not needed. I went from only deepening uprigh in a chair, to lying down in a bed, finally. I was most grateful for the ability to hold my children in my arms and carry them while they slumbered or in fun. I found myself able to sleep through the night, which had not been possible for at least two years.

The indisputable fact that there was an unexpected healing of my body, confirmed by physicians, has lead our family to give thanks and praise to God, and to offer our lives to the service of the Church. It is fair to say that the healing was a combination of spirit and science, but the praise and glory is given to God. It can be said that God’s grace of healing was able to work through our local priest, working mysteriously within me, as the Fathers of the Church had intended.
Many saints of the Church are described as “long-suffering” in the way they met their deaths. In their actions, dealing with tribulation, they imitated the suffering of Christ, who is regularly described during the services of Holy Week – specifically in relation to the Passion – as the “Long-suffering Lord.” In his preaching on Psalm 53 (54), St. Basil the Great says the following about long-suffering:

“Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy power. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear unto the words of my mouth. For although twelve legions of angels might have come to the help of the Lord in His hour of passion, yet that He might perfectly fulfill His service of humble obedience, He surrendered Himself to suffering and weakness, only praying with the words: Father! Thy hands I commend My spirit. After the same pattern, David, whose actual sufferings prophetically foretold the sufferings of the Lord, opposed not his enemies either by word or act; in obedience to the command of the Gospel, he would not render evil for evil, in imitation of his Master’s meekness, in his affliction, in his betrayal, in his flight, he called upon the Lord and was content to use His weapons only in the context of the ungodly.1

Surrendering completely to the will of God and embracing our suffering, for St. Basil, is the way we deal with sufferings. When we turn to the lives of the saints, we are countless examples of long-suffering through tribulations, staying true in their following of Christ. This may seem to be easy enough, and we may even wonder what we would do in situations like these, but dealing with the reality is not as easy as reading about it. Still, suffering does seem to be something that helps us attain the ultimate goal: salvation.

In his first and second discourses, On the Origin of Human Suffering, St. Basil further explores the theme of suffering in the way we experience loss, with an implicit understanding that God did not intend His creation to endure this. As St. Basil explains image and likeness, it is “by our creation we have the first image, and by our free choice we build the second [like- ness].”2 Loss, then, becomes a part of the process of building up the likeness of God within us. If, through our experience of loss, we are reminded of the Goodness of God, then one could argue that we begin our return through the process of grieving or bereavement. As we begin to relearn our world following loss, we face a choice with what role will God play in the world we will come to know? The Old Testament is replete with examples of the people of God struggling to answer this question. We have examples in the Tower of Babel, and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which people reject the God who, shortly before, saved them from destruction, and are able to live in such joy, come from knowing God through our sorrow, and our trust that we, as St. Basil taught, were “born that we might see God … that we might achieve heavenly citizenship.”3

That is not at all to say that we are to seek out suffering. St. Athanasius in his great work, The Life of Antony explains how St. Antony the Great would deal with suffering:

“This was the advice he [St. Antony] gave to those who came to him. And with those who suffered he sympathized and prayed. But always he gave the Lord thanks for allowing the sufferer to be patient, and to know that healing belonged neither to him nor to man at all, but only to the Lord, who doeth good when and to whom He will. The sufferers therefore used to receive the words of the old man as though they were a cure, learning not to be discouraged but rather to be long-suffering. And those who were healed were taught not to give thanks to Antony but to God alone.4

These Fathers show us, first, that we learn to long-suf- fering only through suffering. Long-suffering is a virtue that we develop in order to survive eternal life. Similarly, the virtue of patience must be learned. As human beings, we are not predisposed to patience and long-suffering – as we can easily see in our current American culture – and therefore those virtues need to be learned behaviors. Furthermore, our suffering is alleviated, we are given glory and thanksgiving to God, for it is by Him alone that we are delivered. In his Homily on First Corinthians, St. John Chrysostom takes a different approach. Although St. John Chrysostom and St. Paul appear to be talking about a different form of suffering, their basic message is still appropriate for our purposes. St. John considers St. Paul’s words: “And we labor, working with our hands. Whether we be well or ill clad, we endeavor, being defamed, we endure. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”5

He comments:

Together with our peers from without, we also strain ourselves to the utmost with perpetual labor. And what is still more, no one can say that we fret at these things, for the contrary [of frettling] is our requisite [i.e., our compensation] to deal with them so, as I say, is the main point, not our suffering evil, for that is common to all, but our suffering [it] without de- spectorship or vexation. Whose suffering wrong and wrongs more nor himself nor vexed is reckoned a foil by the heathen; and dishonored and weak, … so also when he [Christ] desires to attract them to himself having all his miracles, he speaks of his sufferings on their account. So also is it our method when we are injured by any and despoiled, whatsoever we have endured for them, to bring the same forward. … For that effect one produces not no well by repulse as by silence.6

So, when we suffer, we are not to seek out revenge and be troubled. Christ spoke of His suffering for our sake, so we also are to suffer in a way that mimics Him. This is counter- cultural – even by the time of St. Paul – but it is the high call- ing of Christians.

Patristic thought on suffering is brought together and summarized by St. John of Damascus.7 In his discussion, St. John looks to the biblical figures known for their suffering, specifically Job, Paul, Lazarus, and the rich man; the man born blind, the martyrs, and, of course, Christ.

For Orthodox permissible the just man to encoun- ter misfortune in order that it may reveal to others the virtue that lies concealed within him, as was the case with Job. At other times it allows something to be done in order that something great and marvelous might be accomplished through the seemingly strange act, as when the salvation of men was brought about through the Cross. In another way it allows the just man to suffer more trials in order that he may not depart from a right conscience nor lapse into pride on account of the power and grace granted to him, as was the case with Paul. One man is forsaken for a season with a view to another’s restoration, in order that others when they see his state may be taught a lesson, as in the case of Lazarus and the rich man. For it belongs to our nature to be cast down when we see persons in distress. Another is desired by Providence in order that another may be glorified, and not for his own sin or that of his par- ents, just as the man who was blind from his birth min-istered to the glory of the Son of Man. Again another is permitted to suffer in order to stir up emulation in the breasts of others, so that others by magnifying the glory of Works Cited


S. John of Damascus. The Orthodox Faith: The Father of the Church, vol. 37.3. The Human Condition


St. John of Damascus. The Orthodox Faith


Gregory Abdalah, M.Div. Pastoral Assistant St. George Church, Phoeniz, Arizona

24 January 2018

The Word 25

When tragedy strikes – whether large-scale, or something like the death of a family member – I am often asked the question “Why?” I struggled with this same question when my own mother died. My mother – a woman who devoted her life to God and His Church, was married to a priest for nearly 30 years, and worked for a hospice agency helping terminally ill patients and their families deal with death – was diagnosed and treated for thyroid cancer in 2004, and battled her life to God and His Church, was married to a priest for nearly 30 years, and worked for a hospice agency helping terminally ill patients and their families deal with death – was diagnosed and treated for thyroid cancer in 2004, and battled...
of the sufferer may truly and deeply understand suffering in the hope of future glory and the desire for future blessings, as in the case of the martyrs. Another is allowed to fall at times into some act of baseness in order that another worse fault may be thus corrected, as for instance when God allows a man who takes pride in his virtue and righteousnessness to fall away into ignorance in order that he may be brought through this fall into the perception of his own weakness and be humbled and approach and make confession to the Lord.11

St. John appears to be saying that God allows suffering so that it might benefit the sufferer and those who witness their suffering, something that is not easily understood by most people – myself included. That being said, this seems to be a concise and complete patristic view of suffering, something that we will all need to understand. This is probably easier for those who have studied theology, but how do we, as pastors, relate this understanding to people who have not studied theology? This connection with life is where things get sticky. How might we begin to teach this?

In his book The Problem of Pain, C.S. Lewis quotes Scottish poet, author and minister George MacDonald. “The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.” Following my mother’s passing, this notion was extremely difficult to make sense of. In the end, when we are faced with our own death or the loss of a loved one, we have a foundational understanding of mortality. I would close a retreat on this topic with the opening of the Epistle reading for an Orthodox Funeral Service: “We would not have you ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, that you may sorrow not as others who have no hope.” This apostolic desire to ensure that people are not cut off from God. In the end, she died peacefully, painlessly, and at home. Through her suffering, she was able to discover what it means to be truly in control, to give herself over to God. She taught us the truth of our mortality.

During turbulent times in our society and in the world at large, our Holy Orthodox Church never ceases to give us the hope that we need in this life. Through miraculous wonders, Christ Himself shows us that our faith is alive and active, that our just and gracious God loves us, and that He continues to pour out on His mercy through the saints and the most blessed Theotokos. As many of the faithful everywhere have found in venerating myth-streaming icons, so I have seen the “Hawaiian” Myrrh-Streaming Iveron Mother make a divine imprint on my life. Imagining being in this physical field of thousands of fragrant roses... The scent permeates your being and you don’t want to leave such a paradise. You close your eyes and hold on to this experience forever. You wonder, have I been transported to another world? In this experience, I ponder our Holy Virgin.

The Mother of God calls us to Her as she called the Christ child. As we pour out our innermost thoughts and feelings in Her presence. She hears us and divines the depths of our pain and suffering. Our Mother saves us through Christ, who loves us and gave His life for us. All of creation rejoices and bows to Her, who is more spacious than the heavens. She rags at our hearts and pierces them with love as She brings us closer to Christ, who is Life and Light.

What can we say about our most beautiful Mother? She gives us hope when we feel despair. She heals us when we are sick. She brings us protection when we call upon Her. “She is the ready help to those who flee to her, and a refuge of all Christians. She has joined the fallen nature of our race to heavenly things” (from Little Compline and the Akathist Hymn). She gives us joy and peace, and a calm that surpasses all time and space. In Her, we find solace.

The “Hawaiian” Iveron Mother weeps myrrh consistently and is a consolation in a dreary world. In knowing our Mother, we know hope. In knowing Her, we know Christ Himself, who dwelt in Her and is God before all ages. In knowing Her, we begin to taste Heaven on Earth; and in knowing her, we learn true humility. As we reflect on the Nativity of Christ, who was born of a Virgin, let us ponder the sweet kisses She gave to the Christ Child, and the love that She also gives to us.

“Since June of 2008, the ‘Hawaiian’ Myth-streaming Iveron Icon has been to over a thousand churches of all jurisdictions in North America, and has been venerated by millions of people throughout the world. As of November 2016, this icon has been officially recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church as miraculous and worthy of veneration, and was given the blessing to travel to the various churches and monasteries of Holy Orthodoxy (www.orthodoxhawaii.org). For more information or to help build a shrine for a more permanent home for the icon, you may contact its guardian, Sub-deacon Nectarios, at O.H.H.I.A. (P.O. Box 251 Aiea, Hawaii 96701). When the Hawaiian Iveron Mother’s icon is not traveling, we may extol and chant hymns of praise to Her, who is the cause of our rejoicing!”

O. Box 251 Aiea, Hawaii 96701). For more information or to help build a shrine for a more permanent home for the icon, you may contact its guardian, Sub-deacon Nectarios, at O.H.H.I.A. (P.O. Box 251 Aiea, Hawaii 96701). When the Hawaiian Iveron Mother’s icon is not traveling, we may extol and chant hymns of praise to Her, who is the cause of our rejoicing!

“From thy holy Icon, O Lady Theotokos, blessed myrrh hath flowed abundantly. Thou hast therefore vouchsafed these, in exile, faithful unto thee, and by thee enlightening, to live in the light of thee, to them that love thee, to them that love thee, to the saints and the just, to the merciful providers by thy Son light. Therefore, O Lady, with tears we bow down to thee. Be merciful unto us in the hour of judgment. Let, having received thy myrrh, we be punished as those who have been contumacious of it. But grant us through thy prayers to bring forth spiritual fruits, and save our souls” –

Troparion to the Iveron Icon, Tone 7

Hronia Tammy Makoul
St. George Cathedral, Pittsburgh

THE HOPE OF THE HOPELESS

Hronia Tammy Makoul

10. When I actually had this discussion, my respondent took a moment, then said, “Wow... that actually makes a lot of sense.”
11. 1 Thessalonians 4:15.
Fifty years ago, when I was a seminary student, a recently ordained priest returned for a visit. As future priests, we were naturally curious about how his new life as a priest was going. I remember almost nothing about the conversation with the new priest, but one remark that he made not only surprised me at that time, but has remained with me throughout my life as a priest: “The most difficult part of my ministry is the weddings.” I do not remember the details of why he found weddings problematic. Over the past half-century, however, I have come to understand his feelings, and I have found that they are shared by many priests. Why is this so?

Anyone who has gone through the often year-long process leading up to a wedding knows that it can be very stressful. Expectations often are unrealistic.

Are these problems new? Not really. Given the importance of a marriage, some measure of stress is unavoidable. One example of wedding problems can be found in the writings of one of the great Fathers of the church, St. John Chrysostom. St. John is most remembered for his preaching. After St. Paul, he is regarded the greatest preacher in the life of the church. He was also a pastor. After his years as a priest in Antioch, he was taken to Constantinople, where he became Archbishop. His life there was very difficult. He was eventually sent into exile, where he died a painful death. St. John was forthright and very direct in what he had to say. His pastoral advice was often unpopular.

In his writings, St. John addresses all aspects of married life: how to choose a spouse, human intimacy, how to live as a Christian in the married state, and specifically how a husband and wife should treat one another. His writings have more wisdom for wives and husbands than the modern advice columns. Although his remarks on all aspects of married life are of great value, I would like to confine my remarks to the wedding itself. What he says about weddings even after sixteen centuries is still very applicable to our present situation.

St. John’s remarks are most likely directed to the wealthiest families of Constantinople. These weddings took place in the family home. What we call the reception took place in the same place. Today a sharp distinction is made between the wedding itself and the reception that follows. In the typical Orthodox parish, this would be what goes on upstairs and what goes on downstairs, or in a rented hall. St. John would reject what is really a false distinction. All is part of the wedding. All is sacramental. The Lord’s presence at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the miracle he performed, were clearly at the reception. He does not stay in the church after the ceremony. The icon of the Wedding Feast at Cana is very revealing regarding the Lord’s presence. He is seated in what obviously is a place of honor. Failing to see the unity between ceremony and reception has serious implications for how people behave in the hours after the ceremony. When people speak of their wedding, they ought not to make distinctions between the ceremony and the reception. “The standards of Christian behavior do not change in the hall. This is true for what is said, what is sung, and how we behave.

St. John’s remarks are very critical of the practices of his time. He himself tells us why: “Nowadays on the day of the wedding people dance and sing hymns to Aphrodite, songs full of adultery, corruption of marriage, illicit loves, unseemly drunkenness and shameful speeches.” When you invoke demons by your songs, when you fulfill their desires by your shameful speeches, when you bring mimes and effeminates actors and the whole theater into your house, when you fill your house with harlots and arrange for a whole chorus of demons to make merry there, what good can you expect, tell me?” (On Marriage and Family Life, pp. 82, 83).

Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation. The Romans knew her as Venus. Her fertility cult, widespread in pre-Christian times had not been entirely eliminated. St. John’s words are sufficient to reveal the erotic content of their theatrical presentations. How widespread were these presentations? St. John was certainly not alone in condemning them. “The Symod of Laodicea A.D. 343–381 makes that very clear: “Members of the priesthood and of the clergy must not witness the plays at weddings or banquets; but before the players enter, they must rise and depart” (Canon LIV). If what happens at the reception embarrasses the clergy, it would certainly embarrass the Lord.

Given the context in which St. John writes, his objections are understandable. “Marriage,” he says, “is a bond, a bond ordained by God. Why then do you celebrate in a silly and inmodest manner?” “You can enjoy a banquet with your friends to celebrate your marriage; I do not forbid this.” (p. 74) “Don’t you remember St. Paul’s words: ‘So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.’ On the Palmist’s when he said, ‘Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice in him with trembling.’ But your behavior is diabolishar and blasphemous, totally without restraint. Is it not possible for pleasure and temperance to coexist?” (pp. 77–78).

“Are you fond of music?” he asks (p. 78). Obviously, he was troubled by the inappropriate content of the songs: “I would prefer that you love silence best of all, but if you must have songs, choose edifying ones, not satanic ones” (p. 78). In his opposition to music, St. John was not alone. The Apostolic Constitutions, written a few years before he became Archbishop of Constantinople, would not allow the baptism of a flute- or harp-player unless he renounced his trade. One musical historian notes, “This vehemence against instrumental musicians is primarily explained by the association of musical instruments with sexual license, luxurious banquets and the immorality of the theatre” (ibid). With this understanding we can see why St. John would say, “Don’t hire bands or orchestras; such an expense is excessive and unbecoming” (p. 79).

St. John knows that his remarks will not be welcome. “I am aware that many people think me ridiculous for giving such advice; but if you listen to me, you will understand the advantages of a sober life-style more and more as time goes by. You will no longer laugh at me, but will laugh instead at the way people live now like silly children or drunken men” (p. 60). “Know that some people think I am burdensome and difficult, giving advice like this and uprooting ancient customs. But I do not care at all about their objections” (p. 82).

Although a lifelong celibate and a great advocate of monastic life, St. John had a very positive attitude toward marriage. Citing St. Paul, he insists on the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage: “This (marriage) is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the Church.” The Christian marriage, including the banquet, is more than a human arrangement. It is a mystery. “This,” he says, “is not an
empty symbol. They (husband and wife) have not become the image of something on earth, but of God Himself” (p. 75). “Sex is not an evil thing. It is adultery that is evil. It is fiction that is evil” (p. 81). “How foolish are those who belittle marriage! If marriage were something to be condemned, Paul would never call Christ a bridegroom and the Church a bride (p. 55). Christ was present at the marriage feast in Cana (p. 81). “Since you know, therefore, how great a mystery that marriage is, and how great a matter it repre- sents, let no one ever attack marriage lightly or casually” (p. 96).

But what marriage? What makes marriage? What makes a Christian marriage different? From the beginning of the creation of man, marriage has been part of the divine plan of God. In one form or other it has existed throughout human history. With the coming of Christ, however, something happened to marriage. It was transformed: “Lo, I come to make all things new.” Central to Lord’s preachment was that the King- dom of God is now among us, on earth. This is absolutely critical. At the Last Supper he announced that he was giving them the Kingdom. (Luke 22:29). The Orthodox Church provides us with a very beautiful wedding ceremony. We need not add to it or take anything from it. As St. John teaches, music should be edifying. This should hold true for the service and the reception. I have at- tended many wedding receptions. Whether the music was appropriative or not, I could not tell; it was usually so loud that I could not carry on a conversation with anyone where I was seated.

St. John fearlessly goes in where angels fear to tread. He talks about women’s clothing: “Don’t… spend end- less hours worrying about dresses” (p. 79). He calls for the bride to be dressed with dignity. “Don’t adorn the bride with golden ornaments, but dress her modestly.” (p. 79). All not wedding dresses are modest. The fact that the typi- cal wedding dress will only be worn once should make the bride consider the amount of money spent on the dress. She might even ask herself, What is the significance of the dress? St. John calls for modesty and moderation.

St. John tells the wedding couple that it is fitting to have a banquet with their friends to celebrate their marriage (p. 74). “Invite your family, your neighbors and your friends.” St. John says, “I call few people as you know who have good charac- ter.” (p. 79). When you celebrate the wedding, you may hold a dinner party, but you should not spend a lot of mon- ey on decorations, clothing and entertainers. You should not bow down in front of what may get broken or lost and give you extra worries. If there are songs, they should be edify- ing songs. “There should be spiritual joy instead of drunken- ness” (p. 71). St. John is also against dancing at weddings: “Pagan mysteries are the only ones that involve dancing.” (p. 80). Marriage is a holy mystery and sacrament of the church. It is an act whereby two people join together for a lifelong union in Christ. As Christ was present at the wed- ding at Cana, He is present in the sacrament of marriage.

Why do priests find weddings problematic? Dealing with stressed out people, of course, can be trying. Yet there is something more troubling. The spiritual element, while not avoided, often takes a back seat in wedding plans. What we might call the simply human dimension of the wed- ding takes precedence. The priest knows that if he wishes to meet with the couple, he had better do so in the early stages of the planning. The final days before the wedding will be filled with a flurry of activities. Time must be given to prayerful thought about the holy mystery that will be cele- brated by the couple on their wedding day.

The priest is also aware that some persons are mar- rial members of the church. Should he marry them? I think most priests are willing to do so, in hopes that the lesson of life will bring them in time to realize their utter dependency on God. As we have noted, St. John does not discourage the cele- bration of marriage. What he asks is that marriage be seen for what it is – the joining of a man and woman in Christ – and that the marriage be cele- brated in moderation, dignity and modesty.
COMMUNICATIONS IN ACTION

HIS GRACE BISHOP THOMAS BLESSES ST. MARY IN SEPTEMBER

To mark the occasion of their Pastoral Feast Day, the Nativity of the Theotokos, Saint Mary’s Hill Valley, Maryland had the honor of welcoming His Grace Bishop THOMAS to their parish from Wednesday, September 6, to Friday, September 8. The commemoration and celebration began Wednesday evening with a Pankhūkul service presided over by Bishop THOMAS. Afterwards, his grace met with Saint Mary’s Young Adult Ministry to enjoy a meal and to answer their questions on Church history, doctrine, and theology. On Friday, September 8, Bishop THOMAS presided over a Vigil for the Nativity of the Theotokos, starting with Great Vespers and Festal Orthros. Before the Divine Hierarchal Liturgy began, his Grace ordained Zade Jabaji as Sub-Diakon Hieratik. Previous to his ordination, his Grace ordained Zade Jabaji as Sub-Diakon Hieratik. Previous to his ordination, Sub-Diakon Hieratik had served the St. Mary’s community faithfully as an altar boy and Teen SOYO advisor.

During his three-day visit, His Grace Bishop THOMAS also received updates on the latest developments of St. Mary’s building and renovation programs from representatives of the parish, and observed the latest phases of the ongoing iconography project.

Thank you, Sayidna, for your love and support and constant prayer for me and my family and parish.

ST. MARY, OMAHA, CELEBRATES 60 YEARS

Congratulations to St. Mary Omaha, Nebraska, for 60 years of service of God in their community! The anniversary celebration took place the weekend of August 19-20. There was much to celebrate: St. Mary’s patronal feast (The Dormition of the Theotokos); V. Rev. Fr. Don Hock’s thirty-year anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, and the twenty-fifth year of His Grace Bishop BASIL’s service as our Bishop. The weekend included a Teen SOYO Brunch, Banquet and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. There were over 250 attendees worshiping and celebrating with them that weekend.

From the early 1900s to the 1950s, many Syrian/Lebanese Christian Orthodox families migrated to the Omaha area. About 1950, they began meeting in family homes and at the Phoenixian Club, where they prayed together. They began to lay plans for an Orthodox Church. In 1957, St. Mary Syrian Orthodox Church was officially incorporated under the laws of the State of Nebraska. To support this parish and our priest, Middle East Dinners were initiated and held twice a year. A choir was organized, a Sunday School was established, and a Ladies Guild created, which became well-known for its dedication and support of the church. In October 1992, Very Reverend Fr. Don and his Khouri, Maggie, and their 5 children came to us. By the grace of God and with our devotion and dedication to His Holy Church, we will continue proclaiming the Kingdom of God and expressing it through faith, humility, and good works. May blessings of the Lord be upon us all, as we continue the journey of salvation!

GATHERING TO THE SHEPHERD: A NIGHT IN HONOR OF BISHOP NICHOLAS

On the evening of September 9, 2017, clergy and faithful from the parishes within the Diocese of New York and Washington, D.C., gathered at St. George Church to honor their hierarch and shepherd, Bishop NICHOLAS. On August 3, 2017, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH appointed Bishop NICHOLAS to the Diocese of Miami and the South East, knowing “his dedication to, and focus on, spreading the word of God;” and his effectiveness as a “shepherd and father to all clergy and laity, especially to the teens and young adults.” In love for their hierarch and in a thankful spirit, people gathered from around the Diocese both to rejoice in the new space and to offer something back to Bishop NICHOLAS as he takes on this new ministry.

The evening started with a heartfelt speech from His Grace, thanking the entire diocese for the many memories and the deep gratitude they have shown him. Parishes and clergy lingered well into the night to take pictures, congratulate him, and share a few more memories with His Grace. As the night came to a close, the words of Metropolitan JOSEPH were realized, as everyone left remembering Bishop NICHOLAS’s “example of service and tireless work on their behalf.”

May God grant Bishop NICHOLAS many years, peace, safety honor, health, and length of days, rightly dividing the word of truth!
ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS
MERTENS, Christopher, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on November 13, 2017, at St. Basil Church, Hampton, Virginia. He is assigned to that parish.

MOSLENER, Deacon Seraphim, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on November 15, 2017, at the Cathedral of St. George, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is attached to the Church of St. John the Beloved in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

PHILLIPS, Deacon Jeremiah, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 26, 2017, at St. Andrew Church, Riverside, California.

2018 PLC Schedule
Diocese of Worcester
Hosted by: Diocesan Ministry Council, held at St. John of Damascus Church, Dedham, MA June 9 & June 23-24, 2018

Diocese of Miami
Hosted by: St. Mary Church, West Palm Beach, FL June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Wichita
Hosted by: Holy Trinity Church, Santa Fe, NM June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Toledo
Hosted by: St. Elias Church, Sylvania, OH June 20-24, 2018

Dioceses of New York and Washington D.C.
& Oakland, Charleston and Mid-Atlantic
Hosted by St. Philip (Suburban, PA); St. George (Upper Darby, PA); & Holy Ascension (West Chester, PA) Churches; held at Antiochian Village June 27-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Ottawa
Hosted by: St. Anthony (St. Antionios) Church, Halifax, NS June 28-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Los Angeles/Eagle River
Hosted by St. George Church, Portland, OR July 4-8, 2018

Clergy Symposium
Antiochian Village July 16-20

2019 Archdiocese Convention
54th Bi-annual Archdiocese Convention
St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, MI July 21-28, 2019

LEST WE FORGET: HONOR WALL

Fr. Antony Gabriel is collecting the names and histories of all of the clergy who have served our Archdiocese from the earliest days until now. Metropolitan JOSEPH has asked Dimitri Zeidan to work with Fr. Antony to preserve and display the materials collected appropriately. It is Fr. Antony’s hope that the collected materials will help tell our story, which is our history. This will allow generations in the future to benefit from the experience of those who came before them and to help them understand better their spiritual lineage in Christ through His Church. See Fr. Antony’s book for examples of the kind of stories that make up our history. These stories make us laugh and cry. They offer insights and data that will allow us to better serve our Lord.

Contact Fr. Antony Gabriel at economosantony@archdiocese.org or call 602-268-7573, or by mail, and send materials to his home at 6202 N Via Tres Patos, Tucson AZ 85710.

Registration and Staff Applications Available
Online January 1st

2018 PLC Schedule

2018 Archdiocese Convention

Diocese of Worcester
Hosted by: Diocesan Ministry Council, held at St. John of Damascus Church, Dedham, MA June 9 & June 23-24, 2018

Diocese of Miami
Hosted by: St. Mary Church, West Palm Beach, FL June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Wichita
Hosted by: Holy Trinity Church, Santa Fe, NM June 13-16, 2018

Diocese of Toledo
Hosted by: St. Elias Church, Sylvania, OH June 20-24, 2018

Dioceses of New York and Washington D.C.
& Oakland, Charleston and Mid-Atlantic
Hosted by St. Philip (Suburban, PA); St. George (Upper Darby, PA); & Holy Ascension (West Chester, PA) Churches; held at Antiochian Village June 27-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Ottawa
Hosted by: St. Anthony (St. Antionios) Church, Halifax, NS June 28-July 1, 2018

Diocese of Los Angeles/Eagle River
Hosted by St. George Church, Portland, OR July 4-8, 2018

Clergy Symposium
Antiochian Village July 16-20

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Hope is the “real” gift you give that provides a needed “hand up” to the lives of those struggling to provide the basic necessities for their children and families.

The 3 Tenets & Governing Principle
Of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Let no man’s place, or dignity, or riches, puff him up; and let no man’s low condition or poverty abase him. For the chief points are faith towards God, hope towards Christ, the enjoyment of those good things for which we look, and love towards God and our neighbor. - Saint Ignatius of Antioch

Act of Faith
Rooted in Love & Compassion
All the way back to our earliest years as a child we are taught to share with others, especially those less fortunate. When we share, we give up what we believe to be control in our lives and put our faith in God that He will provide for our needs in abundance. Through your financial commitment you are allowing God to work through you for the benefit of others. Your gift to the Order is an expression of love and compassion for countless lives and most importantly ... it is an act of Faith.

A Sacrifice
Immeasurable In Its Capacity
To sacrifice for one another is to love. Deciding to “do without” for the benefit of someone you don’t know is the beginning of a true sacrifice. Your sacrifice helps a struggling family send their children to camp enabling them to experience God’s world if only for two weeks. It provides reassurance to a new parish, that it can meet its monthly financial obligations and continue its ministry. As a member of the Order you may consider your sacrifice to be small, but it is immeasurable in its capacity to change people’s lives.

Infinite in Its Effect
Making A Difference Together
You annual gift, less than the cost of your daily cup of coffee, is merely a drop of water in a vast ocean of need. However, the ripple from your gift never ends. It expands to enrich the lives of our youth strengthening their hearts and minds as future leaders of the Faith. It multiplies to help care for our retired clergy and our devoted seminarians. The ripple from your annual or lifetime gift touches the lives of so many that you would never have been able to reach alone.