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The Word

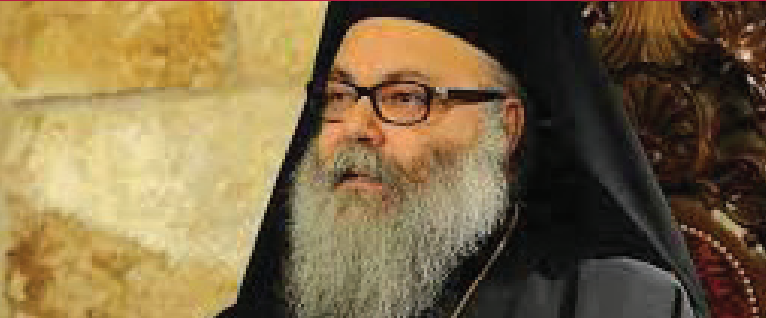
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Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch
& *Patriarch* KIRILL of Moscow



contents



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The Right Reverend
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The Right Reverend
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The Right Reverend
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COVER: Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch and
Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow
Issue Appeal on Syria

3

EDITORIAL
by Bishop JOHN

5

PATRIARCH JOHN X OF ANTIOCH
AND PATRIARCH KIRILL OF MOSCOW
ISSUE APPEAL ON SYRIA

6

ROLE MODELS FOR WOMEN
IN ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN'S MONTH
by Khouria Suzanne Murphy

8

GLORY TO GOD FOR
THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN
by Khouria Dannie Moore

9

BISHOP JOHN PARTICIPATES
IN MARCH FOR LIFE

10

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING
THE DISPUTE OVER QATAR
by Archpriest John W. Morris

12

A MISSIONARY'S JOURNEY
INTO ORTHODOXY IN TURKANA
by Karen Morrison

17

FOOD FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE CALENDAR

18

SYRIAN RELIEF

20

WORSHIP: WHAT'S THE POINT?
by Chris Humphrey

23

FOOD, SEX, AND SPORTS:
IDOLS OR PATHWAYS TO SALVATION?
by Fr. Philip LeMasters

26

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

31

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

32

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

35

GOD IS WITH US!
by Rev. Professor Nicholas M. Kastanas

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

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GREAT LENT

A Time To Share in Christ's Compassion

Christ took on flesh to share in our lives and allow us to share in Him. We who are baptized into Christ, who have put on Christ, share in His priesthood. His priesthood combines the Levitical priesthood with the prophetic. Even in His very being, Christ Himself expresses priesthood as prophet, priest and king. His grandfather Joachim is of the kingly lineage of David, His grandmother Anna of the priestly tribe of Levy. As the Son of the Father, Christ is the perfect prophet or voice of God. Here we see the three priestly functions found in the New Testament. In His priesthood, Christ praises God the Father and brings us to Him, but also with the Father takes care of us. Likewise, in Christ Christians stand with the world and supplicate the Father as well as stand with God revealing God to His world. Christ makes us priests and we share in His priestly work.

As Orthodox Christians, we are the priests of the most high God. No matter what our job or station in society, Christians stand with people before God and with God before man. Although each of us has different spiritual gifts and we all play a variety of roles in society, each of us has opportunities to build relationships and in those relationships to provide God's people with a safe place for Him to heal and for Him to work through us to minister to all His people. God's people are all the people of the world. God took on flesh to save all of humanity, not just one race or group.



By the hand of Fr. Luke Dingman, www.lukedingman.com

“Christianity for me is more a verb than a noun”

God loves all people, and He will bear witness to the people we know and serve them through us.

Too often we fall into despair, imagining God to be too far away and the mission of our Christi-

anity requiring more than we can muster. We fear that we lack too much in our faith and spirituality to do the ministry to which we are called. We sometimes don't pray regularly, and we shy away

from seeking God's will in what we do. Imagining these tasks as too big, we may fall into despair. This despair looks like laziness, a defeatist attitude and a kind of spiritual paralysis. Although we have heard that our Hope is in the Lord, we put more emphasis on *our* and less on *the Lord*. The Lord who is mighty and good has sealed in us His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). He is with us and He will do mighty things through us. It is for us to get out of the way and allow God to work in us. It is for us the surrender to our loving God and merge our own will with His. It is in union with God that we are fulfilled as persons and come to be in the image and likeness of God that we are created for.

Christianity for me is more a verb than a noun. By this I mean that our spirituality is in the doing. We who have adopted the name of Christ to be called Christian have put Him on and share in His work. This work is expressed in His priesthood. It is about praising the Father and taking care of God's people and the world that He has given us. In John 14 we read, "If ye had known *me*, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have *seen* him." We

know the Father by knowing Christ, and we know Christ by putting Him on and sharing in His work. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

One of the first clergy retreats I went on as a young priest over thirty years ago was led by Bishop KALISTOS of Denver. Bishop KALISTOS was a wise and seasoned priest who had much experience mentoring clergy. When one of the younger priests complained about his prayer life, the bishop explained how all of our work was prayer as all of our work brought people to God and God to His people. All of the Church prayers revealed the kingdom of God and the presence of the Trinity. Why, even our shopping in clerical clothes witnessed to our value for our God and our dedication in Him. All of our conversations brought others to a recognition of God and His choice to save us and forgive our sins.

This recognition of the clergyman's life as prayer and witnessing to God applies to the lives of Christians who are not ordained as well. When a Christian postal worker shares God's love and compassion both implicitly and explicitly, God is praised and His love is shared. It is the duty of all of us, as Christians, to live God's life and to love in that life, wherever we are and at all times. When we pray for others, God responds. When we are kind, we witness to the Lord we serve.

God is generous and compassionate. His mercy endures and His love is transformative. When we participate in showing God's compassion and love we share in Christ's priesthood. This is when and how life becomes prayer and unity with God is actualized. We don't need to talk so much. We need to be Christians, to serve God and each other and witness to what God is doing in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Let your Lenten journey be an opportunity to share in Christ's compassion by being deliberate and dedicating yourself to sharing in His life through His priesthood. Lent is about doing.

Bishop JOHN

The substance of this address on divine compassion by Bishop JOHN was given to a conference at Holy Cross Seminary in Boston in the fall of 2013.



By the hand of Fr. Luke Dingman, www.lukedingman.com

Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch and Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow Issue Appeal on Syria

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH REPORTS:

On January 26, 2014, His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X of Great Antioch and All the East and His Holiness Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia made a joint Statement addressed to the participants in the Geneva II International Conference on Syria. Taking part in the Conference are representatives of the opposing parties and the world community. The text of the Statement is given below.

We, Primates of fraternal Orthodox Churches, the Church of Antioch and the Russian Church, met in Moscow in order once again to bear witness to love in Christ, the love which our Churches have preserved intact through centuries and which is addressed to all people, regardless of their nationality, religion or political views.

Today we make our common prayers on behalf of the long-suffering Syrian people who are undergoing unprecedented ordeals. The land, in which Muslims and Christians have lived together for centuries, has been filled with the tears of those who are lamenting the death of their relatives and friends, and who have been driven away from their homes. The calamity that has come to the once peaceful land spares neither old people nor children, neither Muslims nor Christians. No heart can remain indifferent to the horrible tragedy in Syria.

These days, Switzerland is hosting an international conference which gathered at the negotiating table representatives of the opposing parties and the world community. We address our ardent appeal to the participants in the meeting, asking them to exert every possible effort to end the bloodshed and restore peace in the blessed land of Syria.

We call upon the participants in the Geneva II International Conference on Syria to oppose any manifestation of extremism in order to put an end to the intolerance and the policy of ultimatums. It is only fraternal and free dialogue within the Syrian society that can open the way to a peaceful settlement.

Once again, we appeal for the immediate release of the Christians who have been taken hostage in the armed conflict. Metropolitans PAUL

and YOUHANNA Ibrahim, Christian hierarchs from Aleppo, have been held captive for many months now. For over a month, sisters of the Convent of St. Thecla in ancient Maaloula have been held hostage as well. We call upon all parties



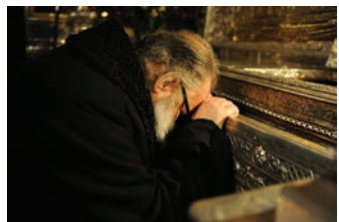
to act humanely and show mercy as evidence of their intention to pursue the re-establishment of peace and prosperity in Syria.

The scale of the disaster makes us, Primates of the two Orthodox Churches, appeal to all people of good will and ask them to help those who are suffering in refugee camps or facing destitution after losing their homes and livelihood.

The destruction of priceless cultural and religious heritage sites, in which Syria is so rich, must stop. Their destruction is a crime against future generations.

We believe that the All-Merciful Lord will show His mercy to the people of Syria and will strengthen and bless those who are striving to restore peace and prosperity in this ancient and holy land.

The Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church



Top: Patriarch JOHN X in prayer



Middle: Patriarch JOHN X addresses Patriarch KIRILL and Archbishop NIPHON translates.

Bottom: Official reception for Patriarch JOHN X

Role Models for Women in Antiochian Women’s Month

When I was a little girl, I loved to read stories about brave knights and lovely princesses. When our children were young, societal sensibilities had broadened so that they could not only read about brave knights, but also brave princesses. The Walt Disney company did a good job of coming up with female characters that were both feminine and brave – and they did this without diminishing the virtues of the male heroes. When our children were little, we were not yet Orthodox Christians, so we didn’t have access to the vast wealth of stories about our many Orthodox saints. Our Orthodox saints are not fairy-tale heroes. These brave men and women (and children) faced very real horrors – torture, enslavement, and death – with steadfast resolve.

Looking back, I wish that I had known more about them so that I could have read my children the real stories about such heroes as the Holy Martyr Hermione, the Daughter of St. Philip the Deacon, and the Martyr Babylas of Nicomedia with the 84 children-catechumens, including Ammonias and Donatus (commemorated September 4). Of course, my husband and I read Bible stories to our children. There are many heroes and heroines in the pages of Scripture which we could point to when our children asked about Halloween costumes. The accounts in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament, are lacking detail, however. It wasn’t until we became Orthodox that we found the treasury of oral traditions that fleshed out the figures we read about in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. It was this oral tradition that gave actual, real names to the Myrrh-bearing Women, and stories about who they were and how they were related to each other and to the Lord. In the Book of Acts, we read of a woman named Lydia: *“We sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ And she prevailed upon us”* (Acts 16:13–15). From this brief account, it would be impossible to guess the details of her

very interesting and compelling life: that she was the first convert to faith in Jesus Christ in Europe, or that she dedicated her life and her fortune to building up the Church in Macedonia and helping the poor and destitute in the name of Christ.

It is this rich oral history of the lives of the saints, and particularly of our Orthodox women saints, that I am going to focus on in the months ahead as the Religious Coordinator of the Antiochian Women’s North American Board (NAB). With the blessing of our NAB board, I contacted John Maddex, CEO of Ancient Faith Ministries, to investigate whether we could undertake a joint effort in this project. My idea is that we would produce several short inspirational spots that would air periodically during the week, featuring a woman saint whose Feast Days we keep in that month. John was very encouraging, and as soon as we get some of the technical issues taken care of, we will begin airing these biographical sketches. As reference, I will use book by Bishop DEMETRI (Khoury), *A Cloud of Witnesses: Saints and Martyrs from the Holy Land*, and the information we have available at our Antiochian Women website (<http://www.antiochian.org/content/orthodox-women-saints>). This site was compiled by one of my predecessors as NAB Religious Coordinator, Dianne O’Regan, and is a great resource. I encourage you to visit the site and read the listings, both for information *and* inspiration.

Our goal in producing and airing these biographies is to give the listeners spiritual and intellectual strength to meet the temptations we each



By the hand of Janet Jaime

face during the day. I also hope this effort will remind us to honor the memory of the saints. Their bravery and fidelity to Jesus Christ in the face of death should encourage each of us. Their ability to bless those who sought to persecute and silence them offers us an example of true godly humility and submission to the Cross. Their exemplary lives will surely inspire you and me to live up to the calling of our Lord to be “perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) – a daunting task, to be sure, but one that we can embrace in the company of the saints.

I hope and pray that you will find this effort helpful in your spiritual life. If you have a saint

who is special to you – especially if she is a more obscure saint – and you would like me to include her in these broadcasts, please e-mail me with information on her life. For truly, “the choir of the Saints have found the Fountain of Life and the Door of Paradise.” Through the intercessions of those who “have trod the narrow way most sad,” may we also draw near to Christ our God and enjoy the “home-country of (our) heart’s desire” at the end of this, our earthly pilgrimage. Wishing you and yours a fruitful Great Lent and a joyous and holy Pascha.

Khouria Suzanne Murphy
NAB Religious Coordinator

Glory to God for the Antiochian Women

Serving with the Antiochian Women of the Archdiocese for many years, I have witnessed many acts of charity done in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are “a sisterhood serving Christ through serving others.” As Antiochian Women, we are called to many acts of mercy in our homes, in our parishes, in our diocese and together in our Archdiocese. So much is required: money and time and, from the Prophet Micah, “to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Sometimes, we may wonder if we are affecting the lives of those we so desire to help.

Having six beautiful children to take care of, from birth to college age, made our home life very interesting. After our fifth child was born, my mother came to stay with us for a couple of weeks, as she did after the birth of each one of our babies. We moved through the day meeting the needs of those in our care. One day, she gently said, “A mother is a loaf of bread, and each child wants the whole loaf and can only have a slice.” Through the years, that observation has been a reminder of how to serve others.

As we recall in the account of the feeding of the five thousand in Scripture, it was late in the day and Jesus had been teaching the people and healing the sick. The Twelve wanted to send them away to get something to eat. Jesus said, “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6: 37). A little boy offered Jesus five loaves and two fish. Jesus took them in His hands and “looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them and gave them to His disciples and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled” (Matthew 14:19, 20). Each person did not receive a whole loaf of bread, but only a portion (or slice). Because Christ had blessed it, the same nourishment (power) was in the portion as in the whole loaf.

We can think of the Antiochian Women being like that loaf of bread. Or we can see the act of mercy we do together as the loaf of bread. Whichever we choose, we can be confident that if we offer our bread to Christ our God, He will bless

it, break it and give it back to us to give to others. And the same power is in each piece as in the whole loaf. We can trust that God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

At this time, we are called together to help the suffering people of Syria. Our humanitarian act of mercy is to send Baby Kits and School Kits for the children and Health Kits for the children and adults in this beloved country, trapped in this conflict they have not chosen. This act of mercy is being coordinated with the IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities).

Let us remember them each day and do what we can for those for whom the hour is already late. Together we can help provide the basic necessities of life.

Glory to God for the Antiochian Women!

Khouria Dannie Moore
NAB Humanitarian Coordinator

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of
North America

Project 2013-2014
Help the Orphans of
War in Syria



*“For I was hungry and you gave
Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave
Me drink.” (Matthew 25:35)*

Our Goal: \$200,000!

A Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others

Bishop JOHN Participates in March for Life

Orthodox Christians from around the U.S. and Canada traveled to Washington, D.C., on January 22, 2014, for the 41st March for Life, marking the anniversary of the Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in all fifty states. His Grace Bishop JOHN of the Diocese of Worcester and New England represented His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP and the Antiochian Archdiocese at the March. After the peaceful march and rally, he wrote the following.



Only our fingers and toes were chilled; our hearts were warmed by the fervor of the crowds, which were not frightened away by the extreme cold and snow. It was an honor to stand and march for life with Orthodox hierarchs, including Metropolitan TIKHON of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), Archbishop NATHANIEL, and Bishops MICHAEL, MELCHISEDEK, and MARK, and Bishop DEMETRIOS of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. It was also a joy to walk with the banners and students from St. Vladimir’s and St. Tikhon’s Seminaries, and many Orthodox faithful who chanted hymns to the Theotokos as we marched.

Bishop DEMETRIOS offered the opening prayer at the March, and special greetings and appreciation was expressed for Metropolitan PHILIP from Roman Catholic Cardinals Donald Wuerl and Sean O’Malley, as well as from the bishops of the OCA. The Antiochian Archdiocese was represented well by priests and laity. Upon reaching the steps of the Supreme Court, the Orthodox faithful offered Trisagion Prayers for the many lives lost to abortion.

(Read “Abortion: An Orthodox Statement,” by The Very Rev. Timothy Baclig, at www.antiochian.org/1135094000.) Photos by Stephen Osburn



Some Thoughts Concerning the Dispute over Qatar



Recently, a serious dispute has broken out between the Patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem over the establishment of an Archbishop under Jerusalem in Qatar, a small Arabic Emirate on a peninsula that is part of the larger Arab Peninsula. The dispute began when the American Ambassador to Qatar, Patrick Theros, invited Archimandrite Theophilos, the present Patriarch of Jerusalem, to hold services in his home for the Orthodox community in the Emirate in 1997. This led to further contact between the Orthodox in Qatar and Jerusalem. In 2001 the Holy Synod of Jerusalem assigned Archimandrite Makarios to serve the Orthodox community in Qatar. On May 4, 2013, the Holy Synod of Jerusalem elected Makarios Archbishop of Qatar. Meanwhile, the Patriarchate of Antioch protested the intrusion of Jerusalem into its canonical territory on May 12, 2013, pointing out that Antioch already had a Metropolitan, Constantine of Baghdad, with authority over the Gulf States including Qatar. Despite the Antiochian protests of the intrusion into its canonical territory, Jerusalem insisted on the consecration and installation of Archbishop Makarios. During its meeting from October 15 to 17, 2013, the Holy Synod of Antioch issued a second protest which warned that the decision of Jerusalem to place an Archbishop under its authority inside the canonical territory of Antioch would endanger communion between the two ancient Patriarchates. The Holy Synod also stated that unless the issue is resolved within two months, that it would withdraw its representatives from the regional Episcopal Assemblies. Since Jerusalem did not comply with Antioch’s request, His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP and the Bishops of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America officially withdrew from the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America

on January 18, 2014. Meanwhile, in an unsuccessful effort to resolve the problem, His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X met with His All Holiness BARTHOLOMEW I, Ecumenical Patriarch, the Archbishop of Athens and officials of the foreign ministry of Greece. His Beatitude Patriarch THEOPHILOS III of Jerusalem has sent two letters to the Patriarch of Antioch, His Beatitude JOHN X, defending the decision to place an Archbishop in Qatar. Jerusalem asserts its claim that its presence in Qatar was approved by the ruler of Qatar, Emir Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Than. The canons and practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church, however, and not the wishes of a secular prince, determine the proper procedure for the Church. Jerusalem also justifies its decision to place an Archbishop in Qatar on its historic official title, “Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, Syria, Arabia, beyond the Jordan, Cana of Galilee and Holy Zion.” It is obvious that this title greatly inflates the actual jurisdiction of the Holy City. Jerusalem does not and never has had authority over the Church in Syria, which has always been under the Patriarchate of Antioch, which moved its headquarters to Damascus, the capital of Syria, during the Patriarchate of IGNATIUS II (1342–1346), nor has Jerusalem ever exercised authority over Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), or any part of the Arabian Peninsula, including Qatar. Finally, Patriarch THEOPHILOS III justifies his authority over Arabia on the commentary of the medieval canonist Theodore Balsamon (ca. 1135–1195), himself Patriarch of Antioch, on Canons 6 and 7 of the first Ecumenical Council, the First Council of Nicaea in 325.¹ Canon 6, however, only mentions Rome, Alexandria and Antioch, and makes no reference to Jerusalem, which had been renamed Aelia by the Romans following the Jewish Revolt of 70 A.D. The 7th Canon is rather unspecific, and merely states that “the bishop of Aelia, is honored, let him enjoy the honor that flows from his position while the dignity proper to the metropolitan city is safeguarded.” Signifi-

cantly the Canon states that “the dignity proper to the metropolitan city is safeguarded.” At that time, the Bishop of Aelia (Jerusalem) was under the authority of the Bishop of Caesarea, who was himself under the jurisdiction of Antioch. Thus, despite the great prestige of Balsamon, the actual texts of Canons 6 and 7 of I Nicaea cannot be used to justify Jerusalem’s claim to Qatar or any other area, because at that time Jerusalem itself had not yet been recognized as an autocephalous or independent Church, but was itself still under the jurisdiction of Antioch through its subordination to Caesarea.² Historically Jerusalem was the last of the ancient Churches to be raised to patriarchal rank. As indicated above, after the Jewish revolt of 70 A.D. and before the First Ecumenical Council, Nicaea I, in 325, Jerusalem was renamed Aelia and its Bishop placed under the authority of the Bishop of Caesarea. The Holy Fathers of Nicaea recognized the special status of Jerusalem as having the dignity, but not the jurisdiction, of a Metropolitan. At the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431, Juvenal, the Metropolitan of Jerusalem, claimed patriarchal rank, second only to Rome. He also claimed authority over Phoenicia (Lebanon) and Arabia, which historically belonged to Antioch. The council, however, was too preoccupied with the problem of Nestorianism to deal with Juvenal’s excessive claims.³ At the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451, Jerusalem was granted the Patriarchal status that Juvenal had unsuccessfully asked for in 431, but as the lowest ranking patriarchate after Antioch, and not as second only to Rome, as the ambitious Patriarch had requested at Ephesus. The Council also limited the authority of Jerusalem to the “three Palestines,” that is, modern Israel, the occupied territories and Gaza, and Jordan. Thus the Holy Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council rejected Juvenal’s claims to Phoenicia and Arabia, recognizing the historic authority of Antioch over the two Phoenicias, modern Syria and Lebanon, and Arabia.⁴ Significantly, in his official reply to Patriarch JOHN X, the Patriarch of Jerusalem recognized, “that the Emirate of Qatar is an integral geographical continuation of Arabia.”⁵ Therefore, it is clear from the decision of Chalcedon that Antioch, not Jerusalem, has canonical jurisdiction over Qatar.

Before the loss of the Nestorians and Non-Chalcedonian Churches and the Muslim conquest of Arabia and the surrounding territories, Antioch had jurisdiction over a very wide area which included not only Syria and Lebanon, but also Palestine, Cyprus, Arabia and Mesopotamia and stretched as far as Persia and India. The Church of Cyprus gained its independence at the Council of Chalcedon. However, all the other of the Churches of the Middle East, except for those in North Africa which were under Alexandria, looked to Antioch as their ultimate superior. Before the schisms following the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, the Patriarchate of Antioch had eleven metropolitanates comprised of one hundred and twenty seven dioceses. There was a bishop subject to Antioch like all other Bishops in the region in Qatar as early as 258.⁶ Even before the Council of Chalcedon put an end to Juvenal’s claims to authority over the East, the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 organized the Church in Persia and the Arabian Gulf into an autonomous Church under an official called a Catholicos, a title used for a bishop with rank almost equal to that of a patriarch in an area outside of the jurisdiction of the Roman Empire, still subject, however, to the authority of Antioch. The decree also listed Qatar as one of the territories under the jurisdiction of Antioch. Thus historical evidence as well as the decision the Council of Chalcedon restricting the authority of Jerusalem to the “three Palestines,” and affirming Antioch’s authority over Arabia, shows the invalidity of Jerusalem’s modern claim to authority over Qatar. Therefore the Holy Synod of Antioch is well within its rights to protest the incursion of Jerusalem into its canonical and historical territory.

Archpriest John W. Morris

1. “The Official Response of His Beatitude THEOPHILOS III of Jerusalem to His Beatitude JOHN X of Antioch concerning the Canonical Jurisdiction of the Emirate of Qatar (<http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2013/04/29/2741>)

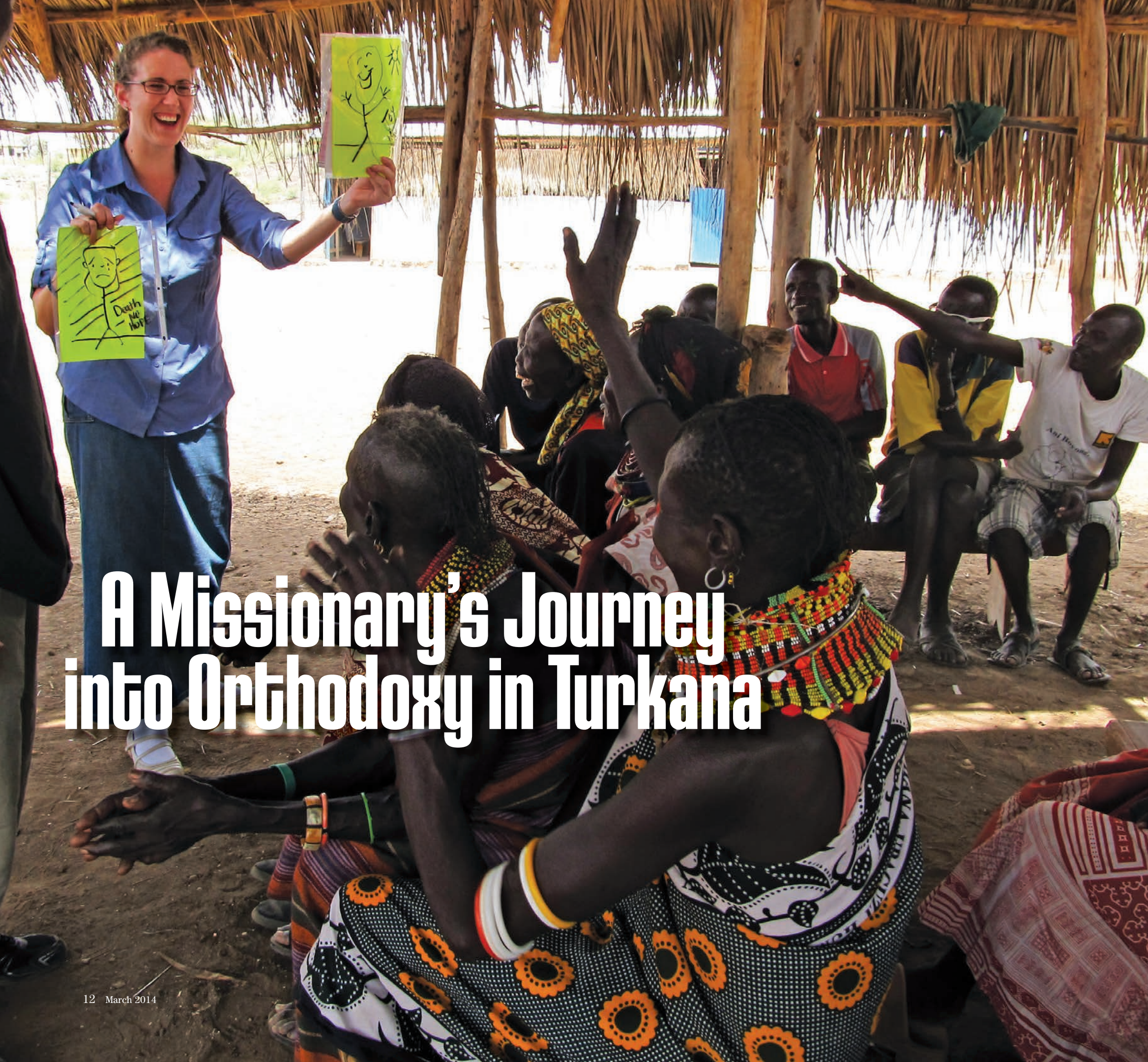
2. Archbishop Peter LHuiller, *The Church of the Ancient Councils: the disciplinary works of the first four ecumenical councils*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996, pp. 53-56

3. Karlyu Bihlmeyer, and Hermann Tuchle, *Church History*, Westminster: The Newman Press, 1968, vol. 1, p. 310.

4. “Decree on the Jurisdiction of Jerusalem and Antioch, Session VII, Chalcedon. A.D. 451,” in Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, in Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace eds, *A select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. XIV, p. 266.

5. The Official Response of His Beatitude THEOPHILOS III of Jerusalem to His Beatitude JOHN X of Antioch concerning the Canonical Jurisdiction of the Emirate of Qatar

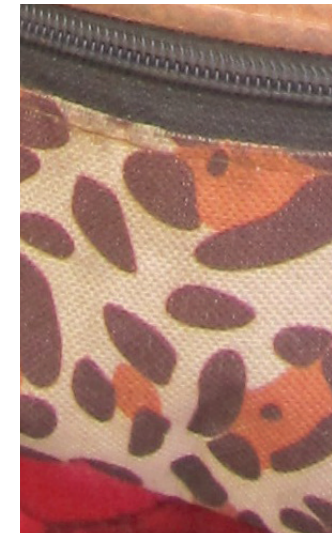
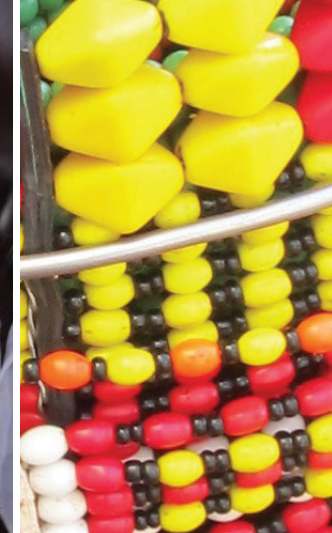
6. Aziz S. Artiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, pp. 176–177, 258.



A Missionary's Journey into Orthodoxy in Turkana

Within the Turkana, there live not only a heartbeat of survival and a foot-stomp of joy, but a soul that takes joy in the risen Lord. Orthodox Christianity is alive and well in the cracked, mystic terrain of northern Kenya. The Turkana, in Turkana, speaking Turkana, proclaim the Trinity with the faith of a child and with the wisdom of an elder. Through the tireless love and effort of local parish priests, the committed involvement of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), and the willingness of many to receive the Gospel, the one, true faith has united over ten communities of believers.





I was accompanied by a team of seven incredible individuals to Kenya. It took no time at all to give ourselves the team name “Turkana Saba” (*Saba* is “seven” in Swahili). Strangers for but moments, we were a pan-Orthodox melting pot from Washington to California to Virginia to New York to Russia, and a few spots in between. The support and prayers of family and friends brought us together at the OCMC headquarters in St. Augustine, Florida. The passionate, dedicated OCMC staff readied us with lesson plan guidance and enlightened us on the Great Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Eager and nervous (because, after all, when do you *really* say, “Okay, now I’m ready to go to Kenya?”), we flew to Amsterdam, from there boarded a Kenya Airways aircraft to Nairobi, and then hopped on a puddle-jumper to Lodwar. Over thirty hours of travel left us worn out but ready. Our team stayed in the modest quarters of a Catholic guest house, which proved just fine for our needs of praying, journaling, eating, sleeping, lesson-planning and socializing. We became experts at spraying bug spray, repairing holes in our mosquito nets, rationing toilet paper, eating cabbage and potatoes, checking



for frogs in our bathroom, hand-washing laundry, taking cold showers, using water bottles to rinse after brushing our teeth, walking with flashlights at night, dodging bats, spiders and small scorpions, and riding in the bed of the pick-up truck that served as our transportation, as our drivers zoomed past pot holes on the dirt roads of the town.

The focal point of our mission work was teaching at St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, just outside of Lodwar. The building itself and the water well beside it were projects of OCMC and continue to be a well-spring of life for the Turkana people. We had two teaching sessions while there, one for adults and one geared toward children. Some of the nomadic, native Turkana walked two days just for our teaching seminars, with the intent of returning to their tribes and sharing what they had learned. It makes one stop and pause – *would I go to such great lengths for Truth?* We had three concurrent teaching sessions, each with a priest/translator. My teaching experience in a Title I school with a large population of ESL students, predominately refugees from Africa, served me well in this capacity. I acted as teaching coordinator for the group, determining what got taught and where. (The location choices included the church building, a grass hut

and a metal shed that we affectionately referred to as the “Tin Can.”) Our teaching topics included various parables, death and its origin, salvation, saints, marriage, seven sacraments, the Creed, transformed life in Christ, and Orthodox parenting. We were quite surprised both at the prior knowledge of several of the people and at the lack of knowledge of others. If there had been any schooling at all, the people were most familiar with a lecture style, but we pushed many out of their comfort zone by asking questions, making crafts and requesting them to participate in dramatizations. Watching the priests teach their own people was amazing, as their teaching exemplified the pure art of story-telling and total engagement with the content through voice inflection and gesticulation.

Highlighted below are some of my notable moments with the Turkana:

- One is always being greeted with a unique handshake and a bow/kiss to either shoulder.
- Kids are always smiling and shouting “How are YOU?!”
- Holding an icon of the crucifixion in one of my lessons, I ask, “Is this the end of the story?” and a small group of men nodding, thinking that Christ’s death was the end.



- Anytime the people heard something they liked, or that resonated in their spirit, they'd stand, clap and jump up and down in joyful tempo – in the middle of a lesson, as a stretch break after a lesson, during Liturgy – constant expressions of joy.
- In lieu of formal school supplies, I brought cardstock in sheet protectors to make dry erase boards. When I asked one group to draw what comes to mind when they think of a saint, an old woman started laughing because she'd never held a marker or pen before.
- I sang the Resurrection troparion in Turkana while holding the Resurrection icon in a lesson and felt inside the joy of Pascha in a way I'd never experienced before.
- Communion was – hands down – the most emotional, transformative experience. As soon as the Gifts come from behind the iconostasis, the beating of a drum, trills, laughing, smiling, jumping, fill the space of the church building. They know it is the Body and Blood. They know it is life-giving. They reminded me of what I often forget, and their reaction to receiving these precious Gifts made nothing but total sense. Tears streamed down my face; it was unforgettable!
- Holding small children, I felt their tiny wrists and every bone of their backbone with my hands.
- While sitting with a group of Turkana women on their mat one sunny afternoon, a woman took off one of her many colorful necklaces adorning her lovely, long neck and placed it on my head as a crown. I was told this particular necklace symbolizes beauty.
- Listening to the different tribes and watching them perform for us in welcoming and closing ceremonies, I hear amazing voices, young and old. The heart of every old spiritual song most definitely originated there. We performed for them, too: "The Call," "Oh When the Saints Go Marching In," "In the Jungle," Orthodox hymns, and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."
- I had many moments with my team – playing cards, laughing, crying, de-briefing, singing Disney songs, performing puppet shows, learning, teaching, sharing experiences together.
- One incident stands out: being hugged and picked up off the ground by one of the Turkana women, Anna, at the close of the adult sessions and her pointing to the sky and saying something with firm conviction. Later I learned she was saying, "I'll see you in heaven!"

Karen Morrison

Cross references:

Matthew 28:16 : ver 7, 10; Mt 26:32

Matthew 28:18 : Da 7:13, 14; Lk 10:22; Jn 3:35; S 13:13; 17:2; 1Co 15:27; Eph 1:20-22; Php 2:9, 10

Matthew 28:19 : Isa 49:6; Mk 16:15, 16; Lk 24:47; Ac 1:8; 14:21

Matthew 28:19 : Ac 1:8; 2:38; 8:16; Ro 6:3, 4; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12

Matthew 28:20 : Jn 14:26; Ac 2:42

Matthew 28:20 : Dt 31:6; 1Ki 8:57; Hag 1:13; Mt 18:20; Ac 18:10

Matthew 28:20 : Mt 13:39; 24:3

Food for Hungry People 2014
40th Anniversary

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	MARCH 3 How many clocks do you have in your home? Deposit \$.10 for each in your Food for Hungry People Box because "time" is running out for those who are starving.	4 "Put a little love in your heart"; get FFHP off to a good start. Put in a nickel for all the "loves" in your life.	5 Count the number of Bibles in your home and deposit \$.25 for each, because Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me food."	6 Count the number of soda cans or water bottles in your home. Put in \$.05 each, because Jesus said, "I was thirsty and you gave me drink."	7 How many radios do you own? Deposit \$.15 each. Radios are a means of communication. Let's communicate our love for the hungry.	8 Count the number of steps (inside and outside) of your home. Contribute \$.05 for each step. Help the hungry "step" into a new future.
9 How many mirrors are in your home? Deposit \$.15 for each. Let your mirror reflect the image of one who cares.	10 Count the locks in your home. Donate \$.15 for each lock. Let's "unlock" the door that gives hope to the hungry.	11 How many rings do you have? Deposit \$.15 per ring. This will help us b"ring" food to the hungry!	12 How many eggs are in your refrigerator? Give \$.05 for each. Hungry people have to "scramble" for their food.	13 How many doors does your home have? Deposit \$.05 for each. Help open a "door" to a better future for the world's hungry.	14 Have all the people in the family deposit all the pennies they have in their pockets or purses. It makes "cents" to help the hungry	15 How many electrical outlets are in your kitchen and living room? Give \$.05 each. You'll get a "charge" out of feeding the hungry.
16 "Button up your overcoat" - so simple to do. They are not only hungry but very cold too. Deposit \$.10 for each coat in your home.	17 For every cell phone in your home, give \$.25. It is "long distance" to hungry areas in most parts of the world. Let's make it a toll-free number.	18 How many extension cords do you have in your home? Give \$.15 for each. Let's "extend" a helping hand to those who need it.	19 For each pie or cake in your home, donate \$.25. We should never "dessert" the hungry.	20 How many tablets do you own? For every one, deposit \$.25. Let's never "tune out" the hungry.	21 For every salt and pepper shaker, give \$.10. Let's all "sprinkle" their lives with a little seasoning.	22 For every TV show that was watched today, donate \$.25. TV helps us see around the world, this money will help us feed the hungry around the world.
23 How many computers do you own? Give \$.25 for each. Let's take a "byte" out of hunger!	24 How many pictures do you have on your walls? Just "picture" yourself without food & deposit \$.10 for each picture.	25 Give \$.25 for each pair of contacts or eyeglasses you have. This will help us "see" clearly the need of caring for the hungry.	26 Do you have a piano or organ in your home? Give \$.75 for each. This is a "key" to sharing and caring.	27 How many erasers can you find in your home? Donate \$.05 for each. Let's "erase" hunger from the world.	28 Count your tea or coffee cups and deposit \$.05 for each. Our "cup runneth over," so let's fill theirs.	29 "I've got my love to keep me warm," that's true, but the hungry have only you. Give \$.10 for each blanket in your home.
30 How many cars are in your family? You can't "Dodge" the hungry, but you can afFord" to pay \$.50 for each car.	31 "Day by day," from dawn till night, hunger knows no hour - nor if it's day or night. Give \$.20 for each lamp in your home.	APRIL 1 How many cameras do you have? Donate \$.25 for each. This will help us make all "negatives" positives.	2 Pick up all the loose change lying around the house. Put it in your FFHP Box. This will help make a "change" in the world!	3 Count the scissors you have in your home and give \$.25 for each pair. Let's "cut-out" the hunger in hunger-y!	4 How many members are in your family? Donate \$.10 for each. The hungry have families to feed also; let's make this a real "family affair!"	5 How many towels are in your home? If you give \$.50 for each towel, this may help us "wipe out" hunger for all people.
6 "Hey, Big Spender," drop a coin in the slot - give unto others what they haven't got! Put in a coin or bill of your choice.	7 How many heads of lettuce are in your refrigerator? Give \$.20 for each. "Lettuce" show the hungry that we care.	8 Count the cans in your cupboard. Donate \$.02 for each. Don't let their cupboards be like "Old Mother Hubbard's!"	9 How many postage stamps do you normally use in a week? Give \$.05 for each. This is a sure way to "stamp out" hunger!	10 How many sweaters do you have? Donate \$.05 for each. Sweaters keep you warm. This is one time they won't mind if we "pull the wool over their eyes."	11 How many chairs are in your home? Give \$.05 per chair. We can't just "sit" around when so many people are hungry.	12 How many cookbooks do you own? Give \$.20 for each. We will be able to "cook up" a better recipe for the hungry to live by.
13 How many eggs are you going to color for Pascha? Donate \$.05 for each. Let's help "color" their world with love!	14 "Brother can you spare a dime?" or maybe two? The FFHP program really depends on you. Put your dimes in the box.	15 Count your C.D.'s. Give \$.02 for each. Let's make this a "record-breaking" year for FFHP!!!!	16 How many songs have you listened to today? Give \$.02 for each. Let's stay "in tune" with the hungry.	17 How many crosses do you have? Give \$.10 for each. Crosses remind us of Christ's suffering; let's not let the hungry suffer anymore.	18 "A dream is a wish your heart makes," and our dream is for an end to hunger. For the wish that we are wishing, is for FFHP program to go over the top!	19 We pray you have been generous in your almsgiving. "For inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto ME!"
20 PASCHA Christ Is Risen!						

Syrian Relief

Church	Amount
Estate of Helen Rebeck, Clifton, NJ	1,000.00
Patricia Milhem, Worcester, MA	100.00
The Living Hope Baptist Church, Geneva, NY	289.00
St. Paul Church, Estero, FL	420.00
St. Barnabas Church, Lexington, SC	50.00
Holy Cross Church, Linthicum, MD	20.00
All Saints Church, Maryland Heights, MO	194.00
St. Mary Church, Brooklyn, NY	4,547.00
Holy Ascension Church, West Chester, PA	50.00
St. Timothy Church, Fairfield, CA	200.00
John Church, Beaver Falls, PA	560.00
Prophet Elijah Mission, Ellensburg, WA	41.26
St. George Church, West Roxbury, MA	51,126.00
St. George Church, Fishers, IN	209.00
St. George Church, Norwood, MA	820.00
St. George Church, Canton, OH	693.00
St. George Church, Coral Gables, FL	1,560.00
Holy Cross Mission, Dorr, MI	1,688.00
St. Elias Church, Austin, TX	987.00
St. Mary Church, Cambridge, MA	1,925.00
Edward and Suzanne Ayoub, Pawtucket, RI	200.00
Philip and Betty Seekonk, MA	200.00
Naseem and Ann Ayoub, Naples, FL	200.00
Marc and Lisa Parent, Davenport, FL	200.00
Richard Michaels, Fort Wayne IN	1,000.00
St. George Church, Cicero IL	3,184.00
St. Gerge Church, Lowell, MA	653.00
Holy Spirit Church, Huntington, WV	333.00
Edward and Jane Arees, Sudbury, MA	100.00
Suzanne Mesalam, Indianapolis, IN	25.00
Michael and Joanne Hakim, Honorary Bp. NICHOLAS	50.00
Michael and Joanne Hakim, Honorary Mt. PHILIP	100.00
St. John Church, Memphis, TN	170.00
St. Mark Church, Youngstown, OH	120.00
St. Andrew Church, Lexington, KY	190.00
St. Michael Church, Greensburg, PA	1,000.00
St. George Church, Montreal, Quebec (Fr. Fadi's Fund)	6,167.00



Worship: What’s the Point?

Soon after I moved to the United States, I was struck by the “can-do” mentality of its people. If, in Canada, the common unspoken question before you did anything new was, “Should I do this?” the unspoken question in America seemed to be, “Can I do this?” The answer in my new country seemed to be, “I can.” Being naturally diffident, I found this “can-do” air I breathed personally very liberating.

This mentality is said to be a hallmark of America: *pragmatism* – doing what works. It has surfaced in political life recently, with a politician’s claim that he wouldn’t be bound by partisan ideology, but would do “what works.” (The problem with this, of course, is that everybody doesn’t agree on the end or the goal of our action, let alone the means.) When I was young, I saw on the station identification for Buffalo’s Channel 4 television station, the saying, “The family that prays together, stays together.” (How times have changed from forty-five years ago!) This was that same American pragmatism applied to religion: religious practice is good for you, so practice your religion. As a scornful unbeliever, however, this bothered me: as true as it might be, it seemed to be unworthy of God – if He existed – to talk about how praying to him would benefit me. In this little bit of conventional wisdom, the Creator of the universe seemed to be made a *means*, to what was a relatively banal *end*.

The Blessed Augustine of Hippo distinguished between things that are meant to be *used*, or *means*, on the one hand, and things that are meant to be *enjoyed*, on the other. One could say that we are meant to *use things*, and *enjoy people* (and *God!*), but instead we sometimes *enjoy things* (as ends in themselves, apart from God), and *use*

people. Who has not been in a rush and treated someone (especially someone selling something we need, like a ticket for a train) as less than another person, simply as a means to an end? Occasionally I have to remind myself that everyone I meet is *someone*, not just there to meet my needs. We may like to serve others, but nobody likes to feel *used*, insignificant as a person, no matter how useful for somebody else’s purposes. No one likes to be treated as a friend, and discover that the other person has some self-serving, ulterior motive.

I became a Christian in the context of Protestant evangelicalism, where it was common to speak of wanting to be “used by God.” There is some truth to this notion: we read that Assyria is the *rod of God’s anger* (Isaiah 10:5), and Jesus says to His followers, “You are *the salt of the earth*”; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then *good for nothing* but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” (Matthew 5:13).¹ These are rare examples, however, and they are negative examples; God relates to us as Person, and personally. The language of *use* and *tool* when applied to us in our relationship with God can be depersonalizing. There is a great deal of ferment in Protestant circles today in the area of worship, and much of it assumes that worship should be constructed, tweaked or modified to achieve some result – converting people to Christ in the old days, more often now affecting the emotions or spirit of the congregants. This is an inheritance of American Protestant revivalism, but it is often forgotten that our worship is not a tool, or a means to an end.

Worship, I submit, is useless. Or perhaps I should say that worship is *beyond* useless. Properly speaking, something is *useless* when it doesn’t accomplish the end to which it is directed. If I try to remove a nail from a piece of wood with dental floss, I will be frustrated. Something is *beyond useless* when the categories of useful and useless don’t apply. I mentioned friendship above: true friendship is its own reward, and not a means to

some other end. It may make me a better person, but that doesn’t enter my thinking, and the person who picks his or her friends for social or employment advantage, and so forth, demeans friendship. On the other hand, someone who makes friends with another person for his or her good is following in Jesus’ footsteps.

To convey the notion of what is beyond useless, I would draw two comic scenes before your mind. An audience is listening to a quartet playing beautiful classical music. Part way through the piece, a member of the audience steps up on stage and starts tapping his foot and looking decidedly impatient. One by one the players cease playing and stare at him. After a pause, the interrupter scowls and says, “Your point? . . .” Now, let’s try the reverse: two venerable gentlemen are arguing a fine point of theology, when one suddenly stops and bursts out in song, with lines from John Denver’s *Perhaps Love*: “Perhaps love is like the ocean/ Full of conflict, full of pain . . .” Music is not an argument, and such behavior is absurd because it implies a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the other behavior. Again, you might give up learning to dance, complaining, “Oh, what’s the use!” There may be a use to dancing lessons – you learn to dance – but there is probably no *use* for dancing in itself. Oh, you may please someone (who really wants to dance with you) and it may be a good cardio workout, and so forth, but it is one of those things that one should either enjoy, or not. Worship is like dancing.

Worship is beyond useless in a second sense. Many, if not most, of the things we do, we undertake for some other purpose. What if there is no goal worthy of the effort? What if any goal is illusory? What if all our activity, our ambitions, strivings, long talks, vehement disagreements, conflicts, hopes and fears are just “sound and fury, signifying nothing”? Does life itself have a point? What if life itself is, in the looser, popular sense, useless?

If you often ask yourself questions like these, you are probably depressed and should seek help. Yet the questions themselves cannot be written off as pathologically meaningless. They are authentic questions that serious people have asked (and no doubt continue to ask) themselves. And they are the questions asked by the author of the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes.

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;
“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”
What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?
One generation passes away, and another generation
comes;
But the earth abides forever.
The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,
And hastens to the place where it arose.
The wind goes toward the south,
And turns around to the north;
The wind whirls about continually,
And comes again on its circuit.
All the rivers run into the sea,
Yet the sea is not full;
To the place from which the rivers come,
There they return again.
All things are full of labor;
Man cannot express it.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor the ear filled with hearing.
That which has been is what will be,
That which is done is what will be done,
And there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there anything of which it may be said,
“See, this is new”?
It has already been in ancient times before us (1:2-10).

If the closest you have come to this way of thinking is wondering why you were making your bed if you were just going to get back into it that night, then this can be shocking stuff. The writer is impressed by the cycles of nature, their repetitiveness, and the impermanence of human beings and anything natural (except perhaps the earth). There seems to be no purpose to folly or madness – they are vain. Yet there seems as well to be no point to wisdom, as the fool and the wise man, the just and the unjust, meet the same fate – or worse, the wise or just man suffers, and the fool or wicked man prospers, and then both die. The author seems to be trying out different formulae for living: if in one portion it is “eat, drink and be merry” (8:15), in another it is to do labor – yet all lead to the grave: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (9:10). “For the living know that they will die; / But the dead know nothing, / And they have no more reward, / For the memory of them is forgotten” (9:5). The Preacher’s text is almost tragic, asking questions to which his answers can only be

unsatisfying.²

The first thing one wants to tell the Preacher of Ecclesiastes is – Christ is Risen! Glorify Him! The Preacher asks, “Is there anything of which it may be said, / ‘See, this is new’?” The answer is Yes!, there *are* new things under the sun, indeed, for “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, / nor have entered into the heart of man / the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:8–10). The Incarnation and Resurrection together are the most novel, significant, important, “world-historical” events. The Preacher thinks that any attempt to make sense of life is vain, because he cannot tie together the justice of God who judges men, and the apparent indifference of God towards the good and the evil in this life (cf. Psalm 73). In fact, the judgment of God on humanity – that end to which our individual lives are pointed – has been brought forward from the end of history to the middle, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ has triumphed over sin and death.

Death *does* make life seem futile, as St. John of Damascus reminds us in the funeral liturgy: “Where is the pleasure in life which is unmixed with sorrow? Where the glory which on earth has stood firm and unchanged? All things are weaker than shadow, all more illusive than dreams; comes one fell stroke, and Death in turn, prevails over all these vanities.” That is not the last word, of course:

“Wherefore in the Light, O Christ, of Your countenance, the sweetness of Your beauty, to (*him/her*) whom You have chosen grant repose, for You are the Friend of Mankind.” Again, “You Who of old did fashion me out of nothingness, and with Your Image divine did honor me; but because of transgression of Your commandments did return me again to the earth where I was taken, lead me back to be re-fashioned into that ancient beauty of Your Likeness.”

So we pray for the deceased, “With the Saints give rest, O Christ, to the soul of Your servant where there is no pain, nor sorrow, nor suffering, but life everlasting” (Funeral Service Kontakion).

Not only do we as individuals have an end to which we are heading – resurrection and judgment

– but history itself has an end, as we are told in the last book of the Bible.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. **They shall see His face**, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 22:1-5).

The end of history as we know it is the vision of God.

If we are tempted to say about life as a whole, “What’s the use?!” God’s answer is our shout to one another: “Glorify Him!” We are meant to glorify Him forever, beginning now, but continuing into eternity. Worship is not the *means* to enter eternity; it is itself the entering of us who are in time into eternity.³ Liturgy prefigures heaven while participating in it. Worship never ceases to be a human work (for us, if not for the angels), with light moments, perhaps. Sometimes it is obviously weak, humanly speaking. And it has no use. Yet, like a dance (without triviality), it is beyond useless.

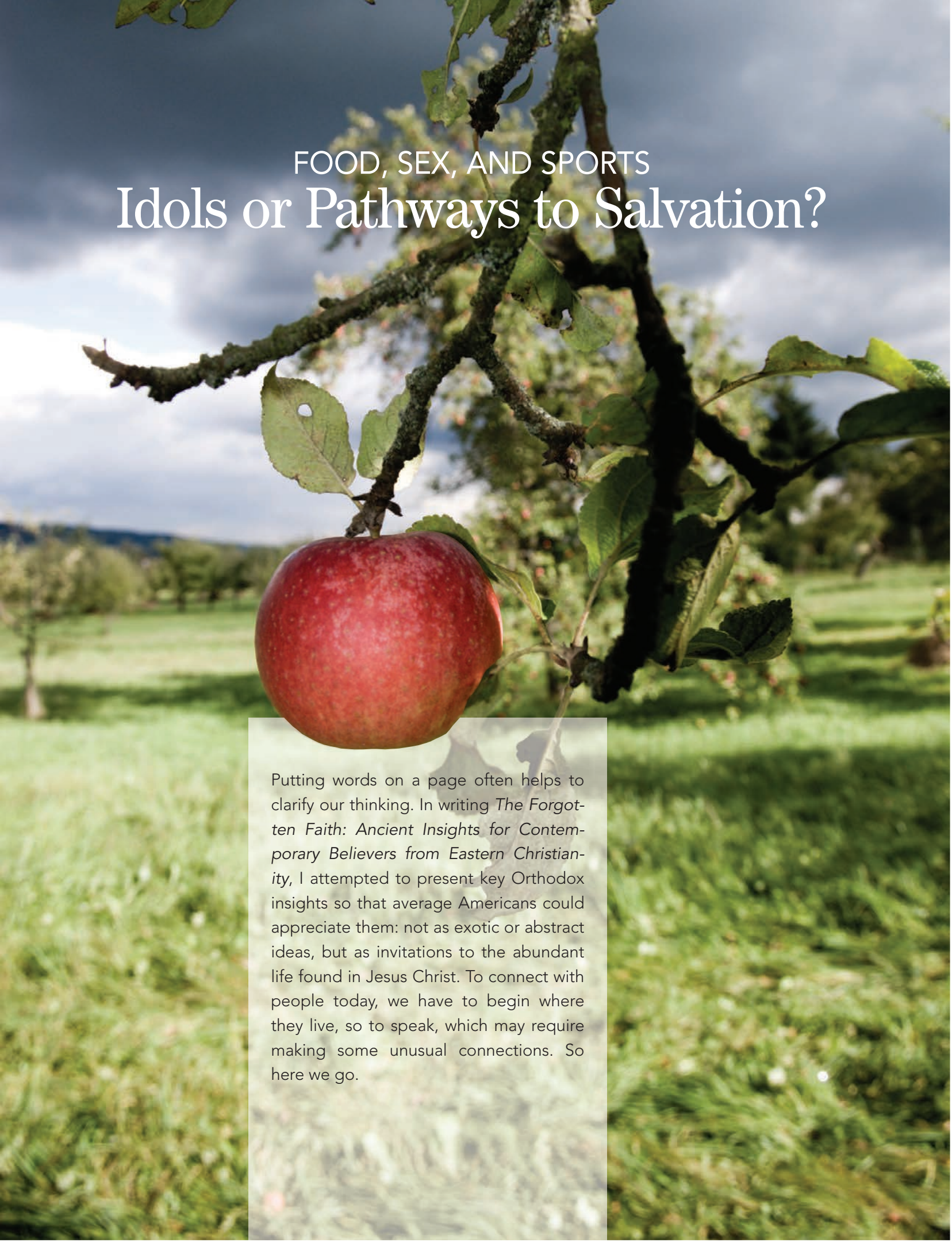
Thank God.

Chris Humphrey
St. George Orthodox Cathedral, Pittsburgh (Oakland)

1. In the prophets the people of Israel are sometimes compared to a pot that is either well-made by the potter, God, or marred and shattered by God (e.g., Jeremiah 18; 19:11). The pot is not presented as a tool for God’s use, but as a thing “for honor and another for dishonor” (Romans 9:21).
2. Someone has commented that this text displays the shock of someone who has grown up with an Hebraic, linear view of history – history and human lives having a distinct beginning and going towards a goal – who now seriously entertains a cyclical view of history based on nature and the seasons, as one might find in Eastern religions, for example. To over-simplify grossly, in the East human life has no real end, but beings (including human beings) are re-incarnated endlessly; there is no true novelty but only repetition of what has past; and suffering is basically an illusion of a life from which one must detach oneself. The Preacher cannot let go of the justice of God, but apparently cannot reconcile it with what he sees.
3. We are tempted to think of eternity as simply timeless, but it is better to think of it as beyond the alternative of time, on the one hand, and no-time or complete stasis, on the other. Perhaps we should think of it as having its own kind of time. Consider: the spatial qualities of the resurrected Christ seem to interact with our space in the resurrection appearances in the Gospels without being constrained by that space; perhaps time in heaven or in the new age is similar.

FOOD, SEX, AND SPORTS Idols or Pathways to Salvation?

Putting words on a page often helps to clarify our thinking. In writing *The Forgotten Faith: Ancient Insights for Contemporary Believers from Eastern Christianity*, I attempted to present key Orthodox insights so that average Americans could appreciate them: not as exotic or abstract ideas, but as invitations to the abundant life found in Jesus Christ. To connect with people today, we have to begin where they live, so to speak, which may require making some unusual connections. So here we go.



Food, sex, and athletics are probably more real to most people in our society than is the Lord. In popular culture, Christianity may seem entirely other-worldly. Contrary to this assumption, however, true Christianity is not an escape from the world as we know it to an invisible and imaginary realm. Our Orthodox faith does not require us to abandon or condemn any dimension of life, but instead to offer all that we are and do for fulfillment, blessing, and healing. There is no part of our existence that is intrinsically evil or cut off from the good news of our salvation. We become more fully who God created us to be through the practices of our Orthodox faith in the world as we know it.

Take eating and drinking, for example. The biblical story of the corruption of humanity and the entire creation begins with the abuse of food in the Garden of Eden. There was nothing wrong with the fruit of the tree, but Adam and Eve chose to use it to satisfy their self-centered desires, instead of obeying God and growing closer to Him. Jesus Christ set right the place of food by using bread and wine as the elements of Communion, as the menu of the Heavenly Banquet. Almost all of us struggle with passions related to overindulgence in food and drink of one form or another. The Lord does not save us by condemning what we tend to abuse, but instead by Himself becoming our food and drink. He fulfills the original role of the fruits of creation in giving life and strengthening our relationship with God and one another.

Orthodox Christians fast, not because there is something wrong with food itself, but because there is something wrong with each of us personally and spiritually. In other words, we have followed Adam and Eve in using these blessings for something other than their intended purposes and, consequently, have become slaves to our distorted desires. No wonder that so many people today are obese, have eating disorders, or develop diabetes due to an unhealthy diet.

By learning to discipline our appetites a bit on fast days, we gain some experience in controlling other self-centered desires for pleasure or simply getting our own way. We can direct the money saved by eating a humble diet to serving Christ in the poor, even as we grow in humility when we find it hard to be content with broccoli and tofu instead of steak and eggs. It is through the

struggle to discipline our desires that we become more fully the people God created human beings to be in the first place.

If fasting is not a sufficiently touchy topic, let's turn now to sex. As the lyrics of both country music and rap demonstrate, the temptations in this area of life are powerful even as the consequences of our missteps in it are grave. Since contemporary American culture has lost all sense of chastity, it is imperative that Orthodox believers – especially our youth – be solidly grounded in traditional Christian teaching and practice about holiness in the relationship between man and woman.

Unfortunately, movies, music, the Internet, and other forms of media celebrate corrupt ways of living that lead people very far from the paths to the Kingdom that Jesus Christ blessed and the saints have exemplified. Though it is terribly unpopular to say today, we must bear witness to the countercultural view that sexual intimacy should occur only within marriage between one man and one woman. Here two persons become one and, in the normal course of things, bring a new person into the world from their embodied love for one another. Not simply a matter of morality or biology, we encounter a profound image of the Holy Trinity in the Christian family, for distinctive persons share a common life and love. Our aim in sexual ethics is higher than enhancing public health or securing consent between the parties involved, for marriage and celibacy are both means of participating in the eternal life that Christ has brought to the world. We should not be surprised that the One who created us as man and woman also directs us how to use our sexuality for our salvation. To embrace anything less is to distort what it means for human beings to be in the image and likeness of God as male and female.

Despite what the advocates of the sexual revolution maintain, there is nothing new under the sun. St. Paul dealt with just about every form of human decadence imaginable in Corinth, and Jesus Christ taught a sexual ethic in the Sermon on the Mount that still challenges even the most righteous to grow in purity of heart. Whether we are married or celibate, we all have more than enough challenges to fight our own passions and keep a close watch on our thoughts and desires. Judgment of anyone else is simply not our concern. Again, contrary to popular opinion, it is

possible – and it is imperative for Orthodox believers – to maintain the ancient Christian vision of sexuality and marriage without becoming like the Pharisees. Both St. Photini (the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4) and St. Mary of Egypt, for example, got off to a bad start in this regard, but ultimately became great saints of the Church. Thank God, there is hope for us all to become more fully who God intends us to be.

Given the skimpy costumes and suggestive movements of some cheerleaders and dance teams today, there is at least some connection in popular culture between sex and athletics. Though we rarely think of sports in relation to religion, there are also some similarities between gatherings of fans and of worshippers. Both congregate as a community to take on a collective identity that they show by what they say and do. Orthodox stand up, raise their voices, and make distinctive hand gestures (for example, crossing themselves) in a familiar pattern, as do fans of many sports. Where I live in West Texas, high school football fans drive long distances, sit or stand in blazing heat or bitter cold, and then arrive back home in the middle of the night. Truth be told, many sports fans make a much greater offering of time, energy, and effort for their teams than many Orthodox do for the worship of the Church. There is no question that more families and kids make participation in athletics a higher priority than participation in the worship of God. Some who cannot imagine making time for Vespers or Matins, for example, think nothing of enduring the hardships of sports practice for hours in very hot or cold temperatures.

It is all a matter of priorities, of course. Human beings are going to worship something, and in our culture athletics has become a god to many people. There is certainly nothing wrong with sports

in and of themselves, but the excessive focus that so many place on it should serve as a reminder that the true race is not for the perishable crown of the praise of others, but for the imperishable crown that God gives to His true and faithful servants. Instead of judging anyone, we should be reminded by the dedication of sports enthusiasts that it is human nature to sacrifice for what we love and to take joy even in daunting tasks that require discipline and steadfast commitment. If athletes and fans devote so much for what amounts to healthy entertainment, how much more should Orthodox Christians devote themselves to fighting their passions, serving Christ in their neighbors, and participating in the collective worship of the Church as a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet?

Let's be clear: To worship the food, sexual attractions, and athletic abilities of human beings is simply to commit idolatry and degrade ourselves. In contrast, to offer them and every other dimension of our life and world to God is to embrace the calling to grow in the divine likeness. That's not an escape from reality; instead, it is our pathway to real life in a universe created, redeemed, and sustained by God. All creation finds its proper place and fulfillment in Him, including you and me.

Fr. Philip LeMasters St. Luke Orthodox Church, Abilene, Texas

Fr. LeMasters is the author of *The Forgotten Faith: Ancient Insights for Contemporary Believers from Eastern Christianity* (Cascade Books, 2013).

Communities in Action



Bishop NICHOLAS and Frs. Anthony and Giuseppe in Allentown

Allentown Welcomes Bishop NICHOLAS

The Blessed Nativity of our Lord reminds us that God's only Son came to earth through the young maiden who said "Yes!" and followed the will of her Creator. We at St. George Antiochian Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania, on this blessed Nativity of 2013 are so grateful and humbled to have shared in this Feast with our humble and beloved Sayidna NICHOLAS (Ozone).

His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS arrived on Saturday, December 21, in the late afternoon and greeted the Sunday school children and their teachers for their Nativity Party. There were approximately 150 people in attendance. We also had another special visitor, St. Nicholas of Myra, who brought the children gifts and encouraged them all to remember the saints. Afterwards, we celebrated Great Vespers and then joined the Very Rever-

end Father Anthony and Khouria Minerva Sabbagh and family at their home for a delicious meal and good conversation.

On the following day, Sunday, we celebrated Matins and Divine Liturgy with His Grace. It was a truly inspiring and prayerful service because, along with Fr. Anthony, we had Deacon Luke Toumi and Deacon Giuseppe Landino. Also, guest chanters Rassem El Massih, Shamaseh Razan Toumi and Amjad Khalil added to our already talented Marwan Sabbagh, Hwaida Mousa, and others. Immediately after the liturgy we enjoyed a Nativity play called "Star of Wonder," directed by Mary and Gabriella Landino and played by our Sunday School children. The bright songs of the children filled our hearts with joy!

Later that evening we went back to the church to share a Lenten dinner with all the organizations. The dinner was expertly prepared by the lovely

Bakhos family, who recently arrived from Syria. Not only has our parish and our Syrian community in Allentown welcomed and assisted many new refugee families from Syria, but they have also donated over \$80,000 to our Patriarchate Syrian Relief Fund to be used in Wadi-Al-Nasara. These funds were sent through our Archdiocese to those in need in our homeland. His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP personally added \$30,000, over and above what we have given to the Patriarchate Syrian Relief Fund. His Grace spoke about how to live the spirit of Christmas in our daily lives. He also informed the parishioners of the actions the Archdiocese has taken to help stop the war in Syria, and of the money that has been collected by all our parishes and has been sent to our Patriarchate through the Archdiocese. He also answered many questions regarding the situation in our beloved Syria.

Our youth were again the center of Sayidna's attention on Monday. As he always does, His Grace held a retreat for our Teen SOYO with the theme, "Living an Orthodox Christian Life in a Secular World." His two-hour-long retreat included a PowerPoint presentation, role-playing and discussions. The approximately fifty young people gave a very positive response to the seminar. They also enjoyed their Christmas Party the same evening.

On Tuesday, the Eve of the Nativity, the parish faithful gathered together at the church and were extremely blessed to be joined by the nuns of St. Thekla's Monastery, York, Pennsylvania. It was a joy to worship with Mother Justina, and with Sister Katerina, who assisted in beautifully chanting the Liturgy, which joined the earthly to the heavenly. All in all, we had a lovely time celebrating the Nativity of our Lord and God Jesus Christ as one loving family at St. George, Allentown.

As our parish continues to benefit from our Bishop NICHOLAS's many blessings, we eagerly look forward to Saturday, January 11, 2014, when he will join us again with His Eminence Archbishop JOSEPH (Zihlawee) of Los Angeles, California, at a fund-raising banquet for the Syrian orphans. The next day will see our very own Deacon Giuseppe Landino ordained by both bishops to the rank of the Holy Priesthood.

St. George, Allentown, is very grateful to God to have such holy, hardworking and caring hierarchs. We continue to pray that God sends faithful servants to His Holy Church.

St. Nicholas, Montreal, Having Busiest Year Ever

St. Nicholas Church of Montreal kick-started the new Church year a bit early, with a sit-down cocktail reception for the raffle that was held throughout the summer months. Over

150 people attended. It was a fun evening and a few people went home richer for the effort. In September a "deli-night" was held in the Church Fellowship Hall. Montreal is known for its smoked meat and we did not let the parish down – in fact, we threw in cheesecake for dessert. You can always tell if people are enjoying themselves by the level of conversation, and they were most definitely having a good time and eating their fill of smoked meat (and, of course, french fries). In October, we became more serious. On a lovely Saturday in October, a bus load and two cars full made a trip to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Lachute, Quebec. We learned how the nuns live, work the land, and make icons, and about their other crafts and the food products they have for sale. Their site is now under construction and in future will allow for overnight guests and retreats. We finished off the visit by joining together for lunch, and then returned home. The following day we hosted a Turkey Lunch following the Divine Liturgy. Again there was a full house. This was coupled with the Wine Raffle drawing held by the Antiochian Women.

In the beginning of November we hosted a Haffi (in a party hall) with well over 200 people present. Both the mezza and the music kept flowing and everyone had a great evening.

With the Fast of the Nativity most activities remained within

the church. We celebrated our Feast Day with Liturgy, and the clergy of our sister parishes and Bishop ALEXANDER celebrating This was followed by a coffee hour with ilbee in honour of the Feast of St. Barbara. On the Sunday, 220 people attended a Feast Day lunch in the church hall. The event was completely sold out, with tons of lenten food and many leftovers. What a crowd!

Our very young people prepared a Christmas concert, along with some Arabic chants. On the Sunday of their presentation the city was covered in snow. While many adults did not make it to church, the children did and gave their concert. Because of these circumstances and two weeks of continuous snow in Montreal, when our Senior Choir was to present their concert on Christmas Eve, the children there were invited to come forward and present their concert once again. Completely unprepared, they did a fantastic job, and the entire parish joined in with both choirs. It was a delightful evening, followed by the usual reveillon.

On February 2, the Antiochian Women will host a lunch entitled Sitto's Kitchen, serving kibbe labaniye and shish-barak. This is very popular with our parishioners.

Another change takes place this year. Rather than have a lenten supper preceding the Madayah Service, we will have one pre-lenten lunch and then five agape lenten meals (on a small-



Fr. Bogdan of St. Anthony's, Butler, joins local clergy for blessing of the waters

er scale) following the Sunday Liturgy.

Other activities which now take place on a regular basis are prayer meetings, catechism classes and movie nights which are preceded by a light fast-food meal. It is fun to eat and watch a movie at the same time.

A full year of activity has been planned, both social and spiritual. The various organizations take care of the social aspects and our priest, Fr. Mark, looks after our spiritual needs in many different and appreciated ways. It continues to be one of our busiest years ever. We thank God for an active parish and a church that increases in attendance every Sunday.

We ask God to continue to bless our parish, our parishio-

ners, our Priest and his family and ask Him to help us to continue to grow in wisdom, and in our spiritual life.

Pan-Orthodox Blessing of the Waters at Moraine State Park

On Sunday, January 5, the three Orthodox parishes in Butler, Pennsylvania, got together and served the blessing of the waters outdoors, at Lake Arthur in the Moraine State Park. The event was covered by journalists from Butler and Ellwood City, and even made the first page of the *Butler Eagle*!

The parishioners of St. Anthony Orthodox Church (Antiochian), St. Andrew (Orthodox Church in America), and Ss.

Peter and Paul (Ukrainian) have grown accustomed to the beautiful practice of worshipping together on their patronal feast days as well as during Lent, at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Yet the outdoor blessing of the waters was a first. True, it was a day early, but the pastoral reasons behind choosing this day rather than the next are pretty obvious. Plus, God sent us a relatively mild day in the middle of the famous "polar vortex," which brought to the area some of the coldest temperatures in decades.

The lake was frozen, so that sinners and saints alike could literally walk on water. Nobody would have been able to dive and retrieve the blessing cross – not that many would have been eager to honor this tradition. So it was that, following the prayers, the priests threw three large ice crosses into the lake, thus "baptizing" the waters with the grace and power of the One who came to baptize all creation with fire and the Spirit.

It was a great joy to see the nuns of the Holy Transfiguration monastery in Ellwood City joining the three parishes. The sisters helped with the singing and brought generous amounts of hot tea for all to enjoy. The only minor accident was that, despite repeated promises, the undersigned forgot to bring foam cups. Thank God it was a milder winter day!

We are hoping to repeat this venerable and beautiful tradition in years to come, and to invite all parishes within driving



distance to join us. *O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world: glory to Thee!*

Bishop JOHN Visits Parish He Served for 16 Years

His Grace Bishop JOHN (Abdalah), Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester and New England, presided over our Hierarchical Liturgy at St. George, New Kensington, Pennsylvania, on Sunday, September 29th. It is extra special for us when Bishop JOHN visits, since he was our parish priest for sixteen years. We were blessed to have also the Reverend Father George Kevorkian and Deacon Luke Toumi join us. Additionally, Khouria Hend Kevorkian, the Youth Director for the Eastern Dioceses, met with our SOYO teens and offered them some valuable tips.

Bishop THOMAS Celebrates the Nativity with St. George, Oakland (Pittsburgh)

On December 24, 2013, we were graced with the presence of Bishop THOMAS in the celebration of the feast of the Nativity. We celebrated the Hours

of the Nativity followed by the Vespers Liturgy of St. Basil on the morning of Christmas Eve. Later that evening, we held Matins and Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It was a blessed service in which we ordained two men in our parish, Michael Janakis and John Norman, to the sub-diaconate. We listened to the words of Bishop THOMAS during the service as he spoke to us about the significance of the feast; it is important, he said, for us to be spiritually awake and to keep Christ as the true meaning of Christmas, instead of other worldly ideas of this holiday. At the end of the service Bishop THOMAS inducted three very dedicated and inspired people into the Order of St. Ignatius. We broke the fast together downstairs with a meal and with much love and joy.

"We should follow the example of the birds. They're always joyful, whereas we're always bothered by something. What is it that bothers us? Nothing, really.... Isn't that right?"

– Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica



Top left: Bishop JOHN with choir

Top right: Bishop JOHN with Clergy and Altar Servers

Above: Bishop THOMAS with Clergy and Altar Servers

St. Matthew,
North Royalton,
Celebrates 25th
Anniversary

Prayers, memories, and laughter echoed throughout St. Matthew Orthodox Church, North Royalton, Ohio, and its social hall during a wonderful celebration of its 25th anniversary. Father Andrew Harmon and the parish welcomed Bishop



Bishop ANTHONY at St. Matthew, North Royalton

ANTHONY to town to preside over the weekend celebration, November 15–17. It was a doubly important weekend, as November 16 is both St. Matthew’s Day and the actual founding date of the parish 25 years ago.

St. Matthew traces its history to its founding as a mission extension of St. George Church in Akron, Ohio, back in 1988. With the blessing of Metropolitan PHILIP and the leadership and guidance of Father Lou Mahshie, Father James Meena (Memory Eternal), and Father Peter Gillquist (Memory Eternal), and the work of the mission founders and many friends, the first liturgy was on December 17, 1988. Our beloved pastor, Father Andrew Harmon, was assigned to St. Matthew in January, 1990, arriving with his wife, Bonnie, and their four sons. (One more son and a daughter have come along since then!)

On Friday, November 15, Bishop ANTHONY began the celebration weekend by having a dinner and discussion with our deacons and sub-deacons, Parish Council, members of the Order of St. Ignatius, heads of our various ministries, and the 25th Anniversary Committee. The Bishop answered many questions and focused particularly on our special responsibility as Orthodox believers to share the words and promises of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to serve those in need, and to demonstrate good will to all.

On Saturday, November 16, Bishop ANTHONY had brunch with the Brotherhood of our parish. Again, many questions and answers made for a great discussion time. The focus of the discussion ended up being on the role of Christian men in their families and how we can deal with all the current challenges to traditional morality and family life. In the early evening we had Vespers with

the bishop. Then there was a lovely banquet to celebrate our Anniversary. Nearly 175 members, guests, and friends were there. Bishop ANTHONY gave his sincere congratulations on our anniversary and our God-given progress over the years. He urged us to keep working hard for the Lord and the Faith, and he read to us the recently received letter from Metropolitan PHILIP giving his blessing to our planned future building expansion project. Sayidna PHILIP’s timing was perfect as he sent his blessing just in time for our anniversary weekend.

Sunday morning, November 17, was the highlight of the weekend as Sayidna ANTHONY led a beautiful and inspiring liturgy. The singing of the chanters and the congregation (yes, we all sing – the whole parish is our choir) never sounded better as we all together raised our voices in praise of God. The Bishop’s homily was a fascinating and moving explanation of the gospel reading from Luke 12 about the foolish rich man – and an exhortation to us to keep our priorities straight and prepare for the world to come by what we do with our lives in “the here and now.” After the liturgy, two of our parishioners, Scott and Simona Palmer, were inducted into the Order of St. Ignatius. To wrap up the busy weekend we all enjoyed together with His Grace a wonderful potluck extravaganza meal hosted by our parish’s Sisterhood.

A wonderful weekend it certainly turned out to be! Thanks be to God for all of His blessings upon us!

Archdiocesan Office

Ordained

FARKOUH, Farid, to the diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on Sunday, January 5, 2014, at St. Mary Church, Brooklyn, New York. He is attached to that parish.

LANDINO, Deacon Joseph, to the holy priesthood by Archbishop JOSEPH on January 12, 2014, at St. George Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

SCHMALE, Lawrence, to the holy diaconate, by Archbishop JOSEPH on January 26, 2014, at Holy Resurrection Church, Tucson, Arizona. He is assigned to that parish.

Elevated

NIXON, Fr. Philip, to the dignity of Archpriest by Archbishop JOSEPH on January 26, 2104, at Holy Resurrection Church, Tucson, Arizona.

Bishop ANTOUN thanks those who sent name-day greetings and made donations in his name.

YOU shall love the **LORD** your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind; and your **NEIGHBOR** as yourself. — Luke 10:27

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Bishop ANTOUN thanks everyone for their prayers and messages on the occasion of his Names Day. In his typical style, he sends prayers back for all who have sent him messages and for all of the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

APRIL 2014
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

1. ISAIAH 40:18-31; GENESIS 15:1-15; PROVERBS 15:7-19 (FAST)
2. ISAIAH 41:4-14; GENESIS 17:1-19; PROVERBS 15:20-16:9 (FAST)
3. ISAIAH 42:5-16; GENESIS 18:20-33; PROVERBS 16:17-17:17 (FAST)
4. ISAIAH 45:11-17; GENESIS 22:1-18; PROVERBS 17:17-18:5 (FAST)
5. HEBREWS 9:24-28; MARK 8:27-31 (FAST)
6. HEBREWS 9:11-14; MARK 10:32-45 (FAST)
7. ISAIAH 48:17-49; GENESIS 27:1-42; PROVERBS 19:16-25 (FAST)
8. ISAIAH 49:6-11; GENESIS 31:3-16; PROVERBS 21:3-21 (FAST)
9. ISAIAH 58:1-12; GENESIS 43:26-32; 45:1-18; PROVERBS 21:23-22:4 (FAST)
10. ISAIAH 65:8-17; GENESIS 46:1-7; PROVERBS 23:15-24:5 (FAST)
11. ISAIAH 66:10-24; GENESIS 49:33-50:26; PROVERBS 31:8-31 (FAST)
12. HEBREWS 12:28-13:8; JOHN 11:1-45 (FAST)
13. PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9; JOHN 12:1-18 PALM SUNDAY
14. EXODUS 1:1-20; JOB 1:1-12; MATTHEW 24:3-35 (FAST)
15. EXODUS 2:5-10; JOB 1:13-22; MATTHEW 24:36-26:2 (FAST)
16. EXODUS 2:11-22; JOB 2:1-10; MATTHEW 26:6-16 (FAST)
17. I CORINTHIANS 11:23-32; MATTHEW 26:1-27:2 (FAST)
18. I CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:2; MATTHEW 27:1-61 (STRICT FAST)
19. ROMANS 6:3-11; MATTHEW 28:1-20 (FAST)
20. ACTS 1:1-8; JOHN 1:1-17 HOLY PASCHA
21. ACTS 1:12-17, 21-26; JOHN 1:18-28
22. ACTS 2:14-21; LUKE 24:12-35
23. ACTS 12:1-11; JOHN 15:17-16:2
24. ACTS 2:38-43; JOHN 3:1-15
25. PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; LUKE 10:38-42, 11:27-28
26. ACTS 3:11-16; JOHN 3:22-33
27. ACTS 5:12-20; JOHN 20:19-31
28. ACTS 3:19-26; JOHN 2:1-11
29. ACTS 4:1-10; JOHN 3:16-21
30. ACTS 4:13-22; JOHN 5:17-24

The Righteous Judge

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His Glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ ”

Your Eminences, your Graces, reverend clergy, brothers and sisters in Christ.

“The rich are here for the sake of the poor, but the poor are here for the salvation of the rich” (John Chrysostom).

Who is the poor man? Is it the man who is asking for money on the corner of the street to feed his family? Is it the man with all the riches in the world but no relationship with Christ? *It is both!* Of all people, Christ was a materially poor man. Although all of creation belonged to Him, He had no place to lay his head. What if Christ walked in here right now with long hair, torn clothes, covered in *sand* and *dirt*: Would we take him in with open arms, or would we keep our distance, afraid of “*catching*” his poverty? Our selfishness and lack of care would *deny* the Son of God the same mercy that HE shows us!

I pray that I have retained the values that my parents instilled in me while growing up, but I would never have imagined that I would be shaped by one particular event in my life that has taught

me the value of service towards others. When I was a child, my mother became very sick. I did not know what was happening or how dangerous this illness was, but I was well aware of how exceedingly difficult our lives were becoming. She was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. With my mother being too weak to be at work, my father was the sole provider for our family, making our financial situation tighter. To see my mother ailing and my father working hard to pay the mortgage and feeding three children was heartbreaking.

The saving grace? – the generosity and service of others. Old family grudges were cast aside so that others could help us by bringing over meals and offering assistance with our homework. What really struck a chord, however, was when our school teachers took it upon themselves to order food to give us before leaving school, or the neighbor who would take us to the local pool to give my mom a few hours to relax and regain her strength. This generosity is exactly what Christ outlines in Matthew 25:35–37: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Now, why does Christ take these kind actions, or *lack thereof*, personally? Well, I know from watching my parents, that when someone does something kind to me, my parents appreciate that person’s kindness even more than I do, which must mean Christ feels the same way when we serve one of His children.

If a poor man steals in order to feed his family, has he sinned? Yes, because sin is never justified, but the greater sin is on me for passing him by and not offering him something to eat. *It is our lack of generosity* that has pushed this man to sin. God gave me more than enough in order that I share with him who does not have enough. During the Divine Liturgy our priest speaks to God the Father directly, saying, “*Thine own* of *Thine own* we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all.” This means that everything is God’s, and we are simply giving back to God what was originally His. If we realize this, giving becomes a whole lot easier, because when we give, God will return back

to us a hundredfold.

If we would concern ourselves with feeding others, we would not need to hear politicians go on about the “social security dilemma” and there would have never been a “war on poverty” in the 1960’s. Love through charity not only fills a man’s stomach, but his heart. This will feed the materially poor man, while simultaneously filling the spiritually empty man’s heart, with Christ’s message of love and hope.

In the Gospel of John, Christ heals a blind man, but there’s something different here. Unlike others, who were infirm in the Gospel and came to Christ for healing, the blind man did not seek out Christ, but rather Christ saw his need and approached him. Likewise, when we see someone who is hungry, or in worn-out clothes, or sick, or depressed, why do we have to wait for them to beg for help? Why can’t we just approach someone in need and offer them a helping hand?

Well, the honest truth is that we don’t have to change the world by creating some great program that will feed all of the starving children in Africa. All we need to do is change one person’s world for one day. That is all Christ asks of us. When someone is in need, we should not judge them, but offer our help. Some may make the excuse, “I shouldn’t give this man a few dollars! He will just go use it to buy alcohol!” If we truly believe that he will buy something harmful, then let us call to mind what the Apostles teach in the Didache, “Let your alms sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give.” We are responsible not to give carelessly to feed someone’s drug habit, but we do have to give; perhaps a bag of food in place of cash, or a donation to a charity like the IOCC, where we know where the money is going.

St. James writes in his universal letter: “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” There is *no doubt* that we are unworthy of going to Heaven, and that it is only through God’s grace, and the death and Resurrection of Christ that we can be saved. Since we are free, however, we will not be forced to go to Heaven. We are only invited to attend the banquet; we accept the invitation through living out God’s commandments.

Is having 12 pairs of shoes sitting in the closet



worth spending all eternity in a lake of fire? Do we really need an iPhone, iPad, and an iMac? *Honestly*, who even needs an iPad? *Isn’t it more important to give a starving child a full belly?* What’s sad is that we could often do both, but simply ignore the needy and worry only about feeding our own selfishness. At times, we even throw away our old clothes because it’s easier than driving them to Goodwill. Meanwhile, people are sleeping on the streets, freezing.

If we simply have a heart and are generous with our neighbor, there is no need to fear His terrible judgment. St. Anthony the Great said, “I no longer fear God, but I love him.” Granted, I am nowhere near the level of holiness that St. Anthony achieved in his life, and probably never will be, but he was motivated by Christ’s love more than from fear of condemnation. This is spiritual maturity. Giving out of love is greater than giving out of fear of judgment.

Finally, we remember the final judgment as we prepare to begin fasting. We fast because, as we read in Luke 3:11: “He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has meat, let him do likewise.” We give up an item that we own or some food to help those who are less fortunate and who may not be able to afford bare necessities, such as food and clothing. We offer this selflessly and without pride, in accord with what we read in the Gospel of Matthew: “Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven” (6:1).

David Rayahin, St. George, Cicero, Illinois

David is the Judges’ Choice from the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest.



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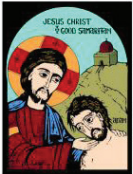
Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada & Upstate New York

The Most Reverend Metropolitan Archbishop Philip
Primate of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

Presiding along with His Grace Bishop Alexander
Bishop of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York

WEDNESDAY, JULY 2nd — SUNDAY, JULY 6th 2014
Sheraton Syracuse University Hotel & Conference Center
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Destiny USA, the 6th largest shopping center in the country at 2.4 million square feet.



YOU shall love the
LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your strength,
with all your mind; and your
NEIGHBOR
as yourself.


— Luke 10:27

Register Today


Diocese of Worcester and New England
Parish Life Conference
June 19-22, 2014
Join us in
Beautiful and Historic Plymouth, MA
at the
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\$139.00/night* - Promo Code: **plc2014**
*Discounted rate if booked by **May 16, 2014**

Hosted by
St. George Church of Boston
V. Rev. Timothy Ferguson, Host Pastor
Dr. Hani Al-Dayaa, PLC Chairperson

Conference theme:




For complete information including schedule,
registration and sponsorship opportunities, visit:
www.stgeorgeofboston.org/plc2014



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God Is With Us!

“God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths” (Psalm 48:1, GNT).

The Psalms of David are the foundation of our liturgical tradition, whereby God inspires us to the breadth and depth of holiness. God is always with us. We need to be with Him.

Whenever the Boston Byzantine Choir, under the masterful guidance of Maestro Charles/Avra'am Marge produces a CD of God-inspired hymns, we are anointed with yet another taste of “spiritual fragrance,” as the liturgical prayer affirms. “God Is With Us” is one of the chants recorded from the Great Compline Service. It represents the refrain for the verses which are intoned in the plagal of the Second Mode. It is prayerfully executed by the choir. All the recordings follow this pattern. Glory Be to God!

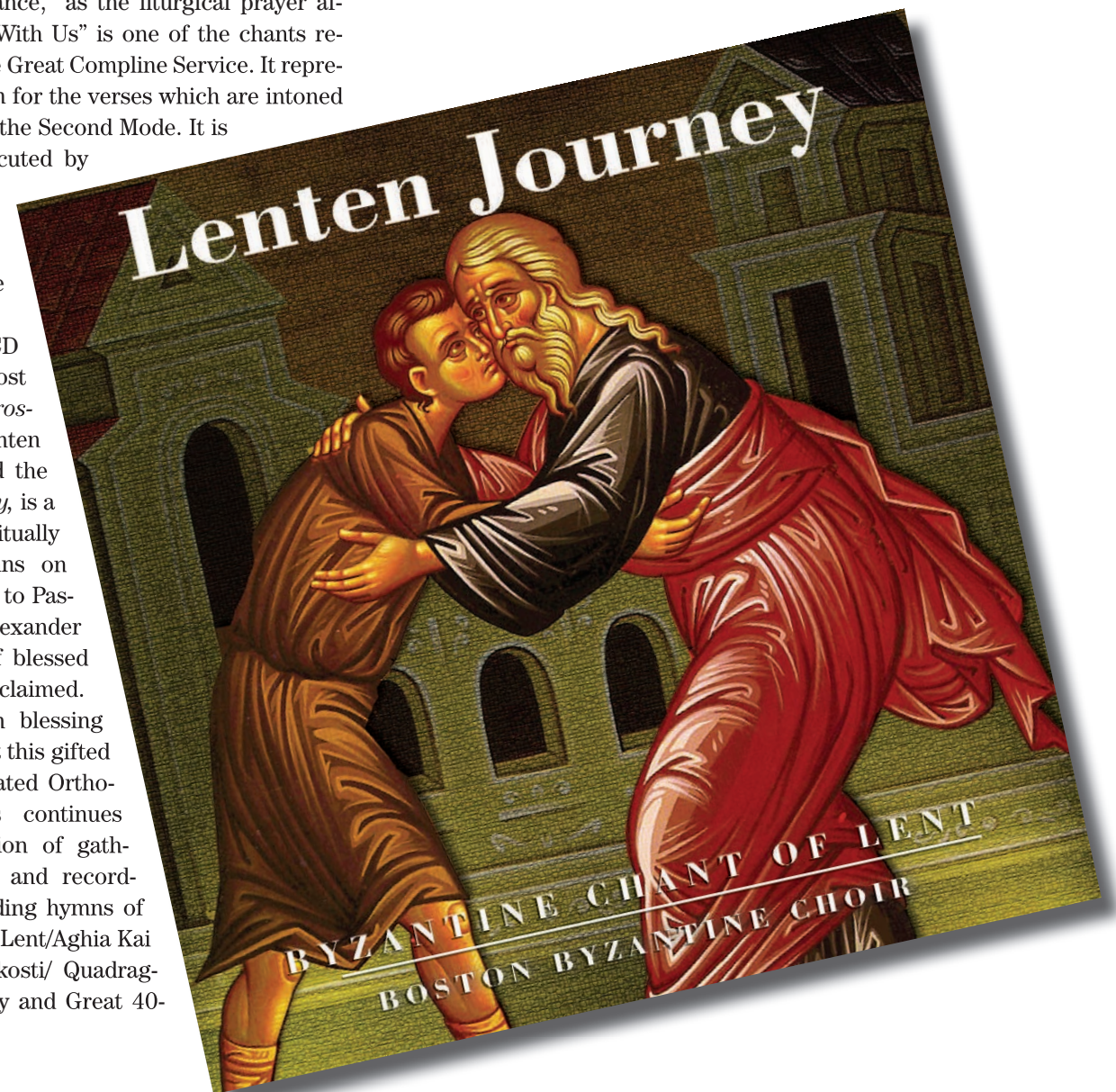
This fifth CD offering (it is most definitely a *pros-phoro*) of Lenten Hymns, dubbed the *Lenten Journey*, is a collage of spiritually acoustical hymns on the “Pilgrimage to Pascha,” as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, of blessed memory, so proclaimed.

What a rich blessing for all of us that this gifted group of dedicated Orthodox Christians continues the rich tradition of gathering, praying, and recording the resounding hymns of Holy and Great Lent/Aghia Kai Megali Tessarakosti/ Quadragesima/ The Holy and Great 40-Day Period!

The 23 gifts on the CD are chanted beautifully in the traditional Byzantine musicological style with consistency and lovely detail. “Well done, good and faithful servants!”

Every Orthodox Christian should welcome and secure this CD for his or her personal journey to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rev. Professor Nicholas M. Kastanas
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Graduate School
of Theology, Brookline, Massachusetts



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