Discerning the Goal from the Process

Lent’s not get so caught up in the Lenten journey that we forget our goal. Lent is a time of preparation. It’s a preparation for our Holy Week celebration, which is a preparation for our Paschal celebration, which is ultimately a preparation for our unity with God and Eternity. Lent cannot be an end unto itself. God did not send His only begotten Son to us for us to crucify Him, so that we could fast, do good, and have a new worldview or religion. God took on flesh to join Himself to us and allow us to join ourselves to Him. Fasting, worship, and almsgiving are the process of our union with God, not our goal. Knowing the truth about God, man and the world is not the goal, but part of the process of learning to commune with the living God. He gave us a way through the Church to receive Him and share in His life. Orthodoxy is not the goal, but the way. Christ is the way and the Orthodox way is the God-given way to worship, live and share in His life. We are given the way and the Orthodox way is the God-given way to a way through the Church to receive Him and share in His life. Eternity. Lent cannot be an end unto itself. God did not send His only begotten Son to us for us to crucify Him, so that we could fast, do good, and have a new worldview or religion. God took on flesh to join Himself to us and allow us to join ourselves to Him. Fasting, worship, and almsgiving are the process of our union with God, not our goal. Knowing the truth about God, man and the world is not the goal, but part of the process of learning to commune with the living God. He gave us a way through the Church to receive Him and share in His life. Orthodoxy is not the goal, but the way. Christ is the way and the Orthodox way is the God-given way to worship, live and share in His life. We are given the choices and opportunities, but there is right and wrong. The relationships that God gives us allow us to enter a process that leads to unity with Him and each other. Our God-given relationships with Church and family let us stretch and grow. They allow us to understand better. They allow us to desire God, to humble ourselves and be vulnerable to each other that prevent us from loving and giving as God lives and gives. Loving God and each other is what brings us into the union with God and each other which is ultimately our goal. Christians are in the process of being saved. Salvation is union with God, and we are in the process of choosing to be united with God. Desire or will are the start of the process, but the whole process involves a synergy of ourselves, each other and God. Lent is a good time to re dedicate ourselves to that process.

In this issue of The WORD, you will find some highlights of our Metropolitan JOSEPH’s efforts, as well as some parish highlights that have been sent to us. We will also see some historic material dealing with the early ministry of St. Raphael, as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of his repose. In this issue of The WORD we publish essays about truth and about the way in which some religious practices are coming into our modern lives and society. It is my hope that understanding these things will help us to discern better what is good and healthy for us in our journey to unity with God and each other. We wish you all a blessed Lent for a holy Eternity.
All he knew was that he was going to Balamand. Everything else was in God’s hands.

In 1964, thirteen-year-old Joseph Al-Zehlaoui had been recruited by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East to study at a newly established secondary school next to the seminary and monastery at Balamand, near Tripoli, Lebanon. His parents, Georgi and Matilda, had consented to send their fifth of six children at a tender age to a sacred place to know our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, and to learn how to serve His Holy Church.

Nowadays, the automobile drive between Damascus, young Joseph’s hometown, and Tripoli takes just a few hours. In 1964, the drive took several days. Moreover, it took several automobiles — taxicabs — to transport the future Metropolitan of North America to his educational and spiritual center. He had some company: boys who would grow up to become Metropolitan DAMASKINOS (Mansour) of Brazil; Metropolitan GEORGE (Abu-Zakhem) of Homs, Syria; and Archimandrite Elias Bitar, a legendary priest of the North American Archdiocese.

When he finally arrived at Balamand, young Joseph immediately thought that this was not the place for him. He now lived among forty teenage strangers just as apprehensive as he. The conditions were less than ideal. (Other students were told to bring their own bedding.) The food was awful at best — clumps of pasta stuck together — but they ate it. Fortunately, young Joseph was taller than most of the boys, so he got his own bunk. On the first day, young Joseph already longed for his parents, siblings, and the comforts of home. He told a priest he wanted to return, but the priest told him not to worry. “Soon,” the priest said, “you will love it here.”

That priest was right. On the second day, the young student encountered the man who would lay the very foundation for every aspect of his life, shaping how he would minister to the Orthodox Christians in the Middle East and abroad.

“He looked like a very powerful man, confident, and a highly educated person,” Metropolitan JOSEPH said of then-Bishop IGNATIUS (Hazim), the future Patriarch IGNATIUS IV of Antioch. “He was so charming and welcoming. He promised to raise us in a Christian environment. All of his promises became true.”

In addition to classes, Sayidna JOSEPH remembers the twice-daily services in the church and the talks that his mentor and spiritual father would give — not just the words, but the man behind them. “The more he spoke to us, the more we became in love with him,” Sayidna said. “The more he was harsh to us, the more we became in love with him, because we started reading about him, how famous he was and how important he was. Everyone respected him, not only at Balamand, but in all the Middle East.”

Bishop IGNATIUS would lecture throughout the Middle East, Europe and the United States, not just to spread the word of God, but also to raise money for his beloved sons at Balamand. Whatever he gained, Metropolitan JOSEPH recalled, he used for their food and clothing.

All of the future Patriarch’s students also came to know his parents, who would stay with him and share all the stories of his diligence, perseverance and humility. These would serve as the real inspirations of life in Jesus Christ to Sayidna JOSEPH and his classmates. He recalled learning of Patriarch IGNATIUS serving as a deacon at the Archdiocese of Beirut in the 1940s. “He came from Syria with ‘not fancy’ clothes on him, and everyone was making fun of him,” Sayidna said. “He was so serious and he used to come home from school with the highest grades,” Sayidna said. “After he finished his day, he would wash his clothes — he only had one shirt, one cassock. He was humble and quiet, and he never complained.”
But at the Archdiocese, even with his success in school, Patriarch IGNATIUS was not permitted to learn Byzantine chant first-hand when professors would come to teach the clergy and laity in the household. “So, he was listening from behind the window outside,” Sayidna said. “He would learn more from outside than the people inside from the professors.”

Sayidna JOSEPH called his mentor the best subject of study, “the best book.” Patriarch IGNATIUS lived humbly and modestly with his students, who in turn drew from the wealth of his knowledge and spirituality. Hundreds of them became respected lay leaders, clergy and even metropolitans, who serve presently on the Holy Synod of the Church of Antioch. The Patriarch trained all of his young men to lead in one way or another, but Metropolitan JOSEPH did not even dream that, some fifty years after his first encounter with his spiritual father, he would take the helm of the largest archdiocese in the Patriarchate.

“As a little boy, I didn’t even hear of the Archdiocese of North America,” Sayidna said. “God prepares everyone for something, for some ministry.” So, as a teenager, Sayidna had only one aspiration – “to become like Patriarch IGNATIUS, but, of course, it is impossible to become like him.” “When he preached, he was a new prophet, a new apostle, another John Chrysostom.”

In 1980, Patriarch IGNATIUS recalled Deacon Joseph to Damascus and ordained his spiritual son to the priesthood, and in 1989, elevated him to the dignity of Archimandrite. In 1991, Patriarch IGNATIUS and the Holy Synod consecrated Father Joseph to the episcopacy. He served as an auxiliary Bishop to the Patriarch until he moved to Los Angeles in 1995. Even then, the “father and son” remained in constant contact until the Patriarch’s passing in 2012.

“I would call him on his private line, and I never said, ‘I am Bishop Joseph, or Archbishop Joseph,’” Sayidna said. “I said, ‘I am Joseph.’” Sayidna recalled that his spiritual father treated him as an equal. “I was his student, but he never gave me the impression that he was treating me like a little boy or inexperienced person. He always respected my opinion.”

Metropolitan JOSEPH says that, when he teaches and guides during his new ministry, his expansive church will come to know the holy man who shaped him. “What I learned from Patriarch IGNATIUS is for all ages and all levels, which I will keep until I depart this life.”

“The bishop is the shepherd of peace and he is the apostle of our Jesus Christ. This is a very important event for us, for the spiritual family of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. For this reason, the bishops came from different areas in the world to take part in this event.”

Patriarch JOHN

A Celebration Coast-to-Coast

THE ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN JOSEPH

by Sub-deacon Peter Sandore
Imagine the spiritual renewal, excitement, festivities and joyful reunion of the clergy and laity at a Parish Life Conference or an Archdiocesan Convention – in the middle of winter.

Antiochian Orthodox Christians on this continent did not have to wait until summertime for such a large gathering. Instead, we had great cause for celebration before then: the enthronement of a new metropolitan, the first for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America in 48 years.

The Archdiocese came together twice this winter, first in Brooklyn, and then in Los Angeles, to celebrate the beginning of the leadership of its new father and chief shepherd: His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, the first for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America in 48 years.

On the night of Wednesday, December 3, His Beatitude led a delegation of bishops, priests, deacons and laity to John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City to welcome His Beatitude and those who flew with him: Metropolitan SABA of Bosra, Houran, Jabal Al-Arab and Dependencies in Syria; Metropolitan BASILIOS of Akkar and Dependencies in Lebanon and Syria; Archimandrite Parthenios Allati, Secretary of the Patriarch; and Archdeacon Gerasimos Kabbas, Assistant to the Patriarch. They had just arrived from an official visit to the Orthodox Church of Romania, where His Beatitude, Patriarch DANIEL and the then-President, Mr. Traian Basescu, along with other ecclesial and civil leaders, received them warmly, as Patriarch JOHN recalled.

“/T/he Romanian people are a lovely people,” he said, marveling at how they guarded their traditions and their Orthodox faith during Communist oppression. “We discussed a lot of ecclesiastical themes for the cooperation between the two churches.”

Patriarch JOHN called the enthronement of Metropolitan JOSEPH “one of love and peace.” “/T/he bishop is the shepherd of peace and he is the apostle of our Jesus Christ. This is a very important event for us, for the spiritual family of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. For this reason, the bishops came from different areas in the world to take part in this event.”

His Beatitude spoke highly of Sayidna JOSEPH: “We are friends. We have known each other since we were young men at Balamand and Thessaloniki. We have a very good relationship, and I pray that he will continue the blessed work of His Eminence, Metropolitan PHILIP.”

Patriarch JOHN also used the occasion of his visit to bring attention to the suffering people of all walks of life in the Middle East, especially in Syria, where the bloody civil war has gone on for almost four years. He had the same message of love and peace for fellow Orthodox Christians, world leaders in Washington, D.C., the United Nations, and the general public. His Beatitude begged for diplomatic solutions, not bombs and troops, to end the strife. He even recalled his own brother, Metropolitan PAUL of Aleppo, Syria, and the Syriac Archbishop JOHN, who were kidnapped nearly two years ago. Even with the violent Islamist presence in Syria’s second largest city, Christ and His Church still endure.

“We have had about five thousand families until now,” His Beatitude said. “They come to the church as usual, and they still live there. We are, despite all of this tragedy, not children of death, but children of the Resurrection.” Without question, Patriarch JOHN misses his brother and prays for his safe return, but until then, “we will continue our work, our duties and our mission for all human beings.”

The night of Friday, December 5, commenced the official activities of the enthronement weekend, which were centered on worship of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Every scheduled event except one gathered everyone at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn for liturgical celebration. The “Mother Cathedral” was full for all divine services, starting with
Great Vespers and the Litià-Artoklasia. That night, 27 Antiochian bishops – all 7 auxiliaries from this Archdiocese under the direction of Sub-deacon Rassem El-Masih. Their Eminences Metropolitan DAMASKINOS of Brazil and IGNATIUS of France joined as well. Together, they sang hymns of praise for one of the most beloved saints the Church has ever known. To say the least, the sights and sounds of the evening were “bursting at the seams” for the actual enthronement ceremony that afternoon. Every seat in the nave and choir loft was taken. People stood crammed in the narthex. Overflow seating exceeded capacity downstairs in the parish hall, where closed-circuit television carried the ceremony. As His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN and His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH entered the Cathedral, it was brightly lit – not just by the chandeliers, but by the constant flashes of smartphones recording and uploading every moment.

The enthronement ceremony consisted of a “Prayer of Thanksgiving” that included the Tisagogion Prayers, a small doxology, and a litany. Between these elements the Byzantine choir and the four-part choir – led by Chairman Christopher Hobey of the Department of Sacred Music – sang three hymns in Arabic and English: the apolytikion for St Nicholas, St Nicholas, and St Joseph of Antimahia (Sayidna JOSEPH’s patron saint) and the kontakion for the Annunciation, “To thee, the Champion Leader.” In the Arabic rendition of the latter, the Cathedral walls shook. At the end of his remarks (which are chronicled in the January issue of The WORD and on www.antiochian.org), Patriarch JOHN called Metropolitan JOSEPH to the episcopal throne to offer him the archpastoral staff. His Beatitude led the diners in his favorite song, “Jesus, the light of the nations.” He later said that he had to find a way to bring a cheer to the head tables and open a path for the people to cross over into the narthex. Leaning upon it and be spiritually strengthened by it in order to calm all the turbulent waves breaking about the Holy Church. With this staff, lead the new people claim to the heritage promised by the Lord.” (Read the entire speech, in which he evoked the example of St. Nicholas: “What did St Nicholas do with the pastoral staff of Christ? He led the people God entrusted to him forward to places they had never been. He encouraged them in their faint-heartedness, he disciplined them in their trespasses, he led them to the inheritance promised by the Lord!”)

The congregation shouted, “Axios! Mustahiq! He is worthy!” as Metropolitan JOSEPH took the staff. Sayidna JOSEPH fought back tears. He later said that he had to take his staff of Moses with which he parted the Red Sea and opened a path for the people to cross over into the Promised Land. Leaning upon it and be spiritually strengthened by it in order to calm all the turbulent waves breaking about the Holy Church. With this staff, lead the new people claim to the heritage promised by the Lord.” (Read the entire speech, in which he evoked the example of St. Nicholas: “What did St Nicholas do with the pastoral staff of Christ? He led the people God entrusted to him forward to places they had never been. He encouraged them in their faint-heartedness, he disciplined them in their trespasses, he led them to the inheritance promised by the Lord!”)
Syria to find a replacement. Don’t worry who will lead
JOSEPH answered. “We may have to go to Lebanon or
I will divide myself into three or four people,” Sayidna
will replace him as bishop on the West Coast. “For now,
right after the other. So, use your freedom with good
be easier for healing. Otherwise, one sin will attack you
rid of it through Confession immediately because it will
JOSEPH continued. “When you have a little sin, get
your lives. Without it, we are not truly human,” Sayidna
presence, then evil things will fill them.
“God has given you all of the precious freedom in
your lives. Without it, we are not truly human,” Sayidna
continuing. “When you have a little sin, get rid of it through Confession immediately because it will be easier for healing. Otherwise, one sin will attack you right after the other. So, use your freedom with good discernment, and you will be at peace.”

One of the young adults asked His Eminence who
he was and why he was talking to the young adults. Sayidna
answered. “We may have to go to Lebanon or Syria to find a replacement. Don’t worry who will lead you – I will be everywhere!”

He then turned to the subject of seminarians. “We need married priests, but we also need monks and nuns – we are not producers of them in North America,” he said. His Eminence recalled the address of His Beatitude Patriarch ELIAS IV of thrice-blessed memory to seminarians upon his return to the Middle East from his three-month trip to North America in 1977. It was one line: “They have everything, but they don’t have monasteries.” His Eminence said, “I heard this as a commandment and an order. Before I die, I will leave a number of monasteries in this Archdiocese.”

Midway through the session, His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS arrived and joined the young adults. The day before, Sayidna NICHOLAS had visited St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary to give the 52nd Annual Father Alexander Schmemann Memorial Lecture on “The Life and Ministry of St. Raphael of Brooklyn,” part of the Centennial Jubilee celebrations. When the session finished, the two hierarchs dined and spoke with all of the young adults.

That afternoon, the hierarchs arrived at the Sheraton Universal Hotel in nearby Universal City to begin a full series of events, beginning with a special reception for clergy and clergy wives. Sayidna JOSEPH told them the same thing that he had told the young adults: that he would not abandon them, even though he had a new home in Englewood, New Jersey, nearly three thousand miles away.

Next, the faithful from across the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West joined the clergy for Great Vespers. It truly looked like a service at the Parish Life Conference, complete with the usual priests who served as chanters, the four-part choir led by Diocesan Sacred Music Coordinator Mareena Bossama-Ball, and the portable iconostasis on loan from St. Mark Church in Irvine, California. Following the beautiful service, Sayidna JOSEPH welcomed his friend, Archbishop Hovnan Derderian, Primate of the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Both hierarchs pledged to continue their friendship, though they are now separated by a greater distance, even if they have to “keep meeting like refugees in airports,” as Sayidna JOSEPH quipped. Archbishop Hovnan replied, “When you get cold, think of California.” The Archbishop presented a special gift to the Metropolitan, as did the clergy brotherhood of the Diocese – an icon of the Mother of God written by Dorothy Alexander.

Following a short reception, the attendees gathered in the grand ballroom for the second gala banquet. A dozen vested altar boys carrying the processional cross, candles, fans and icons led His Eminence to the dais as the Pasadena Master Chorale sang Sergei Rachmaninoff’s “All-Night Vigil,” Opus 37, Number 1, “Come, Let Us Worship.” The Antiochian Youth Ensemble then sang “The Lord’s Prayer.” Finally, the youngest children formed the third choir and sang, in Arabic, Sayidna JOSEPH’s favorite song from his childhood, “Ya Rabbee ana albee” (“O Lord, My Heart”).

The Co-chairwomen of the West Coast Gala, Mrs. Jasminka Gabrie and Mrs. Rose Samore, welcomed everyone who had come from near and far. Mrs. Samore thanked the entire committee for their hard work and for facilitating such a glorious event. Mrs. Gabrie turned to Sayidna JOSEPH and told him that the evening was his church’s gift to him and his ministry. She echoed the words that he often expressed: that the greatest gift would come in the form of the Eucharist at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy the next day. The cover photo of the souvenir journal shows Sayidna JOSEPH holding up the doheh with the bread that would be consecrated for Holy Communion during a Liturgy days before his election as Metropolitan.
Many of Sayidna JOSEPH's counterparts from other Christian churches congratulated him during the banquet. Archbishop Moushegh Mardorian of the Western Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America reminisced on the two hierarchs' years of friendship, as did Bishop Ted Brown of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange, California. Then, His Excellency, Johnny Ibrahim, Consul General of Lebanon in Los Angeles, prayed that the Lord would continue to guide Sayidna's steps in leading the Archdiocese and in his support for the people of the Middle East.

His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS then spoke of how Sayidna JOSEPH's election on July 3, 2014, ended a period of instability for the Archdiocese, but truly began His Eminence's work. “He rolled up his sleeves, and he has been working hard ever since,” said Sayidna NICHOLAS. “I offer you, Sayidna JOSEPH, my congratulations upon your enthronement, and my full support and assistance.” Incidentally, 14 of the 17 metropolitanos gathered at Balamand for the election voted for Sayidna JOSEPH to succeed Sayidna PHILIP.

The banquet was treated to a short video presentation showing various photographs of His Eminence throughout his life – from when he was three years old, to his days as a teenager at Balamand, to his early years as a clergymen, to his ministry as Bishop on the West Coast, to his enthronement in Brooklyn. After that, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco recalled how Sayidna JOSEPH helped him adjust to the West Coast ten years ago, helping him to solve some “slippery things” from the beginning. Diphosora Gerasimos called Sayidna JOSEPH “his beloved brother and mentor.” “I told him he would be the next Metropolitan, but he said, ‘No way,’” Diphosora recalled. “But, here we are today. We have gathered together our collective clergy and laity for Pan-Orthodox events, retreats and liturgies. You have always asked the probing questions to build the Church – I hope you never stop doing that.”

All six hundred banquet attendees then rose and sang, “To thee, the Champion Leader,” just like the Phoenix. Diphosora recited the litany “in front of them, and we even e-mailed a YouTube link prior to the gala to help them learn the melody, so that it could be sung in unison.

Finally, Metropolitan JOSEPH spoke, immediately calling to mind the life and legacy of his predecessor. “Metropolitan PHILIP served several generations in his 48 years leading this Archdiocese,” he said. “He left a great impression on all of us. I have big shoes to fill. I cannot do it by myself, but all of us together will be able to do it. And we will help each other to bring Christ into our lives more and more.”

Sayidna JOSEPH then thanked everyone for coming to the Gala which he considered not as a tribute to him, but as a great opportunity for fellowship, joy, love and charity. All proceeds went to support the St. Nicholas Summer Camp Program and youth education programs.

“I will live with you and die with you,” he told all of the clergy and faithful. “This is how I understand my ministry. You have been so generous to support these programs. If we don’t teach our children to love God, then we will lose them. The Church is our mother and our father. We will work together with God’s mercy and solve all problems.”

The next morning, February 1, saw the best part of the West Coast celebration: Sunday Orthros and Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS were joined by twenty priests, five deacons, and more than five hundred faithful at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles. In between the divine services, the hierarchs led the Triaconion Service to remember six people who had recently departed this life in the hope of eternal life, including Archdeacon Elias Hamaty of Boston, Massachusetts (40 days); Deacon David Daumit of Phoenix, Arizona (three days); and Mt. Ahe Abraham, a lifelong member of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees from Grand Rapids, Michigan (one year).

In his sermon, Sayidna NICHOLAS spoke on what Orthodox commemorates on the Presentation of the Phanerite and Publican, the first of four Sundays in preparation for Great Lent. Great Lent, he stated, “then prepares us for Holy Week, which then prepares us for Pascha, the feast of feasts.” “The Presentation of the Lord is a great reminder of our great need to repent. We are all presentation of the Lord. People are not perfect. We have done for St. Nicholas Cathedral. Sayidna JOSEPH then led the Liturgy at the mission the next Sunday, February 8, with 225 people in attendance.

As a new church is born, so is a new ministry of St. Nicholas Cathedral. Its Dean and Great Economos,Very Rev. Fr. Michel Najim, led the hierarchs and visiting clerics to bless the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Rev. Fr. George Ajalat, and the Choir Assistant Pastor, Rev. Fr. George Ajalat, and the Choir Director of twenty years, Alexandra Mamyari Nassief, and a few other families were leaving their long-time parish to open a new one much closer to their homes. St. Simon the God Receiver Church of Santa Clarita, 45 minutes north of Los Angeles, is the product of many years of labor and determination, and love for the Lord. It will be the first Orthodox Church in that area to hear true witness to Christ. In a special tribute, they were reminded that they will always be loved and never forgotten for all that they have done for St. Nicholas Cathedral. Sayidna JOSEPH then celebrated the first Divine Liturgy at the mission the next Sunday, February 8, with 225 people in attendance.

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“BE THE BEE” Pan-Orthodox Youth Events

Fr. Joseph Purpura of our Department of Youth and Parish Ministries reports an exciting new Pan-Orthodox effort: “Be The Bee” themed events. Youth workers, representing Orthodox jurisdictions from across the country, met at Antiochian Village and put together this new series of unprecedented, inter-jurisdictional events.

1. Orthodoxy youth and young adults are invited to a series of monthly, day-long retreats. Each month, from August 2015 to May 2016, “Be the Bee” will be visiting a different city across the United States, offering Orthodoxy youth an opportunity to worship, learn, and have fun together. Retreats will also offer programs for young adults, parents, and youth workers. For more information, please contact frjpurpura@acrod.org.

2. Orthodoxy teens and parents are also invited to a “Be the Bee” retreat Veteran's Day weekend next year (November 11-13, 2016). It will be held at Camp Nazareth, in the Pittsburgh area, and will offer a unique, multi-day “Be the Bee” experience. For more information, please contact campnazareth@acrod.org.

Also, Youth workers are also invited to next year’s Orthodox Youth Workshops and Camp Conference, to be held January 28-30, 2016. For more information, please contact aboyd@oca.org.

DAILY DEVOTIONS
APRIL 2015
V. Rev. Fr. George Alberts

1. ISAIAH 58:1-11; GENESIS 43:26-31, 45:1-16
2. ISAIAH 65:8-17; GENESIS 46:1-7
   PROVERBS 23:5-24:5 (FAST)
   PROVERBS 31:8-31 (FAST)
5. PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9; JOHN 12:1-18 (FAST)
   PALM SUNDAY
6. EXODUS 1:1-20; JOB 1:1-12
   MATTHEW 24:3-35 (FAST)
7. EXODUS 2:5-10; JOB 1:13-22
   MATTHEW 24:36-26:2 (FAST)
8. EXODUS 2:11-22; JOB 2:1-10
   MATTHEW 26:6-16 (FAST)
9. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-32
   MATTHEW 26:27-27:2 (FAST)
10. 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-2:2; MATTHEW 27:1-61
    (STRICT FAST)
11. ROMANS 6:3-11; MATTHEW 28:1-20 (FAST)
12. ACTS 1:1-8; JOHN 1:1-17
13. ACTS 1:12-17, 21-26; JOHN 1:18-28
14. ACTS 2:14-21; LUKE 24:12-35
15. ACTS 2:22-36; JOHN 1:35-51
16. ACTS 2:38-43; JOHN 3:1-15
17. PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11; LUKE 10:38-42; 11:27-28
18. ACTS 3:11-16; JOHN 3:22-33
19. ACTS 5:12-20; JOHN 20:19-31
20. ACTS 3:19-26; JOHN 2:1-11
21. ACTS 4:1-10; JOHN 16:21
22. ACTS 4:13-21; JOHN 5:17-24
23. ACTS 12:1-11; JOHN 15:17-16:2
24. ACTS 5:11-11; JOHN 5:30-6:2
25. ACTS 5:21-33; JOHN 6:14-27
26. ACTS 6:1-7; MARK 15:43-16:8
27. ACTS 6:8-7:5, 47-50; JOHN 4:46-54
28. ACTS 8:5-17; JOHN 6:27-33
29. ACTS 8:18-25; JOHN 6:35-39
30. ACTS 8:26-39; JOHN 6:40-44

Our Antiochian Heritage Museum is creating a special exhibit honoring the 100th Anniversary of the Falling Asleep of St. Raphael.

We need your help! If you have any historic photos of St. Raphael with a group of parishioners, please send them to the Museum by April! EMAIL (high quality prints only) to julia@antiochianvillage.org. Please also include DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTO (year, location, parish, etc.) and your contact information.

Printed photos will be returned upon request. Images included in the exhibit will be properly credited.

Deadline for submission: April 3, 2015. THANK YOU!
every true mind cannot but rejoice when it en-countered education and knowledge. Every peaceful heart, too, cannot but be reverend when it beholds great philanthropic endeavours which are crowned with a crown of goodness. Therefore, truth becomes evident in the ministry of education; and goodness becomes visible in the works of kindness. It is, then, truth and good-ness which promote mental success and literary advancement in every place and every age. For this reason, mental suc-cess sits up within us joy and happiness; and literary advancement excites within us poetic words of thanksgiving.

Having said that, I cannot but con-vey the great joy which I feel in my heart at the founding of this literary gather-ing, which is composed of Syrian men who have graciously pored out our love for the improvement of their own literacy, education, and knowledge. At the same time, they have spread such virtues to the rest of their un-enlightened brethren. Therefore, I cannot but offer great thanks to the founders of this con-gregation and all of those who have helped and taken part in its establishment. I ask Him who is of true heart and spirit that He may fill the hearts and minds of the founders of this congregation (whether those who make literary offerings, or gifts of money) with the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of knowledge, the spirit of truth, and the spirit of zeal and vision for the future; that they may spread their literary and visionary knowledge to all of their race.

Whatever I beheld in this, your first gathering, is your treasured and rightful intention, throughout all of your discussions and resolutions, “not to believe every spirit, but “to examine everything and hold onto what is good.” Knowledge cannot be established, even if many attest to its truth and validity, if it is handled with chaos and dissension, doubt and deviance; such limiting fac-tors will soon alienate the knowledgeable and the wise, the poet and the counselor. Nonetheless, today knowl-edge has been strongly established as truth through the wisdom of our past.

Therefore, if you read or hear that [the findings of] certain of the sciences contradict religion, it behoves you to understand that such sciences have never been originally founded in truth; indeed, true knowledge and true science is the kin of true religion and true faith. Neither true science nor true faith has the ability to contradict the other. On one hand, true religion is the introduction of what God has revealed to us, with respect to those things that have been termed “the truths of faith and religion.” On the other hand, true science is the introduction of what God has sent to us through His creation and His laws, which have been termed “the laws of nature.” Having said this, it is possible for a true mind to surrender to the notion that what God revealed to us as “the truths of faith and religion” can be contradictory to what He sent to us as “the laws of nature” or “the regularities of nature”? Is it possible that the message of God can contradict what He created? Therefore, reli-gious disbelief among the people [on the grounds of a supposed conflict of science and religion] is an indication of the lack of intellectual balance regarding truth; and, in addition, religious disbelief among scientists is an indication of the lack of intellectual balance regarding true science.

In conclusion, my beloved and dear sons, “Do not believe every spirit, but examine everything and hold onto what is good,” hold fast throughout your scientific discussions what has been forgotten by those who have alienated themselves from true science. Be mindful of how some of the famous scientists of our current age established their beliefs after careful examination and great reflection, determining that the notion that science is contrary to religion is a lie. Therefore, in the midst of the multitude of scientific opinions, remember to pre-serve and protect your religious and literary ties from the attacks of ignorance, darkness, false truths, and other personal pleasures.

Hand-written in Arabic by St. Raphael of Brooklyn, translated into English by Dr. Sam Cohlmia in 2004.

Truth in an Age Without Facts

by Andrew Boyd

M y office building happens to share a front door with the Headquarter’s of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, better known by most New Yorkers as the MTA. As I walked out of my building last week, I walked unknowingly into a huge protest ahead of the regular MTA Board meeting. NYPD, barricades, crazy people, hippies, hippies, who knows what ... As I aggressively pushed my way through the crowd, I still couldn’t figure out what the crowd was actually protesting. I understand that, here in New York City, the MTA may not be the most popular institution, but the breadth and confusion of the protestors’ messages was truly as-tonishing. “Lower Fares! Higher Wages! Legalize it!” Each group had their own signs and badges, their own colors, and each group held fast to their truth, their reality, even when it conflicted with actual reality. (For example, it’s rather difficult to raise wages and lower fares at the same time, and the MTA does not control New York City’s drug policy.)

This protest outside the MTA office is simply a micro-cosmos of our greater society. Truth is no longer a shared concept. Instead, small groups of local people scream their opposing “truths” at each other, ignoring each other in fa-vor of ideology, as the rest of us just try to push through the noise, and get home from work.

Stephen Colbert, in his first episode of his TV show in 2005, coined the perfect term to describe this: “Truthi-ness.” Look it up, it is now in the dictionary. Here’s the de-inition: “the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true.” Does that sound Christian? To me, it sounds ar-gogant and self-centered, and presupposes that I, L, and I alone, know any-thing at all.

How can the Word of God be preached in such an environment, where “truthiness” reigns, what room is there for the Truth? Those of us who preach the word, who look to plant the seed of God’s Gospel, can barely see through the overgrown weeds of partisan cable news, internet memes, political campaigns, and so-called reality TV. What room is there for truth? I can make my own self-serving “truthiness” instead of speaking to my own curiosities and fears, my hopes and dreams. I can create my own “truthy” reality. Truthiness keeps me wrapped up in myself and those like me, demonizing and characterizing those that challenge my reality, and conceding the divine image in my neighbor.

It is now at the point where we many people suffer from what is called “outrage fatigue.” People are going crazy in a hype-up world, where all is conflict, all the time. We can burn ourselves out being “slacktivists,” sac-ritifying our hope and joy at the altar of cable news. We Christians can have the joy sucked out of us by all the noise and scandal and outrage, leaving us like burned-out drug addicts, lifeless on the street, maimed in search of our next fix, the next narrative to be outraged over.

“Truthiness” can even infect the life of the Church. I am Eastern Orthodox. We tend to claim a rather strong monopoly on Truth. Hey, the word “truth” is right there in our name: Orthodox, “True Belief.” “True Wielding” I have always preferred the translation from the Russian, Pravoslavnie – “True Glory.” We tend, also, to be rather closed off with our Truth. How tempting it is to think that “The Truth we have, the Truth we’ve been taught, the Truth we’ve been trained, blessed to inherit, is for us only. God’s chosen people (who happen to be Russian, or Romanian, or Greek, or whatever). How tempting it is to wallow in “truthy” spiritual-ity as mystical gnostics (“God has revealed special things to us, and not to any of you.” or read in “truthy” triumpha- tion like the Hebrews at some points in the Old Testament (e.g., asserting that “as God’s Chosen people, we posses His truth, and our race or nation deserves to be blessed above all others”).
This is “truthness”: the worst kind, teaching God’s merciful presence in history as an excuse to put down and keep out other people. We all know that Christ’s Gospel is truly inclusive. Jesus says: “When I am lifted up, I will draw all to myself,” from the Psalms, “All the world has heard the salvation of our God.”

Our life, in the Church, however, is also the best place to encounter Christ, the ultimate Truth, and to inoculate ourselves to the “truthness” around us. The Church’s history and life commonly calls us to abandon our preconceived notions and encounter Christ, the Way, the Life, the Truth, in prayer, in scripture, in intimate communion with God and each other. If you’re familiar with the Orthodox Church, you’ll know that we have quite a flair for the dramatic, especially in our liturgy. On the night before Good Friday, we keep vigil in the Church reading of all the accounts of the Lord’s passion and crucifixion, starting with His arrest and ending with the tomb being sealed and the guards being stationed. In between the readings we sing hymns reflecting on the gospel messages we have just heard. In a normal parish Church, this beautiful vigil takes about three hours. But, before we launch into the narrative of Christ’s passion, the priest solemnly chants three whole chapters at once from John’s Gospel (15:16-17), that is, Christ’s priestly prayer in the garden. The sets the stage for the whole narrative we hear in Church for the next several days on Christ’s passion, death, and glorious resurrection. “Sanctify them in your name, which you have given me, so that they may be sanctified in truth.” Your word is truth. As You sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

God’s word is truth, and our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is that word incarnate. On the eve of His impending passion, of His life-creating and death-destroying death on the Cross, Christ prays that we may all be kept and preserved in God. This is not some abstract deity, but God who has been present and active in history, anointing Abraham, leading Moses, and speaking through His prophets. It is this God who is Truth. “Preserved” and “kept” for what? To be sent into the World, to be crucified like Him and raised again in Him. The Truth of His crucifixion is the truth that says, “Come, follow Me; I have the words of eternal life, the words that flow from the mouth of God.” God’s word is Christ’s presence on the Cross, Christ incarnate, Christ fully human and fully divine, Christ conquering death by enduring death on the cross. “It is finished” refers to creation.) This is the word of God. This is what we are called to preach into the world: not an idea, not an ornate, not a point of view, an opinion, a concept, not even a fact per se, but Christ the Truth. God’s word is revealed only in humility, only in weakness, only when all worldly logic has failed. God’s word is revealed by Christ hanging dead on a cross.

The Truth is that God became man, limiting Himself in the form of a servant, shaping our lowliness so that He could change us into the image of His Glory. “So that God might be glorified and so that we might be glorified for His sake.” The Truth is that through us sin entered the world and, by sin, death and suffering. The Truth is that Christ our God was born of a Virgin in Palestine two thousand years ago, born to die so that all who have died in Adam might be raised to life in Christ. The Truth is that this Christ willingly accepted a humiliating and violent death at the hands of His own people, descending into hell by means of the Cross. The Truth is that He rose from the dead on the third day, having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by corruption.” So He became the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, the first-born of the dead, that He might be the first, truly the first in all things. This is Christ the Lord. This last answer to Pontius Pilate’s eternal question, What’s Truth? This is the Truth that sets us free from sin and death, a Truth bound up in love for the other, not bound up in the self, in humility, not arrogant.

When was the last time you heard something like this in public? When was the last time you heard something like this in a wartorn world? When was the last time you heard something like this in the public sphere? God’s word is not a slogan, nor a tweet, a sound bite. It is silent action, not self-promotion. It is alms, self-emptying, self-sacrifice, for the life of everyone else. It is fully to the religious, idiotic to the intellectual, but to us who are being saved, the weakness of God is the very power of the Word of God.

What does that word look like, in action? A women named Maria lived in Paris during World War II. In many ways, Maria was unremarkable: an older women who had been married several times, who had lost several children in tragic circumstances, who, rumor had it, had been displaced from her homeland in Russia by the revolution, who smoked, who loved the Church.

Maria worked to save the Jewish population of Paris during the Nazi occupation. She ran a little factory of sorts that made counterfeit baptismal certificates for local Jews, so they could prove their “Christianity” to the Nazi authorities. She bribed local garbage men to smuggle Jewish children out of the city in garbage cans. She preached the Word, rarely with her words, but through the abundance of her self-sacrificial love.

Maria endured her own cross in 1945, at the Ravensbruck concentration camp, just days before the war ended. On Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter, she gave her life in the gas chambers in place of a Jewish women. We wonder how we can preach Truth in an age where truth doesn’t seem to exist. That’s a false question, because anyone would recognize the truth of the love that Maria accomplished for her neighbor. “Truthiness” is whining on Facebook; Truth is giving your own money to smuggle children to safety. “Truthiness” is any message, any scandal, that makes me look good and another look bad. Truth is our God, dead on a cross in between criminals, conquering death by His death, and giving life to everyone.

As we take up our own crosses, as we open our eyes to the suffering of those around us, we preach the same word that Maria preached, the same Word that Christ revealed. This word is active, concerned with the other, and is spoken through quiet self-sacrifice. It makes its way through the noise of the crowd with the Truth of God’s love.

Lord, your Word is Truth; keep us in your Truth.

Andrew Boyd
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March 2015

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Prepared Hands, Prepared Hearts, Prepared People

Edith Humphrey, Ph.D.

The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.

Psalm 24

And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

He is the King of glory. (Psalm 24)

The world and those who dwell therein.

He shall receive blessing from the Lord, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.

Psalm 4

And the King of glory shall come in.

The Lord mighty in battle.

Psalm 110

Him, Who seek Your face. Selah

Psalm 15

The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.

Psalm 24

As people of the Twenty-First Century, we may not as easily prepare ourselves in view of the coming of the Lord! Yet, boldly to call God Father is not the same as preparedness. Our entrance into the time of breaking night: “The spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38). In all these passages, the theme of preparation sounds. Most luminous is that last night of the Lord’s ministry: first, in John 13:10, Jesus speaks to the Apostle Peter of the importance of washed feet (even for those who are largely already clean!); later, in John 15:3, He speaks of His disciples as branches who must be purged, or made clean by God’s word.

In Psalm 24, the psalmist speaks about being prepared to enter God’s majestic presence by having “clean hands” and a “pure heart.” Did you also notice that the Psalm speaks both about each of us personally and about a “generation” of those who seek the face of the LORD? Each of us and all of us together need to be ready for worship—physically (our hands and the rest of our body), internally (our hearts and minds), and together as a group. How then, are we to be prepared for this encounter that is far more significant than all other meetings?

The good news is that the radical preparation has been done in the God-Man, Jesus, who is not ashamed to call others and sisters, and who has made us bold to pray “Our Father.” The good news is that He is even now in the midst of us, and is preparing us to see Him face-to-face (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We may, then, clearly, there is something required of us humans, though God’s generosity is indescribable—we are not to be presumptuous, but to do what we can to prepare for what God is preparing for us! Then, we hear this, through his warning to His disciples: “You also be ready for the Son of Man will come unexpectedly” (Luke 12:40).

Let us not forget, too, His generous explanation to the sleeping disciples, after they had failed on that heart-}

You also be ready: for the Son of Man will come unexpectedly” (Luke 12:40)

You have bequeathed to us numerous aids from the wisdom of the Church in order to prepare to meet with each other, and to meet Him. Our entrance into the time of Lent is, of course, the most obvious provision, helping us to be prepared for the awe of Holy Week and the joy of Pascha, or Easter.

We know, by means of all the careful liturgical moments that we have seen and are now going through, that preparing to come to God is not something that we can do quickly and at the last minute. It is to be our entire way of life, like Mary, who found the one thing necessary at Jesus’ feet. We have been given this gift, a liturgical time of the year in which we are invited to “sack up” the preparation that is to be integral to our whole life. In history, God spent a good deal of time preparing His people for the Advent of the Messiah, through their life-story and through the commentary and instruction of the Law and the Prophets. Similarly, Jesus called His disciples to prepare for the events that would befoul them (and especially Him!) in Jerusalem. The Russian theologian, Fr. Boris Boborinsky, says something on the mystery of the Church that I have found very helpful: “The Church
showed the extent of his love, human determination was exposed as frail and feeble. That is the way it is with us human beings – we are full of contradictions. God has prepared a place for us before the foundations of the world – and so we cannot expect to match that glorious place instantly, and without effort.

So let us commit ourselves to the attentiveness constantly enjoined upon us in the Liturgy, and embrace the disciplines of this season to help us in this watchfulness. Certainly, it is to use these resources mechanically, as if rote prayers and abstinence from food were a magic key, unlocking the gate to God’s house. At our best, instead we will respond to the Spirit’s work, and cry with the Psalmist, “I will prepare Him my heart.” Such inner preparation includes what our bodies are doing, for we are bodies, souls and spirits joined. The resources of preparation highlight the mood, the mechanics, the vehicle of our praise, rather than pointing to the Lord. What a difference if every day we have been seeking the Lord, and then if we come to worship with quiet hearts, determining to set aside competing thoughts, and to enter into worship from the beginning?

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God … Draw near to listen … Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be heavy to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

(Ecclesiastes 5:1–2)

There are, of course, a few words that are helpful before God, for example, that little phrase, “I am sorry.” Sorry for my brazenness, for my selfishness, for all those things that we have done both deliberately and unwittingly. Repentance, in the Scriptures and in the Tradition of the Church, is not simply an abstinence from food, but a change in heart that begins with the asceticism of fasting and the prayer of the Psalms, and the disciplines of almsgiving, and the avoidance of anger and lust. The Church, in the world! We, too, can proclaim, in hope, “We’re going to conquer!” For He has done so already.

The message comes both for each one of us and for all of us together: “Rouse yourself! Prepare! Turn! We need to be continually realigned, for the flesh – what we are as fallen human beings – is weak.

So, then, let us prepare, both personally and corporately, when we come into God’s presence. The Liturgy itself blessedly leads us, by singing and prayer, by hearing and response to the Word, by words of repentance and contrition said together, then by the Mysteries themselves, the Eucharist. As Jesus declared, the Word makes us clean (John 15:3). Then, cleansed by His proclaimed Word, we enter into His life, receiving from Him. We help each other in the service, as we come together before the Lord. There is both koinonia and standing, postures of penitence and boldness before our Father. Proclaiming peace (and, as needed, asking forgiveness) with each other is a requisite to the great event itself. The entire Liturgy is, as Fr. Alexander Schmemann put it, one great action of entrance, and entrance, and even more entrance. Like Risperich in the land beyond C. S. Lewis’s Narnia, we are called “further up and further in.” As we leave behind our worries, we do not leave behind the world that we love, but carry it in our prayers before God’s throne.

Lent is a gift, then: a time when we can focus upon the work that God has laid out for us, the preparation of our hearts, our minds, our hearts, and our communities. We are to come deeper and deeper into the presence of that One who has shockingly entered the world He made, as a Human Being who was to die. He has made for us a revolution, a turning, so that each of us, day by day, and all of us together, might seek His face, and turn away from idle and unproductive things. That Teacher, the one true Master, has laid a pattern, and given the Holy Spirit, so that we might walk the true course to greet Him, and open wide all the doors that have been shut towards us: “Open up the gates! Open up the doors!” That dying, risen, ascended and coming Jesus is Himself the Lord of hosts, the King of glory, who is our strong defense in our daily battle against evil and sin – in ourselves, in the Church, in the world! We, too, can proclaim, in hope, “We’re going to conquer!” For He has done so already.

Edith Humphrey, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Prepared Hands, Prepared People
Orthodoxy and Yoga

In his encyclical dated 4 June, 2013, Metropolitan MARKOS of Chios observes the growing prevalence of the practice of yoga in Greece, as well as in Europe generally and the United States. He states in unequivocal terms that yoga is an unacceptable practice for Orthodox Christians, due to its essential ties with the Hindu religion. He contrasts the popular conception of yoga as merely a form of physical activity, and states that yoga has at its core the pursuit of union with the “Absolute One of Hinduism” through redemption from the consequences of karma, resulting from actions in previous lives. His objection to Orthodox Christians practicing yoga is fourfold: 1) yoga is a part of Hinduism; 2) it cannot be practiced simply as an exercise; 3) it is linked with the doctrine of reincarnation; and 4) it is a “humanistic” effort for salvation. A similar point of view is expressed by Archbishop Anastasios of Albania. He compares yoga exercises with metanias (prostrations) in the Orthodox tradition; that is, the particular movement of the body in the exercise carries a deeper significance. He says, “The more complex yoga exercises are connected with Hinduistic representations and aim at spiritual, religious experiences.”1

In this article, I outline the philosophical and religious origins of yoga, and compare them with Orthodox spirituality, and briefly has been written on the issue. Despite some strongly negative responses to the practice of yoga from Orthodox circles,3 many Orthodox continue to practice yoga in an effort to achieve physical, mental, and even spiritual self-enlightenment, often with little reflection on the question of its fundamental compatibility with Orthodox Christianity.

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Yoga’s explosive growth in popularity in recent years has raised the importance of the question of the compatibility of yoga practice with Orthodox spirituality, and little has been written on the issue. Despite some strongly negative responses to the practice of yoga from Orthodox circles,3 many Orthodox continue to practice yoga in an effort to achieve physical, mental, and even spiritual self-enlightenment, often with little reflection on the question of its fundamental compatibility with Orthodox Christianity.

The majority of yoga practitioners in the western world practice some form of Hatha-Yoga (originating around the end of the first millennium A.D.). Many popular varieties of yoga, such as Ashtanga (“power”), Viniyoga, and Bikram (“hot”) yoga, are varieties of Hatha-Yoga, and most practitioners of these varieties do so out of a desire to improve their health and fitness.4 As pointed out by BKS Iyengar, however, the conception that Hatha-Yoga is a purely physical discipline is mistaken.5 Despite the various motives of individual practitioners, all varieties of yoga share a common origin in Hinduism. While yoga has assumed a variety of forms and been incorporated into the various religious traditions of India and beyond, its most classic exposition is found in the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (Second Century, B.C.). The Yoga-Sutra consists of 194 aphorisms which may be understood to reflect various phases of human spiritual salvation. At the beginning of the Yoga-Sutra, Patanjali states succinctly the basic purpose: “Yoga is the suppression (nirodha) of the modifications of the mind.”6 This simple statement refers the reader back to underlying Hindu metaphysical presuppositions, which shape the particular notion of “salvation” found in Patanjali’s yoga. To understand the significance of the aim of nirodha in the yogic method, one must first have some idea of its religious-philosophical underpinnings.

Patanjali’s Yoga-Sutra builds upon the philosophical basis of the Sandhya school of thought, although with certain modifications. Yoga’s ontological premise is that existence produces suffering, (a common theme in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy). Hence, the aim is to be freed from the continuous cycle of existence and suffering which characterize human life. This cycle of existence (samsara) extends for each person throughout multiple reincarnations. This cycle of existence is governed by the law of karma, in which one’s actions carry repercussions which manifest themselves both in one’s current life and in future lives, thereby trapping one in the samsara cycle of existence and suffering. It is precisely from this cycle that the classical practitioner of yoga seeks to find release.

This leads to the question of the nature of human entrapment in the samsara cycle of existence and attendant suffering. Although yoga gives no precise answer to the question of how human existence came to be, it provides an explanation of sorts for the current state of affairs. According to classical yoga, all existence is divided between spirit (purusha) and matter (prakrti). In our current state, these two have become intermixed. While the authentic human self consists of spirit (purusha), even the human consciousness (buddhi) is only a type of matter. Thus, our problem is the human delusion that one’s authentic self (spirit, purusha) can be equated with one’s psychosomatic or bodily consciousness (buddhi). The goal of human existence is for the core of the human, the purusha, to achieve freedom (moksha) from its entrapment in prakrti and return to the unity of spirit from whence it came. This can only be accomplished by overcoming the false association of one’s self with one’s psychosomatic consciousness, whereby one is trapped in the samsara cycle of existence.7 It is through the practice of yoga that one seeks to overcome this correlation (amaya) between spirit and matter which marks ordinary, transient human existence within the samsara cycle of phenomenal existence and suffering (sukhibba).8 In this pursuit of the transcendence of physical existence, the Hindu deity Shiva holds a particular place. Often seen as a patron of yoga practitioners, he is depicted as the destroyer of the universe; his role is envisioned as that of destroying the specific personalities of persons, as part of the broader goal in yoga of breaking free from the delusion of physical matter and psychosomatic existence.9

In addition to Patanjali’s particular emphasis on meditation technique (as opposed to the emphasis on metaphysical knowledge in Sankhya), the Yoga-Sutra incorporates a certain theistic element in the deity of Ishvara.10 However, the Ishvara is identified as purusha (thus essentially the same as the core of each human), although his defining characteristic is that he is purusha which has never been intermixed with prakrti. His role is very limited: he only aids certain yoga practitioners in their spiritual pursuit.11 For those who seek the goal of “salvation” by transcending the delusion of correlation with matter, the Yoga-Sutra presents an eightfold path: 1) yama (ethics, restraint); 2) niyama (discipline); 3) asana (postures); 4) pranayama (regulation of the vital force); 5) pratyahara (sense-withdrawal); 6) dharana (concentration); 7) dhyana (absorption); and 8) samadhi (enlightenment, or the abort of experience).12 The first, yama, demands that the yogin refrain from killing, lying, stealing, and avarice, and practice sexual abstinence. With the second, niyama, one begins to practice asceticism (tapas) and restricts oneself to the practice of yoga concepts, and to make Ishvara the motive for one’s actions. This may be accompanied by the repetition of the syllable “OM.” Although the exact meaning of this syllable is unclear, it has great significance within the practice of yoga, and is thought to contain the cosmic essence. 13 It has been identified with deity, that is, spirit which is unaffected by mixture with matter,14 and is frequently associated with prayers to Hindu deities.15 It is with the third stage, asana, that the physical

...yoga is an unacceptable practice for Orthodox Christians, due to its essential ties with the Hindu religion.”
As mentioned above, the conception of Ishvara in the Yoga-Sutra is that of parasita (spirit) which has been unaffected by sannyasa (segregation) with prakriti (matter). Within this framework, Ishvara may be seen as a pure version of what is found within human being. This may be contrasted with the personalistic understanding of the transcendent God, Who is, alone, uncreated and is the Creator of all that exists. The Orthodox view in this regard is expressed clearly by St. Gregorius Palamas: “There is only one single essence without beginning, the essence of God, and the essences other than it are seen to be of a created nature, and come to be through this sole unoriginate essence, the unique maker of essences.” While classical yoga understands the inner essence of humans to be the same as that of Ishvara, paraitec Orthodox holds that God’s essence wholly transcends that of His creatures, of whom He is the sole Creator. Moreover, any comparison between Ishvara as the destroyer of the universe and human personalities cannot but show that such a conception is utterly antithetical to the scriptural and patristic God of Orthodoxy, Who is the creator both of the physical and spiritual worlds, and of human persons, who are fashioned in His own Image and Likeness.

Perspective

The practice of yoga, according to Georg Feuerstein, can accurately be viewed as the “progressive dismantling of the personality.” In an effort to transcend the personal psychosomatic mode of existence in the pursuit of morphos, freedom from association with matter, one must ultimately sacrifice his specific personal identity, which is only a result of delusion. In Orthodoxy, not only do humans retain their specific identity in the Kingdom of God, but even God Himself eternally exists in a Trinity of Persons. Thus, persomhesis is not only a particularity of the created order, but also an eternal characteristic of the inner life of the Holy Trinity.

Salvation

Orthodoxy holds “union with God” to be the ontological goal of human beings. Such a union, however, does not eliminate the difference between the created and the uncreated; humans are not transformed or wholly absorbed into the essence of God. Rather, human beings are united with God, while yet remaining created, and become one with the divine life of the Holy Trinity through the Incarnation of Christ. Far from the conception of Ishvara as a deity untouched by matter, the God of Orthodoxy assumed human nature as His own, and took this human nature to the “right-hand of the father” following the resurrection. In this way, Orthodoxy validates both the reality and the goodness of matter and the physical world, matter is not a problem to be transcended, but a reality to be transformed. Orthodoxy does not view the separation of the soul from the body as a good, but rather as a result of evil. Thus, the Lord did not lead His followers into a spiritual kingdom merely through His death, but into the hope of resurrection through His own rising from the dead. Rather than seeking salvation through separation from matter, the Orthodox Christian finds salvation precisely through matter; that is, by receiving the Eucharist, one partakes of the flesh of Christ and is thereby vitally in body and soul by the power and energy of God. This is expressed very clearly by St. Cyril of Alexandria: “For it was necessary, most necessary for us to learn that the holy flesh which He had made His own was enwound with the authority of the power of the Word by His having implanted power into it in a manner befitting God. Let it then take hold of us or let us take hold of it, by the mystical unction.”

Suffering

Rather than call humans to transcend suffering through abandoning physicality, as in yoga, the God of Orthodoxy assumed human nature and entered into the deepest levels of suffering through death on the cross. Thus, suffering is not approached as an illusion to be transcended, rather, it is acknowledged as a deep and painful reality, a reality which God Himself condescended to enter and experience. In His personal experience of suffering and death in the humanity which He assumed, the Lord opened the way for eternal life through His resurrection. Such eternal life is not only spiritual, but also physical; just as the Lord was resurrected and ascend into heaven with His physical body, so also Orthodox believes a physical resurrection and everlasting life thereafter in the Kingdom of God. Rather than calling His followers to escape an illusion of suffering through meditation, Jesus Christ calls His followers to take up His cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). The approach of Orthodoxy to suffering is not one of escape, but of direct acceptance, transformation, and victory, through the power of the One who conquered mortality in His own death and resurrection.

Archbishop ANASTASIOS of Albaenia writes that, despite the Hindu context of yoga practice, some have considered the possibility of utilizing yogic techniques within a Christian framework. The Archbishop says, “This attempt, however, to dissociate these exercises from the Hinduistic theories with which they are united seems like an attempt to separate the human muscle system from the neural system.” He goes on to say that the Orthodox hesychastic tradition allows for attaining genuine inner stillness through the gift of the Holy Spirit, rather than through “independent human-zenetic” techniques.

The Archbishop’s comments seem to echo the words of St. Gregory Palamas regarding pan-philosophy. St. Gregory compares pagan philosophies with a serpent, while certain useful medicinal extracts can be taken from it, the serpent must first be killed. Even if this is done, says St. Gregory, the task of separating out the useful portions requires “much trouble and circumvention.” Perhaps this offers a parietic paradigm for approaching the physical exercises of yoga from an Orthodox perspective: while some might say that extracting certain useful aspects of yogic exercises (such as stretching) from their Hindu context might be essentially impossible, such a pursuit may be compared to a futile attempt to separate “the human muscle system from the neural system.”

It is not my purpose here to present which exercises of yoga (such as stretching and balance) might be re-appropriated from their Hindu context for the purpose of physical fitness, outside the practice of yoga. I feel, however, that a careful study of the deep Hindu roots of the practice of yoga confirms strongly the view of the Metropolis of Chios, that the practice of yoga is an enterprise of intrusive and pervasive Hindu character, of which the physical exercises form a constituent part.
FOCUS North America is a national movement of Orthodox Christians, united in faith and joined by a desire to provide action-oriented and sustainable solutions to poverty in communities across America. FOCUS has operations and life-changing youth development opportunities in more than 50 states.

FOCUS North America provides employment, housing, healthcare and educational services to the homeless and working poor in America. All of FOCUS’ programs are designed to transform sustainably the lives of the homeless and working poor, moving them from dependency to self-sufficiency.

FOCUS North America is effective and efficient. Of funds raised, 93% go directly to helping those in need. FOCUS is a registered BBB charity and of funds raised, 93% go directly to helping those in need. FOCUS is a registered BBB charity and of funds raised, 93% go directly to helping those in need. FOCUS is a registered BBB charity and of funds raised, 93% go directly to helping those in need. FOCUS is a registered BBB charity and of funds raised, 93% go directly to helping those in need.

How You Can Be Involved

FOCUS centers across the country and at our national office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We often need cooks, drivers, servers, administrative support, and professional mentors.

Say YES To Family Days: FOCUS will come to your parish and host a Family Day, during which, parents and children can work side-by-side in outreach activities. This is an exciting opportunity to bring your parish families together and expose them to the poverty in their own community. As they are guided and engaged in active service, families learn why and how to approach the poor and serve their needs. When you set the heart of family life on a strong foundation of service, the Kingdom of God is seen to be a reality in parish life and in daily family life. Family Days are open to families with children 11 years old through high school age.

Give: Please commit part of your charitable giving to FOCUS. We also work with many employers to receive matching donations. If your employer offers a matching-gift program, please contact us and we will take care of all the necessary paperwork to receive a matching gift from your company or organization. Visit www.focusnorthamerica.org.

For Hungry People 2015

41st ANNIVERSARY

Food for Hungry People 2015

we read prayers every morning and evening.

Serve: We welcome volunteers at our FOCUS Centers across the country and at our national office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We often need cooks, drivers, servers, administrative support, and professional mentors.

Pray: As Orthodox Christians, we recognize that prayer is a central part of our daily lives and invaluable in helping the homeless and poor in America. Prayer guides our actions and we ask that you remember FOCUS, its staff and all those served by FOCUS in your daily prayers. Visit our website to add your name to the FOCUS prayer list. You and your loved ones will be remembered daily in the chapel of St. Herman’s House, where
Love isn’t just about an emotion; it’s also about what you do. Love means putting somebody else before yourself, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Would you risk your life for someone? Do you love them that much? Do you love God that much? We, however, know that God loves us that much. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). He gave us His Son, knowing He was going to be ridiculed, spit upon, and killed, because He loves us. He allows us to sin and fall into temptation because He loves us, even though it is well within His power to stop us. He loves us so much that He gives us the free will to fall away from Him. If that isn’t love, then someone, please, give me a better description. Now, God knows that we can never reach that level, but all He asks of us are two simple things, two commandments that we should struggle daily to follow. Love God with everything you have, and love your neighbour.

Now, if we continue reading from where the quote this year ends, we will encounter Christ’s parable about the Good Samaritan. The entire story tells of how people should treat each other, and that even people who supposedly hate each other should act with love towards one another. There is an unwritten rule in the seamon’s cookbook: any survivors found at sea are brought into the boat, given a place to stay, clothes — the works. If they are hurt, you help them. This unwritten code is also followed even in the midst of war. Any survivors are pulled in by the nearest boat, enemy or not, and given aid. How is it that even in the midst of war, human beings can find the time to help out their neighbour? It is called love. Love for your fellow seaman, and love for your neighbour.

Now, I love God, and I love my family, but I also love my phone, my computer, my bed, and so on and so forth. Yet is that the same kind of love? Not in the slightest. Sentimental love is something that should never be confused with real love. Sentimental love is merely having strong ties to something that you deem important in your life — for example, your first baby tooth — not real love by any means. Would you really sacrifice yourself for the sake of your baby tooth? I don’t think so, you get the idea.

As Orthodox Christians, however, we should try to sacrifice our adult desires and passions for our babyhood, for Christ said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 18:3). Children have no knowledge of hatred. What baby is born with anger in his heart? Infants are born with only the knowledge of how to love — love their mother, love their family, love God. “Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise” (Matthew 21:16). God is love, and God makes humans in His image. We begin to cover that image with sins as we grow older, but babies are utterly pure, shining images of God of love. So although we wouldn’t sacrifice ourselves for that baby tooth, we would sacrifice ourselves for that child-like love. For when we truly open our hearts to God, we are filled with his presence, his Holy Spirit, and that return to becoming the image of God. What would the people around us see? They would see a loving person, someone like St. Herman, who could put graciously bears and heal the sick. What do humans see in a Saint? Someone who shines with the image of God, His love. In that, we do see God. For God is love.

At my stage of life, it seems that we are all trying to grow older, and become adults. Yet according to the Scriptures, we are to become “like a little child.” How can we, as teenagers, go back to our childlike love while still becoming adults? The answer is through love, by continuing to love God and being involved in the church, and by truly loving and serving the people around us. We can do this by making time to help out others, whether with school work or food banks, visiting the sick, and inviting those who are alone for the holidays. We are just to show brotherly love in every way we can, so that God’s love might shine through. In the words of the late Patriarch Ignatius IV, “You are an Orthodox indeed if you love the other and see yourself through them.”

Even though the Saints and the Church Fathers, and holy man and woman fulfill to some degree these two commandments of Christ, I still saw regular average people trying their hardest to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27).
Over the last fifty years, we have seen the reality of visions fulfilled throughout the Antiochian Archdiocese. Many of those visions were put forth by His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory. One of the clearest examples of this is the Antiochian Village, located in the Laurel Highlands of Western Pennsylvania. A primary focal point of the Village is the Chapel dedicated to Ss. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of the Church of Antioch. The chapel was constructed not only for our own liturgical use but as a witness to our faith for the thousands of guests who annually come to the Village. We have groups (Orthodox and non-Orthodox) that request tours of the chapel and marvel at the explanation of the icons.

For some, entering the Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel is the first exposure to Orthodox Christianity. Over the years, Phil Zimmerman, a local iconographer, with the assistance of others, has written and installed numerous icons in the chapel. Many of the saints depicted in the icons are saints of the Church of Antioch, but other saints have been included to demonstrate the richness, variety and breadth of Orthodoxy throughout the world. There remained gaps, however, on the side walls of the chapel where it was evident that the iconography was not complete. During one of Metropolitan PHILIP’s last visits to the Village, he instructed the staff to complete the remaining ten icons. After consulting with Phil Zimmerman about the original iconography plans for the chapel, Dn. Matthew Garrett, a former student of Phil Zimmerman who assisted and wrote some of the existing icons in the chapel, was commissioned to complete the remaining sixteen icons needed. Six of those icons have been completed and installed in the Chapel. We expect that within the next year the remaining ten icons will be finished and installed.

We welcome donors to underwrite the cost of these icons and help us fulfill Metropolitan PHILIP’s vision for Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel. The sixteen icons needed to complete the chapel are listed in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon #</th>
<th>Icons</th>
<th>Approx. Size</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>St. Catherine</td>
<td>36” x 44”</td>
<td>$3,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Martyrdom of St. Stephen</td>
<td>36” x 44”</td>
<td>$4,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Raising of St. Tabitha</td>
<td>36” x 44”</td>
<td>$4,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>St. Melorissos of Antioch</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>St. Herman of Alaska and St. Juvenaly</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sts. Cyril and Methodios</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,650</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>St. Patrick of Ireland</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sts. Habib of Homs and Gourias and Samonas</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,850</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>St. Julian of Homs</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>St. Olympia the Deaconess</td>
<td>24” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>St. Moses the Ethiopian</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,350</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>St. Nektarios of Aegina</td>
<td>36” x 20”</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>St. Sava of Serbia</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>St. Pelagia of Antioch</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>St. Evdokia the Penitent of Balaabek</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>St. Abraham of Kratia</td>
<td>24” x 20”</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total cost of Project: $30,100.00

If you would like to help us complete Metropolitan PHILIP’s vision of Ss. Peter and Paul Chapel, please contact Fr. Anthony Yazge at the Antiochian Village (franthony@antiochianvillage.org, or 724-238-9565 ext. 503).
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