

THE WORD

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THE WORD

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Letters to the editor are welcome and should include the author's full name and parish. Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions e-mailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

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THE PRIEST CAN SEE YOU

Bishop JOHN

I have preached literally thousands of sermons, yet I am always surprised when I look out into the church and read the faces of those in the congregation. I can't help but wonder if folks know that the priest can see them! Some look like they are watching television, with their minds at half-power. Others appear to be dozing. Others may be snacking, talking, reading the bulletin, getting up for a break, or checking to see if the watch is still working or the phone gets service. At seminary, they taught us that the sermon was a cooperative action of the Church, with the preacher sharing what he believes God is teaching from His message

for this particular community at this particular time in this particular place. The congregation, praying for the preacher to rightly deliver God's message, awaits His message with holy anticipation. This message will bring nourishment, direction, meaning and life! It seems that there is a disconnect. It is no wonder that new priests wander between tables at coffee hour with a look of bewilderment.

Beloved, liturgy is the work of God's people. It is not a spectator sport. We join together to hear God's word and lessons, to understand them, to receive them into our hearts, to repent and to live. We journey together to meet God at His footstool, to worship Him and to be fed by Him. Then, after giving thanks, we go into the world recommitted to Christ and His work. We share His love and we

witness to His greatness by our hard work, generosity, patience and kindness. We show the world who God is by letting the world know who God has made us, through our baptism, worship, support, and love for each other. We are the only icons of Christ left in the fallen world. We are the only Bible or testimony our co-workers will read. We are the only yeast left to leaven and change the world.

Generally speaking, families no longer speak of Christ, the Scripture messages, the Incarnation, Resurrection or Ascension at home. They no longer pray, maintain worship corners, bless their food, or think about God. Schools avoid God or ridicule Christian teachings. Politicians offer some lip service, but many don't worship or follow basic Christian teachings. The society numbers all faiths and non-faiths equally, and the media and entertainment world



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Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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promote images of a God who is impersonal, and chiefly serves people's desires for acquiring things and taking revenge.

The world interprets personal freedom as a right to make up your own god, who will serve you any way you wish. You can pick and choose from all the ideas taught out there, from those taught by the serpent in the garden of Eden "to be God yourself," to owning and controlling your own gods in order to acquire riches or curse those you judge to be offensive. You can follow your every base desire, and fill your belly with exotic or comfort foods, depending on your whim. Most no longer heed the counsel of the Church, or of God, or of others. We have succeeded, through ego and technique, to replace God with ourselves, looking to ourselves for healing and justification.

Of course, modern humanity without God has also succeeded in changing the climate (according to some), and in polluting our water and natural resources, in lowering the probability of conception, in increasing rates of obesity and high blood pressure, in increasing the likelihood of cancers and auto-immune diseases, not to mention frustrating entire groups of disenfranchised people.

Friends, in a few days we will hear in the Gospel of Mark Jesus ask, "Who do you say that I am?" How do you answer this question? Do you answer with Peter "You are the Christ"? And if you do, what does that say about who you are? You are human, created in God's own image and likeness, for God to delight in you and share Himself with you. You are Christian, committed to witnessing to Christ, sharing yourself with God, and God with the world. You are Orthodox, committed to the faith, which is Christ Himself, as delivered by God in Christ to the disciples and preserved in the living and worshiping community that Christ heads and the Holy Spirit directs. You are members of His Church, established by God for us to live and thrive within.

We are not spectators; we are soldiers of the living God. Soldiers are disciplined and execute the plan of their commander. We are family. God is our Father and we love and are loved by Him. We are not in competition with each other; rather, we belong to one another and to our God. We are blessed to sanctify our space and

make our time holy. Let us say with Joshua: "As for me and my family, we will follow God."

Brethren, having followed the course of the fast, we now come to our time of Pascha. You are God's chosen people, His holy nation, His own kingdom. Put away your watches and cares. Bring your mind to attention, and enter the joy of the feast with thanksgiving and confidence, for God has accomplished everything for us. *Christ Is Risen!*

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Creed and Coexistence

LIVING WHAT WE BELIEVE IN THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS

If America dips toward decline, if respect for human dignity dries up, if public discourse coarsens, if hospitality sprawls, withering under turf-defending individualism, if contemporary Christianity bleeds credibility, if moral anemia increasingly infects our laws and institutions, if sexual confusion – nay, brash perversity – strives to become the new norm, can such cultural deterioration be seen as a gift?

From a certain perspective, it may be so. The key to such optimism may be to understand that, as modernity slides toward depravity, we also slip closer toward the conditions in which the early Church thrived. Cultural deterioration may not be an inherently good development, and Christian citizens do not encourage or ignore it in the naïve hope that a renewal of early Church conditions will necessarily produce a corresponding renewal of early Church piety. We do not sin so that grace may abound (Romans 6:1). Should dark times darken hope, however, the quiet, but consistently bold, culture-influencing faith of our early brothers and sisters may provide encouragement.

THE "FOOLISHNESS" OF THE FULLNESS OF TIME

How do we make sense of the providence of God, "emptying Himself and taking on the form of servant" (Philippians 2:7) at a time in history most dangerous to do so? It is fascinating that the Incarnation should unfold at a time in which the success of any birth was far from certain. The Christ Child is born into a society where Roman Law granted to the *paterfamilias* of any family a full eight days to decide whether that child even should live. Joseph's priorities were different, as we know, and we are all beneficiaries.

How to make sense of the providence of God, "becoming flesh, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) at a time when any sermon that only one true God exists could be silenced by the edge of a sword? It is curious that the scandal of monotheism should mature at a moment in history when, because of Rome's ever-growing reach, polytheism was essential to maintaining social order.

How to make sense of the providence of God, conceived in the flesh by a virgin within a culture of such sexual confusion that the more deviant,

the more celebrated? Strange it is that the glory of chastity, on radiant display in Christ, His mother, and His Forerunner – should be featured at a time in history when prostitution, orgies, homosexuality, abortion, contraception, pedophilia, and male infidelity, were commonplace.

Yet, all those deviancies – the infanticide, the polytheism, the sexuality – lay tangled around what St. Paul calls the “fullness of time” of the Incarnation (Galatians 4:4). Strange is the providence of God.

Yet what was the alternative? Should the Christ have been born into a world in which a pro-life king would never have slaughtered 14,000 innocents trying to get to Him, or a pro-monotheistic culture would never have martyred Christians for their exclusivist claims, or a pro-chastity society would never have resisted the sanity of either the monastic movement or chaste marriage, what would have happened to Christianity’s *core of transcendence*? If Christ had known not a cross, but comfort, would the Church have emerged as the radical, counter-cultural, heaven-pointing, Spirit-filled, other-worldly, theanthropic organism she is? “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world” (John 8:23) Had He the favor of the world, would those words of our Lord, referring to Himself but echoing through His Church, have meant anything to us?

It was precisely this perverted ecosystem, into which the seed of the early Church was planted, that clarified her identity and quickened her purpose. Converts were freely choosing the Church out of exhaustion with their former excess, or frustration with their former devaluation, or inspiration by what their lives could become, even though conversion meant widespread ridicule and real threat of danger. They just knew this Gospel was different, and not merely “the empire at prayer.”

At its emergence in the Mediterranean of the First Century, the Christian creed was a belief that that which was *imminent* – impressive, yes, but so class-driven, so power-mad, and pleasure-moist – could somehow give way to the *transcendent* – so divine and other yet so interior and available. What becomes of anyone’s search for the transcendent, if the imminent is so likable? Who wants to come out of a warm bath or a warm bed?

In *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark famously estimates a growth rate of 40 percent per decade for Christianity in its first three hundred

years, precisely at a time when Christians had no recourse to pass a law in our favor or elect a politician to our cause. Converts were wooed not by force but by persuasion.

If America ails, Christians do not greet such decline with a shrug or some stupified skyward gazing for the return of the Lord Jesus. Neither do we act from carnal or politicized anger, for “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20). Acquire the spirit of anger and a thousand souls around you will be stressed.

Instead, we temper our current urgency – and our legitimate outrage – with a two-thousand year witness that the Church may be at her best when she is most *irrelevant* to culture, most out-of-step with its seething depersonalization and deicide, its illogicality, and crude art. It is the saints who make the Church relevant in any culture: do they emerge in greater numbers from the Church when she stands in lesser esteem with the state?

HUMANIZING GOD, DEIFYING MAN

There may always be a temptation for Jerusalem to copulate with Athens – to dance and wink with worldliness to the point of compromise. For ruining Christian witness, seduction works better than persecution. Modern religion, unmoored from this early history, may always feel a tug to *humanize God* – to filter the central mystery of life as a Christian through popular culture to improve its presentation, digestion, or accessibility. To “humanize God” is to adopt the art forms and thought categories and doctrinal priorities of cosmopolitan sensibility, for the purpose of “speaking the language” of those one is trying to reach.

Of course, humanizing God has already been done, hasn’t it, in the Person of Christ Jesus, who “emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant, made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). God has already *come down*; all that remains is for each man to be *lifted up*. Consider that sweeping reference in the Anaphora of the Liturgy of St. Basil: “Though He was God before all the ages, yet He appeared upon earth and dwelt among men and was incarnate of a holy virgin and emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant, becoming conformed to the body of our lowliness, that He might make us conformable to the image of His glory.” The glorious motion of Christ, lowering down to lift up, has already been

accomplished: “It is finished” (John 19:30).

If there is a work, then, a purpose, a goal to each local Christian community, surely it is not to humanize God, but to deify man. We speak here of an attitude, a frame of mind, and a way of walking through the world, that sees the Church as *the* organism of the only fixed and peculiar transfiguring grace, a still place of ceaseless motion toward the singular goal of deathless life in Christ. Not simply a calendar item for Sundays, not a social organization, nor a shop for moral tune-ups, each parish or monastic community is to be a sweet and shattering confrontation with God. Here is divinity expressed through physicality: when describing the Church, the Apostle Paul ties “the truth” of John’s Gospel (14:6) to the tangible touchstones of “pillar and foundation” (1 Timothy 3:15).

This, then, is the abiding creed of the Christian: God is God and I am not. “Thou alone art holy” (Revelation 15:4). We are from below, He is from above; we are of this world, He is not of this world. He became a partaker of human nature, yes, but did not stop there, like some paratrooper who descends behind enemy lines not to rescue the captives but only to commiserate with what it feels like to be one. No, He partook of human nature so that we may become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

CREED AND COEXISTENCE

In his 1936 essay, *The Crack Up*, F. Scott Fitzgerald (not a Father of the Church but a father of good prose) wrote this: “The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” Christians can walk through this world both close-fisted around the scandalous exclusivity of their creed and open-handed in charity toward all who do not profess it.

Genuine coexistence is not the suppression of differences that divide creed from creed, but an open marketplace where differences exist within a shared presumption that citizens will not kill each other because of them. Christians are not troglodytes, who fearfully keep to their caves with a plea that the world not hurt us. Instead, with passion tempered by peace, we participate. We engage: the salt spreads forth from its shaker, the light shines forth from its flame. We are beggars sharing with

other beggars where to find Bread. It is noteworthy that, when unjustly struck in the face, Christ replied, “Why do you strike Me?” (John 18:23). It is as if he were appealing to some shared higher humanity in his enemies, some common values of fraternity, liberty, and reasonableness, upon which healthy civilizations are built.

Genuine coexistence means that ideas are allowed to rise and fall on their own merits, a liberality not always afforded to Christians in those early centuries, and arguably eroding now. Since Christianity, however, is a good idea with a core of transcendence, it rose over just 300 years, within hostile conditions and maybe even because of them, to become the dominant faith of an empire.

History aside, it is modern man to whom we must tend now. By “modern man,” we mean an understanding of the human being dominant since the Enlightenment, that eighteenth-century European intellectual and philosophical movement favoring reason over faith, skepticism over belief, rationalism over religion, and the science book over the Good Book. Rejected was not so much God, but God’s *nearness*. Unsurprisingly, God now felt very far away. The new existential crisis that entered the void within man – for how can who are made live apart from our Maker? – has been called *despair*.

A STORY

For fifty years, researchers have surveyed incoming college freshman on different topics, from their choice of majors, to their worldview. Consider

You are not your passions; your sin is not your future; you are not trapped; what you have done is not the sum total of who you are. Your problem, modern man, is not that you think too highly of yourself, but that of yourself you think too poorly.

er this detail from a recent survey involving 141,189 first-year students attending about two hundred public and private institutions around the nation: today’s freshmen can lay claim to the unprecedented superlative, historically, of being the most willing incoming class on campus to shut down speech they find offensive.

After learning this, a parish priest in the American south, with children in college, contacted a local



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university, hoping to set up a cordial meeting with any professor who publicly held positions different from his own. Why? Not to argue, not to battle perspectives, not to debate issues, but to discover if the genuine coexistence of ideas is still possible.

He found a man with a Ph.D. in the Department of Psychology who was basically the pastor's photo negative: the pastor, straight, the professor, gay; the pastor, Christian, the professor, atheist; the pastor, traditional, the professor, progressive; the pastor, pre-modern, the professor, post-modern. To the professor's enormous credit, in this aloof, depersonalized age, he replied to an e-mail sent by this priest whom he'd never met nor heard of. The meeting occurred in the teacher's office on a sunny Tuesday. After being invited to sit down, Father asked this alternative, atheistic, post-modern, sexually-experimental professor before him if he encountered any resistance on campus to his publicly-stated opinions and lifestyle. No, he replied. Some of his former students had, but that was mostly in the past.

Next question, professor: do you feel that publicly-stated opinions contrary to yours are welcome

here on campus? Yes, they are. Is true coexistence between different ideas welcome? Yes. The priest defined *dignity in dialogue* – “the vigorous but courteous, honest but humane exchange of conflicting opinions and ideas that does not disrupt peaceful coexistence between persons who hold those conflicting opinions.” He asked if such dignity was present on campus. Yes, it is.

“But,” the professor continued, “dignity in dialogue is possible, unless” – here, a pause – “unless a person publicly expresses opinions that attack me or people like me. If you publicly oppose my identity, then you’re saying I don’t have a right to exist, and I am going to have a problem with that.”

A pivotal moment in the discussion, this. The professor didn’t know it, but he was about to reveal the despair of modern man. After a few more questions, the professor admitted that he makes no distinction between his *humanity* and his *identity*: his identity *was* his humanity. This blur is a post-modern technique. Why is it consequential? It means that reality is not real, truth is not objective, but only individualized experience, and one is what one feels.

The consequences are staggering: if one identifies as anything our culture not long ago sanely called “deviant,” and one’s (sexual) identity is one’s humanity, then any criticism of deviancy or opposition to it is criticism of one’s very humanity and opposition to it. If your identity is unpopular, then you’re convinced your very essence is unpopular; if your identity lies marginalized and unaffirmed, then you feel your core self to be marginalized and disapproved. If some people think that your desires and behaviors – your identity – are in some way wrong, then your inescapable conclusion is *I should not exist*.

Wide lies the detritus when identity is not distinguished from humanity, when *what a person does* is not distinct from *who a person is*: broken hearts and beaten souls everywhere, who don’t believe they are made for anything more than the poor performance their weak wills can muster. Among the many gifts for which we can thank the Apostle Paul is Romans 7, where he distinguishes the alien “law of sin” in his members from his “inmost self,” which he identifies as “the law of my mind,” or *nous*.

While the earnest professor spoke, the priest considered that the humanity with which he identifies is fallen. He leaned back in his leather chair content to be his sin nature, as if his lips could almost form the horror: my fallen nature *is* who I am; sin is my

essence; I am my passions. Father looked across the desk in silent grief: behold modern man in his despair.

SOLUTION

This despair might be where the Christianity of yesterday can make its greatest impact today – an imprint not dependent on favorable laws and friendly politicians (though certainly not opposed to these things). Even as we grieve the downward spiral of the values we believe to be good for a citizenry, don’t we also have something healing to offer those nauseated by the fall? Are we not beggars sharing with other beggars where to find Bread?

The United States is suffering from a frightening uptick in “deaths of despair,” deaths by drug overdose, alcoholism, and suicide. What is the Christian contribution to this troubled marketplace? “Wait, something good can be done with your despair. Your pain can receive a voice. We can sit together in that place between feeling the wound and reaching for potentially lethal relief.”

The Gospel of Christ can help us cope with the reality from which we all occasionally want to escape: we learn to see ourselves as the crucified Lord sees us, to make peace with our lives the way they are, and the spouses and families with whom we live. Christian contribution to coexistence involves a radical realigning with reality, humbly accepting an imminence that, by the grace of God, can be transformed or transcended.

We finish, then, with good news. To the dazed patrons of the marketplace of ideas comes the firm but gentle voice of Christian history: you are not your passions; your sin is not your future; you are not trapped; what you have done is not the sum total of who you are. Your problem, modern man, is not that you think too highly of yourself, but that of yourself you think too poorly.

Strict with ourselves, we are merciful with others. Surely curious to those who use the Bible as the weapon of choice in the culture wars is the fact that the evangelists did not quote Scripture extensively to potential converts (unless, perhaps, conversing with Jews). Tertullian put it succinctly: “No one turns to our literature who is not already Christian.” Instead, there just seemed to be something self-evidently beautiful about the pure Christian message. Why can the Christian peacefully coexist with the neighbor who is having trouble peacefully coexisting with him? He or she can do so because it’s not



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about forcing a conversion, but unveiling the beauty of Christ, who loved His enemies to the end.

The professor organizes an LGBTQ+ conference each year on his campus that celebrates deviant lifestyles. “We invite some Christian groups who are supportive of our lifestyles,” he said, “because we feel they represent the best of Christianity.”

For the first time in the conversation, the priest pushed back: “Is it possible that I, your ‘photo negative,’ could speak at your conference, affirm our common humanity, extend kindness to your group, call for an end to physical and rhetorical violence against those of your sexual preference, while also professing salvific ideas awkwardly contrary to your own, as the lot of us share a cup of tea afterward? Is it possible *that* could represent the best of Christianity?”

After thoughtful silence, the professor replied, “Yes, I suppose it could be.”

Fr. John Oliver

With the Mercy of God Almighty

JOHN X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

A

To My brothers,
Pastors of the Holy
Church of Antioch
My sons and daughters,
all over this Apostolic See
Beloved spiritual Brethren
and Children,

At the beginning of Great Lent, it is a good thing to reflect on how the Church leads the ascent of the soul to the threshold of the Holy Resurrection. In this procession that we have joined, the soul accompanies Christ to reach His resurrection and her own resurrection, with Christ and through Him. The Holy Church established Great Lent to say that a person is their own master as long as they lean on God. The Church established Lent to say that the defilement of the soul must be washed before entering the threshold of Resurrection. She established it to say that God is satisfied with the one who works to achieve self-purification, taming oneself to become bright and clean.

Fasting is charity, mercy, and feeling with the other. Above all, it is continuous giving. It is not just deprivation from food, but rather a symbol through which we say to our Creator God that we deprive ourselves to feed the poor who is beloved of You. Fasting is giving, yielding, and renunciation. Perhaps all its aspects are summed up in this point.

Fasting is forgiveness and forgiveness is a kind of renunciation, and thus it is giving to those whom God has not endowed with earthly money. Fasting is letting go of the anger in the soul and forgiving “those who trespassed against us” until the light of Christ irradiates in us so that we illuminate everyone else. The Holy Fathers have a saying that means: Let us not let the

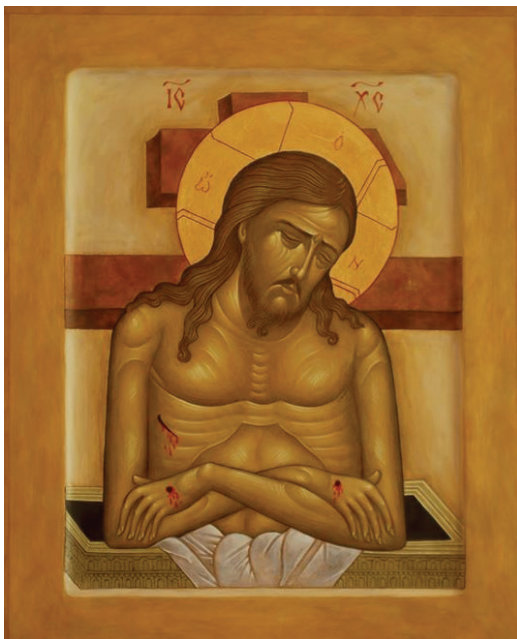
sun of this world set on our wrath, lest our soul be abandoned by the Sun of Justice and Righteousness, that is, Christ, to Him be the glory.

Fasting is a path by which we cleanse the depth of the soul with the balm of Christ. Fasting is a baptism by which we wash self-resentment in the font of repentance. Fasting is a Passover (Pascha), a transition from the routine of life to the spring of the souls. Fasting is a soul that falls on the knees in the Golgotha of Christ, to rise with Him again.

Fasting is the nourishment of the soul that draws from its mortification the flood of life in the Lord; it senses in its strife and ascetic struggle the triumph of the Victorious Lord.

As Christians of the Levant, we have inherited this practice since the dawn of Christianity. At a young age, we have learned how to associate our temporal life with our eternal life. We have learned, especially during this period of Lent, how our ringing bells knock at the door of our heart to worship the “Lord of Hosts.” We were acquainted with these bells calling us up, to gather in one voice around the Virgin in the Akathist Hymn.

Our bells and churches these days invite us to blossom with the spring of nature into the spring of a relationship with the loving Creator. They call us to shake off from the soul every obstacle to our entry into the nuptial room of Christ, the Bridegroom of the soul, to light the lamp of the souls like the wise virgins by vigilance, wisdom, love, longing, and discernment amid this world. They



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shake us to stand watching the richness of a love that has not relented from walking the path of suffering and the cross for the sake of humankind. In the end, they urge us to seek the dawn of the Resurrection of Jesus and to spread on his empty tomb wreaths of triumph and laurel leaves, in commemoration of his victory over death and the glad tidings of his glorious resurrection.

We raise our prayers for the peace of the whole world and for this wounded Levant, which is in travail from pain of its countries and its people from all walks of life. We raise our prayers so that the roaring of wars melts away before the cheering of peace. We extend our prayers for every beloved person ripped away from us by the cruelty of our days. We also pray for all those who departed in the hope of resurrection and eternal life. We pray for God to keep a watchful eye on our homelands, and to be protected from all takfirism, terrorism, kidnapping, violence, and distress.

We raise our prayers for the kidnapped, including our two brothers John Ibrahim and Paul Yazji, the Archbishops of Aleppo, who have been kidnapped since April 2013, under a deep and dubious international silence that grieves our souls and leaves us as indignant as towards the horrid kidnapping itself.

We ask your forgiveness, my brothers and beloved ones, in these blessed days, and may the Almighty Lord, who fasted first to guide us on this path, pour his everlasting mercies in all of your hearts, granting us the abundance of His divine blessings and anointing our whole lives by His holy presence, for He is blessed forever. Amen.

From our Patriarchate
in Damascus
February 23, 2020

برحمة الله تعالى

يوحنا العاشر

بطريرك أنطاكية وسائر المشرق للروم الأرثوذكس

إلى

إخوتي رعاة الكنيسة الأنطاكية المقدسة

وأبنائي وبناتي حيثما حلوا في أرجاء هذا الكرسي الرسولي

أيها الإخوة والأبناء الروحانيون الأعزاء،

ونحن في مستهل الأربعينية المقدسة، حري بنا أن نتأمل كيف تقود الكنيسة مراقي النفس إلى أعتاب القيامة المقدسة. نحن في ركب تسير فيه النفس مع المسيح لتبلغ معه وبه قيامته وقيامتها بها. وضعت الكنيسة المقدسة الصوم الأربعيني لتقول إن الإنسان هو سيد نفسه بالالتكال على الله. وضعت لتقول إن أدران النفس يجب أن تغسل قبل الولوج إلى أعتاب القيامة. وضعت لتقول إن الله يرتضي من ينقي الذات ويروضها ويقودها إليه نقية طاهرة.

الصوم صدقة ورحمة وإحساس بالآخر. وهو قبل كل شيء عطاء دائم. هو ليس مجرد حرمان من أطعمة لا بل رمزاً من خلاله نقول لخالقنا إننا نحرم عن أنفسنا لنضع في فم الفقير الذي أحببته. الصوم عطاء وتخل وترك. ولعل كل جوانبه تختزل ههنا. الصوم مغفرة والمغفرة ترك وهي بذلك عطاء من لم يهَبْه الله ما لا أرضياً. الصوم طرْحَ لغضب النفس وترك "لمن لنا عليه" حتى ينجلي فينا نور المسيح فنُضيي للجميع. يقول الآباء القديسون ما معناها: لا ندعُ شمس هذا العالم تغرب على غضبنا لئلا تهجُرْ نفسنا شمس العدل والبر أي المسيح له المجد.

الصوم مسيرة تغسل فيها عمق النفس بطيب المسيح. الصوم معمودية نرحض بها ضغائن الذات في جرن التوبة. الصوم فصيح وعبور نعبّر فيه وبه من روتين الحياة إلى ربيع النفوس. الصوم انحناءة نفس ترتمي في جلجلة المسيح لتقوم وتنهض به ومعه. الصوم ذخّر النفس التي تتلمس من إمانتها فيض الحياة بالرب وتتحنس في جهاداتها ونسكها ظَفَرُ الرب الغالب.

ونحن كمسيحيين مشرقين قد ورثنا هذه الممارسة منذ فجر المسيحية. وتعلمنا منذ الصغر كيف نربط حياتنا الوقتية بحياتنا الأزلية. لقد تعلمنا، وخصوصاً في هذه الفترة، كيف أن أجراسنا تُقرَع وتَدُقُّ باب قلبنا للرسيد لـ"رب القوات". لقد ألقناها نتاجينا حقلاً واحداً متحلقاً حول العذراء في مدانحها. أجراسنا وكنائسنا في هذه الأيام تدعونا لنزهر ومع ربيع الطبيعة ربيع علاقة مع الخالق المحب. تدعونا لننفّض عن النفس كل ما يعيق لنلج خدر المسيح خُتِنَ النفس ونوقد له كالعداري العاقلات سُرَجَ النفوس نباهةً وحكمةً ومحبةً وشوقاً وتمييزاً وسط دياجير هذا العالم. تهزُّنا لنقف ناظرين غنى محبة لم تأنف من أن تسلك حتى درب الألم والصليب من أجل الجيلة البشرية. وتحنُّنا وتدفعنا في آخر المطاف أن نتلمس فجر قيامة يسوع وأن ننثر على رسمه الفارغ أكاليل الظفر وأوراق الغار ذكرى لنصره على الموت ويشري لقيامته المجيدة.

نرفع صلاتنا من أجل سلام العالم أجمع وخير هذا الشرق الجريح الذي يئن لألم بلدانه وألم إنسانها من كل الأطياف. نرفع صلاتنا كي تذوب تهاويل الحروب في غمرة تهاليل السلام. نرفع صلاتنا من أجل كل حبيب أخذته عنا قسوة الزمن الحاضر. ونصلي لأجل كل من فارقنا على رجاء القيامة والحياة الأبدية. نصلي من أجل العين الساهرة على أوطاننا ومن أجل أن تصان من كل تكفير وإرهاب وخطفٍ وعنقٍ وضيقه حال.

نرفع صلاتنا من أجل المخطوفين ومنهم أخوانا المطرانان يوحنا إبراهيم وبولس يازجي مطرانا حلب المخطوفان منذ نيسان 2013 وسط صمت دولي مطبقٍ ومريبٍ يحز في نفسنا مثلما يحز الخطف المدان والمستنكر.

نستغفركم، إخوتي وأحبتني، في هذه الأيام المباركة ونسأل الرب القدير الذي صام أولاً ليرشدنا إلى هذا الطريق أن يديم مراحمه في قلوبكم جميعاً ويمنحنا من فيض نِعْمَةِ الإلهية ويمشج حياتنا جميعاً بحضوره القدوس، هو المبارك إلى الأبد آمين.

صدر عن مقامنا البطريركي بدمشق

بتاريخ الثالث والعشرين من شباط للعام ألفين وعشرين.

LIVING THE LITURGY — A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

“UNITE US ALL TO ONE ANOTHER”

PART 8 OF 10

FOLLOWING THE LORD’S PRAYER, THE PRIEST LIFTS UP THE CONSECRATED LAMB AND EXCLAIMS: “HOLY THINGS ARE FOR THE HOLY.” IN MY LAST ARTICLE, I RAISED THE QUESTION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY? IS OUR COMMUNITY HOLY? THE WORD HOLY MEANS SOMETHING THAT IS SET APART, SOMETHING THAT IS DEDICATED FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF SERVING GOD. AS DISCIPLES, WE ARE ALL CALLED TO BE HOLY. WE ARE DEDICATED IN OUR BAPTISM, AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, TO BE GOD’S. THIS IS SOLIDIFIED IN OUR CHRISMATION. WE ARE ANOINTED WITH CHRISM, ON OUR FOREHEAD, EYES, EARS, NOSE, MOUTH, HANDS, FEET, AND ON OUR BACK. THIS IS TO DEDICATE US TO GOD, TO MARK US AS GOD’S. WE MIGHT EVEN USE THE WORD BRANDED. IN OUR BAPTISM EACH OF US IS SEALED WITH THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHICH WE RECEIVE THROUGH OUR CHRISMATION. WITH THIS MARKING, WE ARE ORDAINED TO CHRIST’S PRIESTHOOD, A PRIESTHOOD OF SELF-OFFERING, WHICH IS REVEALED IN HIS LIFE AND IN HIS DEATH.

As I have written before, we practice this self-offering through community. Living in community is fundamental to our understanding of holiness. You may hear it said that a monastery is a holy place, and this is most definitely true, because monastics live in a community dedicated to God. Living in community means the denial of our own wants and desires, to focus on the needs of others. In community, we offer ourselves. We don’t find holi-

ness only in monastic communities, however. Holiness is also possible through marriage, and in the familial communities it forms. Living in that community still means denial of our own wants and desires. It teaches us to focus on the needs of others. We are constantly offering ourselves to the other members of our family. This is the foundation of marriage. It is why the bride and groom wear crowns.

In our liturgy, this is followed by the prayer of preparation for communion. In this, we recognize that we are not worthy to receive Christ’s Body and Blood, but are given this as a gift. This doesn’t mean we don’t need to prepare. We prepare ourselves regularly through confession and fasting, which are both opportunities to practice offering ourselves. In confession, we ask for forgiveness of our sins. We are given a spiritual father, too, who helps guide us along the path towards Christ, teaching us how to correct those errors

that keep us from Him. In fasting, we learn that there is a difference between *wants* and *needs*. We need basic things, but not everything we want is something that we need. These lessons prepare us for other opportunities to offer ourselves to others. The gift of the Eucharist strengthens us to offer ourselves to others and strengthens our community.

During the liturgy of St. Basil the Great, immediately after the priest asks the Holy Spirit to descend on the bread and wine so that it might become the Body and Blood of Christ, he asks God to “unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and the Cup in the communion of the one Holy Spirit.” Our community – which is the Body of Christ – is fed in our receiving the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ. This feeding unites the immediate community unites us with other Orthodox Christians around the world.

The Eucharist (which means *thanksgiving*) is the bread of *tomorrow*, which in the Lord’s Prayer is “our daily bread.” So the Divine Liturgy can be called a “foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.” This “bread of tomorrow” is the heavenly banquet of the Kingdom yet to come. When there’s a birthday cake or a special dessert for a big holiday, everyone wants to try a little bit before dinner. Sometimes, we are able to sneak a sample of the frosting. That bite tastes so good because it makes us excited for the dessert that we are going to enjoy later. The Eucharist, communion, is that taste ahead of time. This foretaste is given to everyone who has responded to the call to discipleship and has prepared themselves to receive this gift. We don’t have to sneak it, worried that our mom or grandmother will catch us.

When someone is baptized and chrismated, they immediately begin receiving communion the same way everyone else does. This process continues throughout that individual’s life. We are given an opportunity every Divine Liturgy. So the youngest and the oldest members of the Body of Christ all receive the Body of Christ the same way: remember, “one bread, one cup.” Since we never stop being disciples, this strengthening



continues throughout our lives, solidifying us as disciples of Christ. There is no expiration date on discipleship. Through this process, we also remain united to the community. One aspect of the tragedy of excommunication – when someone is no longer able to participate in the Eucharist – is that this person is cut off from the community.

If I am cut off from the community, how can I continue to learn how to offer myself? I can’t! Offering myself cannot happen in isolation: I need the community. We need each other.

Gregory Abdalah, D.Min.

About Baptism and Infant Baptism

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD REGARDING BAPTISM: HOW IT SHOULD BE DONE, AT WHAT AGE IT SHOULD BE DONE, AND WHAT IT EVEN SIGNIFIES AND MEANS WHEN IT IS DONE. ORTHODOX, LIKE ROMAN CATHOLICS, BELIEVE THAT IT IS ONE OF THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH, SPECIFICALLY THE SACRAMENT OF INITIATION, BY WHICH ONE BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. THEY SHARE THE COMMON PRACTICE OF BAPTIZING INFANTS, BUT DIFFER ON THE TIMING AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER TWO SACRAMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH IT: CONFIRMATION AND COMMUNION. CHRISTIANS IN THE PROTESTANT WORLD MAY SEE IT AS SACRAMENTAL, BUT MANY CONSIDER IT ONLY BE TO BE A SYMBOL OF THEIR PRIOR ACCEPTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST AS THEIR LORD AND SAVIOR. HENCE, THEY WILL ONLY BAPTIZE SOMEONE AFTER HE PROFESSES HIS FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND COMMITMENT TO HIM.

This short article is an attempt to explain the reasons why the Orthodox Church baptizes infants, how it is connected to confirmation (chrismation) and communion, and how it relates to our own physical birth into this world. I will also show why it is more than simply a symbol of the forgiveness of our sins, and is not done only after our individual acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

So first, what is baptism? Baptism is a birth, a spiritual birth into the life of Christ. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3; NKJV). This *born again*, or *born anew*, can also be translated from the Greek as *born from above*. After our physical birth into this world, baptism is our spiritual and second birth from above. Nicodemus wondered how this could happen. When he questions Jesus about being *born again* from his mother’s womb, Jesus corrects his thinking and says, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5). For us, there is direct connection between being *born of water and the Spirit*, and baptism and chrismation. *Baptism* in the original Greek means *immersion*. So, in baptism, we are immersed in the water three times, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). (Single immersion was condemned by the early Church councils and canons.) We are then anointed with chrism and receive the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit in chrismation (or confirmation). This also is revealed to us in the Scriptures. “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:21–22. See also Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30). We receive “the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15) and are “clothed with the garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, in baptism God adopts us as sons and daughters and, by our *putting on Christ*, He becomes our Father, and the

Church becomes our Mother (St. Cyprian of Carthage.) How is this realized?

Romans 6 puts all of this together for us. We read, “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (6:3–4). Our teaching is that the water itself is first a tomb, since we cannot live under water. As we are immersed in it, we die with Christ on the Cross and are buried with Him *into His death*. Then, as we are raised up out of the water, *raised from the dead*, the water becomes like a womb, and we are born from our Mother, the Church. She gives birth to us, which is our spiritual birth from above. We become a member of the Body of Christ, having now put on Christ. We are adopted by God and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are claimed as His child by *grace*, which Christ, the Son of God, is by *nature*.

Baptism and chrismation are even prefigured for us in the sixth chapter of Genesis, in the days of Noah and the ark. When God “saw the wickedness of man ... and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ... He was grieved in His heart” and said He would destroy man and the evil that was in the world (Genesis 6:5–8). This He did by the flood that cleansed the earth. The floodwaters were like a tomb, washing away the



sins of the world. Rising above the water, however, was the ark that Noah built, which is a type of the Church. Righteous Noah and his family were within the ark, and saved from this destruction. As the flood subsided, Noah sent out a dove, which ultimately brought back a leaf from an olive tree. The dove is a type of the Holy Spirit, and the leaf from the olive tree represents the olive oil which is used in the chrism with which we are anointed, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter writes about this in his First Letter:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine long-suffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (3:18–22).

Additionally, St. Cyprian mentions that when “God formed Adam of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7), this too prefigured baptism (new life) and chrismation (the breath of the Holy Spirit). As we say in the Orthodox Church, “Then was the type, now is its fulfillment.”

So, what about the belief that one should only be baptized into Christ after one professes faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? On one hand, this does make sense, for one would not immerse oneself into something if one did not believe in it, or accept it as true. Well, here is where we liken baptism, chrismation and communion to our physical birth and life in a family. When parents come together and bring a child into the world, they do so out of love for each other and love for the child to whom the wife has given birth. They did not ask the child if she wanted to be born! There is no way that they could, and no way that the child herself could agree to existing before the fact. The parents simply give her life. They give her a name, and she becomes a

part of their family. They feed their child from the beginning, and make decisions for that child. They also help her to grow in understanding and awareness of the new life that she has been given, so that she will one day accept it as something for which she is responsible, and manage that physical life on her own. The same is true in the Church. Believing parents know that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and their desire is to immerse their children into this life as soon as possible. Like their physical birth, infants (or young children) do not understand the full meaning of this spiritual birth either. Nonetheless, they are born anew into Christ; they receive the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, by which they are named as Christian. They are then fed with the Body and Blood of Christ from the very beginning for their own nourishment and growth on the road to salvation. There is no waiting until they are seven years old for their first communion, nor for their confirmation at age twelve, because we would not wait to feed our children nor wait to confirm them as members of our family. It is the responsibility of the parents and godparents to guide their children into their own understanding and awareness of their life in Christ, and into their own commitment to it, so that they can be responsible for it as they grow older, and continue to manage it on their own.

Now, after a child grows up, if he at some point goes astray and falls away from his life in Christ, and begins to live a life of sin and debauchery, but one day, like the Prodigal Son, “comes to himself” and realizes his error, he may return to the Church. He does so not to be rebaptized, but to confess his or her sins in the sacrament of confession, and be received back into the Church through the sacrament of holy communion. As the early Nicene Creed of the Second Ecumenical Council (381 AD) states: “I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.” This is in accord with the “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5. Baptism is a kind of birth, and if we have been baptized, we have already been born, physically and spiritually. We are not re-baptized if we come back and recommit our life to Christ, just as we are not (and cannot be) re-born physically if we desire to recommit our life to uprightness, decency and responsibility. We simply recommitment ourselves to follow Christ.

Some may remind us that there are no indications in the New Testament that infants were



baptized. It is true that infants are not mentioned specifically as being baptized, but there are many instances where *households* were baptized. The household of Cornelius was baptized (Acts 10). When St. Peter was explaining this to the Apostles and brethren in Judea, he told them how men from Caesarea came to him with word from Cornelius, who himself heard the angel say to him, “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your *household* will be saved” (Acts 11:13–14). There is the *household* of Lydia (Acts 16:15), and the jailer and *all his family* (Acts 16:33) who were baptized. There is the *household* of Stephanas that St. Paul baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14). In St. Peter’s speech in Acts 2, we read that the people were “cut to the heart,” and asked what they should do. Peter replied, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit [and here we have baptism and chrismation]. For the promise is to you *and to your children*, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (2:38–39). St. Paul even mentions how Timothy received his faith from his grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:5), and then reiterates this later (3:14–15), when he tells Timothy how he should continue in that which

he received *from his childhood*.

Again, this is also prefigured for us in Genesis, 17:9 and following, where God gives to Abraham the covenant of circumcision, instructing him that on the eighth day, every male child should be circumcised, “as a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” Circumcised as an infant at eight days old! This covenant is now fulfilled in baptism, “for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

So, all who come to be baptized into Christ are baptized into His death and resurrection, not only to receive the pardon and forgiveness of their sins, but also to be adopted as children of God, and to become “members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19), which is His Church, the Body of Christ, for salvation and eternal life. Jesus told His disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16). Is this call only for adults? It cannot be. For, when infants were brought to Jesus, He said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16).

Christopher Holwey, M.Div.

The Ave Maria House

Khouria Zoe Kavanaugh

Remember that awesome article by Frederica Mathewes-Green in the December 2007 issue of *The WORD*? She did a great job discussing why, in mainstream society, men are falling away from Christianity, but how in Orthodoxy, there are at least as many men as women. Some of the explanations cited for this difference are that Orthodoxy has a goal, lacks sentimentality, focuses on Jesus Christ, maintains historical continuity, is balanced, and is based on male leadership. It is so true that American society does not encourage the formation of strong, godly men. I cannot tell you how many mothers I have talked to who are concerned for their sons at that critical period from high school and into their young adulthood. There are a range of concerns, but mostly have to do with the young men needing a transition from their childhood home to

being on their own in the godless college or work atmosphere. My husband, Fr. Peter Kavanaugh, and I had the opportunity to address this issue this past winter.

The Ave Maria House exists as a fun, safe, and wholesome atmosphere for young men transitioning from life with their parents to being on their own and finding their own structure as grown men. Orthodox young men from around the country, or outside the U.S., come and either go to college at our local, four-year university, Midwestern State University (MSU) or the two-year Junior College (Vernon College), or take a gap year and intern with Fr. Peter. Alternatively, some young men choose to live at Ave Maria House after they have graduated from college and are starting their life in the workforce.

Close by Ave Maria house is the small, yet active parish of St. Benedict of Nursia Orthodox Church, with services on Sunday, Wednesday, and Saturday, as well as weekly Bible studies and spirituality classes. Ave Maria House itself has three rooms for young men to rent. My mature Aunt lives in the master area, and is the house mother. She ensures hygiene standards, and that the environment remains respectful and respectable. The three men share a bathroom, and all share the kitchen, living area, and beautiful gardens. For those interested in MSU, it is under two miles away, whereas Vernon Junior College, is a mile away. Those interested in the gap year mentorship program would shadow Fr. Peter in his ministerial duties, and assist in our classical co-operative school for children ages 5–12, in which students learn Latin, Classical Music, Gardening, Humanities, Science, and other pillars of Christian education. The intern would also be invited, but not required, to learn liturgics and Gregorian chanting, and attend other church sponsored functions, like monthly cookouts to raise money for the Pregnancy Center, the weekly Skeptics and Seekers Round Table, and the bi-monthly adult Classical Book Club. Fr. Peter leads regular prayer services, as well as young adult get-togethers over coffee or around the fire pit at Ave Maria House. We have created the environment that we both longed for while we attended college, an environment where young men can experience the sweetness of being on their own, and yet have positive interactions with peers and elders.

Even if this ministry has no immediate application in your life, it concerns an important problem we all should address: young men face a crucial period of development during their young adulthood, where missteps can have lasting repercussions for their financial, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Few scaffolds are in place to bridge the gap between living at home and

living alone, and many young men passively fall in with peers who do not support their true freedom in Christ. First, please pray for Ave Maria House, and all young men in this critical period of development. Next, I encourage you to reach out to the young men in your parish. Have them over for dinner and conversation. Talk with them about life's big questions and share nuggets of wisdom gleaned from your mistakes and triumphs. Tell them your stories, and through those questions and stories and nuggets, you will bless them to learn how to think and care. These days, conversation is a lost art, as we sit in the dark, alone on our tablets, phones, and computers. Have a hand in helping young men discover who they are outside of their families. Help these young men to have friends of various ages (that is, mentors and peers), so that they can see the vanity of the world for what it is. Combat the secular culture with your friendship, and help our young men become Orthodox Christian leaders full of focus and purpose.

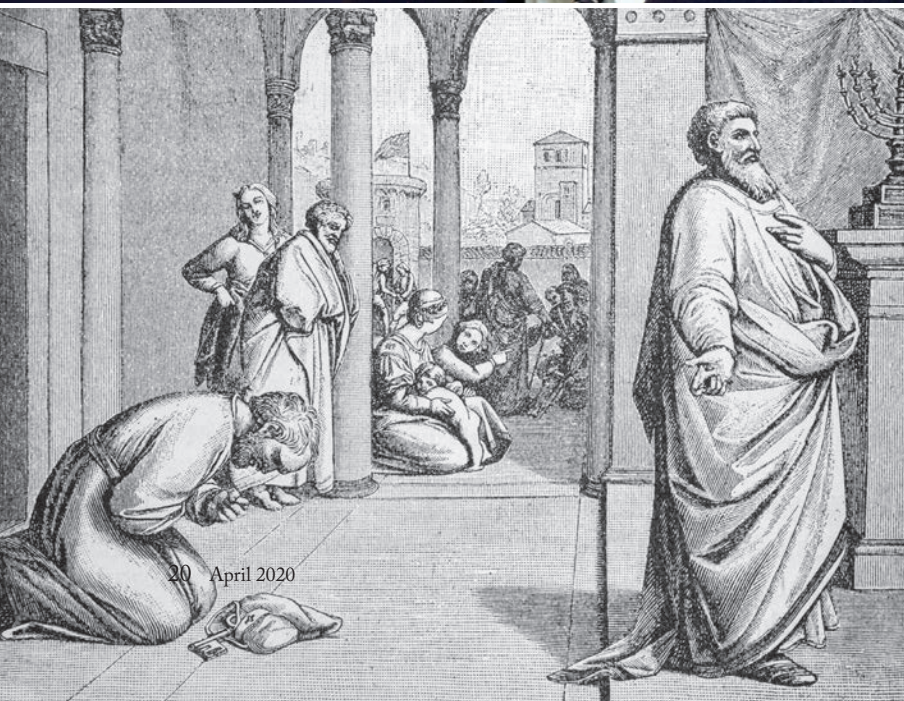
For those of you who are interested in Ave Maria House, please contact Khouria Zoe Kavanaugh (zoe.hcnlab@gmail.com).



Pride or Humility – What About Us?

A HOMILY GIVEN AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. Andrew Harmon



Teddy Roosevelt’s daughter said that, although she greatly loved her father, she thought he was extremely proud and had a very large ego. She said that he always wanted to be the center of attention wherever he went. If he was at a baptism, he wished he could be the baby. If he attended a wedding, he wanted to be the bride. And if went to a funeral ... he would have preferred to be the corpse! Now that is a strong ego!¹

In order to be bi-partisan, let me now switch to a Democratic president Lyndon Baines Johnson. He grew up in the Texas hill country. His family was not wealthy, but was locally powerful – and very, very proud. They were known for how they strutted when they walked. In fact, it was said that even when they were seated, they strutted while in a chair! I don’t know how you strut sitting down, but I guess the Johnson family managed it somehow. Now that is proud!²

And there is a very proud man in today’s Gospel lesson from Luke 18, for the Sunday of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. In this passage, our Lord Jesus Christ tells a short parable about two men who went to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray. The first man was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a very strict and very correct religious group. They know the Old Testament Jewish faith very well. At least on the surface, they followed it very strictly. Most of them were very proud of that! Hear how the Pharisee’s prayer in the Temple is described in the parable. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess’” (Luke 18: 11–12). It’s a prayer of pride. He thanks God not for how good God is, but for how good he himself is!

The second man was a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated men. They collected taxes for the

oppressors of Judea, the hated Roman Empire. And most of them were cheats: they skimmed a lot of money off the top of the taxes they collected. So most of them were very wealthy, which made them even more despised! When this tax collector came to pray, we can imagine people at the entrance to the Temple grounds saying, “What is a wicked man like that coming here for? He shouldn’t even be allowed to be at the Temple!”

But the tax collector came for a good reason: to repent of his sins and beg for forgiveness from God. He came to change. His little prayer is recorded in Luke 18:13: “And the tax collector, standing far off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” The tax collector knew he was not worthy enough even just to look up to heaven. So he lowered his head and begged for mercy.

What were the results of the two men’s prayers? Jesus tells us plainly in verse 14: “I tell you this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other [the Pharisee].” The tax collector was justified due to how he prayed: his sins were forgiven and his soul was saved. The Pharisee was *not* justified by how he prayed. He was lost in his sinfulness and damned.

So where do we Orthodox Christians fit into this picture? If we were going to be plugged into this story, who are we? Well, at least in some ways, we are the Pharisee. In the context of Christianity we, in many ways, fill the same position as did the Pharisees in the context of ancient Judaism. That’s not necessarily all bad: there were good Pharisees! We read in the Book of Acts how lots of Pharisees at the very beginning of our Church’s history became believers in Christ. And, of course, there is that most famous Pharisee of all, St. Paul.

So how are we and the Pharisees similar? They had the fulness of the Old Testament Faith, at least on the surface. They knew the teachings of the Old Testament very well, inside and out. We Orthodox (well, at least some Orthodox!) know the Bible, the Church Fathers, the Saints, and true theology well, inside and out.

The Pharisees were known for sticking to the old ways no matter what. They were very big on tradition. Remember Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*? Tevye’s rabbinic Judaism is a descendant of the Pharisaic tradition, especially in its love for – “Tradition!” That’s our big word, too, and I bet if you go

to the play and hear Tevye’s great song about it, that you’re tempted to stand up and holler “Tradition!” right along with Tevye!

The Pharisees’ love of tradition, all of their strictness, was good in many ways. But then something went very wrong. They knew by heart the prophecies in the tradition, in the Old Testament, about the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, but when He finally appeared in the world, most of the Pharisees blew it very badly. They didn’t recognize Him! They had gotten so self-centered, so proud, that they lost sight of God Himself. When God, in the person of Jesus Christ, walked right up to them, they didn’t know Him! And they didn’t like Him! We can see the root of this tragedy in the Pharisee’s prayer in the parable. His prayer isn’t even about God! The prayer is about how good he himself, the Pharisee, is! He was so caught up in himself that he lost his soul.

So what should we do? We are in some ways like the Pharisees, having great knowledge of the truth, having the richness of tradition, and so forth. Does that mean we are spiritually doomed, as so many of the Pharisees turned out to be? Should we get rid of much of our spiritual heritage? Modify and water down our ancient Christian Faith? Should we be careful to not be *too* strict, to not function in such a way so as to be called “old-fashioned”? Should we try to blend in more?

If our parish wanted to make such changes I guess this year is the ideal time. We’re getting ready to move into our new church, so it’s already a time of big changes. I suppose we could decide to *really* make some changes, to become more like the popular mega-churches. As construction nears its conclusion, we could ask our contractor to install a big screen in the new temple so we can put up the words of the hymns and prayers on it. And instead of installing our planned iconostas we could set up music stands and amplifiers in front and get a worship band ready to go. Those of you who play guitar could start practicing already! We could talk less about the saints, drop the liturgy for a simpler service, and, in general, dump lots of tradition and “go modern.”

No, I don’t think we’ll do that! What we really need to do is to keep our traditions, rejoice in the richness of all God has given us, and keep working at bringing more people into God’s Church. At the same time, we need to be more like the tax

1. Margaret McMillan, *The War That Ended Peace* (Random House, 2014), p. 20.
2. David Pietrusza, *1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon*, (Union Square, 2008), p. 19.
3. Alexander Golitsyn, *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain* (St. Tikhon Seminary Press, 1999), p. 142.

collector. For what did the tax collector do? Standing in the middle of the beautiful Temple, standing in the midst of all the rich Old Testament tradition, he prayed, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” That should be us!

We Orthodox really need to pray for mercy, because on Judgement Day I think it will be harder for us than for other people. For we, like the Pharisees, have it all: the total fullness of God’s truth. We have the full Christian gospel which has been handed down to us for two thousand years. Thank God, He has given us so much! And what did Christ say in the gospels? “To whom much is given, much will be required.” May God have mercy on us! We have it all – very much indeed! So Christ’s words should hit home to us: “To whom much is given, much will be required.”

Therefore, our prayer should be the tax collector’s prayer: “God, be merciful!” We are going to need lots of mercy when we stand before the throne of God! It won’t help on that day to say to God – “Lord, I had all the fullness of true Christianity” – because God may ask us, “What did do you do about it?” Like the tax collector, we need mercy!

In the late Twentieth Century, there was a priest-monk on Mt. Athos in Greece named Father Tikhon. If you went to a liturgy he was going to preside over, you had to be ready for an extra-long service. This wasn’t because he was adding anything to the service that made it longer. It was because there were often “interruptions” in the service. Sometimes, right during the liturgy, Father Tikhon would just stop and stand there a while in silence. Most commonly, this would happen during the Great Entrance. He would just stop singing and stop walking and stand in place holding the *diskos* and chalice, sometimes for even half an hour. Then he would suddenly resume the service. He was such a humble and quiet man that he wouldn’t talk about what happened, until one day someone got him to speak about it. He said that sometimes during the services an angel would come and bring him right up to God’s throne in heaven, where he would worship for a while! After a while, he would say, “Lord, they are waiting below for me to continue the liturgy.” Then the angel would bring him back down so the liturgy could continue!

Think of how amazingly pure and holy Father Tikhon must have been! Yet, he considered himself a horrible sinner. He wept continually for his

sins. There was always a handkerchief in his hand, soaked with his tears of repentance! He wore a simple wooden pectoral cross. The wood of his cross was warped, because it was always wet with his tears.³ If someone like Father Tikhon continually prayed for mercy, how much more should people like us do so? How many tears have we been crying?

To conclude: we Orthodox Christians in some ways are like the Pharisees. We “have it all,” spiritually speaking. God has given us every good, spiritual thing. Let us not, however, be like the Pharisee in the parable: proud and arrogant. His soul was lost. Instead, let us be like the tax collector: very aware of his sins, and crying out to God for mercy. His soul was saved.

God has given us the fullness of truth, the full gospel of Jesus Christ. We have it all, and thus face a stricter judgement than others who only have part of the truth. So do not pray like the Pharisee did (“Thank you, God, for how good I am”). Instead, pray like the tax collector (“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”).

Fr. Andrew Harmon

Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?

The Department of Missions and Evangelism is now offering domestic mission trips for the summer of 2020. For our launch, we have partnered with Fr. Paul Abernathy and his awesome team at The Neighborhood Resilience Project in the hill district of Pittsburgh. Learn more about what Fr. Paul is doing by watching his TEDx Talk in Pittsburgh at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcbu58p0fbA&feature=emb_logo

We have two sessions scheduled for July. Each session will provide an opportunity for training and service. Volunteers will return home with some ideas of how they might be catalysts for change in their own communities. Each “trip” is 6 days, with 2 days of travel, and 4 workdays, beginning with arrival on Wednesday and ending with departure the following Tuesday. The cost for food, lodging (at Duquesne University), and Catalyst training is only \$400 per person! For other details, including dates, fund-raising ideas, and registration, go to www.james218.com.

Please share this opportunity in the church bulletin and with your congregation by e-mail. If you have any questions, contact Dn. Adam Lowell Roberts at 615-971-0000.



“FROM THESE STONES” DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM Opportunities for Development

Orthodox Parenting

The Department of Missions and Evangelism presented a webinar conference in February 2020 about Orthodox parenting. Among the presenters were Father Patrick Cardine, Dr. Philip Mamalakis, Fr. John Finley, Elissa Bjeletich, Jamil Samara, Steve Christoforou, Fr. David Smith and Bishop John. Thousands have already seen it! You can view it at <https://www.youtube.com/adamlowellrobertsfilms>

Servant Leadership Retreats

Servant Leadership Retreats are an initiative of the Orthodox Christian Leadership Initiative (OCLI), in partnership with St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary (SVOTS). The OCLI is developing an Intensive Program in Servant Leadership.



This program is for laity and clergy who currently serve their local churches in a variety of roles, or who are interested in serving the ministry of their parishes. The upcoming retreats will serve as pilots for the Servant Leadership curriculum.

The Servant Leadership Retreats are being held in **Los Angeles, California on May 16 and in Washington, D.C. on June 27.**

Participants can expect the following outcomes:

- Achieve a better understanding of Christian

leadership as doing the will of God in personal, community, church, and secular environments;

- Become a better leader at home, in the neighborhood, at one’s job, and in the parish, witnessing to Christ in loving service to others, and helping to bring about his Kingdom;
- Learn to attract and inspire young adults to assume increased positions of responsibility in the Church;
- Adopt a stewardship approach to life, receiving gifts from God, and giving generously to the needy;
- Acquire a better understanding of ministerial leadership and the co-leadership of laity and clergy;
- Learn to work together strategically in a parish, seeking to be the “city on a hill” that witnesses to Christ and works in the Holy Spirit;
- Master the everyday, managerial aspects of community work: meetings, councils, resolving conflict, stewardship, ethics, and finances.

More information and registration for each retreat are available on the OCLI website (<https://www.orthodoxservantleaders.com/events.html>).

About OCLI

The Orthodox Christian Leadership Initiative exists to nurture and empower Orthodox Christian servant leadership. It is a national initiative to increase generosity, servant leadership, and social outreach by clergy and laity of all jurisdictions working together nationally, regionally, and locally. Originating from the **Orthodox Vision Foundation** (<https://orthodoxvisionfoundation.org/>) and its annual **Orthodox Advanced Leadership Conferences**, the Orthodox Christian Leadership Initiative was established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2018.



An Enlivening Spiritual Discipline

by Andy Geleris

Teaching about tithing in our parishes has the potential to produce spiritual growth and blessing in the Orthodox Church. Many loving and godly priests and bishops, however, are reluctant to preach on this topic, because they do not want to add to the financial burdens of their people. They also may be concerned that teaching about tithing would be misunderstood as an indication that they care more about their peoples' money than their spiritual welfare. Such concerns, however, overlook the reasons God has blessed His people with the discipline of tithing. This oversight has primarily resulted from the scarcity of Orthodox literature addressing the topic. Our greatest monastics wrote extensively on a number of important spiritual topics, such as mindfulness, prayer, fasting, love, and even personal generosity. Yet they composed almost nothing about financial stewardship relevant to people living in the world. This is understandable, because upon entering the monastic life they had disposed of their belongings.

In the early centuries of the Church many luminaries, such as John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and Cyril of Alexandria, discussed financial issues with great prophetic and spiritual power. Since that time, however, Church leaders have provided relatively little further commentary on these subjects. Undoubtedly this has been in large part because governmental support of churches, educational institutions, and charitable organizations in the Byzantine Empire, and in predominantly Orthodox countries, created little urgency

for discussing personal Christian financial management. More recently the Greek and Antiochian Churches under the "Turkish yoke," and the Russian and Eastern European Churches under Soviet domination, had to worry far more about simply surviving than teaching about tithing or fundraising.

Despite this historical lacuna of financial instruction, the Church has nonetheless emphatically retained the tradition of almsgiving as one of the three pillars of Orthodox spirituality, along with prayer and fasting. Among the triad of "prayer, fasting, and almsgiving," however, we discuss the prayer and fasting far more frequently than we do almsgiving. A major reason for this is that in English *alms* is an antiquated word with an extremely narrow meaning. We often think of it as giving a few dollars to a homeless man by the side of the road, or to a Lenten parish collection for the poor, perhaps using money saved through fasting. Contrast this severely constricted understanding of almsgiving to the expansive view we have of prayer and fasting. We view prayer as encompassing a wide variety of activities, such as morning and evening prayers, participating in liturgical services, the Jesus prayer, and even spiritual reading. We see fasting as including not only dietary restriction but resisting a variety of sins such as gossip, envy, and self-indulgence.

A similarly expansive view of the spiritual discipline of almsgiving would include not only giving to the poor, but each and every personal and parish financial decision concerning how we earn, save, and spend our money. While the reasons why we have neglected frequent discussions of almsgiving are understandable, faithfulness to the Orthodox Tradition demands that we confront the fact that this neglect seriously misrepresents the enormous emphasis the Gospel places on attending to financial matters for the sake of our spiritual growth. Jesus taught far more frequently and extensively about money than

He did about the topics of prayer, fasting, love, and forgiveness, to which we direct so much of our energy and attention. Not only the Gospel, but even the current liturgical consciousness of the Church continues to reflect this emphasis. In 2019 more than twenty percent of Sunday Gospel readings addressed significant financial topics, and on several other Sundays the Gospel readings had significant financial components.

This astonishing, indeed breathtaking, divergence between our contemporary teaching priorities and the teaching priorities of the Gospel has occurred because our reasons for talking about money are not those of Jesus. We talk about finances because we care about money. Jesus talked about finances because He cared about people. When we do talk about money in church it is typically in the context of offering people the opportunity to consider prayerfully giving on behalf of various worthy causes, such as supporting the parish budget, providing scholarships for our young people to attend camp, acquiring a new icon, constructing a new building, or even helping the poor. When simple solicitations do not suffice to raise adequate money, we may attempt to raise funds through bake sales or ethnic festivals. For larger financial needs we often import fundraising techniques used by worldly charitable nonprofit organizations such as capital campaigns, matching gift programs, celebrity banquets featuring prominent bishops or famous Orthodox personalities, thermometers in the narthex of our churches, raffles, and even "silent auctions." While the causes we seek to support may be both very worthy and spiritually important, these fundraising techniques are entirely worldly, because they focus primarily on raising money. They are "money-centric."

Jesus had an entirely different interest in His many financial discussions. He never solicited donations, nor did He fundraise on behalf of any cause, no matter how worthy, even for the poorest of the poor. Always and without exception, His intense, single-minded focus in every financial discussion was the significance of money for the heart of the person or group of people with whom He was speaking. His financial discussions were entirely "person-centric," not "money-centric." For example, the reason Jesus told the rich young ruler to distribute all his money to the poor was entirely to attempt to remove a significant obstacle in this man's heart that prevented

him from finding eternal life. Helping the poor had nothing to do with this request. In the story of the sheep and goats concerning the Final Judgment in Matthew 25, once again Jesus did not ask people to give because the poor needed help. He urged people to give for the sake of their own souls, so that they themselves would be able to "enter eternal life." Every one of the parables Jesus told about money likewise emphasized the importance of handling money rightly in order to have a good relationship with God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus summarized His entire teaching on finances. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he



will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Wesley Wilmer observed about this passage, "Scripture consistently reminds us that if Christ is not first in the use of our money, He is not first in our lives. Our use of possessions demonstrates materially our spiritual status" (*Revolution in Generosity*, p. 25).

Teaching about tithing in church is one of the most effective things we could do both to emulate and stimulate a "person-centric" approach to finances. In order to do this, however, we must first overcome some of the serious misconceptions about the tithe that prevail in our midst. Many people see the tithe as simply an Old Testament,

God-ordained “tax” on the people of God intended to support the work of the Temple. They then assume that it has a similar function in the Church today. This is precisely the reason many loving priests are so reluctant to discuss this issue. They love their people too much to “tax” them. As properly understood, however, the tithe has nothing to do with any kind of fundraising “tax,” even for the support of extremely important and worthy church ministries. It is a sacred gift to us from God intended entirely for great blessing. Correctly understanding the tithe will help create the salvific and life-giving “person-centric” financial approach of Jesus as a replacement for the spiritually destructive, “money-centric” approach to finances which now prevails in many of our churches.

I will discuss the profound spiritual meaning of the tithe from two different angles. In this article, I will review how the tithe is sequentially presented to us in the Old Testament in a way that reveals its three important purposes, beginning with the first mention of the tithe in Genesis and concluding with the final mention in Malachi. We will see that the tithe is a means to express gratitude to God, to participate in a holy act of *perichoresis* with God, and to experience His blessing in our lives.

In a second article to come, I will turn to the New Testament, where we will see that in the Gospels Jesus affirms the ongoing importance of the tithe for Christians, and that it is not just an Old Testament legalism. The second aspect of the tithe I will discuss is its relation to parish finances. I will emphasize that parish finances should accurately reflect the priorities of the kingdom of God. I will then present a series of reasons why individuals should give the tithe primarily to their local parish, with additional charitable giving being done above and beyond that amount.

So we begin with the Old Testament. The first two times the tithe is mentioned in the Bible, it is clearly presented as a means to express thanksgiving to God. For reasons that will become clearer later, it is worth

noting that the Greek word for “thanksgiving” is *eucharist*, the same word we often use for the Divine Liturgy. The first scriptural mention of the tithe occurs in Genesis 14, which records the capture by King Chedorlaomer of several kings with their people, including Abram’s nephew Lot, and a vast quantity of possessions. When Abram heard about what had happened, he mobilized an army that defeated King Chedorlaomer. Abram not only rescued Lot, but also acquired enormous riches. Upon returning home Abram was met by “the priest of God Most High,” Melchizedek, who then did two things. First, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine” (Genesis 14:18). This bread and wine are a foreshadowing of the bread and wine of our own Divine Liturgy, as stated in Cyprian of Carthage’s letter to Cecil: “Also in the priest Melchizedek we see prefigured the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Lord... that is, bread and wine, to wit, (Jesus’) body and blood.”¹ The second thing Melchizedek did was to pronounce a divine benediction on Abram. “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand” (Gen. 18:19–20). Out of deep gratitude and thanksgiving to God for all that He had done for him, Abram, “gave him (the priest of God, Melchizedek) a tithe of all” (Gen. 14:20).

The second mention of the tithe in the Scriptures occurs in the context of Jacob’s journey to Haran in order to find a wife. *En route*, he stopped at Bethel, where he had the famous dream in which he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder to heaven. Towards the end of this dream the Lord stood above the ladder and spoke great promises to Jacob:

“I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.... Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Gen. 28:13–17).

In response to these promises “Jacob made a vow,

saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. . . and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You’” (Gen 28:20–22). Just like Abram, Jacob sees the tithe as a way to express thanksgiving to God.

Expressing such gratitude to God is an extremely important matter in our relationship with God. Lack of gratitude to God, or to any person who does us good, is a terrible sin. This may be part of why the description of the Divine Liturgy as *Eucharist* is so significant. Many of us have had the occasional, unpleasant experience of going out of our way to bless another person in some way, only to find that they never expressed any gratitude in return. In a casual relationship such ingratitude may be relatively easy to forgive, but it will certainly make it much less likely that we ever bless that person again. However, ingratitude in close personal relationships, such as between a parent and an adult child, or a husband and wife, can often poison the relationship to some degree, leading to a cooling of love, as one person or the other feels taken for granted, even rejected. Frequently, expressions of gratitude to one another are essential to maintaining the warmth of any close relationship. The same is true in our relationship with God. One of the most spiritually damaging things any of us can do in our spiritual journeys is to take for granted His enormous kindness to us. Both the Psalms and the Divine Liturgy are full of expressions of praise and gratitude to God. As I have already mentioned, too, this issue of gratitude to God is so important that the Divine Liturgy itself is often called the Eucharist.

Both Abram and Jacob gave their tithes before the institution of the Mosaic Law. Therefore, these offerings had nothing to do with liturgical obedience nor were they in any way efforts to solicit any kind of blessing from God. They were entirely concrete expressions of gratitude to God in response to His goodness to them. This is the same meaning giving the tithe can have for us.

The third mention of the tithe in the Old Testament reveals the second point I want to make about the tithe: that it is holy. Almost at the end of the book of Leviticus, Moses wrote, “Now all the tithe of the land, whether seed of the land or fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord” (27:30). A couple of verses later there is an additional reference

to the tithe of animals, such as oxen and sheep, which are also considered to be “holy.” The Old Testament Hebrew meaning of the word *holy* is “to be set apart for a special purpose.” The New Testament word for *holy* also has the meaning of being “set apart by (or for) God” (Strong’s *Concordance*). God Himself is the ultimate Holy One, constantly worshipped by the angelic, heavenly choir, who sing, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:3). We echo this heavenly worship in our Trisagion hymn: “Holy God, Holy Might, Holy Immortal.” At the burning bush God told Moses, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). The feasts of God are called to be “holy convocations” (Lev. 23:37). Even the furnishings of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem are called “holy” (1 Kings 8:4) because they are to be used where the *shekinah* glory of God dwelt in “the inner sanctuary of the temple ... the Most Holy Place...” (1 Kings 8:6).

The Body and Blood of Christ that we receive at communion are holy. The tithe, too, is holy. The fact that the tithe is holy, set apart for God, may surprise many of us. We are accustomed to believe that the money we earn through our jobs is entirely our own, that we are free to spend as we wish. While it certainly is true that we must work hard to earn money, often it is good to retain some humility even about this ability to work. Many people are unable to work because of a variety of physical or cognitive disabilities, caused by illness, traumatic accident, or even congenital abnormality. These include people with conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, Down’s syndrome, strokes, brain infections, or head injuries from a car accident. In many parts of the world, poor economies with high unemployment rates make gainful employment impossible. Severe famines may force some mothers and fathers to watch their children starve. We must never take for granted that we live in a prosperous country where we can work and earn adequate, or even abundant remuneration. Finally, the intellectual capacity often required to do a good job at work, or to create great wealth, is largely an inherited genetic trait. One of the richest men in the world, Warren Buffett, has stated on several occasions that one of the most important factors in his success has been simply “luck.” In Deuteronomy, Moses emphasizes the providential nature of our ability to earn adequate and especially good incomes.

“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God . . . when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God. . . . Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:11–18).

We have seen the scriptural linkage between the first biblical mention of the tithe and the bread and wine foreshadowing communion offered by Melchizedek. There are two specific ways in which they are linked. First, both the tithe and the Eucharist are gifts that God first gives us, that we only secondarily return to Him. Second, both of these gifts produce enormous blessing and spiritual transformation in our lives. The central act of all Christian worship, the Divine Liturgy, itself epitomizes the linkage I am discussing. Prior to the Liturgy, the people of God bring an offering of ordinary bread and wine to the *Proskomedia*. This bread and wine are the product of great investments of hard work and time. Farmers spend long hours preparing soil and planting grain. After months of waiting, they harvest wheat, which is then ground into flour and baked into bread. In the same way, wine is the product of many years of nurturing and pruning grape vines. Once the grapes are picked, it often takes years for skilled vintners to create fine wine. It is crucial to note, however, that the extraordinary efforts of farmers, bakers, wine growers, and vintners would all be fruitless without God’s provision of the proper nutrients of the soil and the light from the sun. Thus, the bread and wine that we ultimately bring to the *Proskomedia* are actually a synergistic product of the hard work of man and the provision of God.

The importance of this synergy is

powerfully proclaimed during the Liturgy itself by the prayer of the priest at the elevation of the Holy Gifts. “Thine own of Thine own,” the priest prays, “we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all.” Thus, a profound spirit of mutual reciprocity and generosity animates the entire process of both the giving and receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ. This synergy is entirely parallel to what occurs with the tithe. From the income we earn through both our hard work and God’s provision of health, jobs, and intellect, we take a “holy” tenth and return it to God with the same “eucharistic” gratitude that characterized the tithes of Abram and Jacob. It would, therefore, be entirely appropriate for each of us to offer our tithes to God with the same liturgical prayer used to elevate the bread and wine, “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee.” Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra said, “Prayer is our inclusion in the life of God, our *perichoresis* in God.”² The elder’s use of the Greek word *perichoresis* evokes an extremely powerful trinitarian concept. It was most fully developed in patristic theology by John of Damascus to explain the interrelationship of the three Persons of the Trinity as they remain one in essence. “Perichoresis or mutual indwelling, then, is the uniting of the one *ousia* with the three *hypostaseis* without confusion, blending, mingling, composition, change, or division of substance.”³ Therefore, if the holy elder Aimilianos feels comfortable saying that in prayer we can move towards perichoresis in God, perhaps we can say something equally bold concerning the tithe. The “holy” tithe is far more than a simple financial transaction. It is a beautiful act of mutual divine and human giving and receiving, a *perichoresis*.

After the third mention of the tithe at the end of Leviticus, there are many subsequent mentions of the tithe in the Law of Moses concerning how the tithe is to be given and used. The final mention of the tithe in the Old Testament occurs in the book of Malachi. It emphasizes the theme of God’s blessing on the tithe. Through the words of His prophet Malachi, God Himself speaks to His people: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this . . . if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). That the tithe is “holy” already suggests that it can manifest a powerful blessing in our lives. The words and actions of a priest, holy water, and Holy Communion

all have the potential to bless. Unfortunately in contemporary Orthodoxy, fear has arisen that any discussion of God’s blessing on tithing will cause people to think that this is the so-called “prosperity gospel.” This heresy asserts that if one gives money to God, He that will then make one wealthy in return. It is heretical because it takes a few verses of the Bible out of context and ignores the clear teaching of the Scripture as a whole, and holy tradition, that the purpose of life is not gaining worldly wealth, but growing in likeness to God. This teaching also ignores the many scriptural warnings in the Gospels, and also in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, that “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9).

In order to understand the issue of God’s blessing on tithing, I would like once again to see this issue within the context of the Divine Liturgy. We approach the Liturgy to do the work of worshipping our infinitely worthy God. In the midst of our worship, however, God, whose very nature is to overflow with generous lovingkindness, blesses us with the gift of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, we who have come to offer the sacrifice of worship actually leave enriched by the greatest blessing any human being can receive. In the same way, when we offer the tithe to God as a holy thanksgiving offering, God refuses to let us walk away empty-handed. He blesses us. Many years ago, I heard a pastor explain the blessing of tithing in the following helpful way. “When we bless God with our money, God blesses us with the things that money can’t buy.” The kinds of things that even billions of dollars can’t buy are joy in our hearts, peace in our relationships, depth in prayer, and meaning in our lives. One of my favorite stories about how God blesses tithing is that of a family with several young children that decided to tithe despite being somewhat tight financially. In order to do this, they had to sacrifice their weekly family dinner out at a restaurant and occasional trips to the movies. Instead they stayed home and played board games and went on occasional outings to the local park for barbecue dinners. After a few months the mother and father realized that spending more time together had significantly enhanced their marriage and created much closer relationships with their children.

Many scriptures point to God’s blessing on

tithing and generosity in general, such as the following:

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren . . . you shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand” (Deuteronomy 15:7,10).

I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken. . . . He is ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants are blessed (Psalm 37:25–26).

A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:25).

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done (Proverbs 19:17).

He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses (Proverbs 28:27).

He who has a generous eye will be blessed (Proverbs 22:9).

If you extend your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday (Isaiah 58:10).

He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you (Luke 6:38).

We have now come to the end of our journey through the occurrences of the word *tithe* in the Old Testament. Far from a God-ordained “tax” on the people of God, we have seen that the tithe is a gift from God and meant for our blessing. It is an expression of gratitude, in which we give him what is set apart, that is, what is *holy* to him. It is a eucharistic act like the offering of bread and wine, in which we return to Him a portion of what we have received for His blessing.

Andy Geleris

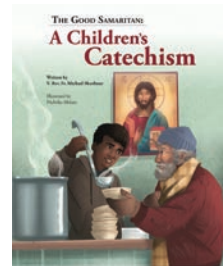
1. From Volume 5 in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series, p. 359.
2. *The Mystical Marriage: Spiritual Life According to Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Newrome Press, 2018), p. 7.
3. Charles Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series Book 216, 2015), p. 45.

NEW GROUND-BREAKING ORTHODOX CATECHISM FOR CHILDREN

“THE GOOD SAMARITAN: A CHILDREN’S CATECHISM”

AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR, V. REV. MICHAEL SHANBOUR

Joshua Harmening



What exactly is this new catechism and is it available to others? Can you provide a bit of a description of this work?

The “Good Samaritan: A Children’s Catechism” is a unique, first-of-its-kind, catechism for children approximately ages six to twelve. It is written in an engaging and understandable way, sometimes using analogy and metaphor to help young readers comprehend the primary aspects of the economy of salvation and the Orthodox Christian faith. Yet it maintains a fully biblical and patristic approach in content and ethos.

The catechism is beautifully illustrated by Nicholas Malara (Spokane, Washington), but it is not a picture book with a couple of sentences here and there! There are thirteen lessons and 118 pages, bound in an attractive 8.5” x 11” hardcover format.

The catechism takes the reader from life in **Paradise**, through **the Fall** of Adam and the reality of **Sin** and corruption, and into the life of **Redemption** through Jesus Christ. In the Church we then encounter **Holy Tradition**, the dynamic “river” that runs through the midst of the Church and provides the “living water” for our thirsty souls. The treasure of Holy Tradition then presents to us the Holy Mysteries of the **Priesthood**, the **Eucharist**, and **Baptism**, along with Repentance or **Holy Confession**, all of which are essential for the health and salvation of our souls. Finally, **Prayer**, **Fasting**, and **Almsgiving** are shown to be the indispensable means of union with God and as lifelong

manifestations of faith, hope, and love. After the introductory chapter, each new lesson begins with a brief summary of the previous chapter.

The whole catechism is held together through the overarching theme of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lesson One), as interpreted by St. John Chrysostom and other Fathers. Here is the whole economy of God, healing of man through Christ in His “spiritual hospital,” the Church.

How did the idea for a children’s catechism come about? What led you to write this book?

I have worked with both teens and pre-teen children much of my life of ministry, as a camp counselor, youth director, and priest now for almost 19 years. My favorite work was with *pre-teens*, doing Bible study in a fast-paced and creative way. Each year, during the summer, I hold a weekly teaching for our young people at Three Hierarchs in Wenatchee, Washington. Instead of Bible study, one year I decided to do a catechism. This required that I plan each lesson in an organized fashion. By the end, I had a full catechism! Of course, it has been refined numerous times since. I’ve used this catechism for my parish kids several times.

How do you envision that the catechism will be used?

In a variety of ways! Priests can use “The Good Samaritan” to catechize young people coming into the Church with their parents, but who are often left out of the catechetical process. The adult catechism is typically just too difficult and time-consuming for them. I’ve personally seen the detrimental effects

when children are not instructed in the Faith from the outset. Without being grounded, they often end up leaving the Church in their teen or college years.

Parents can use the catechism at the dinner table or for nightly reading before bedtime. They can read one lesson (or part of a lesson) at each setting, using it to open various topics of interest and to facilitate further discussion. Homeschooling parents can incorporate the catechism into their curricula.

The catechism may also be an excellent Sunday/Church school text for our parish teachers and a tool for youth leaders.

I should note that several adults have already read the catechism and have commented how much they have learned. This will be true for adults who have never had a formal or extensive catechism, for example, many Orthodox Christians who were baptized in infancy. This was the case recently with my father, who is 87 years old and grew up when there was no Orthodox Church nearby.

For children, I believe it is most effective to *read the catechism to them*, encouraging questions and discussion.

What do you consider some of the more uniquely presented teachings?

First, I would point to the teachings in Lesson One on life in paradise. Not that these teachings are unique, but many Orthodox Christians are simply not aware of the Church Fathers’ teachings regarding life before sin. Yet it is vital to our understanding since what existed in paradise is “normal,” and often the way we live in this world is not necessarily normal according to our true nature. In addition, if salvation in Christ is akin to a return to paradise as some Fathers explicitly teach (see St. Gregory of Nyssa), we need to know what that is.

The catechism follows the Fathers in describing sin as a sickness in need of healing, rather than a crime in need of punishment. Jesus Christ is presented as the “Medicine” and the Church as the place where one can get this medicine through the sacraments and ascetical life.

In the lesson on sin, the passions are described as *magnets* in our heart that are attracted to and “stick to” things outside of us that are not natural and healthy for us.

Holy Tradition is presented as the great “River of Grace” that runs through the Church, into which we must dive and swim if we are going to be continually

refreshed and washed.

There are many more, but I will mention only one: the Priesthood. It is so important that we understand the dynamic and dignified nature of the Priesthood and the priest’s role in our salvation.

Have you received any endorsements?

Yes. Endorsements from **Fredericia Mathewes-Green** and **Fr. Noah Bushelli** appear on the back cover. **Bishop Basil Essey** of Wichita and Mid-America (Antiochian Archdiocese) says the following:

“What a wonderful gift you have given to the Church in *The Good Samaritan: A Children’s Catechism!* Not only is it doctrinally sound, but it is written and illustrated to fully engage its intended audience in learning of the great love of our Triune God for His people. May it be mightily blessed for the edification of the little lambs of Christ’s flock and for the upbuilding of His Body, the Holy Orthodox Church.”

There may be more to come.

Is the book available to order? Where and how?

“The Good Samaritan” can be ordered online at www.wenorthodox.com/store. There is an entire lesson available for view on this site. Book stores can receive a wholesale discount of 40% by emailing wenorthodoxy@gmail.com. The catechism retails for \$35.00.

Joshua Harmening



Fr. Michael Shanbour is the founder and pastor of Three Hierarchs Antiochian Orthodox Church in Wenatchee, Washington, where the community has grown from twelve initial members to almost eighty. He is blessed to share his life with his wife, Kh. Makrina, and his son, Simeon. He is also the author of “Know the Faith: A Handbook for Orthodox Christians and Inquirers,” (Ancient Faith Publishing).

Joshua Harmening is a member of Three Hierarchs in Wenatchee, WA, and CEO of Harmening Marketing Solutions, providing marketing solutions via proven core principles and technology. He is available at Joshua@harmeningmarketingsolutions.com.

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION



BISHOP ANTHONY VISITS ST. JAMES, WILLIAMSTON, MICHIGAN

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” – Psalm 133:1–3



Indeed, how pleasant it was! His Grace Bishop ANTHONY of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest visited St. James Antiochian Orthodox Church for the Feast of the Presentation (Meeting) of Christ in the Temple, February 1–2, 2020. As is customary, he was received at the church with bread and salt by Church Members and a few college students. Vespers followed. He was then treated to dinner by the V. Rev Gregory Hogg, our Interim Pastor, and Rev. Deacon Demetrius Hallock and his wife, Tabitha.



On Sunday after the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, the church treated Bishop ANTHONY to a brunch in the fellowship hall prepared by the women of the church. His Grace spoke to us about the history of the Antiochian Church. We enjoyed warm fellowship with His Grace and had the second opportunity

for a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy since the falling asleep of our founding priest, Archpriest Richard Peters, in 2015. (Pictures from the weekend show the new iconography in the background.)

Khouria Joanna Peters

TEENS FROM ST. GEORGE CATHEDRAL, CORAL GABLES, VISIT BOSTON

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

– Psalm 133:1

On Martin Luther King Weekend (January 18–20, 2020), a group of twenty-nine teens and advisors from Saint George Cathedral in Coral Gables, Florida, embarked on a trip that will remain engraved in their hearts and memories for years to come. As part of what has become an annual tradition at the Cathedral, our Teen SOYO Chapter successfully completed another Saint George Teen SOYO Journey. This time, it was to the beautiful city of Boston.

The purpose trip was to show our teens other churches from this God-protected Archdiocese. It was to allow them to connect with teens from those churches, to meet their priests, and to engage with other Orthodox communities that share their same faith, culture, and life in Christ. Through these trips, our teens have garnered vibrant friendships likely to last for years to come. The outcome is a united youth group committed to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and committed to their Church.

Among the Orthodox churches and sites visited were Saint Mary in Cambridge and Saint George Cathedral in Worcester, where they were well received by Rev. Fr. Milad Selim and his loving community. After participating in the Divine Liturgy Sunday, they had an “Ask Abouna” session. Then they were hosted for a delicious Italian lunch by Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice-Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. This was followed by an afternoon of ice skating! The group also visited downtown Boston, the historic Paul Revere House, the USS Constitution, Quincy Market, and Harvard University. Finally, they stopped at Holy Cross Seminary, where they were received by the Interim Dean, Dr. Bruce Beck, and President George Cantonis. After touring the chapel and the seminary, they went on a private tour of Fenway Park, organized by Mr. Fawaz El Khoury. The Cathedral of Saint George in Coral Gables will remain thankful to Fr. Milad Selim and Mr. Fawaz El Khoury for being such wonderful hosts. They will carry memories of this experience for the rest of their lives, wherever they go.



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Speakers and sessions include:

Fr. Gregory and Kh. Frederica Mathewes-Green — A Conversation for Parents of Adult Children

Fr. Joshua and Kh. Tamara Makoul — Caring for Aging Parents

Bill Marianes — Why Are You Here? How Do You Discover Your Calling And Live A Life Of Greater Significance?

Steve Kellar — Managing Risk in Retirement

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- Thursday: Social
- Friday: Organizational Meetings
- Friday: Bible Bowl
- Friday: Coffee House (After Bible Bowl)
- Friday: Teen Dance (After Bible Bowl)
- Saturday: Brunch with Metropolitan JOSEPH and Award's Presentation
- Saturday: Concert honoring 40 years of Metropolitan JOSEPH's priestly ministry
- Saturday: Oratorical & Choir Festival
- Saturday: Dinner & Hall

Featured Speakers

- Thursday: Teen Open Discussion with Metropolitan JOSEPH
- Thursday and Saturday: Keynote Address by Mother Melania (Sister) of OCA Monastery of the Assumption (Dormition), Calistoga, CA, after Divine Liturgy
- Thursday Workshops:
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 - Caregiving, Aging & Health: Very Reverend George Kallist, M.D.
 - Bereavement Music Tradition in the Church: Reverend Deacon John El Mouk

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PLC Schedule

Deadlines

Hotel Reservation: **June 15, 2020**

Souvenir Journal: **May 1, 2020**

Vendor: **May 1, 2020**

Early Event Package: **June 1, 2020**

Online Registration Deactivation: **June 28, 2020**

Creative Festivals: April 1, 2020
Oratorical: June 21, 2020
Bible Bowl: June 21, 2020

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Icon of the Theotokos, Protectress of Pittsburgh, provided by St. Mary Orthodox Church, Pittsburgh.

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