EDITORIAL

by Bishop JOHN

THE Word Celebrates 125th Anniversary

3

from These Stones —
A Problem of Biblical Proportions
by Archpriest Steven G. Salari

6

Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?
by Nicholas A. Papas

8

More Than What We See

10

Praying for the Departed
by Fr. Andrew Harman

14

St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology

15

Dioce of Charleston, Oakland and
Mid-Atlantic Hono

17

Archdiocesean Office

18

COME WIIT WITH ST. NEKTARIOS
by Lindsey Weber and William Weber

20

A Prayer-Rope for the Entire World
by Archpriest Andrew Stephen Damick

23

The Road We Take to the Cross

24

C r eed and Community

26

Oratorical

28

Communities in Action

32

Fr. Constantine Naas Visits St. Simon Orthodox Mission
by Karen Green Haddad

34

Indiana Couple Discovers the Orthodox Faith
by David E. Sumner

CORRECTION:

Last month’s cover icon of St. John Damascenus was written by Khouriha Randa Al Khoury Azar (Randa.azar@gmail.com). His Feast Day is December 4.

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 are marked and provided as a Microsoft Word document. All artwork should be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:

U.S.A. and Canada, $40.00
Foreign Countries, $50.00
Single Copies, $3.00

The WORD (USPS626-260) is published monthly, except July and August, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 1238, Englewood, New Jersey 07631-1238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: send address changes to THE WORD, 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 1238, Englewood, NJ 07631-1238 ISSN (0343-7964) www.antiochian.org

Canada Post Publication Agreement No. 40345404

Return Canada address to American International Mail. STN A – 90X 697, Windsor ON N8A 8W4, Canada

EDITORIAL

NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION

M etropolitan JOSEPH offers our parishes, clergy, and organizations the Archdio- cese Board of Trustees as the model of cooperation, mutual respect, honest exchange of ideas, sharing of hopes and disappointments, generosity and love. These are the positive traits that make serving God as Christian stewards in our Archdiocese a joy. Archdiocese Board members make great efforts to attend and participate in Board meetings, often traveling an entire day and staying for days at their personal expense for each meeting. Each is appointed to a leadership responsibility within the Archdiocese department structure, or serves on special committees. They prayerfully consider all the issues presented, and use their personal or professional gifts whenever appropriate. People rarely speak out of turn, and always with respect for the time of others. In other words, Board members don’t speak just to speak, thus keeping the meetings efficient.

When disagreements occur, as we expect in a fallen world, we are wise to deal with the issues at hand, never questioning the authenticity or motivations of the other. Let the conflict be about the issues, and never personal. There is no room in the Church for pride and egotism. The Church is God’s. It has been consecrated to Him and it originates in Him. We are created to cooperate with Him. It is He who lives with us in His Church, and who dwells with us in our bodies, which are also called temples of God, or of the Holy Spirit.

Metropolitan JOSEPH and the current Board of Trustees of the Archdiocese have dedicated themselves to transparency, accurate reporting, insurance protection, and full disclosure of all the properties and funds of the Archdiocese,
including the chanceries, camps, and parishes. To accomplish this, Fuzar El Koury, Vice Chairman, and Salim Abboud, Chief Financial Officer, have asked the cooperation of the parishes to gather this information. They have solicited the assistance and support of fellow Board members, Archdiocese staff, bishops, clergy and financial professionals in this colossal task.

The Archdiocese is also trying to update its databases to communicate better with the faithful. Please be sure that your parish has listed you correctly on the mailing list, so that you can continue to get The WORD and keep up with what is going on in the Archdiocese. Have you moved in the last few years? Send your address and e-mail to our registrar, Marlene, at registrar@antiochian.org.

Metropolitan JOSEPH has also made the Archdiocese Web site a priority, recognizing that all the faithful have many fine ideas and activities to share with each other throughout our Antiochian Orthodox family. In addition to The WORD, the Archdiocesan.org site is a wonderful guide to events in the Archdiocese and a trove of theological articles and information.

At one time, many folks assumed that too much information about the finances of the parish and Archdiocese would confuse people and discourage contributions. Certainly, that is not true today. The more people know the good works being done by the parishes and the Archdiocese, the more they are willing to participate. I am encouraged by the spirit of transparency and mutual accountability demonstrated by our Metropolitan and Board, and hope that the parishes all emulate this spirit to the building up of the churches and for the glory of God.

Happy New Year!

Bishop JOHN

“FROM THESE STONES”

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

A PROBLEM OF BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

Archpriest Steven C. Salaris

wo times recently, I was a guest homilist at another Orthodox church. No problem there: I love to preach the Gospel. On both occasions, I arrived at the host parish with sermon prepared, but needed a Bible to read some Old Testament passages. To my dismay, these parishes were completely lacking Bibles! One parish did have a couple of Orthodox Study Bibles (just the Psalms and New Testament). Fortunately, the priest had one of his old Bibles stashed in the sanctuary. In the other instance, I could not find a Bible anywhere in the church. That was awkward.

This is not just an Antiochian Orthodox problem, but a cross-jurisdictional problem in many churches. We Orthodox like to tell people that the Bible is “our book,” or “we are the same church that composed the canon of the books of the Bible.” If we are that proud of “our book,” then shouldn’t it be available in the church?

There are several problems with Bible-less Orthodox churches.

1) It is suspicious to the casual non-Orthodox observer when they enter a church with no Bibles. Questions like, “Isn’t this supposed to be the Church of the Bible?” arise in one’s mind.

2) It is very difficult to discuss Orthodoxy with non-Orthodox if there is not a Bible readily available to which one can refer. When we dialogue with those Christians who have little or no Tradition, Creeds, Church Fathers, Councils, Canons, and so forth, the only tool we have are the Scriptures. When you can point out a text and that person is able to read it for himself or herself, the effect is sometimes astounding.

3) Our worship is biblical. The sacraments are scriptural and large parts of the texts of liturgical services like the Divine Liturgy are either direct quotes of Bible verses or paraphrases of them.

4) Our theology is biblical. What we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and so forth is found in those apostolic writings in the New Testament. Look at icons of the ecumenical Councils. Most of them...
On our way to the coffee shop, Zoe kept slipping into random stores and announcing to the strangers she met that she had a “boo-boo.” Either that, or that her name was “Yo-so.” Since she was facing the trial of a two-year-old, I couldn’t quite tell.

She had recently taken a spill that really hurt her front teeth. This was the “boo-boo” that she was telling strangers about, I assumed. It got me thinking. I wondered how much the “boo-boo” must be on her mind, that she would introduce herself with “I have a boo-boo.” The spill she took and her trauma, the subsequent visits to the dentist’s office, and the probings and attention paid, made this boo-boo a big part of her little life. So, it made sense that she introduced herself with “I have a boo-boo.”

She might be on to something! Maybe this is how we should greet one another: “Hello” and similar introductions are nice and cordial, but “I have a boo-boo” – that might cause a revolution in human interaction.

How would it affect our relationships if we saw one another as wounded? Or, to expand the idea, how would it be if we saw one another as wounded, cute, innocent, scared, little toddlers? In pop culture, one of the greatest moments on Star Trek: The Next Generation was when Captain Jean-Luc Picard had an epiphany. In the “Chain of Command” episodes, Picard was able to see his torturer as merely a scared, innocent, scared, little toddler. In pop culture, how would it be if we saw one another as wounded, cute, innocent, scared, little toddlers? In pop culture, how would it be if we saw one another as wounded?

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 All Saints of North America Church, Maryland Heights, Missouri.

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, 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, fundraising 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 Dr. Adam Lowell Roberts at 615-971-0000. 

Archpriest Steven C. Sahota, Pastor
All Saints of North America Church, Maryland Heights, Missouri

Nicholas Papas, Houston, Texas

Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?

The Neighborhood Resilience Project

The Neighborhood Resilience Project (formerly known as FOCUS Pittsburgh). Learn more about what Fr. Paul is doing by watching his TEDx Talk in Pittsburgh at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skchu5Sp0lA&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, 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, fundraising 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 Dr. Adam Lowell Roberts at 615-971-0000.
Materialism is the view that what you see is what you get—that there is nothing more to the cosmos than the crude materials of observable reality. Secularists who would purge culture of all religion tend to be materialists, as are those whose chief goal in life is the acquisition of riches or fame or power. Mr. Keating, however, wants his students to see a spiritual part of reality—what he calls “poetry, beauty, romance, love.”

Holy Scripture sees two aspects to reality, also. Christ appeals to materiality—to the hard data of the observable and the provable: when approached by the disciples of the imprisoned Forerunner about whether He is the true messiah, Christ responds with a challenge to look at the facts: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.” But He also draws our attention to the spiritual and angelic—the kosmos noetos: “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul?”

The world of the materialist is one-dimensional, and is suffocated by hopelessness because of the inevitability of death. In contrast, those who recognize both physical and spiritual realities have the possibility of broader horizons and deeper experiences. Knowing we are more than material can generate sustaining hopefulness and optimism.

Yet spiritual experiences aren’t always sweet and happy, are they? Yes, angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim and heavenly hosts glorify God everywhere and at all times, in radiant glory. They are present now in the space around you while you read these words. But there’s so much going on in, say, the story of two crazed men, Christ, and a herd of pigs on a hill. Here, we deal with violent and unclean spirits, the tragic detritus from a rupture in the spiritual realm long ago.

We often talk of “God’s will,” but the devil has a will for our lives, too. It is to “steal, kill, and destroy.” What were the insane doing before they were swarmed by unclean spirits? Grazing. Afterwards?

Frenzy, madness, death. As it goes with pigs—from normal to nightmarish—so it goes with people. Thanks to a savvy social-media presence and the promise of a lifestyle without limit or restraint, organized satanism is on the rise in America. One response? You have no idea what you are dealing with.


By the grace of God, however, envy is not without cure. When we find reasons to be grateful; pray for a spirit of contentment; shift our focus to the goodness in our lives; remind ourselves that no one has it all; limit our exposure to what we are prone to covet; believe that every blessing God wants to give me for my happiness is already inserted into this imperfect package that is my life; even thank our guardian angel for protecting us from the unclean spirits who are envious of us—we are more likely to free ourselves of envy.

The Christian knows there is more to life—and to death—than meets the eye. What you see is not all that you get. Instead, we profess an unshakeable belief in broader horizons, in deeper experiences, and in a most optimistic transcendence. Let us humble ourselves before God and neighbor, and heaven with all its radiance awaits.

Fr. John Oliver, Pastor
St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

IN THE 1989 FILM DEAD POETS SOCIETY, ROBIN WILLIAMS PLAYS MR. KEATING, AN ENGLISH TEACHER AT FICTITIOUS WELTON ACADEMY. IN ONE SCENE, HE GATHERS AROUND HIS DESK THE YOUNG MINDS TO WHOM HE LABORS TO TEACH THE VIRTUE OF POETRY: “WE DON’T READ AND WRITE POETRY BECAUSE IT’S CUTE. WE READ AND WRITE POETRY BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RACE, AND THE HUMAN RACE IS FILLED WITH PASSION. MEDICINE, LAW, BUSINESS, ENGINEERING, THESE ARE ALL NOBLE PURSUITS, AND NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN LIFE. BUT POETRY, BEAUTY, ROMANCE, LOVE, THESE ARE WHAT WE STAY ALIVE FOR.”
There really was a big difference with funerals. Yes, we Orthodox sure do pray for the departed—a lot! We do so at funeral services, memorial services (we will have a ten-year memorial service today), grave blessings, our own personal prayers…. Pretty much all the time! Why, when many other churches specifically do not believe in praying for the departed?

Why not? We pray for our loved ones when they are in this world with us. So when they die, we just keep right on praying for them. They are nibt dead. They are alive, even if their bodies are in the grave. We pray and hope and trust that they are in heaven with God, very much alive! Heaven is not far away. Jesus said in the gospels, “The Kingdom of heaven is among you.” It’s close, just a breath away. That’s why our beloved departed are also close—so we pray for them.

What does the Bible say? It’s in the Bible. In 2 Maccabees 12 of the Orthodox Old Testament, St. Judas Maccabaeus prays for the souls of the soldiers in his army who had just died in a battle. In the New Testament, St. Paul prays in 2 Timothy 1:18 for a friend who had died. The deceased friend’s name was Onesiphorus. St. Paul prays that God will be merciful to Onesiphorus on Judgement Day. Church Tradition, too, is very strong here, going way back to the early centuries of Christianity. Our “spiritual ancestors,” going way back, prayed for their departed loved ones like we do today.

It’s the right thing to do, and it’s also the natural thing to do. In the denomination in which I just grew up, praying for the dead was forbidden. It just never was done, and was seen as wrong. I remember as a teenager being at the funeral of an uncle who had died. He had been sick for some time and, of course, our family and relatives had been praying strongly for him. At the funeral, however, now that he was gone, there was no more praying for him. I remember thinking distinctly that this was odd, unnatural, and maybe wrong. Pray, pray, pray for him while he was here and then, after his death, stop praying for him completely? After all, we believed entirely that he was still alive, even though he had physically died, but now it was wrong to whisper a prayer for him!

Praying for our loved ones is natural and good—because we believe in life after death. We pray for people while they are alive in this world, and we keep praying for them after they leave this world. Of course, there is much mystery involved in all this. We can’t even come close to explaining exactly how it works! We just know so little about “the other side.” We pray for those who have died because our prayers really do help them.

Back in 2005 our late Metropolitan PHILIP gave a speech in Toledo. He told a story, how late one night, towards midnight, he got a phone call. It was a woman whose family had gotten to know through several visits to their parish over the years. She was rather weepy and upset, and asked the Metropolitan if he could come and perform her husband’s funeral. The Metropolitan said, “You have my sympathies, I’m very sorry. Maybe I can come….what day will it be?” “I don’t know yet when it will be” the woman said. His Eminence said, “Well, what day do you think it will most likely be so I can check my schedule.” She hesitated and then said, “Well, he hasn’t died yet.” “He hasn’t died? Is he right on the verge?” “Yes, probably not. But he hasn’t been feeling well the last few days, so I figure he’ll probably die soon. And I want to get things ready.” The Metropolitan was rather amazed but kept his composure and said, “Just call me back once he’s dead!” In his speech, the Metropolitan said that woman got quite a surprise. Her husband lived for many more years. In fact, the woman died before he did.

Actually, death is often surprising. We think someone is about to die, and then they live on for years. Every priest has had that happen. We rush to a hospital to give the last sacraments to someone—someone who everyone is sure must be dying, one is sure is dying, someone who will die in years afterwards! Of course, however, it works the other way, too. Someone is in the peak of health it seems, and, suddenly, he or she is gone! We never know when we will go. But one thing we know for sure—we will go, sooner or later. What do we do who are left behind do when someone does die? We pray for them. Praying for our departed loved ones is a big part of our spiritual life as Orthodox Christians. In our funeral, memorial services, grave blessings, every liturgy, many of our other worship services, and in our own personal prayers, we pray for those who have died.

It is right to pray for the departed, and not just to remember and honor them, although that’s very good to do. The main reason we pray for them is that our prayers help them in their life beyond. There is a great mystery in all this, and as precise as we wish to be, we have to admit that the mysterious nature...
Praying for the Departed

There are four particular things for which we can pray for our departed loved ones. First, we pray for the forgiveness of their sins. We see such terminology very often in our prayers for them. When St. Paul prayed for his deceased friend Onesiphorus, in 2 Timothy 1:18, this is what he asked for: “May the Lord grant him to find mercy on that day.” “That day” refers to Judgment Day. Paul prayed that God would remember and grant Onesiphorus forgiveness on that day.

Praying for forgiveness for the departed is definitely mysterious! The services assume that the departed one is in heaven and that God will forgive them. So the question sometimes arises, if they are already forgiven if they’re in heaven? Good question! And there is not a quick answer. There are those same services we pray that God will forgive them. And how do we know? Are they already forgiven if they’re in heaven?

The services assume that the departed have gone on to be with God. Yet in a way we are praying for God to forgive them. So the question sometimes arises, if they have already been forgiven if they’re in heaven?

A good question! And there is not a quick answer. And the question sometimes arises, if they have already been forgiven if they’re in heaven?

The question sometimes arises, if they have already been forgiven if they’re in heaven? Good question! And there is not a quick answer.
St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology Changed My Life.

It was 1986, I was 18 years old, and I had just graduated from high school. My home church in Goleta, California, an Evangelical Orthodox Church, was about six months away from being united to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church through the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America.

At the time, I had many options to choose from concerning my education. I had done well in high school – my twin brother and I tied for valedictorian. I always believed, however, that my faith came first. It was time to put that into action.

I decided to spend my first post-high-school year studying the Orthodox Faith through classes offered by St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology. At the time, we had daily classes and met at the church. The class sizes were small, but the attention to detail was great. Subjects included Old and New Testament Studies, Liturgical Studies, Church History, Christian Ethics, Patristic Writings, and more. I was introduced to authors such as Fr. Alexander Schmemann and Fr. John Meyendorff, and read treasures such as St. Athanasius’s On the Incarnation.

I studied with professors such as Fr. Jack Sparks, Fr. Richard Ballew, and Fr. Jon Braun, who loved God, loved His Church, and were brilliant scholars. Through worship and study, I met my Lord and committed my life to Him. By the end of the year, I knew that it was in and through the Orthodox Christian Church that my faith would grow, that I could truly know God, and that I would raise my family. I am so grateful for the Academy.

Fast forward a few years. I went on to study biology at UC Santa Barbara. From there I went on to UC Irvine for medical school. I now practice emergency medicine in Ventura, California. I have five children and two grandchildren. I am a member of St. Athanasius Orthodox Church in Goleta, and I am truly committed to God and His Church.

Now I serve as the newly appointed Chairman of the St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology. For about the last 15 years, the Academy’s scope has been narrowed to the education of prisoners through correspondence courses. This is a mission we will continue. It is a new day, however, for the Academy. I am excited to announce that our new focus is the offering of correspondence courses online in a distance-learning format for the completion of an Associate of Arts Degree. These same courses that made a profound impact on my life are again available to all.

In addition, we are now offering special classes to homeschooling families in a tutorial format online, and we are developing coursework for a Bachelor of Theology Degree. At the same time, any course offered online can be taken by those who do not wish to earn a degree, but are simply interested in growing in their knowledge and faith.

St. Athanasius Academy is now offering online Orthodoxy studies for homeschooling families. For Grades 6 to 8, we are offering:
• “The New Testament,” with Fr. Joel Gilliam
• “Lives of the Saints,” with Fr. Michael Heningham
• “Virtues and Passions,” with Fr. Paul Giggis

For high school, we are offering:
• “The Old Testament,” with Fr. David Bibeau
• “World History,” with Fr. James Purdie
• “English,” with Fr. Fred Shaheen
• “Virtues and Passions,” with Fr. Paul Giggis

Registration for Fall 2020 opens next month, so check out the details now at www.saaot.edu.
to these black saints, and his developing knowledge of them, guided him to his eventual conversion to the Orthodox faith. (Deacon John was a Baptist minister for over 17 years at a parish in West Point, Virginia.) It is one thing to have a history lesson about saints of the early church. It is quite another to hear firsthand that these saints can and do still affect, in dramatic, inspiring, and encompassing ways, the lives of those living hundreds and hundreds of years after the saints repose. Deacon John explained that, despite being a Baptist minister for many years, he still yearned for a deeper prayer life, and he found it in the Orthodox faith, and in the examples of humility and spirituality so vividly provided by the black saints.

The formal retreat ended with a brief but inspiring worship, reflection and building relationships. There is also time in the weekend devoted to theory. There are various sessions on topics of interest to those who participate in the ministry of music within the life of a parish. These sessions cover such subjects as chant, conducting, vocal technique and music theory. There is also time in the weekend devoted to worship, reflection and building relationships.

ORDINATIONS

BARKLEY, Deacon Timothy, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on July 19, 2019, at Holy Cross Church, Linthicum, Maryland. Fr. Timothy is assigned to St. James the Apostle Church, Westminster, Maryland.

LASSETER, Deacon Herman (Phillip), to the holy priesthood by Bishop NICHOLAS on Sunday, November 10, 2019, at St. Peter Church, Madison, Mississippi. Father Herman is completing his seminary training at Holy Cross in Boston.

ELEVATION

WAGGENER, Fr. Alban, to the dignity of Archpriest by Bishop JOHN on November 10, 2019, at Holy Trinity Mission, Lynchburg, Virginia.

ASSIGNMENT

MOSELENER, Fr. Seraphim, to All Saints Church, Bloomington, Indiana.
COME VISIT WITH ST. NEKTARIOS

Lindsey Weber and William Weber

How can one begin to write about the spiritual treasures hidden in plain sight in Greece? Or, even more, explain God’s grace in His saints that is waiting to be found within her churches and monasteries?

The centennial of the falling asleep in the Lord of St. Nektarios is coming up next year. He is perhaps Greece’s most beloved, contemporary saint. There will be great celebrations as the date of November 9, 2020, draws near. In honor of the Saint and his coming day, I want to dedicate this account of our pilgrimage to Greece as it relates to him.

Before beginning, a brief word is in order about why we went. Native to the United States, we had been blessed several times to experience the heavenly scent of God’s saints. While we were venerating a saint’s relic in Thessaloniki, the priest commented that it always exuded a beautiful fragrance. A priest on the island of Corfu, Greece, informed us that a particular relic, which was redolent at the time we were there, did not always emit a fragrance. Over the course of our pilgrimage we noticed that in some cases a lovely aroma would become delightfully noticeable as prayers were being offered. The most important thing is to entreat His grace-filled saints to pray for us and those for whom we seek God’s mercy. “Wonderful is God in His Saints!” (Psalm 67:36 LXX).

Returning by ferry to the Greek mainland, our next holy site was the Monastery of Panagia Chrysoleontissa, the highest point on the island. The drive up was spectacular, as we climbed the mountain road while looking down over the island and the sparkling Aegean below. As we happened repeatedly throughout Greece, we met inspiring monastics. A warm, endearing nun directed us to the centenary-old miraculous icon of the Mother of God, from which the monastery gets its name. Before this icon, St. Nektarios himself had prayed; and he used to come many times to visit this monastery as part of his own pilgrimage. It was here he came to commune with the Lord shortly before his passing.

Returning by ferry to the Greek mainland, we visited St. Nektarios’ room at the Evangelismos Hospital in Athens. There we were warmly ushered into the room where the Saint spent his final days on earth and passed on to the Lord. Today this precious space is preserved as a chapel where people come and pray and place their requests to the Saint under his pillow on his bed. It is awe-inspiring to stand in this holy room where his first posthumous miracle was performed right after his repose. As a nurse on duty commented that the Saint’s body for burial, one of his garments was set on the adjacent bed where a paralytic lay. “The invalid immediately got up and walked!”

The testimony of the healed man may be seen on the wall as you enter. Also in connection with the Saint’s passing, a heavenly fragrance filled the room. Those in the hospital smelled it for weeks. And for some, the fragrance began. “Though other relics of the saints do not always emit a fragrance, this one clean the cover over these relics with something that had a perfumed smell!” “No,” they answered. It was indeed the fragrance of the Saint. To many Orthodox Greeks this would just seem normal, unlike skeptical me.

I really should have known better. On our trip we had been blessed several times to experience the heavenly scent of God’s saints. While we were venerating a saint’s relic in Thessaloniki, the priest commented that it always exuded a beautiful fragrance.

For visiting monasteries in the United States, Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries is very useful. An excellent online resource for St. Nektarios and other saints is the “Saints and Feasts” section at https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/. For visiting Greece, an indispensable resource is Elevegote, A Pilgrim’s Guide to Greece. For visiting monasteries in the United States, Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries is very useful. The saints await your visit!

COME VISIT WITH ST. NEKTARIOS

Lindsey Weber and William Weber

How can one begin to write about the spiritual treasures hidden in plain sight in Greece? Or, even more, explain God’s grace in His saints that is waiting to be found within her churches and monasteries?

The centennial of the falling asleep in the Lord of St. Nektarios is coming up next year. He is perhaps Greece’s most beloved, contemporary saint. There will be great celebrations as the date of November 9, 2020, draws near. In honor of the Saint and his coming day, I want to dedicate this account of our pilgrimage to Greece as it relates to him.

Before beginning, a brief word is in order about why we went. Native to the United States, we had been blessed several times to experience the heavenly scent of God’s saints. While we were venerating a saint’s relic in Thessaloniki, the priest commented that it always exuded a beautiful fragrance. A priest on the island of Corfu, Greece, informed us that a particular relic, which was redolent at the time we were there, did not always emit a fragrance. Over the course of our pilgrimage we noticed that in some cases a lovely aroma would become delightfully noticeable as prayers were being offered. The most important thing is to entreat His grace-filled saints to pray for us and those for whom we seek God’s mercy. “Wonderous is God in His Saints!” (Psalm 67:36 LXX).

Returning by ferry to the Greek mainland, our next holy site was the Monastery of Panagia Chrysoleontissa, the highest point on the island. The drive up was spectacular, as we climbed the mountain road while looking down over the island and the sparkling Aegean below. As we happened repeatedly throughout Greece, we met inspiring monastics. A warm, endearing nun directed us to the centenary-old miraculous icon of the Mother of God, from which the monastery gets its name. Before this icon, St. Nektarios himself had prayed; and he used to come many times to visit this monastery as part of his own pilgrimage. It was here he came to commune with the Lord shortly before his passing.

Returning by ferry to the Greek mainland, we visited St. Nektarios’ room at the Evangelismos Hospital in Athens. There we were warmly ushered into the room where the Saint spent his final days on earth and passed on to the Lord. Today this precious space is preserved as a chapel where people come and pray and place their requests to the Saint under his pillow on his bed. It is awe-inspiring to stand in this holy room where his first posthumous miracle was performed right after his repose. As a nurse on duty commented that the Saint’s body for burial, one of his garments was set on the adjacent bed where a paralytic lay. “The invalid immediately got up and walked!”

The testimony of the healed man may be seen on the wall as you enter. Also in connection with the Saint’s passing, a heavenly fragrance filled the room. Those in the hospital smelled it for weeks. And for some, the fragrance began. “Though other relics of the saints do not always emit a fragrance, this one clean the cover over these relics with something that had a perfumed smell!” “No,” they answered. It was indeed the fragrance of the Saint. To many Orthodox Greeks this would just seem normal, unlike skeptical me.

I really should have known better. On our trip we had been blessed several times to experience the heavenly scent of God’s saints. While we were venerating a saint’s relic in Thessaloniki, the priest commented that it always exuded a beautiful fragrance.

For visiting monasteries in the United States, Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries is very useful. An excellent online resource for St. Nektarios and other saints is the “Saints and Feasts” section at https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/. For visiting Greece, an indispensable resource is Elevegote, A Pilgrim’s Guide to Greece. For visiting monasteries in the United States, Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries is very useful. The saints await your visit!
The mountain is a prayer-rope for the entire world. At the same time, it is an oasis from which Orthodoxy throughout the world drinks. I drank from it myself personally and learned here and in the Athonite Monastery of Saint Paul that this mountain with its monasteries, sketes and cells is the place where the dough of theology is kneaded with prayer. I learned that the theologian is the one who prays and loves. He does not disdain the knowledge that he acquires in school and he does not disdain the piety and prayer that he sees in monasteries. Rather, he arrives at both in the symphony of his life in order to become a being who hymns God Most High, in every resting-place of the Spirit over the course of his life.

Although this is our Patriarch reflecting on experience in a place to which most of us will never go, and whose life is something we will not take up, I think this observation is exactly relevant and timely for us today, in so many of our parishes. It is helpful when we gather together for parish meetings or council meetings, or as individual ministries, and consider what it means for us to be Orthodox Christian parishes, and what we do with that from here on out.

First, Patriarch JOHN says that “the mountain is a prayer-rope for the entire world.” He is using the image of a prayer-rope, a simple cord of knots used to focus meditative prayer, as an icon of Mount Athos in relation to the world. One of the accusations often leveled at monks and nuns is that they are essentially useless people, because they spend so much time praying, and not doing something “practical.” That same accusation is sometimes leveled at parish churches, as well, that we do not really accomplish anything good, because we are not social activists. Indeed, we may be considered to be bad for society. Our way of life, we hear, is just parasitical on society and possibly even an attempt to control other people. Once someone gets a closer look at the vigorous life of prayer, fasting and obedience to a spiritual father, the accusations of this sort may well mount up.

We are called to be that prayer-rope for the entire world, however, no matter what the world might think of us. The prayer that we accomplish here together is not only for our own spiritual benefit, though it is obviously to our benefit. Rather, it is truly for the whole world, moving from the local to the global to the cosmic. In our common prayers, we pray for “this holy house,” but also for “this city and every city and countryside.” We also pray for “peace for the whole world.” And when we pray for “the whole world,” the Greek there for “world” is kosmos, which refers not just to this planet but to all creation – the universe. In all these petitions, too, we pray not just for the places, but for the people in them.

The prayer that we come together to offer to the Holy Trinity is the first element of our mission in this world. The reason that we make this first is because the sustenance and healing of the world is something that comes from God. He is the Source of all good things. We may be tempted to think that the “real work” will come from mankind, but that is not compatible with Christianity at all. The state of our world should be enough to dispel the idea that we can be successful at this without God’s help. God is at work in this world, but His work is not yet complete. While He is working, we can participate first of all and most of all through prayer.

The image of the prayer-rope is especially apt, because it is a steady, meditative prayer that, over and over again asks for mercy, with the quintessential prayer being offered on such ropes being the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” As he says, “the dough of theology is kneaded with prayer,” meaning that the teachings of Christ come to their fullness of presence and effect
in this world through prayer, especially faithful, persistent prayer.

The second point that I would like to mention is summarized in this sentence from our Patriarch: “I learned that the theologian is the one who prays and loves.” This sentence may be seen as something of an expansion and commentary on the ancient saying of Evagrius of Pontus: “The true theologian is one who prays truly.” So we may see that the Patriarch is perhaps telling us what it means to pray truly: To pray truly is to be one who prays and loves. As Christians, we are all theologians and should seek to be theologians – those who bear the Word of God and words about God.

This is an area, I think, where we have some of the most work to do as Orthodox Christian Americans. For most of us, we come to church, pray together, eat together, and possibly do some work together – so there is indeed some prayer and love happening. In most cases, however, when one of us has a need for love, we don’t have that need met by one another. There are, of course, some exceptions, and they are beautiful.

In more ways than just where we live, however, so many of our communities are “commuter parishes.” We commute to the church, do some things together there, and that is the extent of our relationships. This is not wholly the case for all of us, and I commend those who connect with each other outside these walls. That needs to be worked on in intentionally, however, and not just left to family ties or happenstance. The same needs to happen between parishes, which often do not see other churches as being within their responsibility. So both within and between parishes, our network with each other is not very strong – not yet.

Finally, the Patriarch says that the theologian (that is, the Christian) “does not disdain the knowledge that he acquires in school and he does not disdain the piety and prayer that he sees in monasteries.” He says very clearly here that there is no contradiction at all between the knowledge arrived at through education, and piety and prayer. He speaks of monasteries, but he is on Mount Athos. He could just as easily speak of the piety and prayer of parish churches.

Today, we sometimes believe that there is a contradiction, and even conflict between these two: an educated person is not interested in prayer, and the prayerful person is not interested in education. This, however, is a distortion of the human person, to whom God has given so many capacities, including the ability to learn, and prayer. It is no more a contradiction to love both prayer and education than it is to love both education and physical health, or both prayer and the preparation of food. Indeed, in an integrated, healed human person, all these things interpenetrate each other and inform each other.

More deeply, though, his observation that education and prayer do not contradict each other teaches us something about one of our key problems: if we do pray, we have put prayer into a box. Prayer is not something that, once done, accompanies us in all things. I recently acquired a prayer book that has prayers for moments like burial and putting clothes on. If that sounds weird, it’s because we’ve put prayer into a box.

Finally, this beautiful paragraph from Patriarch JOHN of Antioch concluders this way: “He arrives at both in the symphony of his life in order to become a being who hymns God Most High, in every resting-place of the Spirit over the course of his life.” This is what we as Christians are: beings who hymn God Most High, “in every resting-place of the Spirit,” throughout the courses of our lives. In this way, we find our life consummated in our song to God.

As we consider who we are as Orthodox Christians and who we are together as parishes and as a larger Orthodox community, I pray that this is the purpose and true nature of our life as Christians, and that this is the purpose and true nature of our life as a church, the prayers, the Scriptures, and the Church Fathers and Mothers.

The Road We Take to the Cross

I can still point to the summer of 2013, when I attended the CrossRoad program, as one of the most transformative moments in my faith. My CrossRoad journal still sits on my bookshelf, five years later, next to my yearbook and camp photos. From time to time I pull it out and flip through the pages of hastily scribbled notes. I recall the ten days I spent learning about the meaning of vocation, and how to transition in my faith from high school to college and beyond. The floppy leather binding is worn, having survived more moves than I can count, and the rings are bursting with pages of added notes from alumni reunions and College Conference. As I open it up, the entry marked “Day 1” brings me back to the inauspicious beginnings of what would turn out to be an eye-opening ten days.

“Ride over wasn’t fun.” That was my first note in the journal. I had graduated from high school a few weeks prior and was set to begin college in the fall. The gargantuan tuition bill had arrived, setting everyone in my family on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault. The car ride with my parents was an unpleasant, close-quarters experience. Everyone in my family was on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault. The gargantuan tuition bill had arrived, setting everyone in my family on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault. The car ride with my parents was an unpleasant, close-quarters experience. Everyone in my family was on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault. The gargantuan tuition bill had arrived, setting everyone in my family on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault. The car ride with my parents was an unpleasant, close-quarters experience. Everyone in my family was on edge, a situation I conceived was entirely my own fault.

The second point that I would like to mention is summarized in this sentence from our Patriarch: “I learned that the theologian is the one who prays and loves.” This sentence may be seen as something of an expansion and commentary on the ancient saying of Evagrius of Pontus: “The true theologian is one who prays truly.” So we may see that the Patriarch is perhaps telling us what it means to pray truly: To pray truly is to be one who prays and loves. As Christians, we are all theologians and should seek to be theologians – those who bear the Word of God and words about God.

This is an area, I think, where we have some of the most work to do as Orthodox Christian Americans. For most of us, we come to church, pray together, eat together, and possibly do some work together – so there is indeed some prayer and love happening. In most cases, however, when one of us has a need for love, we don’t have that need met by one another. There are, of course, some exceptions, and they are beautiful.

In more ways than just where we live, however, so many of our communities are “commuter parishes.” We commute to the church, do some things together there, and that is the extent of our relationships. This is not wholly the case for all of us, and I commend those who connect with each other outside these walls. That needs to be worked on in intentionally, however, and not just left to family ties or happenstance. The same needs to happen between parishes, which often do not see other churches as being within their responsibility. So both within and between parishes, our network with each other is not very strong – not yet.

Finally, the Patriarch says that the theologian (that is, the Christian) “does not disdain the knowledge that he acquires in school and he does not disdain the piety and prayer that he sees in monasteries.” He says very clearly here that there is no contradiction at all between the knowledge arrived at through education, and piety and prayer. He speaks of monasteries, but he is on Mount Athos. He could just as easily speak of the piety and prayer of parish churches.

Today, we sometimes believe that there is a contradiction, and even conflict between these two: an educated person is not interested in prayer, and the prayerful person is not interested in education. This, however, is a distortion of the human person, to whom God has given so many capacities, including the ability to learn, and prayer. It is no more a contradiction to love both prayer and education than it is to love both education and physical health, or both prayer and the preparation of food. Indeed, in an integrated, healed human person, all these things interpenetrate each other and inform each other.

More deeply, though, his observation that education and prayer do not contradict each other teaches us something about one of our key problems: if we do pray, we have put prayer into a box. Prayer is not something that, once done, accompanies us in all things. I recently acquired a prayer book that has prayers for moments like burial and putting clothes on. If that sounds weird, it’s because we’ve put prayer into a box.

Finally, this beautiful paragraph from Patriarch JOHN of Antioch concluders this way: “He arrives at both in the symphony of his life in order to become a being who hymns God Most High, in every resting-place of the Spirit over the course of his life.” This is what we as Christians are: beings who hymn God Most High, “in every resting-place of the Spirit,” throughout the courses of our lives. In this way, we find our life consummated in our song to God.

As we consider who we are as Orthodox Christians and who we are together as parishes and as a larger Orthodox community, I pray that this is the purpose and true nature of our life as Christians, and that this is the purpose and true nature of our life as a church, the prayers, the Scriptures, and the Church Fathers and Mothers.

Yet the most important thing I got from CrossRoad was that WE. It was the 30 other young people with whom I opened myself up, laughed, danced, sang, prayed, questioned, learned, and grew. Although I did not know it at the time, that WE also included the greater community of people who had also attended CrossRoad in the past. They would be integral in supporting me as I walked the often-difficult road through college. I was changed and prepared in a way I could not have anticipated, and I do not think anyone can describe it better than 18-year-old me, who wrote, “I’m scared of being hit with all the things I was able to escape from…but I’m excited to be a better me.”

What is CrossRoad? In their own words, “CrossRoad is a ten-day academic summer institute that prepares high school juniors and seniors to make big life decisions and invites them to connect with the Orthodox Christian theological and spiritual tradition. Participants from all over the country come together to experience daily worship, take theology classes from some of the best professors in the country, visit local parishes, serve their neighbor, tour the city, and even spend a day at the beach.”

If you or someone you know would be interested in this transformative opportunity, you can find more information at http://www.crossroadinstitute.org/. Applications for 2020 are due February 1.
CREED AND COMMUNITY
LIVING THE LITURGY — A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

PART 5 OF 10

We often welcome the New Year with resolutions—promises we make to ourselves and goals we set; things we want to change, to give ourselves a fresh start. In fact, we do this every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy; supported and strengthened by a community gathered together for a purpose. This is a community that supports our “laying aside of our earthly cares,” and our preparation to receive the Eucharist. This community is centered around shared views and beliefs. These views and beliefs are taught through the hearing of Scripture and its explanation in the sermon, and is expressed in our Creed.

What is a creed? A creed is defined first as “any system, doctrine, or formula of religious belief” or as “any system or codification of belief or of opinion.” A third definition comes closer to our meaning: “an authoritative, formulated statement of the chief articles of Christian belief....” Our Creed (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan) is broken up into three major sections: the first deals with God, the Father; the second with Jesus Christ; and the third with the Holy Spirit and related matters, such as the makeup of the church.

Where does our Creed come from? It is called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed because it was formed at the first two ecumenical councils. An ecumenical council was a meeting called by the emperor that included all the bishops from the entire Christian world at the time. The first of these councils was called in Nicaea in 325, to correct the teaching of a priest named Arius. Arius taught that Christ had a human body, but that He did not have a rational, human soul like ours. According to Apollinarius, Christ’s mind or soul was divine; his Orthodox opponents saw that this meant that He could not be truly human. Macedonius on the other hand, taught that Christ is a creature, created at some point by God. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as we know it today is the only statements that the Church speaks about “dogmatically,” that is, with authority and without interpretation. A respondent to a survey on worship said that the Creed is his favorite part because he knew the words. This raises the following questions: Does simply knowing the words matter? Does saying them together affect our sense of community? Does the Creed bring our community together? The answer to all these questions is Yes! It is powerful to be together, praying together in the same way. By contrast, when we go to a different Orthodox Church and the words of the Creed are different, or maybe they’re sung, we can feel like we don’t belong, that somehow we are not a part of this community. We may have a similar feeling at times, but about something we don’t want to talk about: What if I don’t believe what we are saying?

It’s normal, at some point, to have doubts about things. In fact, it might even happen several times in our lifetime. The great part about living in community with others is that we don’t have to go through that alone. Chances are good that any questions we might have, others have also had at some point. When we open up the discussion and share with one another, we become more unified as we respond to each other, and to God, who invites us to worship Him. Working through our doubts often helps strengthen and even solidify our faith. Those of us who were baptized into the church as infants didn’t choose these things. At some point, we each have to take an important step, to consciously acknowledge that, for me, the Church is my Church. That step begins when we are unafraid to ask the questions we may have, to discuss these things within our community, and to draw closer to God through our community.

Gregory Abdalah, D. Min.
Every child babysit knows I have two rules: 1. "No whining," 2. "You can’t say ‘can’t.’" The first rule is very helpful when trying to understand an upset child; the second is useful in encouraging people to overcome their struggles. When people are struggling, they too often find themselves bound by the word “can’t.” Because "can’t" is an absolute negative, it suggests that we will never be able to overcome our weaknesses, problems, and passions. St. Paul tells us, however, that all things are possible “through Christ who strengthens” us.

Christ strengthens us, but first we are sometimes allowed to suffer. Life is difficult, or, as Wesley from The Princess Bride puts it, “Life is pain, Highness.” Anyone who tells you different is selling something.” Pain is a great example of this is St. Romanos the Melodist. His humility allowed God’s grace to strengthen him. Likewise, St. Paul’s statement, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” is a sentence of humility, not boastfulness. He was stating that the only way he had learned to be content, was with Christ’s help. He tells the Philippians that he has learned “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” What St. Paul means is that he is full of Christ, but still hungry for the Kingdom of Heaven. He is content with all that God has given him, but he always acknowledges that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

Christ strengthens us, not to become wealthy or powerful for our own sakes, but to resist temptation and transcend our fallen nature. There have been many times that I have given into sin, but each time I fall, I try again, I try and I fight. Through my acceptance of Christ’s mercy, I am able to know that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

Christ strengthens us, not to become wealthy or powerful for our own sakes, but to resist temptation and transcend our fallen nature. There have been many times that I have given into sin, but each time I fall, I try again, I try and I fight. Through my acceptance of Christ’s mercy, I am able to know that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

As she whispered its beginning, I hesitated, and by the time I finally did chant something, it came out squeaky and indistinct. I was barely heard, and if it weren’t for the prayer books, no one would have understood what I sang. I could feel my face turning red, and I stopped chanting.

At the end of Vespers, I ran out of the chapel, tears streaming down my face. I was mortified, humiliated, and honestly believed that I would never be able to chant. When my counselor found me upset, she comforted me and told me that “we were created to love and worship God. Instruments can play symphonies, but no earthly thing can play the words written on our hearts.” My tears stopped and my heart rejoiced with a love and understanding that I had scarcely felt before. I was still wary of chanting, but I knew that with practice and God’s help, I could learn to praise Him.

The next day at Orthros, a new camper was chanting. I stayed away from the chanters’ stand, still wary, but I applauded her bravery. That evening at Vespers, there were two new chanters. By Thursday evening, campers of all ages were lined up across the back wall to the end of the chapel, each trying a verse or two. After that night, a rotating schedule had to be made because so many campers wanted to chant. One of the younger campers came up to me later and explained why there were suddenly so many people willing to try a turn at the stand. She said that I had given them the “OK” to chant. I was stunned. My weak and squeaky voice somehow encouraged all of those children to offer their voices in praise of God. It confirmed for me the common saying that Christ doesn’t call those who are qualified, but qualifies those who answer His call.

A great example of this is St. Romanos the Melodist. Ironically, St. Romanos also struggled with making his voice sing what his heart felt. Born in Syria in the Fifth Century, St. Romanos grew up with the love of God in his heart. He was always the first to come to church and the last to leave. He became a reader, and on the eve of the Nativity, he was told to chant the improvised hymns. Paralyzed, he couldn’t think of anything to sing. Another reader took over for him, but tears flowed down his face as he hid behind the rest of the chanters. After the service, he prayed to the Theotokos, asking, “What shall I say to glorify thy newborn Son?” That night the Theotokos came to him in a vision, giving him a scroll and telling him to swallow it. The saint did as he was commanded and then woke up, full of joy and hymns for Christ. The next morning, St. Romanos went out to chant and without any hesitation or premeditation, sang “Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One.” St. Romanos had been given the gift of understanding, composition, and hymnography, writing hymns for the rest of his life as he continued to answer Christ’s call.

St. Romanos didn’t think that he was worthy to chant. He could have let himself be bound by “can’t.” Instead, his humility allowed God’s grace to strengthen him. Likewise, St. Paul’s statement, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” is a sentence of humility, not boastfulness. He was stating that the only way he had learned to be content, was with Christ’s help. He tells the Philippians that he has learned “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” What St. Paul means is that he is full of Christ, but still hungry for the Kingdom of Heaven. He is content with all that God has given him, but he always acknowledges that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

Christ strengthens us, not to become wealthy or powerful for our own sakes, but to resist temptation and transcend our fallen nature. There have been many times that I have given into sin, but each time I fall, I try again, I try and I fight. Through my acceptance of Christ’s mercy, I am able to know that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

As she whispered its beginning, I hesitated, and by the time I finally did chant something, it came out squeaky and indistinct. I was barely heard, and if it weren’t for the prayer books, no one would have understood what I sang. I could feel my face turning red, and I stopped chanting.

At the end of Vespers, I ran out of the chapel, tears streaming down my face. I was mortified, humiliated, and honestly believed that I would never be able to chant. When my counselor found me upset, she comforted me and told me that “we were created to love and worship God. Instruments can play symphonies, but no earthly thing can play the words written on our hearts.” My tears stopped and my heart rejoiced with a love and understanding that I had scarcely felt before. I was still wary of chanting, but I knew that with practice and God’s help, I could learn to praise Him.

The next day at Orthros, a new camper was chanting. I stayed away from the chanters’ stand, still wary, but I applauded her bravery. That evening at Vespers, there were two new chanters. By Thursday evening, campers of all ages were lined up across the back wall to the end of the chapel, each trying a verse or two. After that night, a rotating schedule had to be made because so many campers wanted to chant. One of the younger campers came up to me later and explained why there were suddenly so many people willing to try a turn at the stand. She said that I had given them the “OK” to chant. I was stunned. My weak and squeaky voice somehow encouraged all of those children to offer their voices in praise of God. It confirmed for me the common saying that Christ doesn’t call those who are qualified, but qualifies those who answer His call.

A great example of this is St. Romanos the Mela-
COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

ST. NICHOLAS, BROOKLYN, CELEBRATES SEVERAL MILESTONES

Seven hierarchs, assisted by almost two dozen clergy gathered in worship around the holy altar at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn, New York, on Sunday, October 20. They thanked God above all for the body and blood of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ; and also for the centuries of the Cathedral on State Street and the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Syro-Arabian Mission by St. Raphael of Brooklyn; for the elevation to the dignity of Archpriest of the Cathedral’s Dean, Fr. Thomas Zain; for the 25 years in the holy priesthood of Archdiocesan Cathedral’s Vicar General, and in his other roles in the Archdiocese.

His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, who arrived in the U.S. the night before his visit, said, “We must continue to remain the salt of the earth, to preserve Christ in our hearts, and to save this world from madness and decay.” Metropolitan Hilarion said in his homily: “We must do all that we can to transfigure it. Each of us is a disciple of the Lord, with humility and love, bringing the gospel to those near and far. Such was the ministry of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who came here 125 years ago, to found the community of this church.”

At the conclusion of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Joseph welcomed Metropolitan Hilarion, who arrived in the U.S. the night before. “Your presence here for this great celebration is greatly appreciated,” Sayidna said. “We thank you for bringing the blessing of the holy Patriarchate of Russia.” Sayidna also stressed the enduring relationship and shared history cherished by the churches of Antioch and Russia.

His Eminence recalled the pilgrimage of Archdiocesan clergy and laity he led in May to Russia, where he visited Metropolitan Hilarion. “You cannot imagine the joy and richness of the faith we brought home with us. We have witnessed the beautiful way of faith in Russia. People are strong and deep in their faith.” Sayidna then turned to the congregation and said, “Go to Russia and see the spirituality and the piety and the monasteries, and the experience of many holy fathers and mothers. St. Raphael experienced all of that.”

Earlier that weekend, Sayidna Joseph convened the autumn meetings for the Archdiocesan bishops, the Order of St. Ignatius, the Antiochian Village Council, and the Board of Trustees.

On Saturday night, following Great Vespers, a banquet was held to honor Fr. Thomas Zain’s 25 years in the holy priesthood. Joining the Archdiocesan leaders at the Brooklyn Law School were the President of the Borough of Brooklyn, Mr. Eric Adams; and the Honorary Consul General of Lebanon in New Jersey, Mr. John Alis-Habib, and his wife, Mrs. Sonia Alis-Habib. Fr. Michael Ellias, Pastor of St. Mary Church in Brooklyn, served as Master of Ceremonies. Fr. Thomas’s wife, Khouria Claudia, Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Mr. Roger David, President of the Order, spoke lovingly of him. His Eminence presented Fr. Tom with the Certificate of Meritorious Service, honoring his years of service as priest, Cathedral Dean, and Vicar General, and in his other roles in the Archdiocese.

Peter Samore

BISHOP ANTHONY VISITS ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST, BAINBRIDGE, OHIO

His Grace Bishop Anthony visited St. Luke the Evangelist the weekend of September 14–15, 2019. The weekend marked his first visit since the parish acquired its new building on 12 acres of property in Bainbridge, Ohio, earlier this year.

The building was originally built in the mid-1980s as a Catholic church, but had been used as a Protestant church for the past 20 years. The parish has been working to transform the space into an Orthodox church since moving into the building this past spring. The first phase of temple beautification was completed a few weeks before Bishop Anthony’s visit. The parish had installed the principal iconography provided by Fr. Jonah Campbell of Damascus Gallery in Wayne, West Virginia, in the church nave.

The hierarchical visit formally began Saturday evening with the reception of the Bishop at the church by St. Luke’s pastor, the Rev. Fr. Matthew Thurman, followed immediately by Saturday Vespers. The chanting for the
parishioners’ questions about the Bishop Anthony also entertained mortgage on the new property. The first priorities, to build a new church temple on nave, and priorities for the parish in congregational singing. Three special celebrations took place at the end of the Liturgy. First, His Grace blessed the church nave and new iconography with holy water. Second, Bishop ANTHONY led the Procession of the Cross in observance of the weekend’s festive celebration. Finally, parishioners Mike Bifano and Randy Verbrugge were inducted into the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch with George and Anne Thomas serving as their sponsors. After Liturgy, the parish enjoyed a formal luncheon with the Bishop, followed by a question-and-answer session with His Grace and the parish’s church school students.

BISHOP JOHN VISITS HOLY TRINITY, LYNCHBURG

Holy Trinity parish in Lynchburg, Virginia, hosted Bishop JOHN, November 9–10. Bishop JOHN oversees the Western Rite parishes in our Archdiocese. His Grace was formally received at Vespers on Saturday and encouraged us with his homily. Supper with the clergy and Parish Council followed at Fr. Alban and Khouria Helen Waggener’s home. On Sunday, His Grace preached at Matins and Mass, and preached. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, he elevated Fr. Alban to Archpriest. A picnic followed at a parishioner’s home, at which the Bishop answered many questions from our Inquirers and the newly-illumined. We were blessed with a beautiful day and the loving ministr y of our beloved hierarch.

Fr. Alban Waggener

BISHOP NICHOLAS ORDAINS A PRIEST AT ST. PETER CHURCH, MADISON, MISSISSIPPI

His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS made his arch-pastoral visit to St. Peter Church in Madison, Mississippi, November 8–10, 2019. The highlight of his visit was the ordination to the priesthood of a son of St. Peter’s, Deacon Herman Lasetter, during the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. Fr. Herman is completing his third and final year at Holy Cross Seminary. A wonderful banquet honoring Fr. Herman, Khouri Nikki (Emelia) and their children, Titus and Thatcher, was enjoyed afterwards by a full house of the faithful of St. Peter and other members of Fr. Herman’s and Kh. Nikki’s families. His Grace kept a very full schedule of meetings with the various organizations and clergy of St. Peter Church and encouraged everyone to participate in the life of St. Peter’s, and the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast.

The Word
emphasized. "You have to make the effort. You have to open the book." The Bible can be "the GPS to enable us to connect to the Creator and help us in the struggle to be like him," he explained. "This world will lead us to darkness, but light leads to light. Abundance of life is being with God, moving with God, obeying the teachings of God. If you do that, your life is full - full of the Holy Spirit. It really depends on you and me if we wish to invoke that Holy Spirit."

Fr. Constantine spoke on seven major topics to amplify his practical advice about bringing the Holy Spirit into our daily lives:

**Water** - Water is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. Our lives begin with the water of Baptism. Fr. Constantine spoke about the "living water" that Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, and reminded us of the words that we sing from Galatians 3:27, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

**Bread** - "Bread was for one reason only: for our salvation, yours and mine, as the expression of the ultimate love of God," Fr. Constantine said. "He reveals Himself as the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." We draw near to Christ to nurture both our physical bodies and our souls, Fr. Constantine explained. "Communion requires bread and wine. The Eucharist is the medicine of immortality. We come to renew ourselves by the Spirit at the heart of the Church. This is the heavenly table of the Lamb, which is laid for you."

Fr. Constantine looked around the church and asked many in the group how they came to be Orthodox. The answers were surprisingly varied, coming from people whose background was Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Jewish, Byzantine Catholic, and Evangelical. This shows, Fr. Constantine explained, that so many people have "hunger for the truth, for the right food. We have the food! What was given to us - this is the Church handed down. Nothing has been changed. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have the one true, catholic, and apostolic Church."

The Tree of Life - "The theme of trees is woven powerfully throughout the Old and New Testaments, beginning with the Tree of Knowledge in the garden of Paradise. Many people today are trying to find their roots, where they came from," Fr. Constantine said. "Those of us who share a family tree, we are blessed. We are living in a transient society. Our relationships may be cut as time passes, but they are restored through connections," as they are here at St. Simeon for us.

**Cross** - The cross of Jesus is heavy," Fr. Constantine said. "Whether we wear a cross or not, we have a cross to bear. Christ said, 'Take up your cross and follow me.' However, Christians are not alone; we help each other. By wearing a cross, it is a practical way we connect with our Savior and his sufferings. "All of us have crosses in all colors and in all shapes. We all have our sorrow days," Fr. Constantine declared. "We all have our victorious days. The way to have abundant life is to connect with the cross. Let it shine!"

**Light** - Two parables in the Gospel of Matthew tell us about light. The first is from Matthew 5:14, where we are advised to let our light shine and not hide it under a bushel basket. "Candles remind you of God’s light, to be illuminated, to shine," Fr. Constantine said. "Whatever you do, whatever you say, it shows. People can see, hear, analyze what kind of light God’s light, to be illumined, to shine," Fr. Constantine said. "Whether we wear a cross or not, we have a cross to bear. Christ said, 'Take up your cross and follow me.' However, Christians are not alone; we help each other. By wearing a cross, it is a practical way we connect with our Savior and his sufferings. "All of us have crosses in all colors and in all shapes. We all have our sorrow days," Fr. Constantine declared. "We all have our victorious days. The way to have abundant life is to connect with the cross. Let it shine!"

**Aroma** - A censer has four chains with three bells each, representing the apostles who’ve come to tell us about God. "The censer has four chains with three bells each, representing the apostles who’ve come to tell us about God. The censer has a source of aroma, giving thanks to God, he explained, an aroma of the spirit to connect us to God. The censer has four chains with three bells each, representing the apostles who’ve come to tell you a story. When the priest censes the icons and then you, he is honoring you for being in the likeness of God."

The question for us to answer, Fr. Constantine said, is What kind of aroma do we bring to Christ? "We must take all this outside into the world; share the aroma of Jesus, the Gospels, with people outside. Wherever you go, represent Christ in all things. Whatever we do, we impact this world either for good or bad."

**Conclusion** - "The last word I want to say," Fr. Constantine said, wrapping up the day, is that this life that we receive is given to share the love and compassion of Jesus. We are created after the image of God to become like God. We are to be reminded of all cleansing and washing of sin through confession. We are reminded to be his light, to share his light. To partake of Him and remember Him as the bread of life. We are remembering all other things: aroma, the tree of life, and the span of life. Finally, we remember that life is a gift, and life should not be taken for granted or be abused. It should be appreciated and loved to the fullest in Christ. I hope that your light will shine. Let your light shine for all men."

"Of course, it isn’t possible to do justice to the full depth of Fr. Constantine’s discourse in one brief article. For the listeners, it was a remarkable opportunity to hear a great speaker give us advice of inestimable value, along with some very practical tips for inviting the solace, guidance, and strength of the Holy Spirit into our lives every day.

Karen Gilbert Haddy
After two of her sisters were chrismated in the Orthodox Church, Loni Freeman of Portland, Indiana, became increasingly drawn to the faith. She read books, listened to podcasts, and visited Orthodox churches. Her husband, Ron, however, was not interested. They were active members at a Methodist church where he had been a Sunday School teacher for 20 years, worship leader, and church council member. He was also a founding board member and past president of Youth for Christ of Jay, Adams, and Wells counties and was often invited to speak at churches in the area.

Both Ron and Loni grew up in evangelical churches and raised their four children in a Christian home. Ron is President and Chief Executive Officer of Jay Petroleum, the parent company of a chain of thirty-four Pak-A-Sak convenience stores, with 450 employees in Indiana and Ohio. He is also a member of the Huntington University Board of Trustees, where he is an alumnus of the Christian college.

Loni and her sisters grew up in a Baptist family. Her sister, Lisa, was chrismated at St. Elijah Orthodox Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 2010. “She had a library full of Orthodox books that we passed around, as well as videos and podcasts from Ancient Faith Radio. I remember being skeptical, fascinated, inspired and confused all at the same time by what I was learning. Some days I was so captivated by Orthodoxy that I devoured books by the hour or listened to podcasts all day long. Loni says that Becoming Orthodox by Peter Gillquist was the most influential book in her journey. “That is the first book that my sister gave me and made me want to read something else about Orthodoxy.”

Ron finally convinced Ron to visit a Fort Wayne Orthodox church. While they were driving home after their second visit, they were talking about the service, she asked him what he would think if she became an Orthodox Christian.

“I was unprepared for the look of pain and shock that crossed his face,” says Loni.

Ron says, “That was a wakeup call for me because I had just considered it a bit of a fad for her. After 36 years of being of the same mindset about Church, faith and all of that, I found it very difficult to accept. That was a tough couple of days for me, and we had several long talks about what it meant. I told her at the time that it felt like a spiritual divorce.”

“Your roots in the Protestant faith run deep very. So, when Loni initially presented me with Orthodoxy, I wasn’t all that interested because I thought I had already found ‘the pearl of great price’ that Jesus was speaking of. But I really wanted to understand what motivated her to consider it. Whether it made sense for me wasn’t the point. I just wanted to understand and accept what she was doing. I just started praying in the morning and asking God to open my eyes to the truth. I just wanted to know the truth. For ten weeks, I spent every free moment examining the faith; first its theology and then its history.”

Ron says, “My most influential book was Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism by Dr. Bradley Nassif. He did such a wonderful job in the first thirty pages of explaining what Orthodoxy is and its differences with Protestantism, and did it in such a gentle way. For someone who was Protestant, it made me want to know more. “In the end, I discovered that I had reached the boundaries of my Protestant faith. As I prayed each morning, I asked God to reveal his truth to me. The walls of those boundaries began to dissolve. The truth that made me feel like I had to become Orthodox very quickly was the Eucharist. I was reading the verse in John where Jesus says, ‘If you do not partake of my body and blood then you have no life in you.’ I’ve read that verse for years and years, and then suddenly, I felt like Jesus was speaking to me personally. I quickly came to believe if I wanted that, the only way I could have it was to become Orthodox. That was very much a turning point for me.”

They began to visit Orthodox churches and discovered the nearest two were more than an hour away: one to the north in Fort Wayne, and the other to the south in Fishers, an Indianapolis suburb. The driving time either way was about the same. The first time they visited St. George Orthodox Church in Fishers, they were immediately struck by the beauty and iconography of the new temple that was completed in 2013. They felt a warm welcome by Fr. Nabil Hanna, Pastor, and the congregation, more than a third of whom are converts from other faiths. “We were very, very impressed,” he says.

At the ages of 60 and 62, Ron and Loni were chrismated on January 6, 2018. They have become active members and Ron was recently elected to the parish council. Now they drive 72 miles each way to worship on Sunday. Sometimes they drive to attend midweek meetings and Lenten services.

They appreciate their pastor and friends at the Methodist Church, who were very understanding of their decision to leave. “But it’s not easy to say goodbye, and I sometimes mourn the loss of fellowship and history that it took us to leave our Methodist and Protestant history behind,” says Ron.

Loni was asked if she had any advice for someone whose spouse doesn’t seem interested in the Orthodox faith. “The only thing you can do is be patient and pray because truly it’s a work of the Holy Spirit. I would say don’t be critical. Sometimes I would go to church with him and then point out things that didn’t line up with my new theology. It was super hard to go there and not see things that I knew were not quite right.”

“That was not a good thing to do, because it just made things worse,” says Ron.

As Loni reflects on the last three years, sometimes she wonders, “Why were we so blessed?” She says, “We were reasonably happy in Protestantism for all these years, but God had something more to show us.”

David E. Summer

2020 Jack G. Shaheen Mass Communications Scholarships

Join the 81 previous recipients!

Award Amount: $2,500.00

Purpose: To honor Arab-American students who excel in Media Studies.

Eligibility: College students with an Arab-American background (juniors, seniors, and graduate school) enrolled in the 2020-2021 academic year, with a minimum 3.0 grade point average (GPA), and majoring in journalism, radio, television, and/or film.

Applications: Hard copy applications only. Send the following items to the ADC Research Institute (address below):

• A one-page statement explaining why you merit the scholarship, identifying your goals, and declaring that you are a U.S. citizen of Arab heritage.

• Two original, signed letters of recommendation from professors of mass communications.

• Copies of your articles, DVDs, films, and so forth. (Items will not be returned to you.)

• Official academic transcripts (minimum 3.0 GPA).

• Your permanent home address, phone number, and e-mail address, and your phone number during the school year, if it is different.

Deadline: Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Incomplete or late applications will not be accepted; remember: only hard copy applications will be accepted. Submit all materials at the address below:

ADC Research Institute
Att.: Mr. Nabil Mohamad, ADC Vice President
1705 Desales Street, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20036

If you have any questions, call 202-244-2990, or e-mail organizing@ADC.org.

Awards will be presented at ADC’s 40th National Convention in Washington, D.C., in 2020.