

THE WORD

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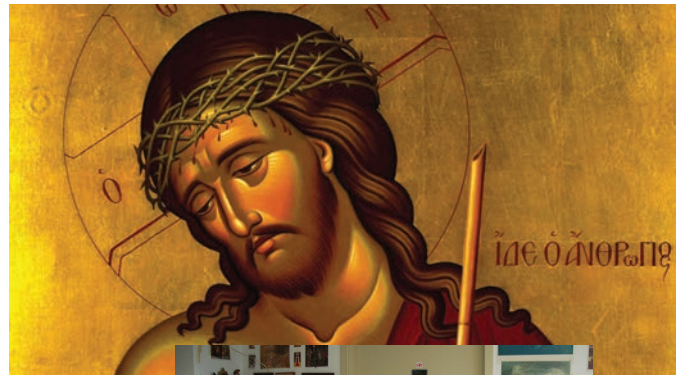
March 2020
Volume 64 No. 3



THE WORD

COVER: GEORGIAN SAINT KING VAKHTANG GORGASALI, A GREAT DEFENDER OF THE FAITH AND A BUILDER OF CHURCHES, WHO DIED DEFENDING HIS COUNTRY AND THE CHURCH. BY NIKO CHOCHELI, WWW.NIKOCHOCHELI.COM

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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.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:
U.S.A. and Canada, \$40.00
Foreign Countries, \$50.00
Single Copies, \$3.00

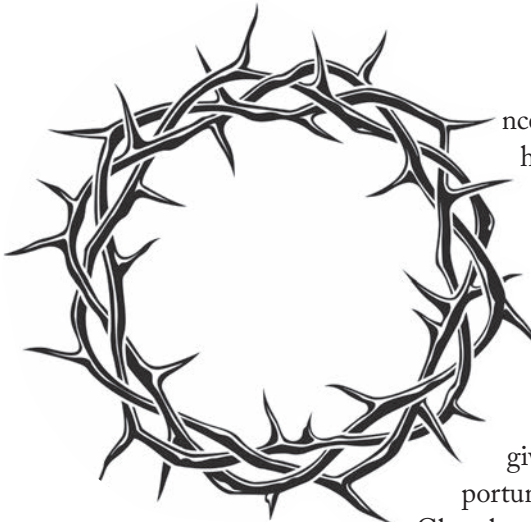
The WORD (USPS626-260) is published monthly, except July and August, by the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238; periodicals postage paid at Englewood, New Jersey 07631-5238 and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster send address changes to The WORD, 358 Mountain Road, PO Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
ISSN 0043-7964 www.antiochian.org.

Canada Post Publication Agreement No. 40043404
Return Canada address to
American International Mail, STN A – BOX 697, Windsor ON N9A 6N4, Canada

Lent Once Again

Bishop JOHN



nce again I have come to begin our annual Lenten journey to Pascha, and once again I am given an opportunity by the Church to get serious about my baptism, my Christianity, my call to righteousness, my forgiveness of others, my gaining of control of my passions, my control of body, my purification of senses, my prayer life, my time in the Scriptures, my reading choices and re-reading of Church Fathers, my time with saints through their writings, and my seeking out and visiting holy people. Only God knows how many Lents I will have before my repose. I should make this one count. I should take advantage of the church worship and readings. I should follow the church diet to simplify my life and clean out the compounds in my body that result from meat and processed foods.

From my youth up, I have enjoyed sharing knowledge and working with others. This is true both about spiritual and non-spiritual matters. In junior high school I enjoyed setting up the audio-visual equipment and reading support machines more than studying or using the equipment myself. I get a good deal of pleasure out of helping others, but none of this can take the place of doing what we need to do for ourselves. We each must be encountering God, sharing ourselves genuinely, recognizing our faults, and working with God through His Church to heal and grow in Christ. A relationship with God cannot be

given by others: we need to work on it ourselves. Like all other relationships, our relationship with God takes deliberation, and is hard.

As parents or adults in our communities, talking to children about healthy living and spirituality is not nearly as good as offering ourselves as living examples of life-giving truths. If I can't do it for myself, perhaps I can fool myself into success by doing it for those God has put in my care. By sharing this with you, perhaps I can become even more accountable and in turn successful. No one in my care is expected to go it alone. It is not fair for me to expect that of myself.

I join St. Paul in his claim that the Gospel that I teach is not mine but Christ's. He has shown Himself to be the King of Heaven and Earth, and He is triumphant over sin, sickness and death. This is precisely what we are celebrating at Pascha, and the very reason we have Lent. God has given us, God's children, everything we need, to join in the celebration of His victory. Our strength comes from Him. You and I can follow each other in celebrating this truth and sharing in the victory. God has joined us in our lives, so that we can join Him in His. We participate through our worship and lives in the Church, the fruit of His victory.

Lent is the ultimate opportunity to put God first, and to worship Him, free from unessential activities. It brings us to celebrate Pascha, the fulfillment of our baptism, Christianity and humanity. To be a man or woman is to be in the image and likeness of God. Righteousness and holiness are the way of life to fulfill this promise. Pascha is our passover into heaven, the heaven that we celebrate in Christ now. Pray for me that my Lent this year can be a genuine and fruitful journey. My prayer for you is the same. Have a blessed Lent.

Editor in Chief Bishop JOHN
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Editorial Office:
The WORD
2 Lydia's Path
Westborough, MA 01581-1841
e-mail: WORDMAG@AOL.COM
Subscription Office:
358 Mountain Road
PO Box 5238
Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
registrar@antiochian.org

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATION

SIROTKO, Deacon Theodore, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on December 8, 2019, at St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is attached to the parish.

ELEVATIONS

THIBODEAUX, Father Finibar (Barry), of Christ the Savior Church, Jacksonville, Texas, to the dignity of Archpriest on January 26, 2020.

RETIRED

SUMMERFIELD, Dn. James, of Holy Cross Church, Yakima, Washington, effective February 1, 2020.

DEPARTED

KINDER, Very Rev. Patrick, at his home in Louisville, Kentucky on January 14, after a long and courageous battle with bone cancer. He is survived by Khouria Vanessa and their son Anthony.

BEAUCHAMP (née Khoury), Khouria Ann (Patty), December 4, 2020, following a stroke. She was the widow of Fr. Antony Beauchamp and is survived by sons Michael (Becky) and Christopher (Sally) Beauchamp, by mother Frances Khoury, and by sisters Elaine Khoury and Denise Panella.

2020 Diocesan Parish Life Conferences

Diocese of Miami, June 10–13, 2020

Hosted by St. John Church, Memphis, Tennessee

Diocese of Wichita, June 10–13, 2020

Hosted by St. James Church, Fort Collins, Colorado

Diocese of Worcester, June 19–21, 2020

Hosted by St. Mary Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Diocese of Toledo, June 24–28, 2020

Hosted by St. George Church, Indianapolis, Indiana

Dioceses of New York/Oakland,

June 25–28, 2020

Hosted by Holy Cross Church, Linthicum, Maryland

Diocese of Ottawa, July 2–5, 2020

Hosted by St. Mary Church, Montreal, Quebec

Diocese of Los Angeles, July 1–5, 2020

Hosted by St. Nicholas Church, San Francisco, California

“For the Healing of Soul and Body: Let Us Pray to the Lord”



Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) and Sub-deacon David Hyatt, with the assistance of Dr. James Rossetti and Rita Madden

“FASTING POSSESSES GREAT POWER AND IT WORKS GLORIOUS THINGS. TO FAST IS TO BANQUET WITH ANGELS.”

– St. Athanasius the Great

Fasting is an important spiritual struggle that carries us into the Kingdom of God. Combined with increased prayer and almsgiving, fasting helps us to say No to the bodily desires in order to say Yes to the spiritual riches of the virtues of Christ. St. Seraphim of Sarov writes, “Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but

the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfillment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God” (*Conversation on the Goal of the Christian Life*).

There are two basic categories of fasting within the Church: the Ascetical Fast and the Eucharistic Fast.

The Ascetical Fast refers to the prescribed days and seasons during the year in which we refrain from consuming all meat, meat products, dairy products, fish, olive oil, and alcoholic beverages. The Eucharistic or Communion Fast refers to the period of time in which we abstain from all food and drink after midnight before receiving Holy Communion the next day. It is important that all fasting rules be

developed and followed under the direction of an Orthodox physician or dietician who is blessed by the parish priest. In certain circumstances, he may relax the traditional fasting guidelines at his discretion due to health concerns, very young children, pregnant women, or nursing mothers. (*Please refer to the Antiochian Archdiocese website for the current fasting calendar and guidelines.*) In this way, fasting can be a spiritually fruitful practice for everyone for the healing of both soul and body.

St. John Cassian (+435), a saint known for his writings on the monastic life, described the difference between eating to provide for the needs of life and self-indulgence. While his writings were specifically for monks, they are also helpful for the faithful in all walks of life. He writes,

A clear rule for self-control handed down by the Fathers is this: stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied.

When the Apostle said, “Make no provision to fulfill the desires of the flesh” (Rom. 13:14), he was not forbidding us to provide for the needs of life; he was warning us against self-indulgence. Moreover, by itself abstinence from food does not contribute to perfect purity of soul unless the other virtues are active as well. Humility, for example, practiced through obedience in our work and through bodily hardship, is a great help.

If we avoid avarice not only by having no money, but also by not wanting to have any, this leads us towards purity of soul. Freedom from anger, from dejection, self-esteem and pride also contributes to purity of soul in general, while self-control and fasting are especially important for bringing about that specific purity of soul which comes through restraint and moderation.

No one whose stomach is full can fight mentally against the demon of unchastity. Our initial struggle therefore must be to gain control of our stomach and to bring our body into subjection not only through fasting, but also through vigils, labors and spiritual reading, and through concentrating our heart on fear of Gehenna and on longing for the kingdom of heaven” (*On the Eight Vices: On the Demon of Unchastity and the Desire of the Flesh*).

St. John offers us a vision of a rightly ordered relationship to food.

- Consume enough food to sustain a healthy life.
- Practice self-control so as not to overeat and become physically and spiritually lethargic.
- Combine fasting with prayer, almsgiving, spiritual reading, remembrance of death and the coming judgment, and a desire for the kingdom of heaven!

The Holy Orthodox Church recognizes our human person as an integrated being of soul and body, made in the image and for the likeness of our Creator. It should come as no surprise, then, that fasting is not only a spiritually profitable exercise, but also a physically fruitful one. Conversely, neglecting ascetical practices prescribed by the Church cannot only take a spiritual toll, but a physical one as well. Choosing healthy ingredients for our meals that serve to sustain life, and limiting our food intake, so as not to put us at further risk for obesity, heart disease, and even cancer, are all important ways that we maintain a healthy body to serve the Lord.

In 2003, a study of one hundred and twenty Eastern Orthodox adults was conducted for one year. Sixty regularly fasted according to the guidelines of the Orthodox Church (the Fasters), and the other sixty did not fast at all throughout the year (the Controls).

The result? Statistically significant end-fasting total and LDL cholesterol differences were found in fasters. Fasters compared to controls presented 12.5% lower end-total cholesterol ($p < 0.001$), 15.9% lower end-LDL cholesterol ($p < 0.001$) and 1.5% lower end-BMI ($p < 0.001$). The end-LDL/HDL ratio was lower in fasters (6.5%, $p < 0.05$) while the change in end-HDL cholesterol in fasters was not significant (4.6% decline). Similar results were found when the pre- and end-fasting values of fasters were compared. No change was found in control subjects. The conclusion was that adherence to Eastern Orthodox fasting periods contributes to a reduction in the blood lipid profile including a non-significant reduction in HDL cholesterol and possible impact on obesity.¹

Further recognizing the natural integration of all spheres of the human person, we should be aware that a neglected body, often manifest as high-caloric or ill-advised product consumption, may not only contribute to physical ailments, but that related health issues have been associated with psychological distress and depression. Though these

relationships are not well understood, they do seem to exist. While the complex interaction of human conditions arising at the fall seem elusive to man, we must remember that the Church remains the hospital in which eternal cure can be found. This said, improper understanding and application of Her ascetical practices can also be damaging.

One temptation that frequently arises during fasting seasons is to eat highly processed foods which, while adhering to the fasting guidelines, are full of unhealthy ingredients. It is important to remember that when we fast, we do so by eating less and more simply in ingredients. When we spend so much time inventing substitute meals that are so tasty that our stomachs do not realize we are fasting, we are sabotaging our fast and robbing ourselves of the spiritual fruit of our labors.

Rita Madden, an Orthodox Christian and Registered Dietician and Nutritionist (RDN), and author of *Food, Faith and Fasting*, writes,

Many highly processed foods contain artificial ingredients such as: food dyes, sweeteners, and additives/preservatives. These artificial foods can be harmful to one’s health. It can be an easy out to choose many of these food-like substances when we are not fasting, but even more so when we are fasting. We need to stick to the real, basic foods that the church outlines as our fasting food options because as Saint Paisios cautions, “Today people make illicit and deceitful businesses. However, they should not falsify food substances, because they become the cause of harming people’s health.

Modern-day science demonstrates that many of these artificially created food-like items are taking a toll on our health. St. Seraphim of Sarov taught that: “Every day one should partake of just enough food to permit the body,

being fortified, to be a friend and helper to the soul in performing the virtues. Otherwise, with the body exhausted the soul may also weaken.” A key word in this teaching – and especially when it comes to our fasting days – is fortified. When we fast, we should choose real quality foods that provide us the nourishment we need and that fall into the guidelines of our Holy Orthodox Tradition. The prescribed foods have nutrients our body needs but are free of the harmful synthetic ingredients. To illustrate: butter is out when we fast, so we choose mar-



“Do not neglect the Fast; it constitutes an imitation of Christ’s way of life.”

garine instead, and half-n-half is not consumed so we choose Coffee Mate. But both margarine and Coffee Mate are harmful to our health; whereas when butter and half-n-half are consumed as a part of a balanced diet they can be food choices that provide the body some of the nutrition it needs. In addition, we do not want to miss the purpose of the fast because we always have a replacement. This downplays the

Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) and Sub-deacon David Hyatt, with the assistance of Dr. James Rossetti and Rita Madden

Rita Madden (MPH, RDN), a Registered Dietician and Nutritionist, MPH, RDN, conducts workshops that use the Holy Eastern Orthodox tradition as the foundation in caring for our health. In these workshops she also explores fasting healthfully, for both body and soul alike, for the entire family. James (Sub-deacon Seraphim) Rossetti, DO – Hematological Malignancy and Cellular Therapy, UPMC Hillman Cancer Center. Dr. Rossetti is the Chair of the Eastern Dioceses Ministry Council of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

essence of the fast as what happens is during the fasting period, we just choose other satisfying options versus allowing ourselves to feel a physical hunger. This physical hunger is pertinent in reminding us that our true food is Christ and our real hunger is for Him. When we choose to say no to certain foods and let go of the ‘replacement game’ we choose to renounce our own will and utilize the discipline of fasting to put God’s will first in our life.

The church has always provided dispensations from fasting when it comes to: specific illnesses, the very young and old, pregnant women and nursing mothers. Yes, children are growing but can do some level of fasting. Where your family is at in the fasting discipline is what needs to be determined with your parish priest (or spiritual father). We live in a land of plenty and when the right food choices are



1. Sarri, K.O., Tzanakis, N.E., Linardakis, M.K. *et al.*, “Effects of Greek Orthodox Christian Church fasting on serum lipids and obesity,” *BMC Public Health* 3, 16 (2003). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-3-16>
2. St. Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2015), p. 196.
3. St. Basil the Great, *On Fasting and Feasts* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), p. 77.

made, both children and adults can attain the nutrients they need while letting go of the non-fasting foods for a period of time.

Children are able to fast as a regular part of the life of the Church with their family, under the guidance of an Orthodox physician or dietician who is blessed by the parish priest. In many parishes, children begin to observe the Eucharistic or Communion Fast between the ages of six and eight. With the loving instruction and nurture of their parents, children can both understand why we fast and learn to embrace fasting with their family and parish community. It is important that the parents be good role models for their children in joyfully fasting out of love for God and a desire to grow

into His likeness. Reading examples from the Holy Scriptures and the lives of the Saints are also important ways to help children understand and embrace the fast.

St. Porphyrios, in *Wounded by Love*, describes the important role of parents in the formation of their children’s love for God and the formation of ascetical practices. He writes, “What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, prayer and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children.”² In this way, children come to understand the full life of the Church and their participation in it, motivated by a loving desire to become saints. St. Basil writes, “Fasting protects children, chastens the young, makes seniors venerable.... If all were to take fasting as the counselor for their actions, nothing would prevent a profound peace from spreading throughout the entire world.”³

Whether we be a child or an adult, we should not neglect, under the guidance of our priest or spiritual father, the fasting practices of the Church. As St. Anthony the Great reminds us, “Do not neglect the Fast; it constitutes an imitation of Christ’s way of life.” This life in Christ is indeed the path back to union with God that was tragically lost at the fall. In this regard, we should not approach our fasting with a frown. As we recall what was lost at the fall, the very wholeness of man, we can both look back upon it and forward to the restored fullness of life that awaits those who seek it. Fasting is thus not only a taste of what once was, but a foretaste of what is again to come. This practice reminds us that while all things are possible, only One is necessary. It is in this context that we heed the following words of St. Theophan the Recluse:

Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life.



Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt

Glorifying God through the Arts

Niko Chocheli

BEAUTY, WHETHER IN THE NATURAL, GOD-CREATED WORLD, OR IN THE FINE ARTS WHERE HUMANITY IMITATES THE CREATOR, ELEVATES OUR MIND AND SPIRIT, BRINGING US CLOSER TO GOD.

Shota Rustaveli, a great Orthodox Christian writer and poet in the court of Saint Queen Tamara. His writing embodies the significance of the Orthodox faith in the ethos of the ancient Orthodox country of Georgia. By Niko Chocheli.



Throughout my career as a fine artist, iconographer, and illustrator, as well as an art instructor and lecturer in art history, I have been asked about the meaning of art, its purpose, and its spiritual significance. These are profound matters, and both the artist and the spectator must be aware of them. Every endeavor we undertake should ultimately give glory to God

who created us in His image, and fine art is a powerful tool to do so. As Orthodox Christians it is natural for us to appreciate the vast riches we encounter in our spiritual lives in the presence of holy icons. Their mystical visages daily reinforce the truth of our faith and bless our lives with the grace of the Holy Spirit in our worship of the Trinity, our veneration of the Saints, and our personal prayer life. But what about fine art? Is it merely superficial, material beauty, or can fine art also deepen our

religious faith and truly glorify God? Does it also have kernels of spiritual truth that reaffirm the Incarnation and elevate the human being? I believe that the answer is Yes, absolutely!

I was invited in February 2019 to speak about this subject at the American Academy of Sacred Arts at the opening of its exhibit of my Orthodox book illustrations and paintings. (See the Youtube video, “*American Academy of Sacred Arts presents Niko Chocheli.*”) In this presentation I analyze these questions in depth and attempt to answer them. We take a look at the role fine art plays in glorifying God, revealing His character, His Presence, and greatness. We are reminded that God Himself is the author and creator of beauty, and that when we create beauty we are imitating the One who made us.

What I would add to that discussion is the interesting relationship between the Holy Icon and its descendent, fine art. I have often spoken about the many differences between the two, namely the icon’s mystical function, versus the narrative or representational role of realistic art. With regard to our spiritual lives and our awareness of God’s presence around us in His creation, however, I believe there is a relationship between the icon and fine art that resembles one between a parent and a child.

As loving parents teach their children, the holy icons focus our attention directly on the faces of Jesus Christ and His Saints, so that we may interact with them on an intimate, personal level. The Holy Spirit uses icons to instruct us, to protect us, to show compassion and encouragement, and to stir our consciences and urge us to repent. We are also moved to speak in prayer to God and to His Saints, as we gaze at their faces. Always the icon is a reminder of God’s love, truth, and wisdom.

Fine art in its highest sense can be viewed as the obedient child of the holy icon, because it reflects its education and upbringing when it glorifies our Creator by showing the beauty and perfection of His creation. Fine art can bring us closer to God, because it is called to make us aware of His beautiful creation, to elevate our minds, and to open our eyes to see things we often fail to notice. As a well-raised child, fine art gives thanks to its parent with an open heart, for whether the artist intends it or not, the beauty the artist creates is a reflection of the care and work of the Divine Creator.

The absence of beauty in art does not give glory

to God. It reflects the mortal nature of man, whose life on Earth is passing. It will show the state of an artist alienated from God by selfishness and pride, and these will all pass away. Art giving glory to the eternal God will never pass away, but will move from glory to glory. This is the essence of fine art and beauty: to elevate our souls and to connect us with the most perfect Creator, God Himself.

Many great artists have sought the timelessness of beauty, and by doing so their creations continue to give glory back to God. Their art still lives, because true beauty is always a reflection of God, ennobling the art, the artist, and the viewer whose mind and heart are stirred. The great nineteenth-century French Master of Classicism, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, told his students, “There are not two arts, there is only one: it is the one which has as its foundation the beautiful, which is eternal and natural. Those who seek elsewhere deceive themselves, and in the most fatal manner.”

This is true not only in painting, sculpture, poetry, or architecture, but also in music, which is another child of the sacred arts. “The final aim and reason of all music is nothing other than the glorification of God, and the refreshment of the spirit,” wrote Johann Sebastian Bach. The timeless music of Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart is permeated with divine beauty. He was a God-loving artist whose certain faith is vindicated by his last great work, his Requiem, K. 626, reminiscent of the Orthodox Funeral Service. When Mozart’s music is paired with Psalm 117 in the Laudate Dominum, K. 339, it is a clear vehicle for God to touch the listener’s heart with “groanings too deep for words.” It delivers a pure, loving message of reassurance that resonates with one’s soul, with or without the listener understanding the words.

Beauty is inseparable from God. It is a concrete manifestation of His love towards His creation. Anyone who looks for it will find God at its center.

Niko Chocheli
Niko Chocheli teaches drawing, painting,
and art history in his art studio in
Doylestown, Pennsylvania.



Twenty-Second Annual Clergy Seminar



Metropolitan JOSEPH's Opening Remarks

FEBRUARY 3-6, ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA

I am overjoyed to greet all of you on the occasion of our Twenty-second Clergy Seminar in this holy Diocese of Los Angeles and the West. For twenty-two blessed years, I have had the honor and privilege of presiding over this gathering of a clergy brotherhood that has always been and will always be close to my heart. We have experienced so many things together as fellow laborers in the Vineyard of Our Lord – all of the joys of ministry, and all of its heartbreaks and disappointments. We have gathered each of these past twenty-two years to rejoice together and weep together, embrace one another and support one another, teach one another and learn from one another. I have cherished each and every moment of each and every seminar with you. I believe this year will be another blessed event that will nourish and inspire our ministries.

I ask that we use this time to reaffirm our brotherhood and our unity this week. We know the old Russian proverb: “One Christian is no Christian.” This can be equally applied to us as the clergy. Our priesthood is not our own – it is Christ’s priesthood. We share in it with all of our clergy and hierarchs. We must be unified with Christ and with one another.

Our Lord teaches that in order to love, we must have obedience. We must be unified in love, and we must be unified in our obedience to the Orthodox Faith – in its teachings, its ethos, and its Tradition – and in our obedience to one another. Brothers, the evil one is at work – spreading his snares and seeking to divide us. Let us not pay attention and react to the noise with anger and defensiveness, for Our Lord kept His silence as the Lamb before the shearers. Let us concentrate here on our unity and brotherhood and let us take it from here back to our ministries.

I am pleased to welcome as our keynote speaker Dr. Daniel Hinshaw, Emeritus Professor of Surgery at the University of Michigan, as well as a Professor of Palliative Care at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and a visiting Professor at our Balamand University. His long and distinguished career has included the founding of the Palliative Care and Consultation Service at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical

Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and providing volunteer hospice services in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Romania. He has published more than eighty papers in scientific journals, as well as two books for

A person who has been raised in the saccharine sweetness of contemporary religion is not equipped to face the suffering and pain of terminal illness. He has not been taught that these trials are allowed by God for his preparation for eternity. He has not availed himself of the means of repentance that bring the peace of his heart and conscience. He has not been sanctified by becoming a partaker of the divine nature in the sacramental life of the Church.

St. Vladimir’s Press on the subjects of suffering and healing from the perspective of our Orthodox Faith. During the recent Conference on the Family that took place during the meetings of the Holy Synod of Antioch this past October, our Father-in-Christ, Patriarch JOHN X, personally invited Dr. Hinshaw to offer a paper on ministering to those who are ending their earthly lives. His paper, “Orthodox Christian Accompaniment at the End of Life,” was enthusiastically received by all of those present, and I can say that he made our Archdiocese proud with his contribution to the Conference. We look forward to learning from Dr. Hinshaw this week, and we are grateful to him for being with us.

The topic this year is “Living and Dying Well as Orthodox Christians in Post-Modernity.” Our role as priests is first and foremost teaching our people how to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. In our contemporary society, it seems that we have confused the role of the Church with worldly aims. The Church is not here to increase our wealth, make us better looking, or affirm us in our passions. The Church is here to prepare us for eternity, and this can only be done through a life of prayer, repentance, struggle, forgiveness, and service. Our mission as priests is hindered today by a culture that seeks to anesthetize us to the reality of our death and the final judgment through its endless distractions and entertainments. Churches are pressured to join this numbing of our consciences through replacing worship with performances, repentance with affirmation, prophetic exhortation with stand-up comedy, confession with pop psychology, and the attaining of the mind of Christ with the adopting of “politically correct” opinions peddled by politicians, actors, and athletes.



Nowhere is this kind of pressure seen more clearly than in how our culture approaches death and dying. As Dr. Hinshaw pointed out to the Holy Synod, medicine tends to concentrate on healing only the biological aspects of diseases, not the spiritual ones. A person who has been raised in the saccharine sweetness of contemporary religion is not equipped to face the suffering and pain of terminal illness. He has not been taught that these trials are allowed by God for his preparation for eternity. He has not availed himself of the means of repentance that bring the peace of his heart and conscience. He has not been sanctified by becoming a partaker of the divine nature in the sacramental life of the Church. So many Christians end their

life in despair, anguish, heartbreak, and anger. They thought that being a good Christian would give them health and material blessings, and they cannot understand why those blessings are being taken from them in their illness. When a person dies, the culture does not want to deal with death. Instead of the funeral service of the Orthodox Church, that beautifully reflects on the transient nature of our life in the profound *idiomela* of St. John of Damascus, contemporary people want the artificially-beautified body enclosed in a casket with a ceremony that simply tells funny stories and amusing anecdotes about the one who has fallen asleep. There is no call to give alms or offer prayers for the reposed – only a “celebration of life” that may cheer up the grieving, but does nothing of spiritual help for the one who died.

Beloved brothers in the Lord, let us pay special attention to the talks of Dr. Hinshaw, and let us not wait to bring what he teaches to our people. If we wait to teach until there is someone who is sick, what good will that teaching be? If we do not teach about this eternally important subject, we are no better than the world – we have the form of Orthodoxy without its power to transfigure our flocks into a people prepared for life everlasting. Challenge the entire parish to consider dying well even in good health, even in youth. Do not wait!

One of the most moving experiences I have had in all of my years of ministry was visiting Khouria Lynn Wilson in her last days. At first I was struck by how much her physical beauty and energy had been worn away by her illness, but then it was so clear that her spiritual beauty was shining forth brightly. Her spiritual energy was strong and vibrant. Her face lit up with a smile and her eyes beamed with courage as she told me, “I am not afraid, Sayidna. I am ready.” With tears in my eyes, I knelt in admiration at her bedside while I offered my humble prayers for this pious woman. All of our people should be equipped to die as beautiful a death – yes, a beautiful death! – as our Khouria Lynn. This is your call, beloved brothers. Do not wait!

I would like to offer a few words about pastoring those who are near death, in addition to what we will hear from Dr. Hinshaw. I am heartbroken

when I hear from families of some of our faithful that their loved one was not cared for when terminally ill. Perhaps their priest made excuses for why he could not visit more often. Perhaps when he did visit, he kept his distance because he was afraid of getting sick himself. Perhaps when he talked with the family, he became uncomfortable and changed the subject to sports, or jokes, or television shows.

When you visit the sick and dying as a priest, you are bringing them Jesus Christ. You are bringing them the healing that the doctors and nurses cannot bring – true spiritual healing. Just as Jesus Christ sacrificially and courageously took up the Cross, you must be self-emptying and brave. Go to them. Unless the doctors forbid you for one reason or another, you should be at the bedside. You anoint them. Confess them. Give them Communion. You hold their hands. You weep with them. Be with them with your whole heart. When you are with their families, bring Christ to them as well. Do not distract them. Bring them the healing that comes from Christ.

This is our call, beloved brothers. Our society has put so much trust in the healing of the body with all of the marvels of our technology, but we see the rise of bacteria that do not respond to our antibiotics, and new viruses that are spreading throughout China as we speak. We can only trust in the healing of the whole person that we have in our Lord, Jesus Christ. And I, as the Metropolitan and Chief Shepherd of this Archdiocese, place my trust in you that you will bring this healing to my flock.

Once again, I welcome Dr. Hinshaw to our seminar. Let us commit ourselves to taking this time to seriously consider his words and apply them to our ministries. We ask the prayers of our All-Holy Lady and the Holy Unmercenary Healers that our Lord will grant us to carry out our ministries faithfully when we go forth from here, and that He will grant to all of us and our faithful a “Christian ending to our life – painless, blameless, and peaceful – and a good defense” at His fearful judgment seat.

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LIVING THE LITURGY — A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

FOLLOWING THE LORD OF THE LORD’S PRAYER

PART 7 OF 10

BAPTISM IS OUR INITIATION INTO THE CHURCH COMMUNITY; IT JOINS US TO THE BODY OF CHRIST. IT IS NOT A COSTCO OR YMCA MEMBERSHIP. WE DON’T JUST FILL OUT A FORM, SIGN AT THE BOTTOM, PAY THE FEE, TAKE AN AWKWARD PHOTO, AND THEN KEEP A MEMBERSHIP CARD IN OUR WALLET TO SHOW AT THE DOOR EACH TIME WE WALK INTO CHURCH. ST. PAUL SAYS IN HIS LETTER TO THE GALATIANS, “FOR AS MANY OF YOU AS WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE PUT ON CHRIST.” WE EVEN SING THIS HYMN AS THE NEWLY BAPTIZED PROCESSES AROUND THE GOSPEL BOOK!



So what does it mean to put on Christ? In the Epistle that we hear at the baptismal service, St. Paul teaches the church in Rome, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” In other words, to join the Body of Christ, we need to be baptized into His death, which was His self-offering on the Cross. This is then lived out in our offering ourselves to others, which we are given opportunities to practice within our communities. By practicing this, we learn how to give ourselves to others and, ultimately, to God.

Being baptized into Christ’s death also gives us a context for tough times – what we call suffering. In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis explores the origin of suffering. He begins this exploration with a quote from George MacDonald, a Scottish philosopher, author, and minister: “The Son of God suffered unto death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like His.” Having been baptized into Christ’s death, then, means we are called to see our suffering through the lens of the Cross. This certainly doesn’t mean that our suffering becomes easy, but it does allow us to put things in context. Before going to the Cross, when

Christ prayed in the garden, St. Matthew tells us that He prayed: “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Interpreting this, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German pastor who was put in a concentration camp by the Nazis and ultimately executed there) writes, “God does not give us everything we want, but He does fulfill His promises, leading us along the best and straightest paths to Himself.” God uses suffering to call us to Him. In other words, being baptized into Christ’s death allows us to use the suffering in our lives as a reminder to follow Christ ... to continue along the path as disciples. St. Ignatius of Antioch shows us this path beautifully as he traveled to his martyrdom. He shows us what living our baptismal calling looks like, and the important role the community that is the Body of Christ plays in that life.

He was arrested for being a Christian. While on his way to the arena in Rome for his sentence to be carried out, he wrote to the other Christians there: “Now I am beginning to be a disciple ... leave me to be bread for the wild beasts, through which I may be able to attain to God. I am God’s wheat and through the beasts’ teeth I shall be found to be pure bread for Christ Then I shall truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ.” On his way to death, he was encouraged by other Christians, so that his suffering strengthened his discipleship. Suffering didn’t pull him away from it.

You might be asking yourself, what does this have to do with the Divine Liturgy? Following the Anaphora, we hear the priest exclaim, “Grant us, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call upon thee, the heavenly God, as Father, and to say ...,” followed by the Lord’s Prayer. How can we call God Father? We say in the creed that God only has one Son. In his work *On the Holy Spirit*, St. Basil puts it in context, “Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to Paradise, our ascension to the Kingdom of Heaven, our adoption as God’s Sons, our freedom to call God our Father, our becoming partakers of the Grace of Christ, being called children of light, sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our inheritance of the fullness of blessing, both in this world and in the world to come.” By putting on Christ, and being baptized into His death, we are members of the Body of Christ, a body that is not divided.

As members of the Body of Christ, we are able to call God “Father,” entering into the prayer that

Christ taught us during His sermon on the mount, His prayer. We all know the prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We begin by calling God Father, and then we recognize His heavenly throne, His Kingship, and that we honor His name as holy (“hallowed”). We then ask that we be included in His kingdom. Then comes the big one: we pray that His will may be done – the same prayer Christ prayed while in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is the prayer we strive to live out each day, and the key to understanding the suffering we discussed earlier.

We ask that we be fed, but that we be given tomorrow’s bread today. You see, as the Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land from Egypt, they were fed in the wilderness with manna from God. Each morning, they would wake up and find the manna on the ground outside their tents. They had what they needed and, if they tried to keep it overnight, it would go bad. This was to teach them to trust God by trusting that He would feed them the next morning. When we ask for tomorrow’s bread today, we speak with boldness, and we also learn to trust God.

We then ask for forgiveness, and remind ourselves that we are called to forgive others. We ask that we be kept from temptation, so we might remain on the path towards God, and that God might keep us safe, the way a father would protect his children. Finally, after we’ve prayed all of this, the priest lifts up the lamb and exclaims: “Holy things are for the Holy.” This raises the question: What does it mean to be holy? Is our community holy? We start to find the answers when we stop viewing church membership as equivalent to Costco membership, and recognize our calling to live life as a son or daughter of God through Christ-like self-offering.



Gregory Abdalah, D. Min.



FULFILLING THE VISION

THE 2020 PROJECT OF THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN NORTH AMERICAN BOARD

“We must build on the past and build the present and the future.”

The Antiochian Village was purchased 41 years ago, in 1978. During the 33rd Archdiocese Convention in Houston, Texas, Metropolitan PHILIP of Thrice-Blessed Memory announced the purchase of the Antiochian Village as “a new spiritual dimension to our lives” and said that it “will inaugurate a new era of religious maturity in our Archdiocese.” Today we are reaping the fruits of that vision. Several times in years past, the Antiochian Women have been charged with raising funds for The Village. Most recently, prior to last year’s NAB Project, the 2013 NAB Project charged us with raising funds following the devastating 2012 tornado.

In 2019, we began to raise funds for the building

of a new cathedral at the Antiochian Village. With your support we presented a check for \$125,336.05 to His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH at the 2019 Archdiocese Convention. This brings us to 2020 and the current and expanded NAB Project: “Fulfilling the Vision” – fulfilling and building on the foundation laid in 1978 for the Antiochian Village. His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH has charged us to continue raising funds to enhance our presence at The Village.

March is Women’s Month throughout this God-protected Archdiocese. Antiochian Women chapters will be participating in the Divine Liturgy and fundraising for NAB Project 2020 across North

America in parishes both large and small. Antiochian Women will be sponsoring coffee hours, hosting luncheons, bake sales, secondhand sales and passing special trays.

A packaged fasting food sale was held on the Sundays during the recent Nativity Fast at St. Ananias, Evansville, Indiana, with proceeds going to the NAB Project and local charities. Last year, at St. George, Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Antiochian Women assembled four beautiful, themed baskets and sold raffle tickets during March and April, with the winning tickets drawn on Palm Sunday. In Geneva, New York, the local chapter of the Antiochian Women will host coffee hours during Women’s Month, with proceeds and donations designated for the NAB Project. There are over 300 Antiochian Orthodox parishes in North America, and as many ways to raise funds for this project. The Antiochian Women play a large role in fundraising for both the local parishes, as well as the efforts of the NAB and the diocesan organizations. No amount raised is too small; every dollar donated is added to the funds we will present to His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH in July 2020.

Finally, with our fundraising efforts once again directed to the Antiochian Village, let us remember that it continues to be the place to find rest, a place for communion with God, a place of study and learning, and a refuge from the cares of this world. For many of us, it is the holy mountain where we find solace and refreshment. A mountain is high and visible to all. The expansion of the Antiochian Village, its cathedral, with all the other facilities, will announce the presence of the Orthodox in this community. It will be a beacon to draw us closer to our spiritual roots; a place of pilgrimage; and a witness to our holy Orthodox faith. We are thankful for the past support for projects for The Village and thank you all for your continued support in “Fulfilling the Vision” NAB Project 2020.

“Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.” – Isaiah 2:3

Sheryl VanderWagen
Antiochian Women North American Board Vice President and Project Coordinator

THAT PEOPLE, THAT TITHE

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt

"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

No parish priest is going to write an article about the joys of paying the parish contribution to the Archdiocese. I mean, who wants to be known among his fellow clergy as *that guy*? Full disclosure: In addition to working part-time for

the Archdiocese, I am a parish priest, and I volunteered to write this article. Instead of being *that guy*, I hope you'll read to the end so that we might struggle together to be *that people*.

Each year, preparing my remarks for the annual

parish meeting, I include an encouragement to tithe. That is, I encourage parishioners to give ten percent (10%) of their household income as an act of worship to the Living God and to further the ministry of the church. In fact, I expect parish clergy and council members to tithe. After all, how else can we lead? For clergy and council to encourage tithing and then do otherwise is hypocritical. Period. That said, St. Joseph/Houston is not unlike your own parish when it comes to tithing – some do, many don't.

Be that as it may, my parish sends a chunk of our change to the Archdiocese. It is a temptation to look at that amount and think of all the local ministry those dollars might provide. We could just about pay for a full-time assistant priest. We could get a youth director. Or, worse still, one might just resent having to send even a nickel of parish donations off to Englewood.

Then there's the occasional comment at a parish council meeting. You know, the one that goes something like this: "What does the Archdiocese do for us?" It is a valid question, especially if the one asking has never sent kids to camp, had a son preparing for ministry in seminary, attended the House of Studies, Sacred Music Institute, enjoyed Antiochian Village, benefitted from the Department of Missions and Evangelism – not to mention the witness of *The WORD* magazine! (The list could go on; check out all the Organizations at <https://www.antiochian.org/organizations>.) One last shout out to the tireless travels, labors, and ministry of our bishops!

Then there's this: "We need to find a way to hide some of this money, so we don't have to send the Archdiocese ten percent." Or, "We don't want

to increase our budget because then our assessment will go up." Think about it. What wife says, "Honey, I sure hope you don't get the raise, or else our taxes will go up"?

Hear me out: using the federal income tax analogy is not the best. It comes with an almost universal negative connotation. Who among us doesn't hope to pay less in taxes? Even to get a so-called refund! Besides, if we view the Body of Christ the same way we view the government, we need to adjust more than our giving!

Few things are more tempting, this side of Paradise, than money. This is reflected in Scripture by the prophets, apostles, and our Lord. Alas, to our detriment, we forget. Once, when there were three Sundays in a row in which the Gospel passages referred to money, I had a woman come to me and say, "If you don't stop talking about money, we may leave the church." She thought I was choosing which passages of Scrip-

ture to read each week. She was not aware that the lectionary is not set by the local priest. In fact, many priests are scared to mention money, tithing, giving and such – choosing, rather, to stick to comforting words, tightening the belt, and hoping for the best.

We have selective memory when it comes to Scripture and the words of the Savior. For instance, there are no less than 2,350 verses in Scripture dealing with money and money management. Jesus speaks about money and money management more than any other topic! The reason for this seems obvious: We are constantly struggling to serve only one master – and too often we choose mammon (that is, money; Matthew 6:24).

My father, God rest his soul, would put only \$1

10%



in the offering plate as it was passed in our Baptist church. His rationale: “The preacher has air-conditioning and a riding lawnmower.” We had neither. On the other hand, my mom paid the household bills; she made sure the family tithed. Like my father, we can all rationalize why we don’t need to tithe to the church – much more so the Archdiocese! I have already tempted some, right this very minute in this article, to begin justifying noncompliance.

Rare is the parish council that sits around and says, “What in the world are we going to do with all this money?” Truth be told, that would be a horrible temptation. Show me a saint of the church who was saved by wealth. Before you jump into another justification, hear what our Lord says, and I paraphrase: “Building bigger barns isn’t always the answer – neither is burying your gift in the ground!” What we do with our money speaks volumes about our character, who we truly are. If you want to know the spiritual state and strength of a parish, just look at its stewardship report.

Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). How we think of money, how we earn it, spend it – and give it – are clues to who we are inside and, face it, to what we believe to be essential. Jesus did not say, “Where your heart is there shall your treasure be also.” What we do with our money reveals what is in our heart.

The story is told of a fledgling parish that was having trouble paying their lease and utility bills, not to mention tithing to the Archdiocese. The young priest went to the bishop and said, “Sayidna, I promise, once we get on our feet, we shall increase our percentage to the ministry of the Archdiocese by 1% each year until we are a fully tithing parish.” Understanding his plight, the bishop said, “May it be blessed.”

And, so it was, year after year by God’s grace and the labors of the faithful, the parish grew. Each year, they added a percentage to their donation until they were fully tithing to the Archdiocese.

Many years went by, the ministries grew, buildings were built, iconography completed, parking expanded, etc. Their annual budget neared the one-million-dollar mark. Instead of tithing on 10, 50, 100 – even \$500,000 annually – the parish

was looking at having to send a check of nearly \$100,000 to the Archdiocese. Trusting the bishop’s understanding, the priest said to him: “This tithing business has to stop. It was fine when our tithe was one thousand dollars, ten thousand dollars, even \$50,000, but we just cannot afford one-hundred thousand dollars. You’ve got to do something, Sayidna!” The bishop nodded his head, and said, “I understand. I’ve got an idea.” The priest said, “Really? You will reduce our annual contribution?” “No,” said the bishop. “I shall pray that your parish income be reduced back to a level on which you are more comfortable tithing.”

That, of course, is a joke. The only reason it resonates is because there is a kernel of truth in the tale. Which brings me to my challenge, cliché though it may be: Strive to tithe. Pastors, councils, and faithful: Review your giving, household and parish, and incrementally increase each year until you have achieved the gift of tithing.

There is much to be done in this land we call home – temporary though it may be! All that we have is on loan from God. It is all a gift. We will have to give an account on the last day for what we have done with our time, talent, and treasure. “Sacrificial giving for the Christian is not an option, it is a joyful obligation,” writes St. John Chrysostom in *On Wealth and Poverty*.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20).

I don’t want to be *that guy* – but I do hope to be a percentage of *that faithful people*.

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt
Vice-Chairman of the Department of Missions and Evangelism

BROOKLYN STREET CORNER RENAMED IN HONOR OF **FR. PAUL SCHNEIRLA**



Photo: svots.edu

In January, 2020, the City Council of New York approved the renaming of the intersection of Ridge Boulevard and 81st Street, where the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos is located, in Fr. Paul’s honor. Fr. Paul served as the parish priest of St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church in Brooklyn for over 50 years.

Father Paul Schneirla began serving the parish of St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church on Ridge Boulevard in Bay Ridge from its inception in 1951 and continued to his retirement in 2002. Fr. Paul was a pioneer “convert” member of the clergy, an author, and a renowned theologian with a long list of noteworthy accomplishments. He served as a member of the General Board of the National Council of Churches beginning in 1940. He was also the last surviving member of the original founders of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas. He

served as a priest of the Antiochian Archdiocese for 71 years and was the first chairperson of its Department of Christian Education.

In addition to his tenure as pastor of St. Mary’s Church, Fr. Paul also served for many years as a Professor of Old Testament at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York, as Corporate Secretary of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, as Vicar General of the Archdiocese’s Western Rite, and as a frequent commentator and speaker for many media outlets. He served as the first chairman of the Department of Christian Education and as the Dean of the Atlantic Deanery. He was an editor of *The WORD* Magazine. As the Ecumenical Officer for the Antiochian Archdiocese, Fr. Paul was a charter member of the Orthodox-Anglican, Orthodox-Roman Catholic, and Orthodox-Polish Catholic Theological Dialogues.

CHRIST'S PARTING WORDS “MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS.”

Fr. Michael Massouh, Pastor, St. Nicholas, St. Petersburg, Florida



Just before ascending to heaven, Christ said to His Disciples:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18–20).

Commentators from earliest times have called these parting words the Great Commission. Taken together with the Great Commandment, that “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... [and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39), we have the basics of Christianity.

Just as we take seriously the last words of a dying person, so the Disciples after forty days of instruction took Jesus’ parting words to heart: “And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.” “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs” (Luke 24:52–53; Mark 16:20).

Christ’s parting words were directed not only to His Disciples, but to all of us baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we who through baptism become one with the Body of Christ. St. Peter makes the consequences of our baptism clear: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

By celebrating the Feasts of Ascension and

Pentecost we have completed another annual cycle of services – pre-Lent, Lent, Holy Week – and now bask in the joy of His Resurrection. As we actively participate in this almost five-month cycle of services, they deepen and strengthen our faith. Rather than simply a verbal recollection of His last week on earth, these events become part of us, molding us in our very being.

So, the big question is, What do we do? Check off these almost five months as a duty fulfilled? Or do we imitate the Disciples who worshiped Him, praised and blessed Him, and went everywhere preaching the Good News?

If we just check off our Lenten and Resurrection experience as an item on a to-do list, we may become just good church-goers, and leave it at that. If we choose, however, to imitate the Disciples, how do we proceed? Not many of us will devote our every waking hour going from town to town preaching the Word. We have responsibilities to our families, to our businesses or work, to our neighbors and friends. In fact, Paul warns Timothy, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

So, how do we proceed? Clearly, the starting point is to take seriously our baptismal vows to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and to turn our backs on activities and thoughts that are incongruent with all that Jesus taught His Disciples to observe. “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). When we make a mental decision to follow Christ, and become His friend as He tells His Disciples – “You are no longer my servants, but friends” (John 15:14) – then we must be cognizant each minute that Christ is near us, guiding us, and loving us.

This mental leap of faith requires that we keep in touch with Him through prayer, worship, and the reading of His word in Scripture. Also, reading the lives of the saints who emulated Him gives us examples of what other Christians have endured. One cannot stay friends with someone to whom one rarely talks; the same is true with Christ.

Moreover, this mental leap of faith also requires that we look at other people as Christ would. Rather than criticizing or condemning a less-than-proficient singer, pitcher, batter, umpire, waiter, waitress, or whomever, we should ask God to help them get

better. Rather than lusting for a beautiful woman or a handsome man, we should thank God for creating a beautiful or handsome person. This slight adjustment in our response to whatever we experience or observe allows us to become more charitable, more loving, more patient, and more Christ-like.

Doing so will not come without effort. It is so easy to fall back to our sinful and hurtful ways, but we must try, and the more we try, the more proficient we become. In His parting words Christ said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In our struggles to stay close to Him as our special friend, we realize that He is with us as He said He would be. This is a comforting thought that should give us peace.

His being with us at all times does not exempt us from struggles, temptations, and even martyrdom. “If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you,” He warned His Disciples, and in turn, us (John 15:20). Despite the ungodly world in which we live and the possibility of being maligned, or arrested, or falsely accused, or whatever misfortune we may suffer, He is with us. “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,” and so shall we! (John 16:33).

So, brothers and sisters, know that, as we are welcomed into the Kingdom of God, we are not alone or without assistance, but are connected to the great “cloud of witnesses” praying for us.

How else are we to make disciples of all nations? We are not St. Nina who evangelized Georgia, or St. Vladimir who converted the Rus, or other men or women equal to the Apostles. Not to despair, for in a quiet way we can bring others to Christ through our actions and behavior. St. Seraphim of Sarov said that by acquiring the Holy Spirit we can save a thousand people around us.

Many people today are searching for authenticity, goodness, and truth. As they find us, or rather as God directs them to us, we need to welcome them home.

Christ is in our midst! Stay faithful!

“IT IS FINISHED!”

By Fr. Michael Massouh

The Apostle and Evangelist, John the Theologian – the only one of Christ’s Apostles to stand with the Virgin Mary and the other women at the Cross – records in his Gospel the words of the Savior, “It is finished!” (John 18:30). To what does it refer? Is it the agony of suffering crucifixion so overwhelming? Or is it the expression of his completed humanity and mission.

In the West, Christ is depicted many times in three dimensions, with a writhing, twisted body, and a face full of pain, weighed down, looking at the ground; a rood cross. Eastern Christian iconography, on the other hand, most often shows Him at peace, as if sleeping. His body is calm, as if reclining. Eastern Christians focus on the benefits of Christ’s death – defeating death – and not on the instrument of execution. So for us the Cross is no longer an instrument of death, but the “life-giving Cross.” We place the Cross in prominent places in our homes and churches, wear crosses around our necks, place it on vestments, and bless people with it.

For all Christians until the Middle Ages in the West, and now for all Orthodox Christians, the it is not the agony of crucifixion, but the completion of Christ’s mission on earth. Christ makes it very clear to His Disciples that he did not come to dwell among us to destroy the Law and the Prophets. Rather, “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

By the time of His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, He had fulfilled almost all of the prophecies recorded in the books of the Old Testament: preaching to the poor, healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, raising the paralytic, cleansing the lepers, exorcising the demons, and raising the dead. Indeed, His entrance into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass was prophesized by Zechariah (9:9). Still, there were a few more prophecies to fulfill, and they could not be fulfilled until His betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

He knew that He must die by crucifixion (“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”; John

3:14). He as Man was in agony, sweating blood and praying to His Father, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). As the Son of God, He knew what He must endure, and so concluded that He would continue with His godly mission.

Now, the remaining prophecies could only be fulfilled on the Cross. When Jesus cried out, “Eloi, Eloi, why has thou forsaken Me,” He was not thinking that His Father had abandoned Him. Rather, He was reciting the first words of Psalm 22 (21) which contained actions that were taking place before Him, or were His own: casting lots for His clothes, Pharisees and Scribes wagging their heads and telling Him to save Himself, and saying He is thirsty and asking for a drink. The gospels report these actions, and others, as foretold in the Psalm.

None of these prophecies could have been accomplished beforehand, but could be now that He was hanging on the Cross. So, when He completed all the prophecies on this side of the grave, when He had done all that was asked of Him, He said that the mission for which he was sent was now accomplished; there was nothing more for Him to do. “It” – His mission – is completed. “It is finished!”

This is like a composer putting the final note on his musical composition. It is like the novelist completing the final edit of his manuscript. It is like the carpenter putting the last screw in his cabinet. It is like the sculptor chipping away the last bit of unneeded stone. My masterpiece is finished. Christ’s masterwork of inaugurating a new covenant between God and His people is finished.

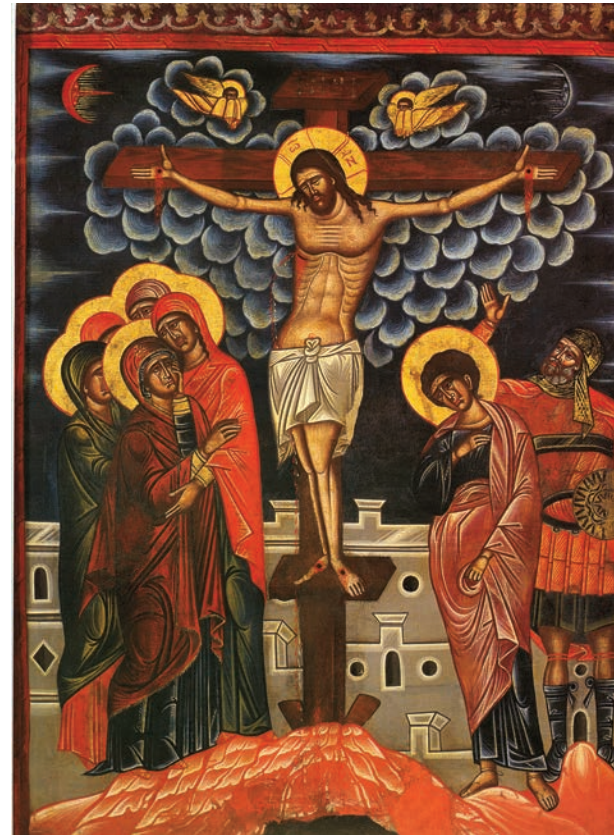
As Man He suffered and prayed for this cup to pass, but as God He was in charge of His life. According to the gospel accounts, when the final prophecy on this side of the grave was fulfilled, “He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit” (John 19:30). Earlier He had instructed His Disciples about His authority: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I

have received from My Father.” When it came time to commit His soul to God, He did it on His own authority. Thus, when He felt it was time to die, He ‘lay down His life.’ He died of His own volition. That is why Pontius Pilate was astonished to learn that Christ was already dead when Joseph of Arimathea asked for His body. “Pilate marveled that He was already dead” (Mark 15:44).

Yet there were two more prophecies to be accomplished. Christ must fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel about the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14). According to Ezekiel’s prophecy, the dry bones of the dead will be fitted together – bone to bone. Then sinews and muscles will begin to hold them together. Next, they will take on flesh and skin will cover them. Then the Spirit of God will breathe on them, and they will live. For Christ to fulfill this prophecy He had to enter Hades, and He could only do that by dying, “trampling down death by death.”

The prayer the priest says when he places the chalice and the discos on the altar after the Great Entrance makes clear that Christ is present everywhere: “In the grave with the body, but in hades with the soul as God; in paradise with the thief, and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit wast thou, O Christ, filling all things. Thyself uncircumscribed.” In Hades after breaking down its doors, He enters in and raises Adam and Eve, David and Solomon, John the Baptist, and all the prophets, as well as all the faithful people who departed this life before Him. According to Matthew’s Gospel, “the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the city and appeared to many” (27:52–53).

The final prophecy to be accomplished, of



course, was His rising from the dead on the third day. This He does on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Eighth Day. He will spend the next forty days “opening the Scriptures” to His Disciples, now that they are prepared to hear and to heed Him. Then He will ascend into heaven, from which He had come as a babe, to return to His Father. As He tells His Disciples He must return to His Father to send them the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7). When the Spirit descends on Pentecost, ten days after His As-

cension, Peter is prepared to quote Scripture boldly that affirms that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Messiah.

John the Evangelist was an eyewitness to the final hours of Jesus’ human life as he was the only one of the Disciples who stood at the Cross. He was there to hear Christ’s last words: “It is finished!” Fulfilling all the prophecies, Christ does indeed satisfy the expectations God the Father has for Him.

So, what does this mean for us? We are the beneficiaries of His suffering, His grace, His love, and His inauguration of the New Covenant. We are the New Israel, born out of the Old Covenant. We are blessed by His actions that allow us to enter into paradise and His Kingdom.

Christ is Risen! We are no longer in bondage to death. How great is our God! Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

FATHER PAUL SCHNEIRLA: A DAUGHTER'S TRIBUTE

Dorothy S. Downie

As the daughter of a clergyman, I can attest to the authenticity of someone whose vocation and faith dovetailed with his commitment to the people he served. Father Paul Schneirla, my father, was my rock and inspiration for the seventy-one years I was privileged to know and love him.

Born in a log cabin in Alaska at his German-American father's gold mining camp, Fr. Paul moved over his lifetime through the Mid-West's farming community to institutions of higher learning in New York City and, eventually, to converting to the Orthodox Church and ordination to the priesthood.

His third parish assignment was to St. Mary's Antiochian Church in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. For fifty years, he balanced teaching as an Old Testament professor, engaging in national ecumenical efforts, being a right-hand man for his bishop, and meeting the 24-hour-a-day demands made of a parish priest.

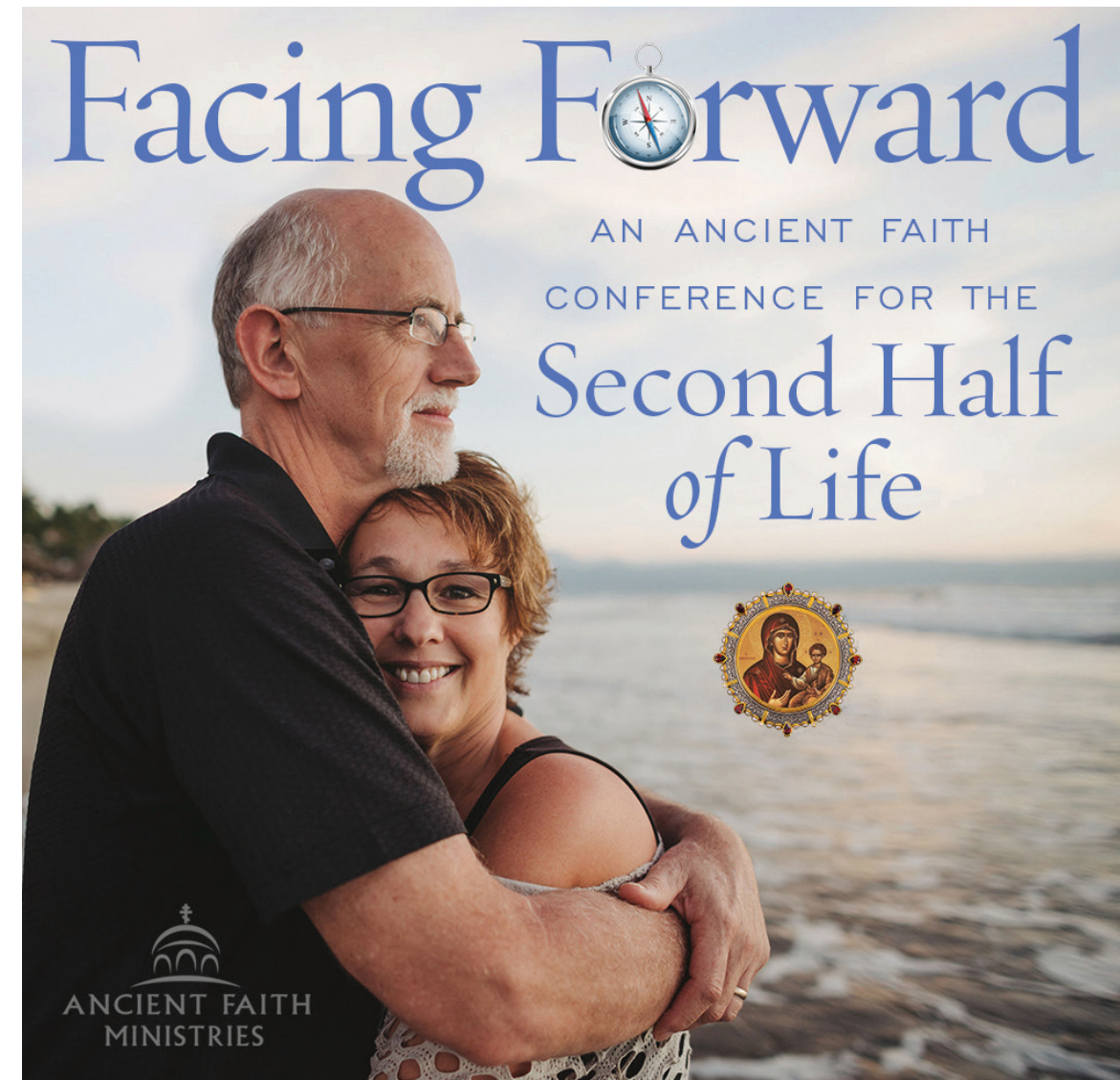
He baptized, married, and buried several generations of his Syrian-Lebanese Christian parishioners. He counseled them through difficult times and shared in the good times. He built a cohesive and viable community of people who celebrat-

ed their heritage, but who also embraced and fully lived the American dream. My youth was lived against this backdrop of positive energy with the clear purpose of serving the church. It was a happy time. While the role of a parish priest is demanding, it never seemed to be that way for my father.

When I saw the light under the bedroom door in the middle of the night, I knew Fr. Paul was getting ready for a hospital or home visit to minister in a sudden emergency. With all the security tied to the Church calendar and the framework of his faith, there were always the intrusions of tragedy and heartbreak. Fr. Paul seemed to take everything in his stride. His religious beliefs were his foundation, but, to his credit, he never tried to convert or press anyone into following what for him was "a calling," and very personal.

Following the death of his beloved wife of 70 years, a caregiver came to live with Fr. Paul for his remaining two years. When he died, I thanked her for all her help and the support she gave the family in caring for him. Her response was to say that she should be thanking us – that the two years she spent with Fr. Paul were the most peaceful of her life.

Once I asked my father how he wanted to be remembered. He said that he just wanted to be thought of as someone who tried to do the right thing. I can attest that, with his first-rate mind, a first-class temperament, and a buoyant sense of humor, he cheerfully gave of himself in the cause of doing what was right. At the end of your life, all you have left is what you've given to other people. With Fr. Paul, his influence will extend far beyond his own lifetime through the families and friends he so faithfully served. There are many of us who will cherish the memory of that rare entity: a learned and truly good man. Fr. Paul and St. Mary's, Bay Ridge, are linked for all time. To honor them with the name of an intersection is to underscore the happiest of associations, founded in a commitment and dedication to the spirit of goodness, to community, and to the city at large.



FACING FORWARD: AN ANCIENT FAITH CONFERENCE
FOR THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE
MAY 28 – 31, 2020, ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE, BOLIVAR, PA
REGISTER AT: ANCIENTFAITH.COM/EVENTS

The middle season of life marks itself in our experiences as an ending and a beginning. It is a season of change and realization and can be a time of great joy and great suffering. There are many questions to ask as we seek to reinvent ourselves, to stay connected with grown children, to care for aging parents, and to think practically about the end of natural life. We invite you to a weekend of thought-provoking conversation, worship, and good fellowship as we study the joys and trials that come to us as God grants us many years.

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

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival
for the Diocese of Miami and Southeast

Today, I ask you to think about doing the impossible. How many people have spent their lives chasing the impossible? Anyone with a new invention, discovery, or achievement could say they are “doing the impossible.” In fact, it shapes the very ideals of our society and history as humans. George Washington, Albert Einstein, Beethoven, Thomas Edison, Helen Keller, Abraham Lincoln – all of these people have one thing in common. They ignored all logic and everyone who told them that what they were doing was impossible, and had faith. Every single one of these people changed the world. They changed not only their own lives, but those of the people around them, and many more who were to come.

Ever since I was a child, I always wanted to do the impossible. My mother quoted to me

Matthew 19:26, “With God, all things are possible.” So naturally, I asked my mother if God could turn me invisible or make me fly. She told me if God wanted me to fly, He would make it happen. To my dismay, however, I did not sprout wings right then and there, not because it was impossible, but because it was not the will of God.

This verse and Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” have very similar messages. They state that, with God and all of His strength and love, we can do the impossible, or achieve any miracle. My first thought as I began to write for this oratorical contest was to look for a magnificent and impossible task that I got through with God’s help. I was on the lookout for miraculously healing from a disease, scoring perfect scores on my tests, or even an icon spontaneously beginning to stream myrrh – really anything that would undoubtedly prove God was behind the miracle. Each day went by and nothing out of the ordinary seemed to happen. I neglected, however, to see



the miracles that had already occurred every day by God’s presence in my life. Joshua 1:9 explains, “The Lord your God is with you in all things, wherever you go.” His grace grants safe travels, food, water, a house, healthy family and friends, and even helps us to juggle school, work, extracurriculars, and stress. My own life was filled to the brim with miracles. I had failed to recognize these and many more. Finishing my work meant that I had more time for church, SOYO, and volunteer-

ing. These miracles, these small impossibilities, were bringing me closer to God.

It is easy to see how miracles could strengthen one’s faith. Yet what many people do not consider is that troubles can also help our faith. My mom always used to remind me that if anything went wrong, or if I had difficulties, it was for my salvation. Running my mom’s car into a brick wall taught me humility. Having someone treat me disrespectfully reminds me to be kind.

Being judged by others reminds me not to judge. Even dealing with physical or emotional pain can bring us closer to Christ, because He does not abandon us in times of grief. My relatively easy life can seem difficult at times, but many go through much more. When coping with depression, anxiety, losses, illness, or suffering, it can take a miracle to get through the day.

Everyone here has felt as though they were facing odds stacked against them at some point or another, but one of the Beatitudes says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” We make it through with the help of Christ. His love for us heals the loss of love from others in our lives. His comfort eases our worries and anxieties. His strength helps us to fight off the devil and his attacks. His words give us hope in times of duress. His truth gives us the knowledge that we have a purpose

and are loved for who we are. This is restated in the Book of Revelation 21:4: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain for the former things have passed away.” How are we supposed to make it through the turbulence of life without Christ? Our future on this earth is completely unknown to us. But it is not unknown to Christ. His purpose for us is not only to face difficulties of our own, but also to always help others on their journey to eternal life.

Helping others could be anything from giving to charity and volunteering, to selflessly putting others before yourself, even to the point of death. In Philippians, Paul mentions to the faithful many times that he is suffering in prison. He contemplates dying and being with Christ, or continuing to preach and helping the faithful. St. John Chrysostom speaks in his 4th Homily on Philippians about Paul’s contemplation, saying, “Paul might depart to Christ, and would not, but still remained in the contest on behalf of man.” Paul chooses to live because it is “more needful” for him to be with us. This is an encouraging statement, as it is a reminder that we can all go through our own trials and come out victorious, but it simultaneously emphasizes that we must have the same desire to help others before our own needs. St. John Chrysostom later asks, “How then do you [speaking about Paul], who livest a life so exceedingly bitter, wish to still remain here?” Paul does so because, though he is in prison and realizes he will face more pain by continuing to live, he does not despair. Christ gave him the strength to bear his chains for the sake of the faithful. Whatever God has intended for us in this world, we will have the ability to carry it out, no matter how impossible it seems. In actuality, impossibility is only the lack of a previous example. If you are struggling with something, remember that Christ will give you the strength to bear your chains as Paul did. Even as you ask Christ why it is you that must bear these troubles, remember that they may be for your own salvation, or that of another.

Consider the book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Had Lucy and her siblings not fallen into the wardrobe that led to Narnia, they would never have encountered difficulties with leaving their home, staying in an unfamiliar place, the death of Aslan, the capturing of their friends, and fighting the witch. Yet because they suffered these troubles

and faced them, all of Narnia was saved. Their purpose in the story was to help save Narnia. Though it was difficult, they all had the courage to bear it.

In both Narnia and Philippians, we see people enduring trials for the good of others. He has blessed us each with unique abilities and gives us the strength to carry out His will. In my own life God has helped me to help others through being president of SOYO and singing in church. I have also had others help me without my realizing it. Every year my faith is rejuvenated at Camp St. Thekla. Whenever I leave camp, I am deeply saddened in a way that is remedied only by looking forward to the next year at camp. Many of my friends feel the same and it is easy to see why. We all have great friends and amazing memories which makes it hard to leave. However, that is only a small part of why leaving camp is so unbearable. Camp is filled with God’s presence. The people at camp all seem to radiate love, kindness, and faith. They truly “walk as children of the light,” as is written in Ephesians 5:8. As I leave camp I feel encouraged to deepen my faith because I have seen the strong belief of others. It is a beautiful thing to witness, but that makes leaving even more painful. After all, who wants to leave heaven on earth?

The positive impact camp has had on my life is immense and it has helped me to move forward on God’s path by continually invigorating my faith. That is truly what our purpose is all about: faith. When Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” he speaks of doing God’s will. Paul suffers to preach our faith to all those who will listen. Camp and all of my friends have helped to grow my own faith. Lucy and her siblings confronted difficulties to save all of those in Narnia. Today we must use all that God has given us to strengthen our own faith and that of others. The Gospel of Matthew 17:20 says, “And Jesus said to them ... ‘If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to the mountain, move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’” This faith is that through which all is possible. This faith is what gives us miracles and hope. This faith is what supersedes nature, heals illnesses, and raises the dead. This faith, this beautiful belief in God and his truth, is what will save us all.

Lauren Evancho, 17,
All Saints Church, Raleigh North, Carolina

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

CELEBRATING THE MINISTRY OF V. REV. FR. JOSEPH ALLEN UPON HIS RETIREMENT AFTER 53 YEARS IN THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

It was a glorious two-day celebration as parishioners young and not so young, current and alumni, came out to celebrate Fr. Joseph Allen on his retirement from the Holy Priesthood and as pastor of St. Anthony's after 53 years. We were delighted and honored to have both Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop JOHN with us to celebrate the entire weekend.

The festivities, under the direction of our amazing co-chairs Alice Ziemba and Jim Tweel, began Saturday, December 21, 2019, with an elegant banquet at the Knickerbocker Country Club, which was beautifully decorated for Christmas. (No doubt a family or two will use the "money shot" photo in front of the giant tree as next year's Christmas card!)

A wonderful cocktail reception allowed everyone to have a chance to see one another and catch up as we dined on delicious hors d'oeuvres prepared by our parishioner Ghiath Abdallah. We then moved to the ballroom where we enjoyed dinner and had the opportunity to hear about Fr. Joe's many accomplishments from all aspects of his life.

Co-Masters of Ceremony Ed Assile and Jim Bach introduced the visiting dignitaries, including priests from our surrounding area – and beyond – from every archdiocese, and we heard about the incredibly impressive career of Fr.

Joseph. The consummate teacher, he has taught over 5,000 students, both clergy and laity, and written/edited 13 books. Fr. Joseph and was a longtime faculty member at both St. Vladimir and Holy Cross Seminaries and he founded the Antiochian House of Studies, which offers a theological education for Orthodox Christians and others to increase their knowledge of the faith and to acquire practical skills in support of their work in the Church through a unique distance-learning framework – and served as its director for 40 years. We heard of his founding leadership and 25-year ministry as the Chaplain of the Order of St. Ignatius as well as his service to the Archdiocese, including as Vicar General and Co-Editor of *The WORD* magazine.

We also heard some fun facts, including that Fr. Joe was the first priest ordained by +Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice Blessed Memory and that when he was named the pastor, at age 24, one of our church founders advised him to grow beard so he would look at least 26 or 27.

Fr. Joseph's sons, Phillip and Joe, paid loving tribute to their dad. Fr. Joseph spoke of how, as pastor, he has had five different parishes, as the body of faithful changes every 10 years, because "everything in life changes. Only God is an unchanging constant." It was emotional for all, but he lightened the mood by suggesting, with his new free time, he might throw his hat in the ring for President of the United States.

Metropolitan JOSEPH spoke of Fr. Joe's ministry – devoting over half a century of his life to St.

Anthony and the archdiocese, as he officiated at marriages, christenings and burials, and served as father confessor and provided pastoral care, for two full generations. Metropolitan JOSEPH also reinforced that the Pan-Orthodox nature of St. Anthony's was a jewel and would not change. Fr. Joseph was bestowed the title of Pastor Emeritus and our church hall has been renamed in his honor.

A special element of the night was a Commemorative Journal, designed by Arlene and Ed Assile with a special assist from their daughter, Robyn Ziemba. In full color, with photos from long ago to present, parishioners had the opportunity to write special memories of their relationship with Fr. Joe. We read of a young man picking up a copy of "Inner Way" from his college library only to be surprised to drive down our little side street and see the author's name in front of the church. We also read about a marriage of over 20 years that was born by Fr. Joe encouraging a cup of coffee together. Our own Archdeacon Peter Boulukos visiting St. Anthony's from his then home in Long Island to tape the Liturgy so his parish could learn to chant in English. The thread that ran through every memory was how Fr. Joe has been there through the most joyous celebrations and darkest hours for his parish family and how he warmly welcomed every person who came through the door.

On Sunday, December 22, the altar was full as Metropolitan JOSEPH and Bishop JOHN, and many visiting priests and deacons, celebrated the Hierarchical

Divine Liturgy. And it was to our delight that Peter Thomsen and John McMinn, who have served the altar and St. Anthony's since they were children, were tonsured Subdeacons and new members were inducted into the Order of St. Ignatius.

The family luncheon in the church hall was packed and a joyful celebration, which included the Church School children singing two Christmas songs with special lyrics, Angels We Have Heard of High and Jingle Bell Rock were recast as "We love Fr. Joe" and "Fr. Joe Rocks." The very talented duo of Dana and Jared Lindbloom serenaded Fr. Joseph with "Dream," and Fr. Joe's original Teen SOYO singing group from the 1970s got back together for a reprisal of a Godspell song that they had performed more than 40 years ago. We saw a beautiful video, put together by George Tewfik, that was a mix of photos from across 50+ years and personal reflections, a giant photo display from across the decades put together by Pete and Thelma Dacales and their son Jeff, and Fr. Joe's four grandchildren spoke about their "Jiddou."

Fr. Joe then was presented gifts from the various organizations: a beautiful photo blanket of Church School Students in front of the altar, a gift to Fr. Joe and Kh. Valerie of the Waterford Angel Grace and 2 cherubs from the Women's Guild, a framed all-parish photo, a beautiful bronze plaque commemorating his service to St. Anthony and the gift to come: a wall icon of Joseph the Betrothed in his honor.

This joyous two-day celebration ended with Fr. Joe's favorite activity: All of us singing Christmas carols together. We are abundantly grateful that Fr. Joseph Allen was our pastor these past 53 years. We pray for his good health and long



life, and are so happy to welcome our assistant pastor for the past 2 Fr. Michael Ibrahim, who has been years, as our new pastor.

Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?

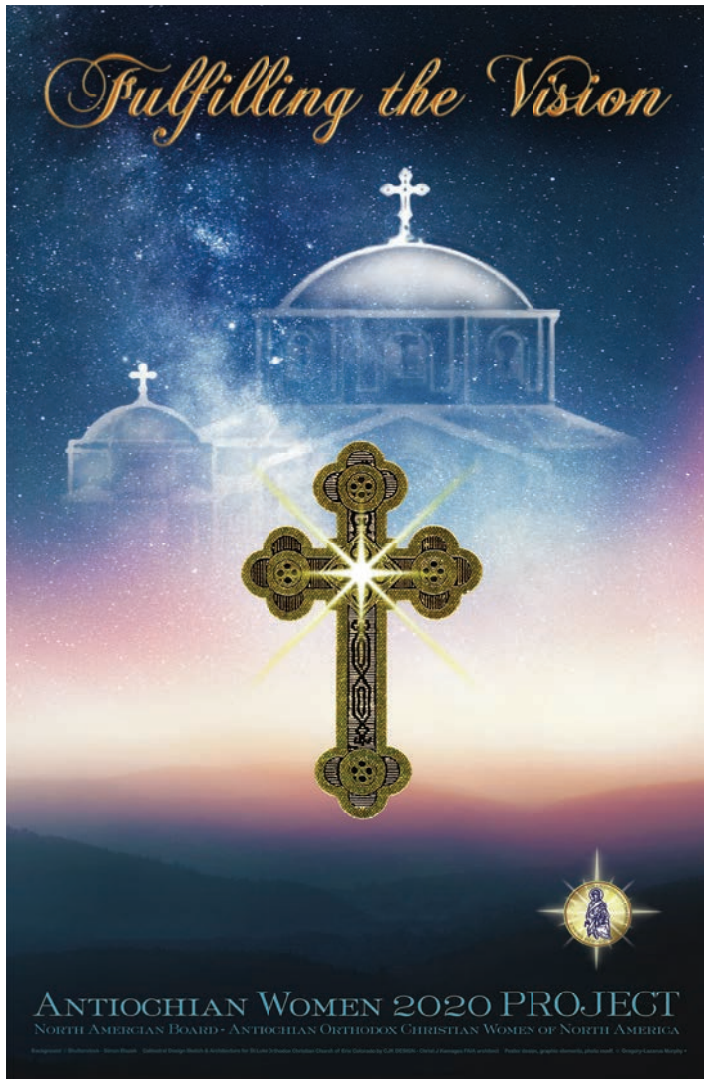
The Department of Missions and Evangelism is now offering domestic mission trips for the summer of 2020. For our launch, we have partnered with Fr. Paul Abernathy and his awesome team at The Neighborhood Resilience Project in the hill district of Pittsburgh. Learn more about what Fr. Paul is doing by 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.

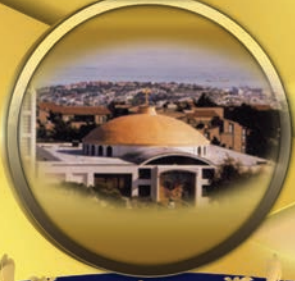


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