MARCH 19, 2019, MARKED THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REPOSE OF OUR BELOVED METROPOLITAN PHILIP OF THRICE-BLESSED MEMORY. METROPOLITAN PHILIP SERVED OUR ARCHDIOCESE FOR ALMOST HALF A CENTURY WITH INTEGRITY, DISTINCTION, VISION AND JUSTICE. HE WAS A DIPLOMAT FOR ORTHODOXY AND THE DISPOSSESSED, ON THE WORLD SCENE AS WELL AS AT HOME IN AMERICA. HE HAD GREAT COURAGE TO CHAMPION OUR CAUSES BEFORE WORLD LEADERS, BOTH ECCLESIAL AND POLITICAL, REGULARLY MEETING WITH PATRIARCHS, CHURCH LEADERS, PRESIDENTS AND POLITICIANS. METROPOLITAN PHILIP WAS ALSO VERY DELIBERATE ABOUT PREPARING THE ARCHDIOCESE CLERGY AND ORGANIZATIONS TO CONTINUE IN CHRIST’S SERVICE AFTER HIS DEATH – WHAT PATRIARCH JOHN X CALLED SAYDINA PHILIP’S “DISMOUNTING FROM HIS HORSE AND ENTERING INTO ETERNAL LIFE.” (PHILIP MEANS KNIGHT.)
Under Sayidna’s leadership, the Archdiocese grew four-fold in number of parishes, and in exponential levels of ministry. Metropolitan PHILIP promoted education, love, integrity, service and generosity in every aspect of his life. Orthodoxy in North America and the Antiochian Patriarchate is in a better place because of this one man’s sacrifice and vision.

In the Memorial Homily by Patriarch JOHN X, His Beatitude spoke of Metropolitan PHILIP’s heart and soul in poetic terms, which I found most appropriate for our great poet. Patriarch JOHN called Sayidna a valiant soldier “whose spiritual heart is still beating with prayers for the Church of the Antioch, in her homeland and in her dewy branches abroad (America), solidly strengthened by the Antiochian roots, blossoming and growing for the glory of God.” The Patriarch continued to hail him saying, “Sayidna, you have doubled the talent and made it grow new parishes, you raised up an Antiochian Village! … You planted in the hearts of your children the love of the Church and the love of the hospitable motherland. All these draw you near to the heavenly throne.”

Metropolitan JOSEPH at the burial service hailed Metropolitan PHILIP as a man of action, recalling his often repeated call to America to “come home.” “America, come home to the Faith of the Orthodox Church! Come home to the faith of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul!” Metropolitan JOSEPH continued to hail the Metropolitan “as the one who not only unified the immigrant children from the Middle East and elsewhere in North America, but went out to the highways and the hedges to seek the lost. He fed his Arabic-speaking flock and their children while at the same time seeking out the lost children of our generation.”

Sayidna JOSEPH continued in that homily to remind us that “Metropolitan PHILIP never allowed the status quo to freeze him into silence or passivity. He preached, he acted, he took big risks, all based upon the central ethos of apostolic love. History is not inscribed by clever minds or arm-chair thinkers, but rather, by energetic men and women of action! The deeds of this kind of leader will be trumpeted through the ages!”

Metropolitan PHILIP’s spiritual family remembers him with gratitude to God. May God grant this valiant knight of the Church, our light-filled father of almost fifty years, eternal rest with the righteous, and, through Sayidna PHILIP’s own prayers at the footstool of Christ, grant us courage and strength to continue Christ’s ministry.

BISHOP JOHN’S PRESENTATION TO THE CLERGY SYMPOSIUM

Priest as Minister of the Sacrament

I’M NOT A THEOLOGIAN, NOT A PROFESSOR, NOT EVEN A GOOD STUDENT, BUT I SPEAK TO YOU TODAY OUT OF MY OBEDIENCE TO OUR METROPOLITAN AND THE JOY THAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED AS A MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENTS. IT IS OUR MINISTRY OF THE SACRAMENTS THAT DEFINES OUR COMMUNITY AND GIVES CHRISTIAN IDENTITY TO OURSELVES AND GOD’S PEOPLE.

n the Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy, Fr. Nicon Patrinacos writes that the term mysterion is a composite from the verb myeω, which means to close one’s eyes for the purpose of protecting them. In the holy mysteries, we are closing our eyes from an extraordinary vision of the living, eternal God. Mysterion denotes the will and action of God, which is beyond the understanding of man, beyond what we are allowed to see. The mysteries, in other words, are God’s actions in our lives, which we are protected from seeing. Were we to see them, we could be blinded by God’s glory, like our eyes would be blinded by the sun. Seeing God would surely leave us without defense and would expose the chasm between our sinful state and the glory of God. It is God’s mercy toward us that He chooses not to manifest Himself any more tangibly than when His Word became flesh and walked among us. Now, as He hides in the elements of the sacraments, this restraint on God’s part is a mercy towards us.

How would we respond were we to see the fire of the Godhead at the water of the baptismal font? Would we plunge the baby into those waters? If, as we were walking down the church aisle on our wedding day, we could see the sleepless nights waiting for a teen to come home with the car, and feel the knots in our stomachs when we get calls from the police, how would we respond? Would we run for the hills? If at liturgy we saw the coals from the fire on tongs being placed in our hands and mouths in the Eucharist, would we be passive and receive Christ? What if we saw the angels and demons, or the raw pain of our parishioners, when they come for confession or counsel? Would we be so nonchalant? How would we respond?

God has chosen to hide Himself from our eyes, for our safety and good. Yet as God acts in the daily lives of our parishioners, we clergy are in a unique position as ministers of the sacrament to witness regularly, up close and intimately, God’s action in our lives and in the lives of our parishioners. We see the epiphany of people recognize God’s action. We witness repentance as Christians surrender to God’s will. We see healing of disease, as God’s peace and comfort are allowed into one’s heart. How glorious a life! More than yachting, golfing, or even making money, for sure. Ministering as God’s peace and comfort are allowed into one’s heart. How glorious a life! More than yachting, golfing, or even making money, for sure. Ministering...
PRIEST AS MINISTER

make distinctions between clergy and laity. Laity denotes membership in the world, while experts or clergy are called out and separated. There’s an old Serbian expression: “Here come three men and a priest,” as if the priest is no longer a man. In our Church we are all baptized into the royal priesthood or ministry of Christ. Every Christian is called to work in Christ’s own priesthood, of bringing God to man and mankind to God.

Some are called to various kinds of servant leadership, such as church educators, choir members or leaders, chanters, ushers, and such. Others are ordained or ordained to serve at the altar as liturgical deacons or servants, and others as presbyters or bishops. No office negates our earlier responsibilities; it adds to them. As Sayidna JOSEPH reminds us, a bishop is still a deacon or a servant. I add that a presbyter is still a Christian, that is, a member of God’s law, or laity.

The concern of Archbishop ANTHONY (Bloom) is that to classify the clergy outside of the people, or laity, makes it seem that simply being a person or a Christian is not as good; to be equal to the clergy, the laity would need to be clergy. Such a distinction leads to all kinds of modern ills, including tension and distrust between clergy and laity.

We would do well to help people understand how sacred and wonderful are the humanity and royal priesthood that we share. God embraced this humanity in his Incarnation. He has reclaimed fallen man, first created in the image and likeness of God, and thus made us to be God’s servants and sacraments, can put God on and share in Him, to the trinity of baptism and wedding services. I used the word koino-

To build up the Church, I believe that we who are clergy need to elevate the minds and hearts of God’s people. We need to help people fulfill their priesthood to pray for the world, and to reveal God to their families and cohorts. By helping them to “lift up their hearts,” we recruit them to serve God, in their order, to sanctify themselves, their homes, their work, and their recreation. We ministers of the sacraments need to live among God’s people as examples of God’s love, so that people we serve need to give and serve. If we want their service to be ministry, we need to teach them about sacramental life – how to do ministry – and then lead them in worship and service.

We need to raise their comfort levels by encouraging them to speak about the Church. We need to engage them in worship and send them out to minister. In short, we need to give them the language and understanding necessary to under-stand and do ministry.

Sacraments offer the opportunity to reveal God and transform our communities. Of course, the sacraments are not limited to seven. Our working definition of sacrament is God’s action in the lives of our faithful. God is ministering in times of sickness, death, house-blessings, council meetings, hospitality, church camping, Parish life conferences, and perhaps sometimes in food fairs and bowling leagues. This is real koinonia, or fellowship, being the Church that is revealed through the sacraments, being the Church that reveals and is revealed, and that God’s action is what they’re comfortable talking about. Our lay leaders, like us, are created in the image and likeness of God. God gives and serves. Like God and like us, the people we serve need to give and serve. If we want their service to be ministry, we need to teach them about sacramental life – how to do ministry – and thus lead laity in worship and service.

The sacramental life of the priest is one of prayer. Prayer is constant communion or communication with God and his people. It is by definition extremely intimate and personal. When God acts in our lives, we are the most open and vulnerable. We need to show utmost respect for the sacred opportuni-ties we share when we pray with others personally and corporately as Church. We are to remove our sandals because we are in the sacred space of God’s presence. We need to approach our parishioners with awe, respect, and humility. How else will they learn the awe of God? When we attend a seminary or are ordained to any of the Church orders, we are perceived by the people to offer them opportunities to connect with the living God, who is accessible through the prayers of our holy fathers en masse. They sense that God dwells in his priests.

God is a fervent fire. Do not let false pride or humility steal from them the opportunities they seek to meet God. Be careful, though, that your own social needs do not make you too familiar to be able to help people meet God. We need to be accessible, but serious and pious enough to fulfill our priestly vocations and offices. We need to be ever-vigilant, because we never know when and where God will use us to minister. We have multiple relationships with our parishioners. We have special relationships with our children and youth, and the work of baptism, marriage, and liturgy in their marriages, go to school functions with them, attend birthday parties at their homes. In other words, we are pastors, family, friends, counselors, and so forth. We need to be cautious not to allow these various roles to compromise our priestly role as minister of sacrament. We need to be vigilant and deliberate.

I once stopped for pizza after a hospital visit in Pittsburgh. While I walked into the shop, a pizza was introduced to the owner’s father, who was visiting from Syria. The old man began to cry, saying that God had visited him in his time of grief. The day before, his wife of 45 years was buried, and he was unable to get home for the funeral. I couldn’t speak words to this man because my Arabic was so poor, yet God spoke through my presence. This man was able to grieve, and his journey to some kind of peace and balance had begun, because a priest came to his son’s pizza shop.

The Church is the community called out of the fallen world to follow the way Christ established for us. This way is expressed most perfectly in the gathering of the community for the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God’s people being the Church in the world. The clergy connect God’s people to God and to each other. We share the same Christ who is our source. The bishops, the Eucharist, and the faith are...
PRIEST AS MINISTER

Modern man is self-centered and insists on an individualistic freedom, but such a freedom is not free at all; it is only free from God. This society is running chdonism or self-pleasing. If we are to call people to freedom is not free at all; it is only free from God.

We can also call them to the fasting and charitable practices of the Church community that help us understand the difficult teachings of the Church. We can encourage them to discover our other to peers, we need “venters,” and we need protégés. We need people who teach us, people whom we can embrace and be comfortable with. We need all three kinds of relationships. We need to pass on our life experiences with others to keep a healthy balance in life. In the parish with the same people, we have lots of different roles that we play. My point is, as Sayidna JOSEPH reminded us, a presbyter is always a presbyter. He should always, in whatever he does, be authentic and be who he is, we shouldn’t, when we’re being a friend, do anything that would compromise our primary reason for being in the community, which is to hear the confessions and to help people to Christ.

Peer relationships are very important for us to keep in balance, and friendships take a lot of work. Americans are notably lazy when it comes to friendships and relationships; they don’t spend the time or do the work. That leaves us isolated and lonely. So we need to be deliberate about having relationships, investing ourselves, finding people who can meet all three levels of our needs. It’s up to us to identify our real needs and to be creative about meeting those real needs and following through. If you want to share something with a friend who is a priest, think about whether or not what you’re sharing will compromise your ability to hear his confession, to support his marriage, and to be an icon of Christ. That might mean that you have to call a friend from seminary or from the House of Studies or from the diocese for some of these peer relationships.

Q3: My question then is educational and sacramental, especially for young people today. How do we teach our young people? When we introduce them to sacraments and teach them about sacraments, would we say, “Oh, this is fire, this is not water”? That would be confusing. So what is the best way for young people today to learn about those sacraments?

Bishop JOHN: Father, my working definition of sacrament is God acting in our lives. When the deacon comes to the bishop or the presbyter, he says, “It is time for God to act.” Another translation is, “It is time for us to do God’s work.” God is working, and we are interacting with Him, and so together God is manifesting Himself, working, and doing. I would just try to teach plainly. Help people understand that truth is beyond words, as we see in our apophatic tradition. I think children even can understand that sometimes it’s really hard to describe something, and what we want to describe is beyond the limits of the words we use. We have an analogy with the language of the people in the far North, who have names for five different kinds of snow, whereas, in Baltimore, they just have snow.

Q2: Would you please speak more about the meaning of being similar but apart from the people? Because when we are with them, eating and celebrating birthdays and stuff, we feel more close to them, but how can we be apart at the same time?

Bishop JOHN: How do we keep clear the many different relationships that we have with people so that we can be appropriate? I think we all choose things, general kinds of relationships. We need peers, we need “venters,” and we need protégés. We teach them. We can encourage them to discover our teachings in the Scriptures and Fathers by sending them directly to the sources. They are capable of understanding more than we typically need people who teach us, people whom we can embrace and be comfortable with. We need all three kinds of relationships. We need to pass on our life experiences with others to keep a healthy balance in life. In the parish with the same people, we have lots of different roles that we play. My point is, as Sayidna JOSEPH reminded us, a presbyter is always a presbyter. He should always, in whatever he does, be authentic and be who he is, we shouldn’t, when we’re being a friend, do anything that would compromise our primary reason for being in the community, which is to hear the confessions and to help people to Christ.

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Q3: Sayidna, I was intrigued about your experience in New Kensington, coming there. You mentioned attendance was low, but you used the opportunity of funerals and the preaching especially at funerals to inspire people to become more active. I wonder if you could speak more about the role of preaching in liturgy, in sacraments, and in the formation of community.

Bishop JOHN: The Antiochians were blessed to be able to be the first really to use a lot of English in worship. I think that is because, when the first wave of immigrants came, they weren’t nationalist because they were under Ottoman rule, and Arabic wasn’t really our language. That was imposed on us by the Ottomans. So we didn’t have the kind of loyalty that the Greeks or the Serbs or the Russians had to their language or their country. So it’s a little more tribal.

Yet translating into English isn’t really enough, because now we need to translate the English so that what’s really happening is understood. What does it mean when we say in the liturgy, “A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise”? That’s our priesthood, that’s their priesthood. Let us pay attention, that we, all together, may offer the oblation in peace. A mercy means God’s priesthood, of our priesthood, bringing God to man; and a sacrifice of praise, our praising God. That’s what it means for each of us Christians to be priests. What does it mean to mysteriously represent the cherdum? It means to call to understanding, that we’re joining the angels at the throne of God and we’re already at Christ’s side, and He’s feeding us his life. I think we need to help people understand what they’re doing when they come to worship, and that becomes exciting.

At one of our NAC meetings, a leader stood up and said, “I don’t get anything from church.” I said to him: The service isn’t there for you to get, the service is there for you to give, to be the Church, to witness to the world, to manifest Christ’s presence, to be gathered as an expression of the heavenly kingdom. Once we’re able to help people experience that, then work could be done more easily. I tell folks that we don’t baptize people to make them consumers. In our world, they’re all consumers. Are they consuming it like a hamburger, like they’re entitled to it, because they put fifty cents in the collection? That’s not what it is. So we’re soldiers. So what does it mean if you’re a soldier and you don’t show up for six years? Or you come and choose which army to fight in, for which battle that you like? Or you work for a company and expect a paycheck because you’re entitled, but don’t go to work! What does it mean? We’re not spectators. What the Church gives you, my friend, is the opportunity to give: an opportunity to participate in Christ’s ministry, to do what was promised God that you would be in your baptism. Because we meant it, even if you didn’t know what you were saying. In baptism, when you spit at the devil, you might not believe in the devil, but the devil believes in you, you know? So let’s know that this is serious business. The sacraments are the most serious business.

We – all of us Christians – are participating in God and His work and His ministry and His life. It’s not right to let them do that without knowing what they’re doing.
Q4: . . . It’s not important not to have a bishop who’s been married. It used to be an experience to have children . . . through the years . . . What is your experience of having been married and being a bishop. Does it hamper you? Does it add things you, which I believe it did?

Bishop JOHN: The question is, What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a married bishop, because I’m the only married bishop of An- toch, right? And Constantineople has only one mar- ried bishop.

C1: We have had a married patriarch.

C2: You’re on your way! [Laughter]

Bishop JOHN: We have had a married patri- arch, but in the past we’ve had other bishops who’ve been married. Here are some advantages. I think I have lots of sermon illustrations. I have the expe- rience of being awakened late at night. God gives each of us different things in our lives that we are able to use for his glory. When my first son was born, his heart didn’t make the change to send the blood able to use for his glory. When my first son was born, his heart didn’t make the change to send the blood

I look back on my priesthood and my family life, as a whole, and there are so many things that God has given me, that I think that I can’t really—not that I can’t really, but I wanted to make sure we had enough money. I didn’t live any better when I was making $60,000 than when I was making $12,000. I didn’t live any differently. Only God knows how that stuff worked. But I said to him, “This is your turn to be a kid and to play. We have been put in charge of the finances, and we’ll decide what we spend money on. And when you have kids, then you worry about the finances and what toys you buy and what toys you don’t buy. So let’s be deliberate that parents are par- ents. Kids are kids. Then it’s the things that we do, and this is how we work.

I’m not saying that you treat your parishioners like little kids. Imagine if I were twenty-four—years old! Imagine if I were twenty-four—years old in a parish. I’m not going to go to an eighty-year- old guy, and say, “Son—.” [Laughter] Just be your- self, serve your people, and let God work through you. When I went to New Kensington, I had no plans. I had no strategy. I had no mission statement or any of those kinds of things. I’m a priest, I was there to serve the parish. I needed the parking lot, because the parking lot was full of weeds. I changed 40 light bulbs in the church. Three-quarters of the light bulbs in the church had burned out and no- body noticed. The walls were covered in soot. Nice marble, but nobody noticed that they were covered in soot.

Q5: Sayidna, I’ve been a priest for a while, and I look back on my priesthood and my family life, and I know I made lots of mistakes on both sides. When I was younger, everyone was always saying, “You’ve got to balance your family life with the parish, with the parishioners.” How did you do that? For younger priests, with families, from your experience, what advice do you give them?

Bishop JOHN: I think we need to be very de- liberate. I read a book – from a Protestant, but some very good advice — about managing time, energy, and finances, which are all finite. We need to budget our energy, our time, and our money. We can only do that by being deliberate. If you don’t have end- less time, then when you make an appointment, you need not only to make a starting time; you need to make an ending time. “I can see you from 12:00 to 12:50.” At 12:50, if the work isn’t completed, then they can come back next week, when you have an- other 50 minutes. So by being deliberate, we can make more things happen in a morning or an after- noon or an evening. That make sense?

Priests are busy, very busy, but we, as priests, have some flexibility. We have to bury people, but if the time we have to bury them is at nine o’clock because of something else, then we can offer opportunities and schedule our times and our energy, so that we take care of ourselves, our fami- lies, and our parish. When you take care of yourself, you teach your family that God is important to you, and you need also to take care of their relationship with God. When you take care of your family, you show the parish that family is important, and you model for them how you behave. So taking care of yourself, going to the gym, doing your prayers, doing your spiritual reading — are gifts to the parish! It keeps you balanced, it keeps you fed, it keeps you able to do things.

If you are working so hard at the parish that you’re not sharpening the blade, then you’re not go- ing to do much cutting. So we need to keep breath- ing, we need to keep praying, we need to take care of our families, we need to be deliberate about how we use our time and how we use our energy. It’s not fair that you give the parish all of your energy so that, when you’re home, you’re there physically but can’t play with the kids or can’t talk to your wife and spend time with your wife. That’s not fair. And that will end up costing more. So we need to keep our priorities and be deliberate and be serious.

I think sometimes we go from one extreme to the other and we’re not going to be balanced. But just count up how many minutes you spend making hospital calls, how many minutes you spend praying, and so on. Just by making that inventory, you’ll start re-balancing . . . Take a look at your checkbook and see where your money is going, and then begin to see where you are, and then you are able to make some choices so that you can be more deliberate about how you use your time, your energy, and finances.

When my wife was sick, it was like God micro- managed my time. I never missed a time when she needed help getting to the bathroom, and I never missed the Little League game or a service or a hospital visit. It was like God just helped me take care of every- thing. It was all His. One time, my son was real- ly young, and I came downstairs, and he was going through my checkbook. I thought that was pretty curious, so I said to him, “Honey, what are you do- ing?” And he was embarrassed that I caught him, and he said, “Well, I was going to ask for something, but I wanted to make sure we had enough money.” Pretty sweet. I said to him, “Honey, between your mother and me we have four master’s degrees, and we can’t figure out that checkbook.” Really, only God knows how it went, because it never made any sense. I didn’t live any better when I was making $60,000 than when I was making $12,000. I didn’t live any differently. Only God knows how that stuff worked. But I said to him, “This is your turn to be a kid and to play. We have been put in charge of the finances, and we’ll decide what we spend money on. And when you have kids, then you worry about the finances and what toys you buy and what toys you don’t buy. So let’s be deliberate that parents are par- ents. Kids are kids. Then it’s the things that we do, and this is how we work.

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The parish had gone to sleep; they were re- tired. I needed the parking lot, I changed the light bulbs, and we began to have a different image of what we were: we weren’t retired any more. We had kids who could go to the Bible Bowl and bring us praise. We were people who could win art contests. I started telling them, because at least on the Bowls they had an opportunity, how big and how wonder- ful they are and what great ministry they could lead. I made all my parishioners co-ministers. I told them they could do anything. They had no idea what God could do in them. They were in their minds in such a ghetto. They really imagined that everyone around them had better theology and better missions and better structures and better everything.

When converts came, the parishioners couldn’t understand what the converts wanted, because what the converts had was so much better. They didn’t re- buke new people because they thought the people of the parish were too good for them; they rebuked people because they didn’t think that their parish was good enough. That’s how they saw themselves. They were so excited that the Roman Catholic priest would talk to them; he was so special, and they didn’t have anything. So you help them understand what their heritage is and what it means and what the liturgy is, and that it is the entrance to the kingdom of heaven.

We had a “full gospel” congregation down the street, and they put on their church sign: “Bible- Based Church.” So I thought that was really cute. So I put on my sign: “Church-Based Bible.” This minister preached three sermons against me by name! I never met the guy! Three hours he talked about my arrogance and my pride. The people were so shocked by the literalism, and so on. I put up a discussion about what it means to be the Church that wrote the Bible that they’re interpreting.

I told my parish about my favorite Saturday Night Live show. On Saturday Night Live, they had a skit about a handwriting expert who had a Ph.D. and could tell better what somebody wrote than the person who wrote it. He knew more of what you meant than you did. “No, that’s not what you meant. I have a Ph.D.” What a silly notion. We’re the Church that wrote the epistles — to our churches, to us! And somebody else knows better what the letter means? We have the live experience of the situation. That’s who we are! So I helped people feel better about themselves, and that helped them a little. We changed our idea of who we are and what it means and what the Church is, and that it is the entrance to the kingdom of heaven.
THE SECOND PASSOVER: PASCHA

We Christians celebrate each spring Christ’s Passover—PASCHA—from death to life, because we remember that His Resurrection from the dead gives us the opportunity of eternal life in His kingdom.

But there was an earlier Passover! Perhaps the most significant event in the Old Testament was the passing, by the Angel of Death, over the blood-anointed door posts and lintels of the homes of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt. In this way, God spared their first-born children and livestock. Not so for Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

This action of God achieved His ultimate objective: rescuing His people from four hundred years of bondage. This event resonates throughout the books of the Old Testament, and continues to resonate with Jews to this day. This was the first Passover: an action of God in history, a sign of His love and compassion for His people, one that makes supremely evident the Immortal caring for us mortals.

Yet we mortals have never acted out of gratitude to Him for His concern. We have not always remembered His saving action, and lived our lives in accordance with His expectations of us. Like Adam and Eve, we continue to disobey Him. God, however, true to Himself, has not forgotten the high point of His Creation—us mortals. He sent His prophets to admonish us concerning our wayward ways, and to remind us of His steadfast love for us. In the fullness of time, He sent His only begotten Son to reach out to us, and to gather us under His wings.

Pascha, the Second Passover

In this Second Passcha, Christ passed over from death on the Cross to life in His Resurrection on the third day. The Second Passover supersedes the first, in that it opens the gates of Paradise to all people—Jews and Gentiles. It is not exclusive, for one people only; rather, it is potently inclusive of those from all nations of mankind.

Moreover, this Second Passover took place on the occasion of the celebration of the first. Christ instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover meal of lamb for Him: “Go into the city to a certain person and instruct him: ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples”’” (Matthew 26:18). Then He became the sacrificial Lamb inaugurating the New Covenant with His blood.

Our God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—desires to be with us, to walk with us, and to talk with us. Little by little, He reveals Himself to us as far as we can understand. We cannot know God on our own, and we will never know God completely; knowledge of Him is not something we can acquire through our own cleverness. As mortals—created out of dust—we cannot fully comprehend the Immortal, the One who created us from that dust. Can the clay advise the potter? As Isaiah points out (Isaiah 29:16), He is unsearchable. What we do know is what He has revealed about Himself to us.

What He reveals to us through His prophets, but especially in His Son, is a loving, caring, long-suffering, and compassionate Person. Unlike the god of the philosophers—the unmoved Mover of Aristotle, for example—He is a God who works in history for our benefit, so that we may have life, and have it abundantly. He is not distant, but nearby. He is not abstract, but real.

Think of it. He sent His only begotten Son to rescue us, not from Egyptian slavery, but from death itself. As St. Basil the Great puts it in his Anaphora prayer at the high point of the Liturgy, He loosed the pains of death and rose again on the third day, making a way for all flesh unto the resurrection from the dead, for it was not possible that the Author of life should be held by corruption.

What greater love is there than for one to give his life for another? Christ gave His life for all of us. Moreover, He did not leave us alone, or abandon us after He rose from the dead, nor when He ascended into heaven to return to His Father. St. Basil continues in the Anaphora prayer:

And he bath left with us, as memorials of his saving passion, these things which we have set forth according to his commandments.

For when he was about to go forth to his voluntary and ever-memorable and life-giving death, in the night in which he gave himself up for the life of the world, he took bread in his holy and immaculate hands, and when he had broken it unto thee, the God and Father, and given thanks and blessed it and blessed it and broken it, He gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying: Take, eat. This is My Body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins. In like manner, having taken the cup of the fruit of the vine and mingled it and given thanks and blessed it and blessed it and broken it, He gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying: Drink of this, all of you. This is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. …

Do this in remembrance of me: for as often as you shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you do proclaim my death and confess my resurrection.

Christ did not abandon us. He sent His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth and He is with us at all times. This is especially true when we partake of His Holy Body and Blood. As He told His disciples and apostles: when you partake of the Eucharist, I abide in you and you abide in Me.

There is no abstraction here. There is reality. There is personal engagement. There is the mortal with the Immortal and the Immortal with the mortal, as a foretaste of our journey to Christ in the Kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the Kingdom there is no longer suffering, pain, sickness, nor sorrow, but brightness, green pastures, and peace.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us celebrate joyfully this Second Passover—this Pascha—this cosmic action of God in history. Christ came into our midst, died for us, reopened the doors of Paradise for us, and allowed us to partake of His Holy Body and Blood. Moreover, He is with us at all times. When we wander off, He waits patiently for us to acknowledge His saving Grace and to return to Him. He does indeed abide in us and grants us life everlasting.

Who is so great a God as our God? Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!
St. Nicholas Church traces its history back to the early 1900s, when Orthodox immigrants from that part of the Ottoman Empire then known as “Syria” began to come to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Many of these immigrants made their living initially as peddlers, selling their wares door-to-door as the city grew into a center of commerce and industry. As they became more prosperous, they opened stores of their own. Others found employment in the city’s well-known furniture industry.

As early as 1906, the community was visited by traveling priests, who served the recently arrived Orthodox immigrants scattered around the Midwest and concentrated in growing cities like Toledo and Fort Wayne. At least twice, Grand Rapids was visited by St. Raphael Hawawrey, who encouraged the faithful to establish a church and who ordained and trained St. Nicholas’s first Pastor, Father Philipous Abu-Assaley. Father Philipous was ordained in 1908.

The community purchased its first church building in 1908, and incorporated as St. George Church in 1910. Grand Rapids became a center of Orthodoxy in the Midwest, as Father Philipous himself continued to travel around the region, ministering to the faithful. By 1923, however, Grand Rapids’ Antiochian Orthodox community found itself divided by the dispute known as the “Russ-Antakya” split, a dispute over church governance that arose in the aftermath of the repose of St. Raphael and the organizational confusion that ensued throughout American Orthodoxy in the wake of the Russian Revolution.

As a result, St. Nicholas was formed in 1923. St. George Church also remained, and to this day is located on property it purchased at the time of the dispute. St. Nicholas moved to a location on Cass Avenue in Grand Rapids, where it would remain until the 1950s. Then it moved to a suburban location in nearby East Grand Rapids. During this period, the Rt. Rev. Ellis Khouri served as Pastor of St. Nicholas. Beloved throughout the Archdiocese, he was instrumental in fostering St. Nicholas’s involvement in SOYO and other activities, and later served as Praxisyneglos of the Archdiocese.

In fact, St. Nicholas has traditionally been actively involved in the national endeavors of the Archdiocese. Two of its current members, Alan Abraham and Dan Abraham, have recently served on the Archdiocese Board of Trustees. Dan Abraham also served as National Chair of the Order of St. Ignatius, a post currently held by Roger David of the parish. Rob Rinvelt and Kathy Abraham held national offices with NAC SOYO and the Fellowship of St. John the Divine. A son of St. Nicholas, Very Rev. Thomas Zain, is Dean of St. Nicholas Cathedral and Vicar-General of the Archdiocese.

In 1996, St. Nicholas purchased a 12.5-acre parcel of land in Kentwood, located near several major roadways in a developing part of the area. In January 2000, the community began to worship there and on October 15, 2000, its new temple was consecrated. In 2001, the Very Rev. Daniel Daly became the Pastor of St. Nicholas. The church is marked by its Byzantine-style architecture, featuring a large dome as well as ample classroom, office, and fellowship facilities. It also includes a bookstore and the Chapel of St. Joseph of Damascus. St. Nicholas has been blessed with extensive iconography by the hand of Father Theodore Koufos of Toronto.

Upon Father Daniel’s retirement in 2015, the parish welcomed the current Pastor, the Very Rev. Michael Nasser. Father Michael is well known throughout the Archdiocese and has many years of service, including as director of the Antiochian
Build A Thriving Ministry Team

So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” – Acts 6:24

“Not pastor, not even the best one, can run a parish on his own. With fewer priests, more demands from parish ‘it’s a must.’ Every pastor needs a leadership team, a special group of people who are collectively committed to helping him make the parish amazing and bring more people to Christ and His Church.” – Pat Lencioni, New York Times bestselling author

Every day, our clergy serve Christ and His Church by offering themselves selflessly, sacrificially, and completely to their people. They are called to stand in innocence before God’s holy altar to proclaim the Gospel of His Kingdom, to teach the word of His truth, and to offer unto God spiritual gifts and sacrifices, to renew His people. Additionally, our clergy must step confidently into the roles of administrator, be consulted in the affairs of the parish, be the advisor to lay ministries, heal conflicts, aid in promoting parish events and activities, and so much more. There’s often no limit to the roles a pastor has at any given time. But here’s the thing: the needs of a parish community simply surpass what one person can do alone. God knew that and so should we. No pastor should ever think that he is alone.

The need for a team of trusted and competent co-laborers in parish life is significant. While many of our parishes are bustling with thriving teams, every pastor is called to continue in his ministry to help parishioners identify and cultivate their spiritual gifts, so that they too can serve the Body of Christ. Metropolitan JOSEPH recognizes that whether it’s hiring a youth worker, finding the right person to serve on the Parish Council, or working with the Church School staff, instruction in key aspects of collaborative ministry and team-building is not only essential for pastoral self-care, but also very necessary for optimal parish health. He knows that when ministry is shared, the depth of pastoral care can be far reaching within a parish. When the right people collaborate in the right ways, everyone on a team is blessed.

That’s why this July, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, His Eminence has enlisted the team at Faithtree Resources to create a practical and unique experience for Antiochian Orthodox clergy throughout North America. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Faithtree team will cover practical strategies that empower our clergy to build teams and cultivate the spiritual gifts and talents of their people. With eight chosen speakers, and a ton of interactive and multimedia instruction, the event will provide pastors with an opportunity to see how they might develop a collaborative ministry, so that, as the team thrives, so does the pastor. We encourage pastors to register early online with Faithtree Resources at faithtree.org.

Michelle Moujaes is the Founder and Executive Director of Faithtree Resources, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Orthodox pastors develop thriving parish communities.
Forty is a very biblical number, often representing a long time. It was the number of days of rain which caused the flood, from which Noah, his family, and the animals were saved in the Ark. The people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty long years, after being set free from slavery in Egypt, and before entering the Promised Land. Jesus fasted and was tempted in the wilderness for forty days, just prior to his earthly ministry, and, in imitation, we fast for forty days of Great Lent. So forty of anything is a long time.

As hard as it is to believe, it is also the number of years that we celebrate the good ministry being done at the Antiochian Village. It was forty years ago, when the total number of campers attending the entire summer was a fraction of those attending any given week these days. It was not known from the beginning as the standard of success that it is now, with over 1,000 campers attending each summer, and whose ministry has contributed to another thousand attending the various camps throughout the Archdiocese each summer.

I’m not the only priest of the Archdiocese who credits the Village for playing a significant part in our answering the call to the holy priesthood; many of us acknowledge Fr. John Namie’s enduring influence. Even a few of our bishops would say the same! The number of clergy, youth directors, chanters, choir directors, Church School teachers and Parish Council members (among a myriad of other ministries) who credit their time at the Village as an important inspiration continually grows. The renaissance in Byzantine chant throughout the Archdiocese cannot be distinguished from the experience of those who attend our camps. We do indeed have much to celebrate!

Such an important milestone needs a GRAND celebration, and that’s just what we’ve planned for the 2019 Archdiocese Convention taking place July 21–28, 2019, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While we’ll have to put up with luxury accommodations instead of sleeping on bunk beds in the cabins (someone needs to make the sacrifice!), this reunion will bring together campers and counselors from the Village’s forty years of faith, fellowship and fun. Some of the highlights of what we have planned include remembrances of these blessed years through picture and song. The celebration of this anniversary will be woven throughout the Convention’s events, from Thursday’s “Evening Program” of the River View & Family Fair, to a special multi-media segment, “The Village Remembered,” at the Friday “Antiochian Spotlight: From Broadway to Grand Rapids” musical spectacular, to the Saturday tribute to the Village at “The Light the Night Gala” dinner-dance. Having been a counselor in the 80s and early 90’s, and then the camp’s director in the late 90s and early 2000s, I find it to be a great blessing to act as the host pastor at the Convention, celebrating the Village’s four decades. One highlight for me personally will be the “Wine Down with Fr. Michael,” a gathering planned by our camp alumni here at St. Nicholas. I hope to see many of the campers and staff I knew from my Village days.

The impact on each of the thousands of us who entered that sacred ground through the arch is immeasurable, as each encountered God and His Church in new and meaningful ways. It’s why that arch is featured prominently in this year’s Conference and Convention logo, and the biblical quote which emblazons it is our theme: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). We’re looking forward to seeing campers and counselors from these four decades reunite,
renew their Village bonds, and be revitalized in the faith that we learned to live in deeper ways during our days there. Among our forty years of alumni, of course we have our “Pioneer Villagers” from the 70s (when the staff outnumbered the campers!) and early 80s, those I remember from the “old school” days in the late 80s, and the Villagers who enjoyed a much larger program of the 90s and 2000s. For a while now, we’ve seen “second-generation Villagers” (campers who are children of those early campers or staff in the 70s and 80s). Now we’re beginning to see third-generation Village babies at Family Camp!

We’re looking forward to the blessed assembly of all those who met their future spouses at the Village, and a group picture of all the “Village babies.” So we invite you to “come home to the Village” at this summer’s Archdiocese Convention! No matter which “country roads” will take you home, or if you need to leave “on a jet plane,” we promise you a Convention to be remembered, as we remember our time at the Village.

V. Rev. Fr. Michael Nasser
St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

I imagine that, to answer that last question, you will ‘Google it’ on the computer or phone. And, this gets me to the point of this article, but I’m not going directly there. We have more to first cover.

In the popular analyses of these videos, the common refrain is that young people these days are “not taught to think.” This is a fair assessment, since many of these “gotcha” videos feature question that require some basic analysis and problem-solving. Yes, you can blame the rather banal, “how-does-this-make-you-feel?” culture of modern schooling, but, to be fair, modern education does preserve some problem-solving aspects. The common criticism is summarized in the title, “Why Johnny Can’t Think,” and it appears that our education system in America is failing to teach children to use logic.
WHY JOHNNY CAN’T REMEMBER

There is, however, an underlying problem that is being ignored. That is, Johnny can think, but he often can’t remember enough facts to form proper thoughts. While popular education and society undervalue rational discourse in favor of emotional experience, the truth is that humans cannot avoid thinking. We hunger for reasons and to grasp causal relations. We want to know why things happen, and we all know that, ultimately, “because I felt like it,” is a really dissatisfying answer.

The reason most of the people in those man-on-the-street videos can’t answer the questions is that they can’t remember the answers. They are conditioned from early education through undergraduate studies, students learn to “dump the data”—to forget everything they learned from the previous semester to make room for new information. (Most courses are one semester long.) There is only so much information that a student can keep in his working memory, and the rest is shoved off into some dark corner of the mind, or even into complete oblivion. So, the professor was forced to review the previous semester’s contents, which was moderately successful, though it was clear that students remembered the terminology, but only small amounts of the content. To this day I only have vague recollections of the topics of that class.

Why do students dump so much information? Well, if you consider the sheer volume of information modern people are responsible for learning in school, and what it competes against, it is no wonder that we forget as much as we do. When I lived in Japan, I was astonished how my Japanese friends occasionally struggled to make out signs we encountered in the streets of Tokyo, often seeming like they were only partially literate. They all gave the same story: they had to memorize dozens of characters each week in school, but promptly forgot them the next week to get ready for the next round to be memorized. To be literate in Japanese, one must learn three different character systems, with thousands of characters and combinations with distinct meanings: a true feat of memory.

We older folks remembered when most news came through the morning newspaper, and then maybe an hour of TV news in the evening. Now, we have the Internet, with unlimited access to every bit of news (and quite a bit of ‘fluff’) brought to us through Facebook, 4chan, Twitter, and other “social media.” We have hundreds of opportunities each day to be exposed to every corner of human knowledge.

Now, when we don’t know something, we can “Google it.” We don’t need to put much effort into mastering a topic. I have built buildings and repaired machinery with YouTube videos. If you asked me to repeat what I did right now, however, I’d be at a loss. As soon as I finished my project, I dumped most of the detailed information. We learn primarily through repetition, and I don’t have time for that. A new challenge is here, and I must make room to learn a new task quickly.

People nowadays bounce through numerous jobs and even several careers, except when deep, detailed knowledge is required. Still, it is impossible for anyone to master an entire field. A doctor must specialize in a certain kind of medicine, just as an engineer must specialize in a particular portion of his field. Generalists really don’t exist, or they become synonymous with “. . . master of none.”

We are overwhelmed with information, and have little time to digest it. This is why we have become so reliant on pictures and images: we get a lot of information very quickly, with a small dose of brain chemicals that arouse emotions and help us “attach” to that image. We know more about history than our ancestors ever imagined—because we have little time to digest it. This is why we have forgotten the names of all Twelve Apostles—I’ll save you the trip to Google: the list varies in the Four Gospels, so that was kind of a trick question—but we should expect that the next year they will remember only a few of them.

If we expect that Christianity is taught the same way as mathematics or philosophy or grammar, then we should expect similar results. Our children will (and frequently do) forget what we teach them.

Is there any hope? Yes, but it requires us to set aside our present expectations. We need to stop approaching Orthodoxy as a collection of facts. Often, after encouraging inquirers to read about the Faith, I will then ask them to shut the books and just come to services. Why? Because, it is only through immersion in the Faith and routine participation in the services that someone can resist the tidal wave of other information that inundates the modern mind.

The Divine Liturgy centers around the Anamnesis, calling to remembrance the glory and love of God for us and for His creation: “Having the remembrance, therefore, this saving commandment and all things that have come to pass for us . . . .” Our worship is a constant act of remembrance, of reminding ourselves of God’s mercy and compassion. This is also the way the devil seeks to destroy a man, he first separates him from worship. He cultivates discontent with the parish community in the heart of the tempted man, and lures him away with dreams, say, of a “purer” parish that will have perfect liturgies with perfect people. He no longer desires to be patient with the failings of others, because he has forgotten the elementary foundation of Christian behavior and morality. He prefers books and
Certainly, you can read the writings of a saint who condemns heretics, but does that give you the right to do so as well? Are you God’s newly appointed representative of His Church, simply because you have a little knowledge? We certainly do forget humility, as we forget so much else. We even train ourselves to forget: would you enjoy a movie if you continued to remember that each actor is just an actor, and one you’ve seen in countless other roles? Would you enjoy music if you thought about how Autotune made the singer seem to hit those notes, and how much editing it took to make that song seem in the least bit palatable?

Our hope for the Gospel is that we can become immersed in the daily living out of the Faith, rather than being the keepers of odd knowledge and obscure facts. Our spiritual struggle is through repetition of the basics, which is trying simply to live out a life of virtue through union with Jesus Christ.

Countless children pass through our Sunday schools, and then go off into a world where they will invariably forget much of what we teach them. It is important, then, to make sure some things are repeated enough for them so that they remember their Father, as did the prodigal son. The lesson that will stay with them is our example of love and compassion lived out on a daily basis. Our daily prayer life, regular confession, and routine attendance at services will keep us mindful on a daily basis of the essentials of the Faith, but also provide our children with constant reminders of what is needful. Yet even these can become empty forms, without our intentional effort to remain mindful of what virtue really is, and how far we are straying from it.

You don’t need to memorize all the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils to be an Orthodox Christian, but you do need to remember to forgive those who harm you. You don’t need to have vast numbers of Scriptural quotes memorized in order to be charitable to the poor. You don’t even have to be particularly studious in order to be patient. But, you do have to remember that to be forgiving, charitable, and patient is essential to the Faith.

If you are worried that Johnny can’t remember his Faith, ask yourself whether you are mindful of your own, and whether you are serving as a reminder to him of what the Faith is.

Archpriest George Aquaro
Potlatch, Idaho

Internet pages to his brethren. After all, the books don’t force him to exercise virtue.

Is it possible to read too many Orthodox books? Yes! Some people plunge head-first into a sea of literature, not all of which is accurate or beneficial. The real problem is that, in getting deep into a theological controversy, Christians will dump the basics: love, forgiveness, long-suffering, charity, kindness, refraining from condemnation, and so forth. Early lessons that stirred them to repentance for their own sins will be replaced by new lessons condemning others. They forget their own short-comings as they read saints who condemned others, and feel themselves to be in alignment with the saints, though certainly without the years of ascetical struggle and repentance the saints relied on to avoid going off the deep end.
experienced the most eerie calm and quiet I'd ever experienced of the Cherubim, high above Damascus, I experienced that terrifying boredom. Worse still, it can sound kind of New-Agey,” as we old folks used to say.

A BIG SHOUT-OUT TO SILENCE

WHY DO WE CALL IT A “RETREAT,” WHEN IT’S JUST A FEW TALKS WITH A GUEST SPEAKER? THAT’S THE QUESTION. IN FACT, THAT REALLY WAS MY QUESTION WHEN COMING INTO THE CHURCH YEARS AGO. BACK AT MY DAYS AT NASHOTAH HOUSE SEMINARY, OUR ANNUAL RETREAT WAS SPENT IN SILENCE; THAT IS, NO TALKING, EVEN DURING MEALS. A GUEST SPEAKER GAVE VARIOUS MEDITATIONS ON A SELECTED THEME, BUT THE BEAUTY OF THE EXERCISE, THE TAKE-AWAY, WAS SILENCE.

My intent here is not to disparage all the worthy retreat talks I have attended over the years. Lord knows, though unworthy, I’ve spoken at my share. Yet many pilgrims have experienced silence and solitude only at monasteries. After nearly three decades in Orthodoxy, I can honestly say that I have attended only one real-deal silent retreat. It happened in my own parish. It was Plan C, as two potential retreat speakers had fallen through.

I had long wanted to do a quiet day. Now I had the chance. Why would I need an excuse? Well, because advertising a Quiet Day (without justification and explanation) might seem akin to celebrating boredom. Worse still, it can sound kind of New-Agey,” as we old folks used to say.

Also, let’s be honest, we’re afraid of silence. Once, while praying in the chapel of the Monastery of the Cherubim, high above Damascus, I experienced the most eerie calm and quiet I’d ever heard.” I couldn’t stay long. I had to get out of there! Yet I long to stay.

The flyer for the retreat stated —

This is a silent retreat: no screens, no phones, no gadgets — a detox from worldly noise and distractions. Adults only; no childcare provided. Brief meditations each hour.

The Ladder of Divine Ascent read during silent lunch.

See what I did there? Pretty scary. Giving up the addictive gadgets is a challenge. On the day of the retreat, we gathered for breakfast snacks and lively fellowship. No doubt, there was some nervous energy bubbling in anticipation of the silent struggle ahead. We also had folks turn in their phones, smart watches, and so on, which we kept in labeled bags and returned to them at the retreat’s end. It is crazy that we’ve come to this, no?

In a talk given to a conference on digital media and pastoral care, renowned theologian Jean-Claude Larchet said that during fasting seasons, Christians ought to reduce their activity on social platforms.

Concerning the consumption of food and sexual activity, the Orthodox Church has established rules of limitation and abstinence for the Lenten periods as well as certain days of the week and of the year.

One of the main purposes of these rules is to accustom the mind to controlling the bodily and psychic impulses, to resist and refocus the psycho-physiological forces towards the spiritual life, to establish a state of hunger and desire causing a person to sense their dependence on God and their need for Him, and to establish in the soul a peaceful state disposed to penitence and promoting attention and concentration in prayer.

The abuse of new media, which has become common, produces effects contrary to those sought by fasting and abstinence: the vain exhaustion of energy, permanent external solicitation and dispersion, incessant internal movement and noise, an invasive occupation of time, the impossibility of establishing or maintaining inner peace, and the destruction of the attention and concentration necessary for vigilance and prayer.

Be that as it may, in the weeks prior to our Quiet Day Retreat, I sat in front of my screens and searched up talk upon talk about silence. I wanted to give the retreat participants good reason to long for quiet. It eventually dawned on me: Why don’t you provide them with … silence? Still, I persisted.

The seriousness of the silent affair was a personal challenge. I once gave a short talk following a Lenten service; I wasn’t expecting to speak but was asked on arrival while visiting another parish. If I do say so, the talk (an old podcast episode) was a hit. Afterwards, a man came up to me and said, “I just figured out why I don’t like you.” “Okay,” I said, “why?” He said, “Because you’re an entertainer, not a theologian!” My protestation, that I never claimed to be a theologian, resulted only in his smile — which was nice enough, as I was staying at his house that night.

My web surfing landed on a worthy article by Fr. John Breck entitled, “Silence, Stillness and Listening to God,” wherein he notes:

There is a very familiar little story in the alphabetical collection of traditions that have come down to us from the desert fathers of the early Christian centuries. It is said that one day Abba Theophilius, who was an archbishop, came to Scetis, a desert wasteland and spiritual paradise, where great numbers of monks carried on their unseen spiritual warfare. Archbishop Theophilius made his way to the cell of Abba Pambo, a man recognized and acclaimed for his humility and wisdom. The brethren who accompanied Theophilus said to Abba Pambo, “Say something to the Archbishop, so that he may be edified.” Abba Pambo replied: “If he is not edified by my silence, he will not be edified by my speech.”

Of course, one would be hard pressed to find quotes from the Church Fathers on how to conduct a silent retreat. Silence, itself, is a retreat. And, much like virtue, silence is its own reward. But the saints of the Church speak volumes about silence.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov: The Lord remained silent before Pilate and Herod; He made no attempt to justify Himself. You must imitate His holy and wise silence when you see that your enemies accuse you, with every intention of certain conviction; they accuse only with the purpose of hiding their own evil intention under the guise of judgment.

St. Joseph of Optina: Prayer is food for the soul. Do not starve the soul, it is better to let the body go hungry. Do not judge anyone, forgive everyone. Consider yourself worse than everyone in the world and you will be saved. As much as possible, be more quiet.

St. John Climacus: The first stage of this tranquility consists in silencing the lips when the heart is excited. The second, in silencing the mind when the soul is still excited. The goal is a perfect peacefulness even in the middle of the raging storm.

St. John Chrysostom: Let us always guard our tongue; not that it should always be silent, but that it should speak at the proper time.

Abba Pimen: A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

The sayings and other worthy words of others were peppered throughout our Quiet Day Retreat. Yet it was no surprise that what participants found most beneficial were the long periods, thirty to forty minutes each hour, of silence.

Would that we offered more space, more time, for silence — not only in our lives, but in our communities! The Divine Services are not conducive, for their purpose is not silence. Yet in them we offer our vocal pleas, prayers, and praise to the Holy Trinity. Yet, as Fr. Breck notes, without silence we cannot pray, we cannot hear God:

FROM THESE STORIES
DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

A BIG SHOUT-OUT TO SILENCE
Fr. Joseph Humbercutt
[Silence and stillness] require ascetic discipline, including fasting and ongoing repentance. Some demons can only be driven out by prayer and fasting, Christ tells His disciples. The same is required in order to learn to pray, paradoxically, we can only learn to pray by praying, by opening ourselves to the movement of the Spirit in the temple of the heart. Yet we can, at the same time, ask for the gift of prayer.

In those moments when prayer seems farthest from us, when we walk in a desert wasteland with no sense of God’s presence or concern, then we must ask for the gift of prayer.

Silence is the prerequisite for inner stillness, and only inner stillness enables us truly to listen to God, to hear His voice, and to commune with Him in the depths of our being. Yet silence and stillness are, like prayer itself, gifts that God can and wants to bestow upon us. The greatest truth about us is that God has created us with a profound longing, a burning thirst for communion with Himself. We can easily pervert that longing into an idolatrous quest for something other than God. Yet God remains faithful even in our times of apostasy. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, He always awaits our return. Once we begin that journey homeward, through repentance and an ongoing struggle against our worst inclinations, God reaches out to embrace, to forgive and to heal all that is broken, wounded and wasted. He reaches out to restore within us the sublime image in which we were made.

At the end of our four hours of quiet together, the retreat participants seemed aglow with praise: “I didn’t even miss my phone!” “That was great, we should do it quarterly!” “Abouna, I was sad when it was over!” “Funny. The same sentiments are shared by campers at the end of church camp.

Although camp might be a far cry from silent, our young people are inundated with the worldly pressures – the noise – of the ever-present social media. Camp is a way to decompress. Silence is a way to decompress. We all need to decompress.

St Seraphim of Sarov: You cannot be too gentle, too kind. Shun even to appear harsh in your treatment of each other. Joy, radiant joy, streams from the face of one who gives and kindles joy in the heart of one who receives. All condemnation is from the devil. Never condemn each other, not even those whom you catch committing an evil deed. We condemn others only because we shun knowing ourselves. When we gaze at our own failings, we see such a morass of filth that nothing in another can equal it. That is why we turn away and make much of the faults of others. Keep away from the spillage of speech. Instead of condemning others, strive to reach inner peace. Keep silent, refrain from judgement. This will raise you above the deadly arrows of slander, insult, outrage, and will shield your glowing hearts against the evil that creeps around.

Alas, I could say more. I can’t say enough. And, ironically, I’ve said enough.

A Big shout-out to silence.
COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

Father Joseph as the new Dean of the Cathedral and looks forward to continued growth under his spiritual leadership and his vision for the future. His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, of the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast, welcomed and installed Father Joseph as Cathedral Dean on Sunday, February 3, 2019, at the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. A celebratory luncheon and program followed as each of the Cathedral’s organizations presented Father Joseph, Khouria Carol, and Aidan with gifts of love and welcome.

METROPOLITAN JOSEPH MAKES HISTORIC VISIT TO SAINT ANTONIOS’ CHURCH, HALIFAX, CANADA

In January of 2019, Saint Antonios Antiochian Orthodox Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was blessed with the visit of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, to celebrate the feast of Saint Anthony the Great, the patron saint of the church. Upon his arrival to the Halifax airport, Metropolitan JOSEPH, accompanied by Deacon John El Maassh, was met by many parishioners who came, led by Archpriest Maximos Saikali along with Mr. Ibrahim Salloum, Chairman of the Parish Council, to give His Eminence a warm welcome in his first visit to the Canadian East Coast.

Metropolitan JOSEPH’S schedule, during his few days stay in Halifax, was a busy one. On Wednesday, January 16, the eve of the feast, Sayidna Joseph celebrated the Divine Liturgy, while clergy and faithful from sister churches participated. This was followed by an Agape meal prepared by Saint Antonios Antiochian Women in the church hall. On Thursday, Sayidna had dinner with the Parish Council, Archpriest Maximos, Khouria Rita Saikali, former Parish Council chairman, members of the church construction committee, and members of the Antiochian Women.

On Friday, Father Maximos and many parishioners accompanied Sayidna on a tour of the City of Halifax. The Honorary Consul of Lebanon, Mr. Wadih Fares, and the Honourable Lena Merlege Dub, Minister of Immigration, Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, arranged and facilitated the tour. Among the sites they visited were Province House, the Canadian Museum of Immigration (Pier 21), the newly built Halifax Public Library, and the Lebanese Immigrant Monument at the city’s waterfront. In the evening, after the Paradoksis service, His Eminence held an open discussion session with parishioners. The parishioners had a very cordial and open talk with Sayidna about various issues; in particular, they asked about how to involve the youth avidly in the life of the church. Sayidna commended the parish of Saint Antonios for being an example of keeping the Faith and preserving the traditions.

On Saturday, the Sunday School children gathered in the church for prayer and a discussion with Metropolitan JOSEPH. The children loved Metropolitan Joseph and were eager to bear all that he had to say to their thought-provoking questions. He was responded eagerly to the children, calling them up to the front and asking them to answer their own questions first. The discussion was followed by a brunch in the small hall. On Saturday evening, all of the church committees gathered for vespers prayers and professional photos were taken with His Eminence.

On Sunday, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was celebrated with Metropolitan JOSEPH presiding. Serving along the Metropolitan was Father Maximos Saikali, Father George Esber (visiting from Lebanon), Father Theodore Efthymiadis, Deacon John, and the altar boys. With the presence of His Eminence, the Liturgy was quite special, and the choirs chanting under the direction of Khouria Rita Saikali, accompanied by Deacon John, was uplifting. In his sermon, His Eminence thanked the parishioners of Saint Antonios for their warm hospitality and reaffirmed the strong faith and leadership in the parish.

After the Liturgy, The Honorable Lena Merlege Dub, Minister of Immigration, Acadian Affairs and Francophonie, presented Sayidna with an official Certificate of Welcome from the Nova Scotia Government to commemorate his historic visit to Halifax.

As every year, on the feast of Saint Antonios, two parishioners who have served in Saint Antonios for more than 20 years with distinction were recognized. This year, the recognition awards went to Khouria Rita Carol and the Rev. Fr. Theodore Efthymiadis.
for her dedication as the head of the choir for more than 25 years, and to Mr. Besim Halef, a former Parish Council Chair- man, for his service and gener- osity. Also, the Parish Council gave special recognition to Dr. Maria Saikali Haddad and Dr. Nada Haidar for their leadership in hosting the Parish Life Con- ference in Halifax in July 2018. Furthermore, a special award was delivered by Sayidna to the Ar- monian family on behalf of His Beatitudine Patriarch JOHN X for their generous contribution to help a hospital in Syria. Everyone was invited afterwards to a cele- bratory luncheon in the church hall.

Metropolitan JOSEPH end- ed his visit on Monday, January 21, with a morning Liturgy for the feast day of St. Maximos the Confessor. This historic visit of Metropolitan JOSEPH was truly inspiring and touched many lives. We are grateful to His Eminence for his many expressions of love towards our parish. We pray that God may grant him many years of good health and wisdom.

PARISH WELCOMES RECORD NUMBER OF NEW MEMBERS TO THE ORDER OF ST. IGNATIUS

The largest induction cere- mony held in recent times for the Order of Saint Ignatius took place on Sunday, January 13, 2019, at Saint George Antio- chian Orthodox Church in Little Falls, New Jersey. The day began with the arrival of our chief shep- herd and father in Christ, Met- ropolitan JOSEPH, to celebrate Hierarchical Matins and Divine Liturgy. Concelebrating with His Eminence were Archpriest Dimitri Darwich, the pastor of the parish of St. George; Hierar- chical Assistant Father Nicholas Belcher; Deacon John El Mas- sih, Assistant to the Metropoli- tan; Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor of the Archdiocese; and Deacon Scott Miller.

The formal induction cere- mony began after the Liturgy, with the solemn entrance of the 33 candidates for induction into church. After they and their sponsors were each introduced and blessed by His Eminence, Parish Council Chairman Amin Amireh presented His Eminence with a beautiful, shining new pas- toral staff on behalf of the parish. The inductees were then sworn in by His Eminence by reciting the pledge of the Order. Five ex- isting members also upgraded their memberships, and two in- active members returned to active status as well. This induction into the Order was the largest in the history of the Archdiocese.

His Eminence expressed his joy and gratitude to all of the in- ductees, and to Fr. Dimitri for his good work as the pastor of the parish. His Eminence spoke of the many benefits that the Order provides to the Archdiocese and its programs, especially the An- tiochian Village, the clergy retire- ment fund, and missionary work. After the ceremony, His Emi- nence posed for photos before the iconostasis with the induct- ees, members, and concelebrating clergy. Finally, Fr. Dimitri invited everyone to a beautiful banquet, prepared by the A-Men fellow- ship group in honor of His Emi- nence and the new inductees, clergy, dignitaries, and guests. All of those in attendance were joyful and thankful to be present for such an exceptional display of stewardship, honor, and faith.

The parish was elated by the presence of several visit- ing dignitaries. Roger David, the Chairman of the Order, and former Chair Mary Winstanley O’Connor were in attendance, as well as Souhel Shehady, an ambassador of the Order, and Salim Abboud, the CFO/Treas- urer of the Board of Trust- ees of the Archdiocese. Doctor Nawaf Salameh, the Founder and Chairman of the interna- tional humanitarian organization the Alenadron Foundation, was also present to witness the induct- ion ceremony. Mr. David praised the inductees for their commit- ment to the Archdiocese and spoke briefly about the history of the Order, the important pro- grams and activities it supports, and shared testimonials of the many lives positively affected by the Order.

Mr. Amireh, Mr. Shehady, Mr. Abboud, and especially Fr. Dimitri dedicated months of effort to assure that this histor- ic event took place. It was more than just a ceremony or the mak- ing of pledges. Most important- ly, such a large group pledging to the Order is a testament to their love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the work He accomplishes through the Order. By joining the Order, these new inductees have pledged their trust and support of His Emi- nence Metropolitan JOSEPH, whose fatherly love, vision, and archpastoral leadership of the Antiochian Archdiocese con- tinue to bear ever more fruit in the vineyard which the Lord has planted in America.

May God grant them all many years, and continue to bless the Order of Saint Ignatius!
A TABLE IN THE PRESENCE
RETREAT FOR ORTHODOX COMBAT VETERANS

Orthodox Christian combat veterans of OEF and OIF:
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Your fallen brothers remain in your hearts and minds.
Combat is a threshold that cannot be uncrossed.
Your stories are not easy to tell. Who can bear them?
BUT GOD KNOWS THEM ALL.
AND HIS LOVE FOR YOU ENDURES FOREVER.

Your Orthodox Military Chaplains and some veteran clergy have planned a retreat.
No cost – just get to us, if you can. We’ll take care of the rest.
WE GATHER TO TALK. WE GATHER TO PRAY.
TO STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER AND TO FACE GOD.

Columbus Day Weekend 2019 at the Antiochian Village
Funding provided by the Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch
To register, contact Barli Ross at barli@antiochianvillage.org

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Hosted by All Saints Church
Raleigh, NC

Diocese of Wichita
June 16-19, 2019
Hosted by St. Peter Church
Fort Worth, TX

Diocese of Toledo
June 19-22, 2019
Hosted by St. Nicholas Church
Champaign, IL

Dioceses of Oakland, New York and Charleston
June 26-30, 2019
Hosted by St. John Chrysostom Church
York, PA

Diocese of Ottawa
July 3-7, 2019
Hosted by St. George Church
Richmond Hill, ON

Diocese of Los Angeles and Eagle River
July 10-14, 2019
Hosted by St. Anthony Church
San Diego, CA

Diocese of Worcester
June 22, 2019
Hosted by St. Stephen (Springfield) and Emmanuel (Worcester)

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DIACONATE OF WORKS AND NEW ENGLAND
Hosted by St. Stephen (Springfield) and Emmanuel (Worcester)
St. George Orthodox Church
51 Eamondale Rd., West Roxbury, MA
Saturday, June 22, 2019
Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Antiochian Village,
60 Years of Western Rite Worship, and
Over 120 Years of Our Ministry in New England
Theme: I can do all things through Christ Who Strengthens Me
8:00 a.m. Orthros
9:00 a.m. Hierarchical Divine Liturgy
10:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. Awards and General Assembly Branch
1:30–2:45 p.m. Gatherings for Parish Council, Order of St. Ignatius, and Adults
Antiochian Women
Music Groups
Teens
Youth
2:45–4:30 p.m. Bible Bowl
2:30–5:15 p.m. Vespers - Western Rite / Winners of Oratorical Contest
3:30–7:30 p.m. Dinner and “New England Got Talent”

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