

THE WORD

الكلمة

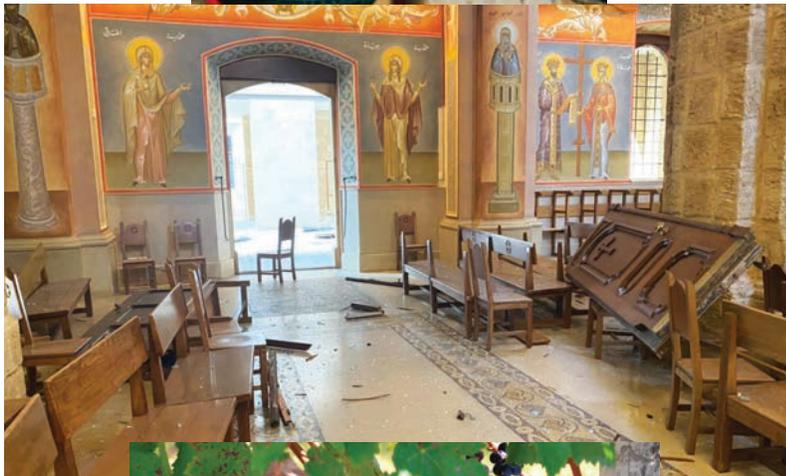
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THE WORD

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

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ADDRESS FROM

HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN JOSEPH AT ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK ON AUGUST 2, 2020

Beloved Hierarchs, Clergy, Monastics, Trustees, department/organization heads and faithful in Christ:

Today, in humble gratitude to the Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3), I have once again celebrated the Divine Liturgy here in the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn, NY. I am reminded of the words of St. Peter when he said: And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore you, secure you, strengthen you, and establish you (1 Peter 5:10). And indeed, even in the midst of our continuing struggles during these challenging times, the “God of all grace” is restoring us, securing us, strengthening us, and reestablishing our communities throughout the Archdiocese!

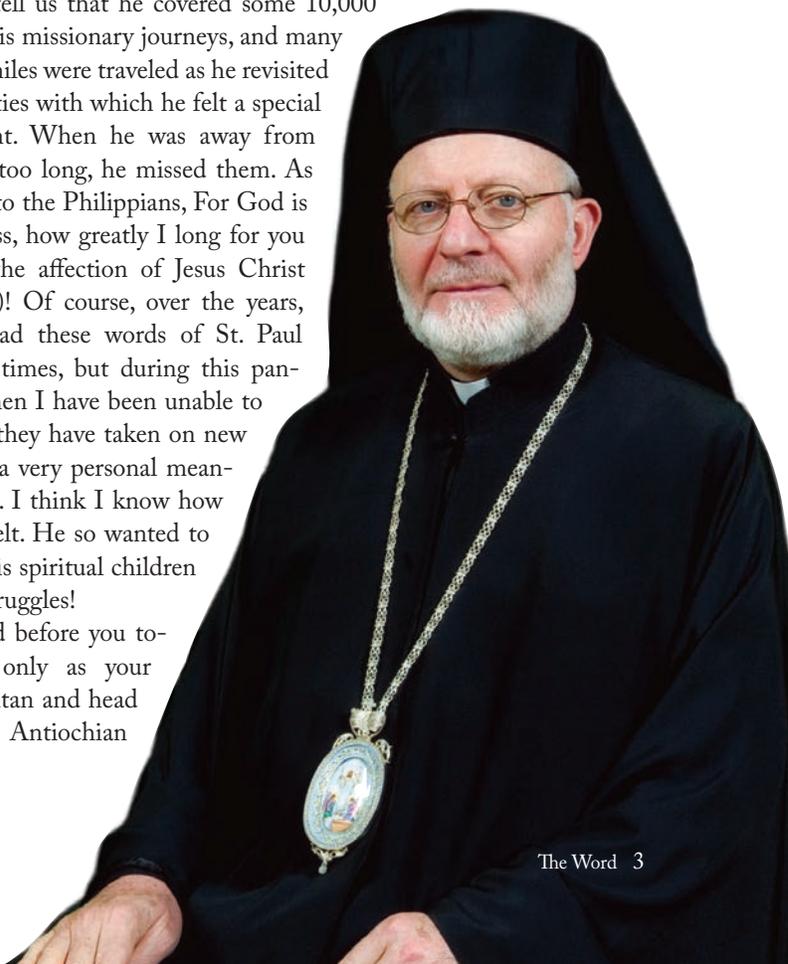
Just as many of you, I have spent these last several months in prayer, fasting, and concern beseeching the Lord for guidance, patience, and wisdom in discerning and understanding the scope of daily information that has come our way. Prayer should be and has been ceaseless, and it is through our united prayers for one another, and indeed for the whole world, that the bond between us has remained unbroken. I thank God for this.

From the very first days of the Church, Christians have faced innumerable challenges, not unlike the ones we face today. St. Paul reminds us that We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not for-

saken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:8-9) assuring his spiritual sons and daughters that while they were experiencing difficult times, he shared their suffering by virtue of his constant deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, he asks, and I am not weak? (2 Cor. 11:28-29).

How St. Paul loved the churches, especially those who recognized him as their father (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15)! Scholars tell us that he covered some 10,000 miles in his missionary journeys, and many of those miles were traveled as he revisited communities with which he felt a special attachment. When he was away from them for too long, he missed them. As he wrote to the Philippians, For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:8)! Of course, over the years, I have read these words of St. Paul countless times, but during this pandemic, when I have been unable to visit you, they have taken on new meaning, a very personal meaning to me. I think I know how St. Paul felt. He so wanted to support his spiritual children in their struggles!

I stand before you today not only as your Metropolitan and head of the Antiochian



The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)
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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

Orthodox Church in North America but, more importantly in this moment, as your father in the hope of addressing the many things which burden you. I have heard from so many of you, which has brought me both joy and concern. You have written, called, emailed, texted – and I have heard you. Not one of your words or concerns has escaped me.

The months have passed so quickly. The Church has celebrated the great Feasts of Pascha, Ascension and Pentecost, as well as the fast and feast of our Sts. Peter and Paul, patrons of our beloved Church of Antioch. In the upcoming days we will fast in preparation for the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos. In a few days we will celebrate the Feast of Transfiguration – and soon after that, the beginning of the new Church Year.

And now, where do we find ourselves? The reading from today's Epistle from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians offers us two important thoughts to contemplate: First, Is Christ divided? (1:13); and second, For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (1:17).

Let us understand in the first part that St. Paul rebukes the Corinthians, begging them to put aside their differences and to maintain true unity of the Church. Is Christ divided? he asks. What does this mean? How can Christ be divided? He cannot be divided... , but we can be divided if we do not follow His word and teaching.

I don't need to name the ways in which we can be divided but only the ways in which we can be united. Christ asks us to follow Him. Following Him means trusting in Him; denying ourselves; praying our way through pressures and anxieties; sowing the seeds of good, kindness, and understanding everywhere; and ultimately living in true unity with one another through love, humility, mutual forgiveness, and service. If we do these things, we are securely bound to one another in the love of Christ. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? (Rom 8:35). Shall a virus or economic instability or political tensions separate us from the love of Christ? The answer is clearly NO. Christ is not divided, and if we are united in the love of Christ, we cannot be divided. As St. Paul assures us, In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Rom. 8:37).

In the second part of the epistle from First Corinthians, St. Paul reprimands the faithful and speaks of preaching the Gospel and not with eloquent wisdom lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power. This is both timely and so appropriate. Inundated by media from many sources with words of philosophy, opinion, and rhetoric, we see that the false eloquence of the world does not bring us to salvation or to any understanding of what God wants from us. Quite the opposite. It dangerously sends us into separation from Him – and from one another – by insisting on our own sensibilities, interpretations, and understandings. God has made foolish the wisdom of this world for since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God (1 Cor. 1:21-22).

During the course of these past few months, I have done everything in my power to capably steer the ship (which is the Church) through numerous letters and directives to our clergy. My expectation is that our clergy, in turn, have conveyed everything to you so that you would clearly understand the position of the Church as it relates to current events. My first and foremost priority has been the spiritual and bodily health of our flock. Working with my brother hierarchs and staff, I've done my best to navigate through sudden lockdowns and re-openings, all the while studying complex questions of epidemiology, as well as constitutional law. Balancing our desire for access to the sacraments with our concern to prevent any kind of COVID outbreak in our parishes, we have cooperated with public health authorities, all the

while being mindful of our duty to protect our religious liberties.

Ultimately, as the Metropolitan, these decisions have been mine to make. I assume full responsibility as the Father of this Archdiocese for making them to the best of my ability, while utilizing the wisdom of those holy ones who have preceded me in experiencing similar situations.

One example I'd like to share with you is found in the wisdom of St. Nikodemos of Mount Athos. In his manual on confession called *The Exomologetarion*, he lists the ways in which one might violate the Sixth Commandment – “Thou shalt not kill.” He writes, “those who in time of plague, knowing they are infected, associate with others and thus infect them” and in another place he speaks of “all those who are reckless.” One of the challenges in the current situation, which differs from that of the past, has been that the spread of the virus has been caused by those with few or no symptoms. Thus, we have justifiably been asked by the civil authorities to act with caution when we gather. I believe St. Nikodemos would agree that those who gather in these times with reckless disregard of the advice of so many Orthodox Christian healthcare professionals could certainly fall under the condemnation of the Sixth Commandment. This grave moral responsibility is one that has weighed heavily on me throughout these days.

At the same time, I have had to consider questions regarding the assertion of our civil rights. There are legitimate questions about the ways in which some officials have considered certain aspects of our First Amendment rights as more important than the freedom of religion. We are aware that there have been those in civil authority using this current crisis to unfairly burden churches and deny the faithful of the Holy Sacraments by placing a priority on entertainment and sporting events while virtually ignoring the essential need of every human being to worship. Do not think that this has gone unnoticed or has escaped me. Rest assured that we intend to stand firm in our position to never let any civil authorities violate our right to freely exercise the Orthodox faith according to our traditional practices – including the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Our approach has been one of prayerful deliberation as well as coordination with our sister Orthodox jurisdictions in the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States. We bishops have spoken with one voice when we felt it pastorally necessary, and we have acted somewhat independently of one another in responding to specific situations demanding at-

tention in our respective jurisdictions. All the while, we have consistently maintained a unity of spirit in addressing the difficult problems posed by the pandemic.

Beloved faithful in Christ, if we believe in God's Providence, then we understand that everything happening in these challenging times is either His will or His allowance. If it is His will, let us give thought to what that will might be. If it is His allowance, let us consider what it is specifically that He wants from us. I do not claim to know His will, but certain things are obvious. Whether it be His will or His allowance, He desires us to be closer to Him. Whether through



prayer, repentance, charitable work or submission to His call. He wants us close, very close. Not because He needs us to be close for His sake, but because He knows we need to be closer for our sake.

Let us abstain from blame, which only succeeds in dividing people from one another. Instead let us re-examine our own lives, reassess our priorities, meditate on our moral state, and heal our relationships with others, to spend more time in prayer and to take up our cross with strength and dignity – in other words to transfigure and be transfigured.

When a man came to St. Paisios of Mount Athos and confessed that he often saw the defects and faults of other people, the elder responded by asking him whether he was aware of his own illness and whether he knew what illness he had. The man was confused, to which St. Paisios said:

“This is why you only see the illness of others. If you knew your own illness, you wouldn't be aware of the illness of others. I am not saying you shouldn't be

Icon of The Dormition written by the hand of Niko Chocheili

concerned with the pain and suffering of people, but you must not preoccupy yourself with their faults. If a person is not primarily focused on one's own weaknesses, the devil will lead him to be concerned with other people's weaknesses. If we work on improving ourselves, then we will come to know ourselves better and to know others better as well. Otherwise, we judge others by the wrong assumptions we make about ourselves."

Now is the time to undertake this spiritual struggle of the fast we began yesterday in preparation for the celebration of the Holy Dormition, the Falling Asleep of the Most Holy Theotokos.

Beloved faithful in Christ, the season is upon us to examine ourselves truly and deeply and to weep with repentant hearts, occupying ourselves with chanting the Paraklesis service, with confessing our sins, increasing our prayers and decreasing our distractions. Let us be mindful of what goes into our mouths that we will gain more control over the hurtful things that come out of them. In this way, we will be victorious in healing the many spiritual viruses – pride, greed, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth – which cause us more harm. While we will all die a momentary physical death, we need not die the eternal spiritual death through sins. Let us forgive, love, show mercy, offer alms and do good work befitting of the example given us but the Most Holy Theotokos – the empowering example of faith, strength, courage, meekness and obedience to the Will of God.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all the brave doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers for their self-

less ministry during this pandemic. Let us not cease in our prayers for them, for the sick and all those suffering. I also give thanks to my brother bishops, the clergy, the educators, and camp staffs. While you have not had crowds of parishioners, Sunday School students, or campers gathering before you these last several months, you have all worked diligently to feed the faithful with the Word of God – perhaps not on a mountain but now on a screen. It has certainly not been ideal, but you have worked and been creative to make the best of every situation, and I am proud of you and your efforts.

And that brings me to my concluding point. In the midst of all these trials, God wants us to support one another in our efforts. St. Paul said it best: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2). In your presence today – and indeed before all the faithful of the Archdiocese – I pledge that I will continue to do all I can to help you in bearing your burden in these difficult days, and I sincerely request that you assist me in bearing mine.

God has given us one another. Let us rejoice in that great gift and use it to further our own healing and the healing of our society.

May Our Father among the Saints, Raphael of Brooklyn, Our intercessor before the Lord and the intercessions and prayers of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, lead us and help us take up our cross, carry it and ultimately be transfigured.

+Metropolitan JOSEPH

STATEMENT BY THE ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS IN THE UNITED STATES ON THE TRAGIC CONVERSION OF HAGIA SOPHIA FROM MUSEUM TO MOSQUE

We, the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, protest the decision of the civil courts in Turkey, as well as the clear direction of their government, to re-convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. As citizens of the United States of America, we implore our government to intervene for the reversal of this decision. Furthermore, we urge the Turkish government to return to the status quo, whereby Hagia Sophia remains a museum, respecting both its origins and history.

By contrast, this unilateral action denies the universal vocation of this holy and sacred place. Hagia Sophia belongs to the whole of humanity as a World Heritage Site. Built in 537 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Justinian, it has been, for more than a millennium, a place of rich cultural and spiritual inspiration for all.

We are particularly concerned about the negative effects such a change will have on religious pluralism in Turkey, as well as on the relations among nations and between faith-based organizations. We call on the international community to invite the Turkish authorities to revise their decision, affording all people the opportunity to continue enjoying the full and rich history and beauty of this outstanding landmark. This unique Christian monument should remain open to all as a sign of co-existence and peace among all peoples of good will.

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

August 4, 2020

Brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, Esteemed Members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, Organizations and Department Heads, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings to you and your families as we progress in this holy fast dedicated to the Mother of God, the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. I pray that you and your families are safe and well as we continue to deal with the pandemic that is plaguing our respective countries.

It is with a sense of shock and awe that I learned of the horrific explosion in Beirut. I immediately called the Archdiocese of Beirut to check on His Eminence Metropolitan Elias and the clergy and faithful of the archdiocese, as well as our churches in Beirut. Thanks be to God; His Eminence was not harmed, and the clergy are all safe. The same, however, cannot be said for the archdiocese headquarters, the churches and our St. George Hospital. Many of our churches and institutions in Beirut suffered devastating damage as well as the homes of many of the clergy and faithful.

Not only are these people our brothers and sisters in Christ, but for many of us they are family and friends of the faithful of our archdiocese. As such, we are making an immediate appeal to all of you to do whatever you are able during this economically difficult time and spare whatever penny you can, keeping in mind the parable of the widow in the Gospel, “And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.” (Luke 21: 1-4). Please give to your local parish and your parish will forward the money to the archdiocese in a timely manner. You may also give directly to the archdiocese and mark your check “Beirut” or give online using the following link:

<https://antiochian.networkforgood.com/projects/106179-financial-aid-following-beirut-explosion>

During this time of distress, we appeal to the Mother of God as we sing the Paraklesis service, crying out from the depths of our hearts and souls, "Preserve and save, O Theotokos, thy servants from every danger. After God, do all of us for refuge flee unto thee; a firm rampart art thou and our protection." As we continue to pray for those suffering and those who have reposed from COVID-19 in our own archdiocese, please remember the victims of this tragic explosion in Lebanon and all those throughout the world who are suffering and in need of our prayers.

Wishing you all a blessed remainder of the Holy Dormition Fast, I remain,

Yours in the service of Christ,

Metropolitan Joseph

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America



Condolence Letter of PATRIARCH JOHN X



بطريكيّة أنطاكية وسائر المشرق للروم الأرثوذكس
Patriarcat Grec-Orthodoxe d'Antioche et de tout l'Orient

رقم: ٢٠٢٠/٤٥

سيادة المطران جوزيف زحلاوي متروبوليت نيويورك وسائر أمريكا الشمالية، الجليل الاحترام،

المسيح قام، حقاً قام.

ونحن على عتبة وداع الموسم الفصحي المبارك، تلقينا نبأ انتقال قدس الأرشمندرت الياس بيطار إلى الأخدار السماوية على رجاء القيامة والحياة الأبدية. يختصر الأب الياس في حياته سيرة ذلك المتفاني والغيور الذي كرس حياته للرب واستحق أن يدعى "كثارة أنطاكية" في أمريكا الشمالية تمثلاً بمن سبقوه في حقل الترتيل وخصوصاً في أبرشيتكم الكريمة. أربعون عاماً من العطاء والخدمة الكهنوتية قدمها الأب الياس بخوراً لذيد العرف يتتسم من خلاله مرضاة رب السموات، رب القيامة وسيد الرجاء.

نتقدم بالتعازي القلبية إليكم شخصياً وإلى أبرشيتنا المحروسة بالله في أمريكا الشمالية. ونتقدم عبركم إلى عائلته الكريمة بخالص التعزية سائلين ربنا يسوع المسيح أن يتعمد نفسه بمراحمه الإلهية ويُسكنها مع الأبرار والصديقين. هذا ونعمته تعالى فلتأخذ بيمينكم.

دمشق، ٢٥ أيار ٢٠٢٠.

✠ يوحنا العاشر
✠ يوحنا العاشر
بطريك أنطاكية وسائر المشرق



بَطْرِيكِيَّةَ أَنْطَاكِيَّةَ وَسَائِرِ الْمَشْرِقِ لِلرُّومِ الْأَرْثُوذُكْسِ
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

His Beatitude Patriarch John X, in a Letter to...

News » [News](#) » [His Beatitude Patriarch John X, in a Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch](#)

2020-07-13

His Beatitude Patriarch John X, in a Letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch:

"We are dismayed by the recent decision of the Turkish government regarding the Church of Hagia Sofia. We strongly denounce and condemn any act that could counterfeit the historical identity of our homeland."

Damascus, July 13, 2020.

His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East of the Orthodox Church denounced the recent Turkish decision regarding the Church of Hagia Sofia in Constantinople. The Patriarch made his stand in a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, stating the following:

Your All Holiness and Brother,

" Thou hast shown the earthly beauty of the holy tabernacle of Thy glory to be like unto the splendor of the heavenly firmament, O Lord. Strengthen it forever and ever, and accept our prayers which we unceasingly offer therein unto Thee, through the Theotokos, O Thou Who art the Life and Resurrection of all."

With these words, the hand of the hymnographer chose to describe the Church of Hagia Sofia, which was inaugurated in Constantinople in the middle of the sixth century. With these words also, the Holy Church of Constantinople and all the Christians of the East have consecrated this holy and priceless architectural and ecclesial jewel. They saw in its splendor a reflection of the heavenly abode, of the dwelling of the Holy God Most-High. These same words survive in the church liturgy, as to remind us that the earthly glory contains part of the heavenly glory, no matter how sublime the latter. Notwithstanding that the glory of the heavens is the glory of the humble self, the human eye is eager, still, for a glance at heaven's majesty and symbols, here on earth. Saying this there comes to our

minds the theological exegesis proper to the Church of Antioch, which stems from the concrete and tangible world to approach the intangible realms, emphasizing the equal importance of the body and the soul.

This depicts a live picture of the Church of Hagia Sofia in Constantinople, where earthly glory reflects part of the heavenly magnificence. We say this because we all know the history of this church and its status in the early twentieth century. We say this, having in mind the ups and downs of history that transformed it into a museum in the last century.

Your All Holiness and Brother,

It is with much regret that we received the news of the Turkish government's decision to convert the Church of Hagia Sofia to a mosque.

We are dismayed by this decision. We strongly denounce and condemn any act that could counterfeit the historical identity of our homeland.

The recent decision aims at marginalizing the Christian presence in the East, not to say that it attempts to eradicate the remaining pioneering role and Christian presence in peaceful coexistence with the rest of the religious groups. History contains abundant evidence of tolerance and religious brotherhood in mutual respect. This decision comes to undermine all the efforts deployed by the countries of this East to build states of citizenship that respect religious diversity and promote the positive values of secularization. Yet, here is a decision that opens the wounds and thus, alas, reinforces extremism and eliminating the other.

We stand by you, dear Brother, joining our prayers for your Holy Church and this wounded East. We support every effort of yours to enhance your presence in your own land, the land of your ancestors, the Church of Constantinople, the new Rome to which we are all bonded by brotherhood and unity of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Greeting your holiness with an embrace in Christ, we convey to you the solidarity of our faithful in the Church of Antioch and All the East, asking the Lord our Savior to grant you many years of ministry in this holy parish, providing them with the wellsprings of salvation.

Ὁ Χριστός ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἡμῶν.



البطريرك يوحنا العاشر في رسالة إلى البطريرك...

أخبار « أخبار » البطريرك يوحنا العاشر في رسالة إلى البطريرك المسكوني

2020-07-13

البطريرك يوحنا العاشر في رسالة إلى البطريرك المسكوني:

"تأسف لقرار الحكومة التركية الأخير بشأن كنيسة الحكمة المقدسة ونعبر عن استنكارنا وشجبنا لكل ما يمكن أن يزيّف الهوية التاريخية لبلادنا".

دمشق، 13 تموز 2020.

استنكر البطريرك يوحنا العاشر بطريرك أنطاكية وسائر المشرق للروم الأرثوذكس القرار التركي الأخير بشأن كنيسة الحكمة المقدسة في القسطنطينية. موقف البطريرك جاء في رسالة بعث بها إلى البطريرك المسكوني برثلماوس جاء فيها:

الأخ الكلي القداسة،

"كجلال الجّد العقلي أظهرت حسن المسكن المقدس السفلي مسكن مجدك يا رب. فشددته إلى دهر الداهرين واستجب لنا نحن المقدمين لك فيه التضمرات بلا انقطاع بشفاعه والدة الإله، يا حياة الكل وقيامتهم.

بهذه الكلمات اختارت يراع ناظم التسابيح وصف كنيسة الحكمة المقدسة التي دشنت في القسطنطينية أواسط القرن السادس. وبهذه الكلمات دشنت كنيسة القسطنطينية المقدسة، ومعها كل مسيحيي المشرق، هذه الدرة الكنسية والمعمارية المقدسة والنفيسة ناظرةً فيها شيئاً من بهاء المسكن السماوي مسكن الله القدوس العلي. وقد بقيت الكلمات ذاتها في الليتورجيا الكنسية وكأنها تذكرنا أن مجد الأرض فيه شيء من مجد السموات مهما تسامى ذاك الآخر عليه. صحيح أن مجد السموات هو مجد النفس العامرة بالتواضع لكن هذا لا يلغي أن عين الإنسان تواقفة أيضاً لترى شيئاً من عظمة السماء ومن رمز السماء هنا على الأرض. إذ نقول كل هذا يرتسم أمامنا لاهوت كنيسة أنطاكية التفسيري والذي ينطلق من الملموس والعيني ليداني غير الملموس ويشدد على الجسد كما يشدد على الروح أيضاً.

إذ نقول كل هذا يرتسم أمامنا صورة كنيسة الحكمة المقدسة في القسطنطينية والتي يعكس مجدها الأرضي شيئاً من عظمة السماوي. نقول هذا وكلنا يعرف تاريخ هذه الكنيسة وما آلت إليه في أوائل القرن العشرين. نقول هذا ونحن نعلم نوازل وصواعد التاريخ التي أدت إلى تحويلها متحفاً في القرن الماضي.

أيها الأخ الكلي القداسة،

سمعنا وبالغ الأسف قرار الحكومة التركية تحويل كنيسة الحكمة المقدسة من الوضع الذي كانت عليه إلى جامع. نأسف لهذا القرار ونعبر عن استنكارنا وشجبنا لكل ما يمكن أن يزيف الهوية التاريخية لبلادنا. إن القرار الأخير يصب في خانة تهميش الوجود المسيحي في الشرق إن لم نقل محاولة الإجهار على ما تبقى من دور ربادي ووجود مسيحي متعايش بسلام مع بقية المكونات الدينية؛ وشواهد التاريخ على التسامح والأخوة الدينية ضمن الاحترام المتبادل هي كثيرة. يأتي هذا القرار لينسف كل الجهود التي تتطلع عبرها دول هذا الشرق لبناء دول المواطنة التي تحترم التنوع الديني وتعزز قيم العلمنة الإيجابية. فإذ به يعود إلى نكء جراح تعزز ويا للأسف التطرف وإلغاء الآخر.

نحن معكم أيها الأخ الكلي القداسة في وحدة صلاة من أجل كنيستكم المقدسة ومن أجل هذا الشرق الجريح. نحن معكم في كل جهد تضعونه لتعززوا وجودكم في أرضكم وأرض أجدادكم في كنيسة القسطنطينية روما الجديدة التي تربطنا إليها كل أخوة ووحدة إيمان بيسوع المسيح رباً ومخلصاً.

وإذ نعائق قداستكم في المسيح، ننقل إليكم تضامن مؤمنينا في كنيسة أنطاكية وسائر المشرق ونسأل الرب المخلص أن يمنحكم سنين مديدة في خدمة الرعية المقدسة موردين إياها منابع الخلاص".



His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

July 10, 2020

Beloved Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you and your families in the Name of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Life is very different today than it was when I last wrote for your newsletter. We have endured the ravages of a worldwide pandemic that interrupted our normal commemorations of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. Our already civil society appears to be coming apart at the seams as our nation wrestles with appropriate ways to deal with this pandemic as well as the issues of racial injustice.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you as the Antiochian Women of our Archdiocese. We saw through these last few months the vital role played women – many of whom served courageously during the pandemic as doctors, nurses, chaplains, physical therapists, and mental healthcare counselors. Many had to juggle their roles as mothers with needing to work from home and as well as serving as homeschool teachers for their children at home.

Most importantly, we saw the roles of our grandmothers, mothers, and godmothers keeping the Faith alive in our homes as we were called to limit the gatherings of our faithful for worship. When I saw the photos on social media of children praying the services of Holy Week and Pascha with their own handcrafted biers and decorated candles in front of their home altars, my heartache over our lamentable situation was transformed into hope and joy.

Please accept my gratitude for all of the hard work and sacrificial love that you, the courageous women of our Holy Church, have offered us and our wider society in these uncertain and trying times. I pray that the All-Holy Theotokos, your heavenly patroness, will continue to intercede for you and strengthen you in the vital ministries you offer. With paternal love and fervent prayers for you and your families, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
(201) 871-1355 T Archdiocese@antiochian.org (201) 871-7954 F



CHANGE IN THE BREAD AND WINE?

Fr. Paul Martin

How does the Orthodox Church understand the sacrament of Eucharist? And how does this understanding differ from that of Rome? This paper concerns one important difference concerning the question of change as relating to the bread and wine offered in the Eucharist. I speak in a spirit of ecumenical dialogue, hoping to bring about a richer understanding of some issues we have with some who are not of our “confession”, to use Western terminology. But I also hope that what I say here will resound with my Orthodox brothers and sisters.

Orthodox Christianity is Chalcedonian, Chalcedon being the 5th century Church council that defined the person of Christ as consisting of two natures, divine and human; and so it would follow that our understanding of the Eucharist would align with Chalcedonian Christology. For the Orthodox

Church maintains that we encounter Christ in the Eucharist – perfect God and perfect man, one person or hypostasis in two natures. With recourse to the principle of *perichoresis*, referring to the mutual indwelling of the human and divine properties in Christ (“*without alteration, without confusion, indivisible and inseparable*”, as declared at Chalcedon), Orthodox Christianity holds that the bread and wine are indeed Christ’s Body and Blood, but the very terminology stresses that it is Christ’s perfect, deified humanity that is imparted to us, *not* his divine nature.

Orthodox sacramental theology is grounded in the patristic understanding of the symbol. In Greek it is σύμβολον, meaning “token, watchword”, from the words σύν, meaning “together” and βάλλω, meaning “I throw, put”. According to the patristic



Fathers, the bread and wine, being “put together” in Christ, are ontologically one with Christ: the bread and wine *embody* Christ – one divine person, two natures.¹ And so for us the bread and wine are what they are while being permeated with the uncreated energies of God. [Here I must stress the patristic distinction made between God’s essence and his energies: God’s essence or substance (what he is in himself, his nature) is absolutely transcendent and therefore not communicable to created beings; but the divine energies “everywhere present and filling all things”, as we say in our prayer to the Holy Spirit, are fully and most intensely present in Christ’s deified humanity, which we receive as his Body and Blood.]

Chalcedon is our touchstone. For as Chalcedonian Christology maintains that God became man without change or alteration, so does the Orthodox Church. This is explicit in two places within the Orthodox divine liturgy, the Hymn of Justinian and the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn, the latter said silently over the gifts by the priest:

*“Only Begotten Son and Immortal Word of God, who for our salvation didst will to be incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever virgin Mary, who **without change** didst become man ...” (Hymn of Justinian).*

*“Nevertheless through your unspeakable and boundless love for mankind, you became man, yet **without change or alteration...**” (Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn).*

Justinian’s Hymn and the Cherubic Prayer are accepted as doctrine, being expressions of patristic

Christology. Therefore, Christ and the Eucharist being one, the Eucharist *cannot* involve a change of substance. Just as God became man “*without change or alteration*”, so the elements become Christ’s Body and Blood “*without change or alteration*”.

The Orthodox Church does not develop doctrine. The Church *clarifies* doctrine. And our understanding of the Eucharist is a signal example of such clarification. It is clearly an application of Christology to the master sacrament of Eucharist.

On the other hand, Roman scholasticism, a medieval application of Aristotelian philosophy to theology, departs from the patristic understanding, failing to distinguish God’s essence from the divine energies and maintaining that the bread and wine, despite appearances (“*accidents*”), are changed (“*transubstantiated*”) into God’s substance.² In this view, the bread and wine change nature; they are absorbed into the divine nature with the words of consecration said by the priest at the Canon of the Mass. This has been a bone of contention for centuries. It has led to the caricature of sacrament as magic, “*hocus pocus*”, the term being a Protestant play on the Latin “*Hoc est corpus*”. But Orthodox Christianity maintains that sacrament is *not* magic; it is mystery.³ And how is it possible for any theology having its basis in discursive reason to enter into mystery? Reason classifies, makes distinctions, discriminates. We use our reason to identify a crux, often an antinomy, and to determine the extent to which that may be illuminated, as the Chalcedonian Fathers did. But when faced with a mystery, we can go no further. We cannot say *how* any mystery occurs. Whenever reason attempts to go into the beyond, it “*meddles*”, as the poet Wordsworth says – it “*misshapes the beauteous forms of things*”.

And yet reason dictates that there must be some aspect of change surrounding the Eucharist and rightly so. But this has to do with us, as recipients of Christ’s Body and Blood. Orthodox Christianity holds that the change occurring in the liturgy is about human *restoration* leading to *deification*. But this is not a change of nature. It is in *fulfillment* of human nature: participants become what humans were made to be – *gods by grace, not by nature* – for it would be begging the question to say that humans might become other than what they are by nature. And this is precisely what scholastic theology says when it insists upon a change in nature. The theology of transubstantiation draws radical distinctions between

nature and supernature, the sacred and the mundane, those inside and those on the outside. We Orthodox find these distinctions neither true nor helpful, especially when working to bring outsiders into the faith, which is our holy mission.

What does the Eucharist mean to Orthodox Christians? Eating Christ's Body and drinking his Blood, communicants are blessed. And what does it mean to be blessed? The Greek verb is *εὐλογῶ* (from the words *eu*, meaning "well" and *λογῶ*, "a word"), so a literal meaning of *εὐλογῶ* would be "to have a good word said upon" something or someone. The term also means "to cause to prosper".

But *εὐλογῶ* has a cognate meaning within Orthodox Christian worship. It is *to make manifest, to show*, as Jesus blesses the bread and wine at the last supper, showing them to be his Body and Blood (Mk. 14:22, Mt:26:26). And for us this is to be made *to see*. In the Epiklesis of the Divine Liturgy written by St. Basil (329-379), the Holy Spirit is invoked "to bless, to hallow and to show" ("εὐλογῆσαι αὐτὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀναδείξαι") what the bread and wine are. Just as Christ's blessing does not change the substance of the bread and wine, so the Holy Spirit does not change what the bread and wine are by nature or what we are. But both our gifts and our humanity are renewed, made holy, restored – *deified* by the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of the Epiklesis of the divine liturgy. **The Holy Spirit blesses us, hallows us, makes us holy and shows us that we are in Christ. He recreates us, hovering over us and our gifts as he hovered over the waters at the world's first creation. And thus it is the Holy Spirit who makes us see ourselves and our offering as being one with Christ's holy Offering – who makes us see that Christ shares his holiness with us** (for "One is Holy", as the faithful affirm just before receiving the Eucharist).

Of course, only God can make us holy. Only God can open eyes and hearts, although our cooperation with him is essential. And so the bread and wine we offer to the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit have a particular meaning. They are the work of our hands, the hands of the faithful (this is made most clear in the divine liturgy, as the bread – the *prospora* – is made by the laity and the wine provided by the laity). Through these gifts we offer up all that we are – hands and hearts – and then the Holy Spirit makes us holy by our willing participation in Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit,



we are united to Christ, "the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received" (Prayer before the Great Entrance of the Divine Liturgy).⁴ **By this** we partake of Christ's Body and Blood. As our offering of bread and wine become one with *his* Offering, with *his* Body and Blood offered once and for all "for the salvation of the world", *this* is a real change that happens to our gifts and to us. But it is perceived as gradual, *a growing into Christ's deified humanity – our deification in holy time*.

This means that the consecration of the bread and wine at the Epiklesis is *our* consecration into Christ. In bread and wine, we "*commit ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ our God*" (pronounced by the deacon following the Great Entrance) – and then, being thus committed, *we* are changed by the Holy Spirit. In this commitment, witnessed by the Holy Spirit, we vow to make of our lives an offering to God – "a sacrifice of praise", as we say at the beginning of the Anaphora – meaning that our participation in Christ is ongoing, a process to be accomplished in the Parousia. This is acknowledged in the prayer said silently by the priest following reception of the Eucharist:

"Great and Most Holy Pascha, O Christ; Wisdom, Word and Power of God, grant us to partake of you more perfectly in the unwaning day of your Kingdom"

The Orthodox Church says that Christ has given us himself in the Eucharist so that we may be made into "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The *image* of God in us begins to be realized, and so we begin to become *like* our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, which means that we begin to be *deified* by

God's grace gifted to us by the Holy Spirit. It all comes down to God's making us fully his own both from his eternal "place" outside of the cosmos and within His place here on earth, by virtue of the Incarnation and the activity of the Holy Spirit. We see human life as a process of *re-creation*, while stressing that in the process God does *not* change our nature. He *fulfills* human nature as we work with him in the Holy Spirit with "fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12-13).

All matters of theology and life dovetail so profoundly well within Orthodox Christian theology: talk about Christology leads to talk about the Eucharist as the central sacrament; and this in turn leads to anthropological considerations – what we were made to be and what God is making us into by the Holy Spirit with our cooperation, which is about our deification; which leads to discussions about synergy and free will; which make it necessary to talk about the divine energies, which are uncreated, and to distinguish them from the divine nature, which is transcendent. And so the Orthodox Church maintains that we become gods by God's uncreated grace, *not* by nature – since there is *one* God in *three* persons. If it were otherwise – if we were to become assimilated into Christ's divine nature – we would lose our humanity and become what we are not by nature. Then there would be more than three divine persons – there would be as many as there are communicants! In seeing it this way, we maintain the patristic understandings.

Orthodox Christians experience the divine liturgy as heaven on earth, our participation in eternity within time made possible by God's becoming man and the work of the Holy Spirit. The liturgy *deifies* time. It is our participation in holy time, our progress toward the Parousia. This is to say that the divine liturgy is experienced *in its totality* as the mystery of sacrament, the most intimate of all possible encounters with God in time on earth and a process of offering ourselves to the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The rational mind stands in awe, mute before this experience, while the heart opens up in holy poetry. For this mystery of mysteries concerns the relation between temporality – within which change is a reality – and eternity – where it is not. It would be out of the question to speculate concerning a point in time when change takes place within the elements. The Orthodox Church objects to the literalness of the scholastic

approach, given that change is only possible in time and the Eucharist, being Christ's eternal person, is Truth *beyond* change and time. As for the change effected by reception of the Eucharist, this surely *begins* to take place in us when our offering becomes one with Christ's Offering at the Epiklesis – *if* our hearts are there in the offering. But then we see what has already been accomplished in the Body: we are being saved, of course – but beyond space and time, as Christ's Body, *the Church is and always will be saved!* "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it!"

How can any "rational" theology find words to clarify a process that is in completion, a process that, being eternal, is both in and beyond time? For Orthodox Christians, participation in the Eucharist is this and infinitely more.

Rev. Fr. Paul Martin
Ph.D student in the Antiochian House of Studies
and Presiding Priest Annunciation-St. Paraskevi
Greek Orthodox Church

1. In *For the Life of the World*, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann decries what is "hopelessly missing today in both doctrine and institution, and this not because of human sins and limitations, but precisely because of a deliberate choice: the rejection and the dissolution of the symbol as the fundamental structure of Christian 'doctrine' and Christian 'institution'" [Crestwood, N.Y., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995], 148). Of interest is an article by Fr. Raymond Maloney, S.J. appearing in a Roman Catholic publication, *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, 1987). Speaking of the development in the West from ancient times to the Middle Ages, Maloney states, "[With this transition] many of the thought forms of [the ancient] world passed away, and in particular that sense of 'ontological symbolism'...Platonic thought forms gradually gave way to Aristotelian ones, and with the loss of the ancient sense of symbolism, medieval thinkers lost the key to the sacramental synthesis of the Fathers" (347, italics mine).
2. Christos Yannaras is critical of medieval scholasticism, for it uses "Aristotelian logic not to arrive at a correct methodology that allows a dynamic participation in knowledge but to define correct knowledge 'objectively'... What is real is defined intellectually, by the coincidence of the object of thought with its definition: *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*. When the truth about reality is reduced to an intellectual idea and its correct definition, experience (sensory, personal, or social) is clearly excluded from the knowledge of truth. An intellectualism made absolute allows no room for the dynamics of experiential knowledge and experimental science" (Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West* [Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006], 65).
3. "When attempts at a 'rational' explanation of the Eucharist arose in the West in the beginning of the eleventh century, Berengar of Tours proposed a distinction of what is 'mystical', i.e., symbolic, on the one hand, and what is 'real' on the other. In his teaching the sacrament is *mystice non realiter*. The council that condemned this doctrine (Lateran 1059) answered that it is *realiter non mystice*, i.e., real and therefore not mystical, not symbolic. This is the dead end into which scholasticism inevitably falls. Its essence lies in the gradual departure from the original understanding and perception of time, and together with that the gradual 'expiration' of the eschatological essence of the Church and the sacraments. Beginning with the thirteenth century, writes Louis Bouyer, the Eucharist in the West came to be 'buried under untraditional formularies and interpretations'" (see Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* [Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003] 223).
4. In an unpublished edition of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom by Frs. Michel Najim and Patrick O'Grady, this passage is translated as follows: "For thou thyself art he that offereth and is offered, that accepteth and is distributed". Fr. Najim explains the passage thus: "Namely, that Christ offers as man and accepts the offering as God; decreed at the Synod of Constantinople in 1156 against Soterichos".

SHARING THE FAITH

BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,



"This then, is our task: to educate ourselves and our children in godliness"

– St. John Chrysostom

"This, then, is our task, to educate ourselves and our children in godliness."

"Christ is in our midst!" is such a simple greeting, and at the same time a statement that carries the weight of our faith. I greet you with the phrase as the Department begins a new chapter, prompted by the coronavirus crisis. I will be explaining our new situation, and reporting on our project to support Church Schools this Fall.

May God have mercy on us all,

Carole A. Buleza, Director

CHANGES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Department of Christian Education has adapted to a "new normal" – its library is primarily in storage, and the new office is now a bedroom in my house. While our volunteer Diocesan Coordinators and Associates will continue to serve our department, our hourly program staff positions are no longer in our budget. Our services will be impacted, notably training and website, social networking, the Antiochian Gospel Program, and Creative Festival coordination, and we ask your patience in the coming year.

Our social network presence will be continued with the Facebook page, Orthodox Christian Church School Directors, managed by Anna-Sarah Farha, who volunteers her time for this ministry. Anna-Sarah is the Diocesan Coordinator for Miami and the Southeast and volunteers her time to manage this page. She will be monitoring our Parent and Teacher pages as she can. I will occasionally post on the AODCE Facebook page.

We are thankful for the wisdom of His Eminence in this crisis, and knowing that Christ is in our midst, we go forward to meet the needs of Orthodox Christian Education during this unusual school year, as a Department and at the parish level. We can do all

things through Christ; let us keep our gaze on Him!

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19

A glance back to when we thought our hurried measures to provide virtual Christian Education would be temporary ...

Early in the pandemic, two online programs surfaced for family use. "Religion at Home," produced by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, offered a lesson plan for the family that included the Gospel reading and discussion (courtesy of our Antiochian Gospel Program), materials for various ages, and links to other sites. Fr. Anton Vrame, Director of the Department of Religious Education, is not certain whether this program will be continued as they are experiencing budget constraints as well.

The second, "Virtual Sunday School," also provided a plan based on the Sunday Gospel and/or Commemoration, and featured a photo essay/video presentation, family-focused activities and discussions, stories, and links. "Virtual Sunday School," was created by Elissa Bjeletich and Kristina Wenger, our Staff Assistant for Social Networking. They will not be continuing this program, and instead plan to augment "Tending the Garden of our Hearts," their AFR podcast, with ideas.

WHAT MIGHT CHURCH SCHOOL LOOK LIKE THIS FALL?

Family-oriented Online Programs. The Gospel and Epistle readings and/or Sunday commemoration can serve as the content for family-oriented programs. The Antiochian Gospel program can serve that purpose.

Real-time Class Sessions. The virtual classroom is the option being used in most public schools. It allows real-time, interaction between students and teachers who can see and speak with one another. Lesson materials, such as puzzles or worksheets can be sent to the children through email before or after the session.

Pre-recorded Lessons. Teachers can use their computer camera to record a lesson and post it to a platform such as YouTube. This option allows for

accessing the lesson at the students' convenience.

Church School as Home School

The Orthodox text materials we use (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Orthodox Christian Education Commission) have lesson plans, and can be used in the home with parents as teachers. As with video programs, discussion portions of the lesson and group activities are limited if even possible at all. The materials, text and handouts and perhaps craft instructions and supplies, can be packaged for download or hardcopy delivery/pick-up ahead of the lesson. The lessons can be taught at the convenience of the parents.

THE DEPARTMENTAL MEETING REGARDING FALL 2020

In mid-July, the Department of Christian Education Coordinators and Associates met, via Zoom, with several Church School Directors to learn how the challenge of the pandemic had been addressed across the Archdiocese, and to discuss how we could support the ministry at the parish level.

Our discussion concluded with the forming of work groups to address the following needs:

- a list of platforms suitable for hosting virtual church school classes with their pros and cons
- samples of curricula suitable for virtual learning
- teacher trainings on how to make a live (Zoom) or recorded (video) class engaging, interactive and meaningful
- information on making activity kits to complement a virtual class, or as parent-taught lessons
- resources and non-traditional learning formats for older students
- ways to stay connected with students outside the classroom
- support for parents who will be assisting in their child's Christian Education.
- original video "shorts" for teachers to use

Knowing that parishes vary in size and resources, the Diocesan Coordinators are available to help with any decisions to be made in modifying parish programs.

Anna-Sarah Farha, Assistant for Church School Directors, is co-managing the project with me, and updates can be found on her Facebook page, Orthodox Christian Church School Directors. She volunteers her time in service to the church school director community.

WHAT ABOUT ONLINE CURRICULA?

At this juncture we are not aware of any online programs

for the Fall. The decision was made not to create our own. For parishes who wish to use a "packaged program," there are three choices we thought would be worthwhile.

Orthodox Journeys. This program is for elementary through high school and is based on the Gospels/ Commemorations and Feast Days. It is being produced by David Lucs and is for Elementary through High School students. A Sunday packet costs \$3-\$5 per parish and can be reproduced as needed. His website is <https://www.dlucscollection.com/shop>

Crossroads. Shereen Marcus has produced the curriculum, "Crossroads," as part of a larger project, "Bridge to Orthodoxy." The program contains lessons for teens on current topics and faith questions. Her packets, one per month containing four lessons, cost \$99.

<https://bridgestoorthodoxy.com/collections/crossroads>

The Relationship Project. Faithtree Resources has produced a group study program with a feature video component that explores aspects of identity and relationship, within the understanding of Orthodoxy. The cost is \$399 for 12 sessions.

<https://www.faithtree.org/the-relationship-project>

WE CAN DO THIS!

The Department will be providing trainings for Zoom lessons as soon as we are able, and assistance with other formats as well. We should not be daunted by a change in the way we will teach, or interact with our children, or by mastering technology. The seed for "passing on the faith" already resides within us.

Begin with Engagement. Imagine yourself as a tutor planning for the first session of Christian education with a new pupil. You know it isn't appropriate to open the session with a read-and-discuss assignment because your pupil comes to the session likely wondering what is in store, what you will be like, and why he or she is there. Your first priority is to engage the child, to answer those questions, and to establish a relationship of trust, caring, and genuine interest. The plan for learning takes off from the knowledge of the pupil's needs. With attention to the pupil's response and need for growth, the tutor is able to present lessons that continue to engage and be meaningful.

Engagement is the key to learning, not text materials or lesson plans. Icebreakers are a fun way to get to know the children, and to build relationships and community.

Relationships. In order to continue to engage the

children in learning, we need to care about each one, and all of them. We need to build a rapport in the classroom. After discussing with the class the importance of listening respectfully, spend time getting to know each child. You may have known that child since he was born, but there is always more — a story she can share, his growth from year to year. Each child comes to us as a mystery, and bearing gifts.

If the attention to “students first” seems upside-down from the way we have approached Orthodox education in the past, anxiously teaching the content and concerned about finishing the book on time, know that academic achievement scores markedly improve in schools that adopt the student-engagement concept — where teachers show sincere and consistent interest in their students personally, and in their need to learn and grow. The concern first for the students will also create a more relaxed atmosphere, and the sense of “it is good for us to be here,” which is at the core of the Orthodox experience.

The trainings and webinars we will be offering will provide skills and tools for improving our teaching, but we already have what we need to begin the new year. While it may seem difficult by way of explanation, engagement is no different than making a friend. And no, this does not mean you give up your role in the classroom. Ask yourself, “Who were my best teachers, and why?”

Resources for Families During Covid-19 and Printable Prayer Resources (rev. 6/1)

At www.antiochian.org/christianeducation

During the spring we began our Resources for Parents During COVID-19. We find ourselves in almost the same situation as when the quarantine began, finding a new routine to guide our days. Knowing what to expect and how to plan, we have a chance to use this these days at home to create a sanctuary of time and space where we can take a break from the stress and be renewed. Parents who pray and/or read the Bible with their children are giving them, in their own way, the gift of faith. Any parent knows it is not easy to have consistent, quiet times of prayer. Let’s keep our eyes on the goal, never forgetting that the Evil One will always try to steal our gaze from how good life can be.

Several printable resources are available in the companion file to the table. Most prayer pages have numbered lines to make participation easier. There are a few scriptural quotations for the icon corner. I also prepared pages of Scripture quotations to be cut out and read aloud as extra bits of inspiration before and

after the longer prayers. These can be cut apart and placed in a basket or hidden around the house or icon area for the children to find as they go about their day.

It is so easy to bypass praying, or to put it on our to-do list for when we have time. I was jarred out of my complacency when I read the following words of a saint: “We should not put off praying as if it were an obligation or a burden, no, we should run to prayer!”

What greater gift have we than the privilege of speaking with our Creator and our Lord! Let’s flee to prayer as to a refuge each day, looking heavenward as we speak to God joyfully and lovingly. King David left us the Psalms, the prayer book of the Church. He wrote about his relationship with God through prayer. In his words, “He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield” (Psalm 144:2).

<p>He who dwells in the help of the Most High shall lodge in the shelter of the God of heaven. Psalm 90:2</p>	<p>Praise the Lord, O you servants; praise the name of the Lord; Blessed be the name of the Lord from this present time and unto the ages. Psalm 112:1-2</p>
<p>Hear my supplication, O God; attend to my prayer. Psalm 60:1</p>	<p>But as for me, it is good to cling to God. To put my hope in the Lord, that I may proclaim all Your praises. Psalm 72:28.</p>

St. Patrick’s Breastplate Prayer*

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,

DIOCESAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COORDINATORS
Eastern Dioceses

Fr. George Alberts, 570.824.5016
frgeocar@sbcglobal.net

Toledo and the Midwest
Robert Snyder, 330.285-3688
bobsny1107@aol.com

Ottawa, Eastern Canada, Upstate New York
Fr. Christopher Rigden-Briscall, 519.807.2986,
xcsaviour123@gmail.com

Wichita and Mid-America
1) Deacon Elisha Long, rlongsummer@gmail.com
Deaneries: Great Plains, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Rocky Mountain

2) Kh. Gigi Shadid, gigishadid@yahoo.com
Deaneries: North Texas, Central Texas, East Texas and Southwest

Worcester and New England
Kh. Anna Hughes, 978.686.3274,
matannah@aol.com

Miami and the Southeast
Anna-Sarah Farha, 901.409.8059,
aodce.csdirectors@gmail.com

Los Angeles and the West Anne Beach
425.478.9885,
philothheavenizelou@gmail.com

DEVOTION TO THE THEOTOKOS

“All generations will call Me blessed” (Luke 1:48)

Very Rev. Daniel Daly



Icon of The Theotokos written by the hand of Randa Azar

Any non-Orthodox Christian entering an Orthodox church for the first time, whether one of the great cathedrals in Russia or a modest Orthodox Church in the US, would experience what we might call “spiritual culture shock.” The “sights, sounds and smells of Orthodoxy” are far afield from what one would experience in a typical Protestant church. One of the most striking differences is what the visitor would experience about the Virgin Mary.

Orthodox Christians believe in the permanent and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, leading the Church in all truth. This guidance is found in Holy Tradition. This has led to a deeper understanding of the place of Mary. Those raised in the strict *“sola scriptura”* (only the Bible) traditions, not sharing this understanding have a far more limited view of Mary.¹

Consequently the visitor may ask, understandably, “How did the Orthodox Church come to the point where Mary is seen as so important?” The large icon above the altar of Mary holding Christ is probably going to be overwhelming for our visitor. For us, this icon, sometimes called the “Icon of the Sign,” depicts the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Virgin who would conceive a son. Our visitor could hardly miss it. If our visitor attends Vespers, the closing words, “Most Holy Theotokos save us,” will no doubt set off his or her “theological alarm bells.”

Is the place of Mary in the Orthodox Church something present in the earliest days, or was it something that developed much later? My hope is that this article will answer those questions, both for the visitor and for the Orthodox Christian wishing to respond to such enquiries. To do so, we must return to the very early Church to discover the sources that speak of Mary, and also to observe the development of Marian piety in the subsequent centuries.

How soon does Mary appear in the earliest of Christian writings? In the post-New Testament years she is mentioned in a number of sources. Among these, the Fathers of the Church are especially important. They are not alone, however. Documents termed “apocryphal” (that is, “hidden”) also speak of Mary. Two of these are very ancient. *The Ascension of Isaiah*, possibly an early, second-century document, witnesses to interest in Mary and the birth of Jesus. The unknown author describes the appearance of an angel who speaks to him, and he sees Mary with the Infant and Joseph. Here, Mary herself is amazed at a miraculous birth. *The Odes of Solomon*, which may date from the First Century, describes Mary’s birth-giving as without pain.² The Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky makes an important point which must be born in mind. “The Mother of God was never a theme of the public preaching of the apostles ... [W]hile Christ was preached from the housetops ... the mystery of His Mother was revealed only to those who were already in the Church.”³ (I believe she still is.)

THE SECOND CENTURY

One of these apocryphal sources is the *Protevangelium of James*, also known as *The Birth of Mary*. Dating from about 130 A.D., it is the story of Mary’s birth and early life. Several things about this document are striking. It is very ancient. When it was written, many people who would have known the Apostles (and possibly Mary?) were still living. We may safely conclude

that the memory of the Theotokos would have been very much alive.

The Protevangelium begins with the story of Joachim and Anna, and their desire to have a child. God hears their prayers and they have a child, the Virgin Mary. From her earliest years she is cared for at home, until she is three, when she is taken to the temple. Here she dances on the steps. She is taken by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies,⁴ where she is fed by the angels. She was “loved by all.” (In the Incarnation, Mary will become the very dwelling place of God, another “Holy of Holies.”) At puberty, she becomes the ward of Joseph, which also takes place in a miraculous way. The story continues to the births of Jesus and John the Baptist. It concludes when Zachary is killed by Herod and is replaced by the aged Simeon. It is he who will receive Mary and Jesus in the Temple.

How should we react to this – as some might say – incredible story? It is extremely early in the life of the Church. In the East it was translated into at least seven languages. Its widespread usage is strong evidence of the interest in Mary by Christian people. The liturgical feasts of the Birth of Mary (September 8) and the Presentation of Mary in the Temple (November 21) both celebrate events spoken of in this document. Given its very early appearance, it is too important to be dismissed out of hand.

Mary is mentioned by a number of sources in the Second Century.⁵ Among the early Fathers, St. Ignatius of Antioch (+107), warning against the challenges of the Docetists, acknowledges the importance of the physical motherhood of Mary. It is with St. Justin Martyr (100–165) and St. Irenaeus of Lyon (130–202), however, that Mary’s unique theological importance begins to be expressed.

ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

The great defender of the Christian people, St. Justin Martyr, is famous for his parallel between Mary and Eve. “(The Son of God) became man through a Virgin, so that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had begun. For Eve, who was a virgin and undefiled, gave birth to disobedience and death after listening to the serpent’s word. But the Virgin Mary conceived in faith and joy... (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 100). This parallel, noted in the Second Century by St. Justin (100–165), will be repeated countless times in later centuries. It was very quickly developed by St. Irenaeus of Lyon.

ST. IRENAEUS OF LYON

St. Irenaeus develops this further by calling Mary the “advocate” of Eve. “By obeying, (Mary) became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith.” The Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve.⁶

Adam had to be recapitulated in Christ, so that death might be swallowed up in immortality, and Eve (had to be recapitulated) in Mary, so that the Virgin, having become another virgin’s advocate, might destroy and abolish one virgin’s disobedience by the obedience of another virgin.

And just as the human race was bound to death because of a virgin, so it was set free from death by a virgin, since the disobedience of one virgin was counterbalanced by a Virgin’s obedience.⁷

Both fathers are seeing Mary theologically. If she is the new Eve, she must have a significant place in the divine plan of redemption. If she is an “advocate,” she is an intercessor! This is of paramount importance. Although the liturgical feasts, prayers, hymn, and icons will be developed later, her unique place in the divine plan is recognized here. The case for the importance of Mary rests here in the Second Century.

THE THIRD CENTURY

Here we meet Origen of Alexandria, certainly one of the greatest Christian intellectuals. Already at this early date he addresses a problem regarding Mary that even today can lead to a misunderstanding. “Therefore, it is wise to accept the meaning of Scripture attentively and not to pay attention to those who say that (Jesus) was born through Mary and not of her. The prescient apostle has said ‘But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were born under a law’ (Gal. 4:4). Observe that he did not say: ‘born through a woman’, but rather ‘born of a woman.’⁸ Origen also speaks of Mary as the “Panagia” (all-holy).

PRAYER TO MARY

In 1917 an English library purchased a torn piece of parchment no larger than an index card. What was written on the parchment looked like something someone jotted down. Although there were letters

missing, three words were recognizable. On the document were the words “under,” “compassion,” and “Theotoke.” These lines were addressed to the Birth-Giver of God. What we have here is a text of what appears to be the oldest preserved prayer (or hymn?) to the Blessed Virgin also as Theotokos!

“Beneath your compassion, We take refuge, O Theotokos. Do not despise our petitions in time of trouble. But rescue us from dangers, only pure, only blessed one.”

Although scholars date the document to about 250 A.D., some think that the prayer might actually be older.⁹ At this early date in Church history, the Church had yet to produce fixed liturgical prayers, and yet someone is clearly praying to Mary as an advocate.

THE FOURTH CENTURY

The Fourth Century is the era of the great Fathers of the Church. Although it is impossible to quote all these Fathers, there is one beautiful homily that is worth reading, that of St. Athanasius of Alexandria.

ST. ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA (+373) AND THE HOMILY OF THE PAPYRUS OF TURIN

His theology of the Incarnation is quite familiar to the Orthodox. One treasure is his *Homily of the Papyrus of Turin*. This one homily in praise of the Blessed Virgin illustrates how far devotion to the Theotokos had come, and leaves no doubts about the place of Mary.

O noble Virgin, truly you are greater than any other greatness. For who is your equal in greatness, O dwelling place of God the Word? To whom among all creatures shall I compare you, O Virgin? You are greater than them all. O [Ark of the New] Covenant, clothed with purity instead of gold! You are the Ark in which is found the golden vessel containing the true manna, that is the flesh in which divinity resides. Should I compare you to the fertile earth and its fruits? You surpass them, for it is written: “The earth is my footstool” (Is. 66:1). But you carry within you the feet, the head, and the entire body of the perfect God.

If I say that heaven is exalted, yet it does not equal you, for it is written: “Heaven is My throne” (Is. 66:1), while you are God’s place of repose. If I say that the angels and archangels are great – but you are greater than them all, for the

angels and the archangels serve with trembling the One Who dwells in your womb, and they dare not speak in His presence, while you speak to Him freely.

If we say that the cherubim are great, you are greater than they, for the cherubim carry the throne (cf. Ps. 80:1; 99:1), while you hold God in your hands. If we say that the seraphim are great, you are greater than them all, for the seraphim cover their faces with their wings (cf. Is. 6:2), unable to look upon the perfect glory, while you not only gaze upon His face but caress it and offer your breasts to His holy mouth....”

Much could be said about this homily. The place of Mary in the mind of St. Athanasius is obvious. Mary is the one who speaks freely to her Son. But here we find Mary compared with the Ark of the Covenant. These Old Testament “types” of Mary will permeate the liturgical prayers of the church.

ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN (306–373), “HARP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

Ephrem was born in Nisibis in Syria. He is regarded as the greatest poet of the patristic age. Gambero says, “The Marian doctrine of the Syrian Church reaches its most sublime expression in the poetry of Ephrem. He is rightly called the “Harp of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ Brian Daley says that the “artistic character of Patristic writings from the fourth century, particularly about Mary, were very much affected by the rich theological rhetoric of Ephrem’s hymns on Mary.”¹¹

ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM (313–386)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who might be called the father of Christian catechetics, is most famous for his catechetical lectures given to those preparing for baptism, and afterward to those who had been baptized. In the first lectures, Cyril stresses the cooperation that the Virgin offered, in mysterious collaboration with the Holy Spirit. Mary’s importance is in the mystery of the Incarnation: “The Virgin plays a visible and important role.” Preparing the catechumens to answer the objections of the Jews and the Gnostics, Cyril tries to make his catechumens understand about the earthly Mother of the Son of God.

APPEARANCES OF MARY

Some of the earliest indications of Marian cult comes from the writings of the two great Cappado-

cian Gregorys, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus. St. Gregory Nazianzus preached the funeral sermon on St. Gregory the Wonderworker, who had been very important in his family. In his sermon he tells about a vision of the Virgin experienced by Gregory. This is the first-time apparitions are mentioned in the Fathers. The fifth-century historian Sozomon says that Marian apparitions were fairly regular occurrences in St. Gregory Nazianzus’s Church of the Anastasia in Constantinople.¹²

Gregory of Nyssa, brother of St. Basil the Great, affirmed that “if anyone does not accept the Holy Mary as Theotokos, he is without the Godhead.” Here we have, as far as can be ascertained for the first time, a Mariological statement as a test of orthodoxy.

THE FIFTH CENTURY

The Fifth Century is certainly a watershed for Marian devotion, most notably because of the Council of Ephesus in 431, at which Mary is defended as Theotokos. The Orthodox scholar Mary Cunningham summarizes the course of events after the Council of Ephesus in 431:

Popular veneration of the Theotokos began to take off from the middle of the fifth century and especially in the course of the sixth. Relics, such as her robe and belt, were discovered in Palestine and brought to Constantinople, churches began to be founded in her honor, and feasts commemorating events in her life were added to the liturgical calendar. This process culminated in the Virgin’s special place as protector and patroness of the imperial city, Constantinople. The Akathist hymn is the most famous witness to this phenomenon.¹³

Brian Daley, taking us into the following centuries, states that “between the I Council of Constantinople in 381 and the II Council of Constantinople in 553 both the doctrine and spirituality regarding Mary seemed to have evolved most fully. In the half-century that followed the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the figure of Mary emerged like a comet in Christian devotion and liturgical celebration throughout the world...(emphasis mine). Mary is an object of veneration in her own right.”¹⁴

THE MARIAN FEASTS

According to Cunningham it is difficult to say exactly when the Marian feasts begin. There was

1. It is important to note here that among Protestant Christians there exists a wide disparity in their views of the importance of the Theotokos. There is no single voice that speaks for all the denominations. However, it can be said that she is widely undervalued in Protestantism.
2. Cf. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and The Fathers of The Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press.), pp. 33–34. This is an excellent source of information on Mary’s place in the writings of the Church Fathers.
3. Vladimir Lossky, “Panagia” in *The Mother of God: A Symposium*, edited by E. L. Mascall (London: Dacre Press, 1959), p. 35.
4. See Margaret Barker’s treatment of the Holy of Holies as the realm beyond this world in *The Great High Priest* (London: T & T Clark International), p. 189.
5. Aside from Ss. Ignatius, Justin and Irenaeus, mention of Mary is made in the *Ascension of Isaiab*, the *Odes of Solomon*, and by St. Mileto of Sardis (+180) and St. Aristides of Athens (+134), all of the Second Century.
6. Cf. Gambero, op. cit., p. 54.
7. Ibid.
8. Gambero, op. cit., p. 73.
9. The hymn is used in the Coptic liturgy to this day, as well as in the Armenian, Byzantine, Ambrosian, and Roman Rite liturgies. In the Byzantine Rite the hymn occurs as the last dismissal hymn of daily Vespers in Great Lent.
10. Gambero, op. cit., p. 108.
11. “On the Dormition of Mary,” *Early Patristic Homilies*, translated and edited by Brian E. Daley, S.J., SVS Press, 1998, p. 2.
12. Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), p. 131.
13. Mary B. Cunningham, *Wider Than The Heavens*,

SVS Press, p. 15)

14. Brian Daley, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

15. Mary Cunningham, *op. cit.*

16. The Patristic scholar Johannes Quasten regards this sermon as the most famous Marian sermon of antiquity, in *Patrology*, vol. 3, Christian Classics Inc., p. 131.

17. Brian E. Daley, S.J., "On the Dormition of Mary," *Early Patristic Homilies* (SVS Press, 1998), p. 4.

18. Walther L. Brandt, ed., *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), p. 199.

19. Calvin's *Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 136.

no universal liturgical calendar for all the churches. Constantinople was influenced by Jerusalem, but the introduction of the feasts varied from church to church.¹⁵

Although the fifth-century feast In Memory Of Mary, celebrated on one of the Sundays before Christmas or on December 26, is seen as the oldest of the feasts, it is interesting to note that the Western pilgrim Egeria witnessed the celebration of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple during her visit to the East in 381-384. This feast was known as the Hypapante or Entrance. It also commemorates the Purification of Mary. It was added to the Constantinopolitan Calendar during the reign of Justinian I (527-565).

Narratives concerning Mary's death and assumption into heaven had been circulating in Eastern Christendom from the end of the Fourth or beginning of the Fifth Century. According to the fourteenth-century historian Nicephorus Xanthopolos, the Emperor Maurice (582-602) was responsible for the feast of The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15).

The origins of the feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple (Nov 21) are obscure. The feast may have been introduced in Constantinople in the Eighth Century.

THE MARIAN CHURCHES

Marian churches existed before the Council of Ephesus. The Church of Our Lady of Zion in Ethiopia dates from the Fourth Century, as does the Church of Mary of Trevastere in Rome. During the Council at Ephesus (431), St. Cyril of Alexandria preached in the Church of St. Mary in Ephesus.¹⁶ Nonetheless, a building boom was about to begin. In Jerusalem, a basilica in honor of the Theotokos was built at the foot of the Mount of Olives, near Gethsemane, as early as the 440s. This may have been built on what was believed to be the home of Mary.

There was one other church of importance. This was the Kathisma Church, half-way between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This fifth-century church was discovered in 1992. The church is known as the Kathisma, or "seat," of the Virgin, marking the place where the pregnant Mary rested on her way to Bethlehem.

The New Church of the Theotokos was a Byzantine church erected in Jerusalem by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (r. 527-565). Like the later Nea Ekklesia (Νέα Ἐκκλησία) in Constantinople, it is sometimes referred to in English as "The Nea." The church was completed in 543, but was severely

damaged or destroyed during the Persian conquest of the city in 614. Pope Sixtus III (442-440) built The Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome in honor of the definition of the Council of Ephesus immediately after the Council. In Constantinople, the Empress Pulcheria – long known for her personal identification with Mary – sponsored the building of at least three major churches in the Virgin's honor, all completed by about 475.¹⁷ The Chalcoptreia Church was the repository of the belt of Mary. The Church at Blachernai which dates from the 470s was the home of the veil or robe of Mary. The Church of the Monastery of the Panaghia Hodegetria housed the famous icon attributed to St. Luke, which was brought from the Holy Land by Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius II.

CONCLUSION

From the ancient sources that exist, and we wish they were more, the Church's interest in Mary and love for her have been there from the early days of the Apostolic Church, East and West. What caused the place of Mary to undergo such a change after the Protestant Reformation, especially when Martin Luther believed that Mary was a virgin before and after the birth of Christ, and that she did not have other children,¹⁸ and John Calvin too rejected the notion that she had other children?¹⁹

There are a number of reasons. One is worth noting. It lies in the understanding of the mystery of salvation. Following St. Augustine, western theology has seen salvation very much in legal terms. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of man. His death is seen juridically. The eleventh-century Anselm of Canterbury saw the death of the Lord as "making satisfaction" for man's sins. The mystery of salvation is played out in a courthouse, so to speak. Mary simply does not have a place here.

In the Eastern understanding of the mystery, there is of course only One Savior, Jesus Christ. In this understanding in which the Divine and Human are united in one Person, Mary is very important. She provides our human nature to the Logos, which is critical to the union of the human with the divine. Coupled with the rejection of the intercession of the saints, there was no place for her in their spirituality.

Mary foretold that all generations would call her blessed. May we continue to do so.

Very Rev. Daniel Daly

Chanting With the Angels:
**A REFLECTION OF FATHER
ELIAS BITAR**

Recently, Father Elias Bitar departed this earthly life to join the chorus of the heavenly angels. Father Elias was a good friend of mine, as he was to so many people. His voice, once heard, could not be forgotten. His chanting, like incense, lifted up our human prayers to God's kingdom.

It was in 1968 that Father Elias began his relationship with our Antiochian Archdiocese. He wrote, "It was a fall afternoon in 1968 when I, a seminarian serving at the Archdiocese headquarters in Tripoli, Lebanon, heard that the Metropolitan Archbishop of North America was coming for a visit. My heart rejoiced." That meeting opened a door of opportunity which gave Father Elias a chance to fulfill the dream of coming to America – one which he thought was out of reach.

While in Lebanon, one afternoon after lunch, Father Elias chanted for the assembled group the Ninth Ode of Pascha, "The Angel." He so impressed all those present that he was invited to come to America. Since Father Elias had completed his studies at Balamand Seminary in 1967, the invitation came at a propitious time. His education did not end at the Balamand, however. Father Elias studied an intensive course in English, and spent three years at Saint Vladimir Seminary earning a Master of Divinity degree. Prior to this, he spent time in Thessaloniki, Greece. With this education, he became fluent in Arabic, English and Greek, His education culminated with a Doctor of Ministry degree from Saint Vladimir seminary.

Father Elias's ministry in North America began at Saint Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, California, under the direction of Father Paul Rom-



ley. This was followed by a few years in Northern California. His next and longest assignment was as Pastor of Saint George, Little Falls, New Jersey. While serving in New Jersey, Father Elias developed a close relationship with the area parishes, in particular Saint Anthony, Bergenfield, New Jersey; Saint Nicholas Cathedral, Brooklyn, New York; and Saint Mary's, Brooklyn, New York,

as well as other area churches. He also served as Vicar General during his tenure at Saint George.

Father Elias's story was not only about his much-admired chanting and pastorate, but also his family life. His generous attention and love enriched life with the late Khouria Joanne, daughters Katrina, Sister Ignatia, and Martha, and son Anthony, and, later on, grandchildren. For all the years at Saint George, he found fulfillment and love with his flock.

On the lighter side, Father Elias laughed easily and could even be something of a prankster. Everyone around him was always made to feel comfortable. To add to the wonderful characteristic of his friendliness, many students who passed through the Antiochian House of Studies frequently commented and wrote about his knowledge of Byzantine chant. He was a fair-minded professor. Not at all punitive with fledgling chanters, he was instead a supportive mentor.

To those of us who are clergy, he was a true brother. To our dear laity, he was a kind and loving priest. His voice now resonates in the heavens for the ages. Father Elias will be missed.

Father Joseph Allen,
writing at the invitation of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

May 23, 2020

Mother Aemiliane, Reverend Clergy, Katrina, Sister Ignatia, Martha, Michael, Anthony, Madeleine, Members of the Family, Sisters of the Monastery of St. Nina, and Beloved Faithful in Christ:

Greetings to you in the Name of our Victorious and Risen Savior, Jesus Christ! Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

Joined by my brother hierarchs, reverend clergy, esteemed trustees, pious faithful of our Antiochian Archdiocese, I offer my sincere condolences and heartfelt prayers to all of you at the falling asleep of our dear brother and concelebrant, the Right Reverend Archimandrite Elias Bitar. The loss of Fr. Elias is felt by us as well as all of his countless spiritual children and students of our ecclesiastical music, and we are saddened that under current circumstances we cannot all be there to chant the beautiful hymns of St. John of Damascus' funeral odes with you. I must also express my personal feeling of having lost a brother, for Fr. Elias and I grew up together at the Balamand Monastery and were raised in the Faith by our beloved father in Christ, Patriarch Ignatius IV.

We all knew Fr. Elias as "The Voice" of our God-protected Archdiocese. We may forget that many people of our Archdiocese thought that the English language would never be an authentic means of chanting our traditional Byzantine music. The immense strides we see in English ecclesiastical chant would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Fr. Elias, who worked so hard in raising up a generation of clergy and chanters through his holy and selfless labors at St. Vladimir's Seminary and the Antiochian House of Studies. We owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude, and we are fortunate to live in a time where the recordings of his beautiful voice will remain with us forever.

The Lord has taken Fr. Elias to his heavenly abode as we conclude our celebrations of Holy Pascha. While we mourn his passing, we are comforted in these holy days by the surety of the Resurrection of our Lord and the defeat of death. Fr. Elias is joining his beloved Khouriyeh Joanne, but he is not departing from us in spirit. I find it fitting that he will be laid to rest with the triumphant chanting of Christ is Risen by the assembled clergy and monastics, as he joins his ever-memorable voice to the choirs of the angels singing triumphantly at the Throne of the Conqueror of Death for all eternity.

With paternal love and heartfelt prayers for the Lord to grant Fr. Elias rest with the Saints and to you His comfort, peace, and strength, I greet you with the angelic proclamation resounding from the Empty Tomb: Christ is Risen! Indeed, He is Risen!

Your Father in the Risen Lord,

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDINATIONS

JOHNSON, Deacon Martin, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on June 5, 2020, at St. George Cathedral, Charleston, West Virginia. Fr. Martin is assigned as Pastor of St. Anthony Church, Butler Pennsylvania.

ASSIGNMENTS

ANDREWS, Fr. Andrew, as Second Priest of St. Nicholas Cathedral, Louisiana, effective July 31, 2020.

BARKER, Fr. Colin, as Pastor of St. Mark, Youngstown, Ohio, effective August 1, 2020.

BERGER, Fr. Calinic, as Assistant Pastor of St. George, Wichita, Kansas, effective July 31, 2020.

DAMICK, Fr. Andrew, to Ancient Faith Ministries.

DILLON, Fr. Christopher, as Pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul, Ben Lomond, California, effective August 23, 2020.

HANNA, Fr. Nabil, as Dean of St. Nicholas Cathedral, Los Angeles, California, effective July 31, 2020.

KISHLER, Fr. Andrew, as Pastor of All Saints, Chicago, Illinois, effective July 1, 2020.

LANDINO, Fr. Joseph, as Pastor of St. Paul, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, effective August 1, 2020.

LASSEETER, Fr. Herman, as Pastor of St. Stephen, Hiram, Georgia, effective August 1, 2020.

PHILLIPS, Fr. Jeremiah, as Pastor of St. Sophia, Dripping Springs, Texas, and St. Katherine of Alexandria Mission, Burlington, Texas, effective August 15, 2020.

ROBINSON, Fr. Jesse, as Assistant Pastor of Holy Trinity, Santa Fe, New Mexico, effective August 1, 2020.

SAHADY, Fr. Mark, as Pastor of St. George Spring Valley, Illinois, effective July 1, 2020.

SHADID, Fr. Christopher, as Director of Antiochian Village, Pennsylvania, effective August 1, 2020.

TAWHEEL, Fr. George, as Pastor of Holy Cross, Palm-dale, California, effective July 1, 2020.

THOMPSON, Fr. Nathan, as Pastor of St. Antho-

ny the Great, San Diego, California, effective May 18, 2020.

TREMBLY, Fr. Nathaniel, as Pastor of St. Nicholas, Pinellas Park, Florida, effective August 1, 2020.

WINN, Fr. David, as Assistant Pastor of All Saints, Raleigh, North Carolina, effective August 1, 2020.

YAZGE, Fr. Anthony, as Pastor of St. George, Fishers, Indiana, effective July 31, 2020.

ZAFARAN, Fr. Meletios, as Pastor of St. George, Allentown, Pennsylvania, effective August 1, 2020.

RELEASED

SMITH, Fr. Peter, to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

RETIRED

BAIZE, Fr. John, retired and attached to St. Mary, Wichita, Kansas, effective July 1, 2020.

BETHANCOURT, Fr. John, TBD.

HILLHOUSE, Fr. Edward, effective August 1, 2020.

MASSOUH, Fr. Michael, effective August 1, 2020.

MOORE, Fr. Andrew, effective August 1, 2020.

NAJIM, Fr. Michel, effective July 31, 2020.

REARDON, Fr. Patrick, effective July 1, 2020.

ROHAN, Fr. Daniel, effective August 1, 2020.

SABBAGH, Fr. Anthony, effective August 1, 2020.

SORENSEN, Fr. Nicholas, effective January 1, 2021.

DECEASED

EL MURR, Father Jean, 62, on May 19, 2020. Father Jean El Murr was a priest of Saint George Orthodox Church, Montreal. Father Jean faithfully and generously served the parish of Saint George Orthodox Church for the past seventeen years, six and a half years as a deacon (March 29, 2003) and eleven years as a priest (December 13, 2009). Father Jean also served as the Youth Director of the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada, and Upstate New York from 2000 to 2005. He is survived by his wife, Khouria Souhaila Maatouk.

BITAR, Right Rev. Archimandrite Elias, on May 21, 2020. Father Bitar leaves behind a lifelong legacy as

“the voice of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America.” During his nearly forty years in the priesthood he has been a Lecturer in Liturgical Music (with a specialty in Byzantine music) and Practical Theology at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary, Vicar General of the Archdiocese, and the presiding priest for churches in California and New Jersey. Father Elias studied for his Master of Divinity degree at St. Vladimir’s from 1972 to 1975, and subsequently earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Seminary in 2001. Father Elias Bitar is survived by his children Katrina, Sr. Ignatia, Martha, Mikey, Antony, and Madeleine, as well as his grandchildren Zachary, Jacob, Samia, and another granddaughter on the way. He was preceded in death by his wife, Khouria Joanne.

GRIFFITH, Hieromonk David, 74, on May 31, 2020. Father David retired from the pastorate at All Saints Orthodox Church in Salina, Kansas, and was residing at St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

Following graduation from Wilkes College (now Wilkes University) in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1968 with a BA in Sociology (minors in Philosophy-Religion and French), Hieromonk David entered St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary. After graduating with an M.Div. in 1971, and with the encouragement of his spiritual father, Fr. John Meyendorff, he entered the Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches (Celigny, Switzerland), receiving a *Certificat* in Ecumenical Studies from the University of Geneva. As part of the year-long program, he did three months of research into monastic communities in France while a resident of Le Centre S. Dominique (a retreat house of the Dominican Province of Lyons) in Eveux sur l’Arbesle (near Lyons). Returning to the United States in 1972, he did further studies at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. Hieromonk David was fluent in English, Greek, and French.

In 1973, Metropolitan PHILIP received Hieromonk David into the Antiochian Archdiocese and ordained him a deacon at St. Mary’s in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 7, 1973, and then a presbyter at St. Mary’s, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, on October 21, 1973.

Between 1975 and 1985, Hieromonk David pastored the following parishes: St. George, Albany, New York (1973–1979), Ss. Constantine and Helen, Dallas,

Texas (1979–1982), and St. George, Lowell, Massachusetts (1982–1986). During his last two years in Albany, he was Dean of the Upstate New York Deanery. In Lowell, he was Instructor in Liturgical Theology in the St. Stephen’s Course. On Pentecost, 1986, he was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite by Metropolitan PHILIP.

In October 1986, with the blessing of his Eminence, Hieromonk David went to Greece to gain a better knowledge of Greek and to understand more deeply the Orthodox Church in context. After a very difficult but spiritually fruitful year in Thessalonica, he moved to Athens in 1987, where with the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch IGNATIUS and the support of Dr. Constantine Scoutaris (Professor at the Theological School of the University of Athens), he was appointed Assistant Priest in the parish of St. Anne, Chalandri, in the Archdiocese of Athens, a position which he held until returning to the U.S. While studying Modern Greek and working as a Th.D. candidate in the University of Athens, he resided at the Metochian of the Ascension and was celebrant of daily services there. (The Methochian is a dependency in Athens of Simonopetra Monastery, Mount Athos.) He also served as supply priest in the Church of St. George, Karitzi (the church of the former royal court) in Athens.

Feeling constrained to return to active service within the Antiochian Archdiocese, he came back to the US. In 1994, after a brief pastorate at St. George, Utica, New York, in 1995 he became pastor of St. Michael’s, Geneva, New York. He served as Dean of the Can-Am Deanery, Regional Spiritual Advisor for the Antiochian Women, and Regional Spiritual Advisor for the Fellowship of St. John the Divine.

Hieromonk David’s name was Daniel before his tonsure to the Little Schema after his retirement. At his tonsure he was given the name David.

WINFREY, Fr. John Guy, 58, on MAY 26, 2020. Father John was the Pastor of St. Katherine Mission in Burleson, Texas. He was a great asset to our Archdiocese as the compiler and professional typesetter of many books, including our Holy Week book, the funeral service book and the more recent editions of the *Liturgikon*. Fr. John is survived by his wife, Beverly, and three young children – Danielle, Gregory, and Mary.

CHRISTIANITY AND RACISM



DISCLAIMERS

WITH SUCH A PROVOCATIVE SUBJECT, I NEED TO MAKE A LOT OF DISCLAIMERS. I WAS BORN IN 1962 AND GREW UP IN A WEALTHY, ALL-WHITE NEIGHBORHOOD IN OKLAHOMA. I WAS A DEVOUT MEMBER OF AN ALL-WHITE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH. I KNOW VERY LITTLE, APART FROM BOOKS, ABOUT THE STRUGGLES OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND THE SEGREGATION OF THE “WHITE” AND “BLACK” CHURCHES, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOUTH. IF A BLACK MAN WOULD HAVE SPOKEN TO US AT CHURCH AND POINTED OUT THAT WE WERE ALL WHITE, IT WOULD HAVE SURPRISED US. WE WERE NOT TRYING TO BE A WHITE CHURCH. WE DIDN’T THINK ABOUT BEING WHITE, BECAUSE WE DIDN’T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT BEING WHITE. WHILE I HAVE SINCE SPENT SOME TIME IN AFRICA AND AMERICAN INNER-CITY CHURCHES, I AM NOT GOING TO TELL YOU THAT THIS MEANS ANYTHING OTHER THAN IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE THAT OPENED MY EYES TO THINGS TO WHICH I HAD BEEN BLIND. SOME WOULD SAY THAT MY WHITE, RICH, PRIVILEGED, SOUTHERN UPBRINGING, WITH VIRTUALLY NO EXPOSURE TO BLACK CULTURE, CHURCH, AND LIFE, DISQUALIFIES ME FROM SAYING MUCH OF ANYTHING AUTHENTIC ABOUT RACISM. THERE IS SOME TRUTH THERE. OTHERS MIGHT SAY, HOWEVER, THAT I AM EXACTLY THE GUY THAT NEEDS TO QUIT REMAINING SILENT.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement of the 1960's was not a movement centered in "the Church." The movement was deeply divided in its membership and on its strategy of non-violence. It was the *black church*, identified with the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., that stepped forward into the civil rights movement, and then carried it. While one can find other non-black church shoes walking in those marches, the majority of white conservative churches stood on the sidelines, and not infrequently stood in the way.

Church life in general was a more predominant part of daily life in 1960 than 2020; and white churches were at a standstill, to at least the same degree that black churches were on the march for change.

PENTECOST

Deep division in the Church based upon ethnicity and race is far from new. In fact, the Church is born with an act of racial reconciliation. Three times a year, the Jews were required to make pilgrimage to the Temple. They came from all over the Roman and a multi-ethnic Greek-speaking world. After Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, they came on the feast of *Shavuot* to the place of the Temple.

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." By the grace of the Holy Spirit what could not be accomplished by man's efforts at Babel was gloriously accomplished at Pentecost. The three thousand brought into the Church that day was a divine "unity in diversity." As Noah gathered different types of animals into the Ark, God gathered many tribes and ethnicities into His Church and lit them with holy fire.

Now they were in Jerusalem from every nation

.....one must understand that misbehavior is the language of the wounded

under heaven ... Parthians, Medes and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene [that is, Africans], visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in their own tongues. Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2: 1, 5, 9–12).

This beautiful fire of unification and love did not extinguish all the sins of division, retaliation and hatred. Like all sin, racism continued, even in the Church, and racism is a sin.

RACISM IS MY SIN

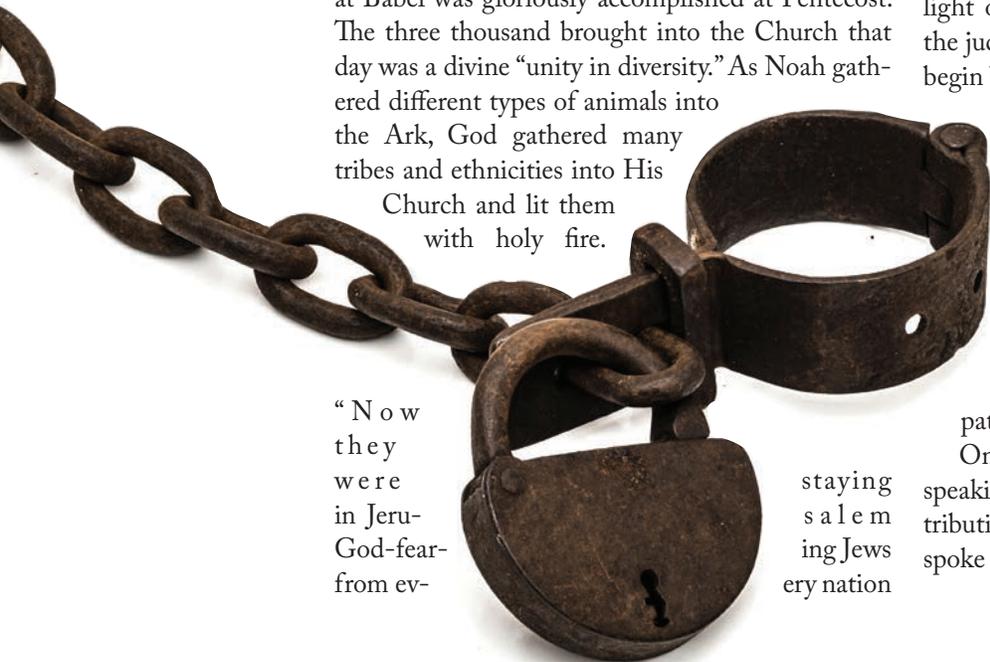
Almost all white people, even those who have committed egregious actions and posted vile statements, will begin with the words "I am not a racist, but..." I do understand, as a sometimes naive white male, not wanting to shoulder the "white guilt" of all American history. In Christ, however, it simply cannot be too heavy to say in humility, "I occasionally do racist things, sometimes without awareness." To heal, we must place the knife where the wound is most putrid.

CHRIST THE HEALER

The Church of the ancient East viewed sin in light of the "therapeutic" stethoscope, rather than the judicial gavel. To heal another person, one must begin by hearing the story of his pain. One must enter into the story fully, so that one sees oneself in that person, no matter how different he is. Even when there is misbehavior, and especially when there is misbehavior, one must understand that misbehavior is the language of the wounded. One cannot prescribe the correct medicine until one understands the detailed, dark history of the pain and suffering, and its meaning to the patient.

One must hear and feel the pain of the Greek-speaking widows, who were overlooked in the distribution of alms from the Church because they spoke Greek and presumably came from outside

staying in Jerusalem from every nation



Jerusalem. One must hear and feel the pain of the Christian, Onesimus, who was still shamed as a slave after conversion. One must hear and feel the pain of the Gentile Christians who were not accepted and even plotted against by the judaizers, who sought to preserve religious and ethnic purity. The Church was not silent and indifferent in these matters. The Church combated these injustices with the formation of an ethnically sensitive diaconate (Acts 6:1–6), with apostolic letters written and read to the churches (Paul’s letter to Philemon; Galatians 3:28), and the first council at Jerusalem, in which it was debated how a Gentile could be a fully accepted without the requirements of the Jewish law (Acts 15). The Church acted to give hope and healing to persons who were excluded.

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

The Gospels tell us that the Light of Jesus is a holy light, so bright that it contains all colors. Many of us as children sang, “Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.” Pentecost tells us that all languages from every race can speak the Name of God. In Christ’s Church, there is no enmity. The one you called “enemy” is called “friend.” Love protests against fear and hatred. The epistles tell us that the slave is set free by being your brother. He is recognized as a full human being in your home.

A GLOBAL FIRE

So now we come to the death of George Floyd, an event which is seen by many as the most recent link in a long iron chain of racism, injustice, and slavery. His death has become a global icon for a human being not being treated as a full person. The protests and the demonstrations may mean many different things to different people. The global outpouring of tongues that are speaking in their own languages is itself a witness to how deep this wound tunnels under the ground of all history. But is this current civil “movement” of man, or of God? Is the march to a social tower, or a Holy Temple? Is this “fire” one of anger and destruction, or love and reconciliation? Like many conflicts of the early church, and like the

civil rights movement of the 1960’s, and like marches today, the just are mixed with the unjust. Some of us are frankly bothered that God *might* rain on them both. We would rather bring swift judgment to this global uprising, hoping the tongues quiet down and the smoke clears. We would rather people “not be offended by everything, of going through history, and looking at everything.” Perhaps more commonly, we just close our mouths, eyes and ears.

Is the march to a social tower, or a Holy Temple? Is this “fire” one of anger and destruction, or love and reconciliation?

On our own, we are all too biased to honestly know better. You and I don’t really know the hearts and minds of all the people walking and talking around the globe in response to George Floyd’s death. The news source you watch or the friend group to which you belong, will greatly color your view of these protests as either more non-violent or more destructive, holy communication or babble. We must struggle together to stay obedient to the voice of the ancient New Testament Church.

THAT ALL OF THEM MAY BE ONE

Rather than any of us pointing a finger at another, shouldn’t we be pointing the other three fingers back at ourselves and ask, “Where is the Church?” Not just, “Where is the black church?” but “Where is your “white” conservative Protestant Church? Where is your “white” Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church? Why can we easily embrace the words of Scripture, “neither Jew nor Greek,” but it seems so hard to live it as “neither white nor black”? Why is this any different than looking at widows and saying Greek lives matter? Or slaves lives matter?

If George Floyd had not died, we should still want to say unapologetically “You are no longer a slave, but a brother! In Christ’s love, you have been set free!” But because of his death, we must say it now (without any qualification). Our witness of who Christ is, and what his Church is, may depend upon it. What a unique opportunity to spread the universal message of Pentecost. While remaining in our differences, in Christ we live as One. By the breath of the Holy Spirit, we should speak it. By the love of the Church, we should act upon it.

Mark Mosely
St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas

"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

ON STEWARDSHIP

*"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,"*

Says the Lord of hosts,

"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven

And pour out for you such blessing

That there will not be room enough to receive it."

– Malachi 3:10

W

hen we give to the Church, thinking of it as a charitable organization to which we belong, we might rightly ask, "How much does the Church need? Can I see a financial statement? I want to know how the money is spent, and how much people are paid, before I commit to a stewardship pledge."

When we give to God from the first fruits of our labor as an act of gratitude in worship, might we look up toward the heavens and ask, "God, how much do you need? How are you going to spend my money?" Would you agree that such questions seem rather inappropriate?

Whose money is my money anyway? Where did I get my money? Is it really mine? What is a steward anyway? Why do we call it stewardship? A steward is a person who manages another's property; one who administers anything as the agent of another; a person who has charge of the household of another. As a Christian, would it be fair to ask, "Is it my money, or is it God's money?" We know the answer, but rarely think of our money as God's money. We rarely think of ourselves as stewards of God's money, God's property, God's assets.

The formula for stewardship giving is not based on the Church's budget, it's based on the Biblical principle of tithing from the first fruits of our labor. "*The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God*" (Exodus 23:19). It needs to be sacrificial – a sacrifice of praise, a sacrifice of faith, a sacrifice of love, a testimony of our priorities in life.

What is the biblical understanding of "first fruits?" It is a tenth of our income, called a tithe. If we are not used to worshipping God with the first fruits of our labor, ten percent may seem like a lot, maybe too

much, like "I can't afford that." We should be reminded, however, that one hundred percent of our income comes from God, and belongs to God, and we are the stewards of His money, and He commands that we only return ten percent. What bank would issue a loan and only ask that ten percent be paid back? What's more, God promises to *pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.*

My father taught me to tithe at an early age. I had two brothers, and my father would divide the tithe between himself, my mother, and us three sons, and put them into offering envelopes that we would carry with us to Sunday School on Sunday mornings. I learned, whether consciously or unconsciously at a young age, that I was not to go to Church empty-handed. Instead, I was to go prepared to worship God with the tithe, as an act of gratitude and thanksgiving for His watch care over my life.

Even after I left home and went to college, got married and began to raise a family, I never stopped tithing; it had become a part of my life in Christ. Even during difficult financial crises, I would continue to tithe, believing that God would take care of me and my family. I honestly believe that when we tithe, God multiplies the ninety percent to go further than if I had kept the whole hundred percent for myself. Do you remember the story of the multiplication of the five loaves and the two fish? Do you believe that really happened? I do. And I believe that just as the five thousand ate and were filled, with food left over, that our gracious Lord will multiply that ninety percent when we offer ten percent back to Him, in such a way that we cannot understand, to stretch farther than the one hundred percent would have gone.

Ask yourself: "Is my family budget tight? Is my

business hurting? Am I worshipping God with a tithe? Fr. Richard Ballew of blessed memory taught me that there is an invisible string extending from my heart to my wallet in my hip pocket. It reminded me of this passage from Christ's Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Let us take this passage and apply it to the principle of tithing, realizing that our hearts are intricately tied to our money.

Sometimes we may wonder, as a church community, why we aren't growing, why we aren't vibrant, why we seem to be stuck in a rut, why people are unhappy, why we can't do what needs to be done with the church facilities, why we can't have a fulltime pastor. We say to ourselves, "We need help. We need financial assistance. Why doesn't somebody help us? Why doesn't the big church down the way help us? Why doesn't the Archdiocese help us?"

A priest once announced to his congregation, "I have wonderful news. We have all the money we need!" The faithful breathed a sigh of relief with great joy. "But," he said, "there is bad news... That money is in your wallet." Do we really need help? Do we really need financial assistance? Is no one truly willing to help? We have all the money we need; we just need to worship God with our first fruits.

I once had a conversation with man who insisted that the key to Church growth in his community was a full-time priest, and a beautiful new church building. "I know people will come and join the church if we have those two things" he said. I responded, "It's kind of like the baseball movie *Field of Dreams*, right? If you build it, they will come." He said, "Exactly." I responded again - "I have a different formula: If we tithe, God will build it, and they will come." He didn't like that, because he wasn't tithing and didn't want to tithe. He wanted someone else to worship God with their money.

Here's another formula: If *we* tithe, not if *he* tithes, or a *few people* tithe, but if *we* tithe. God certainly looks into every individual's heart, but he also looks into the corporate heart of a community. Have you ever heard the phrase "God is no respecter of persons"? In this particular application, I would say that God will not respect just if a few people tithe, but he is looking for

the widow's mite as well. He is looking for a corporate action, a corporate agreement, a corporate act of worship, adoration, and trust.

As a member of the Department of Missions and Evangelism for over twenty years, I have often been asked, "What is the key to church growth?" I don't know if there is any one key, but I do know where to begin. Church growth begins with a tithing community.

The act of receiving the tithes and offerings of the people should be a prominent feature in our worship services. The Baby Boomer generation got rid of the formality of "passing the plate" during worship services when they created the Jesus Movement churches. This preference for just having an offering box tucked away at the entrance in the back of the church has been adopted by many Christian denominations and even many Orthodox Churches. How can we teach tithing as an act of worship in gratitude to God when the collection of such tithes and offerings is hidden and finds no place in the Liturgy? Have you ever heard it said, "out of sight, out of mind"? In my opinion, we need to give in the Divine Liturgy visibly and physically as a part of the "work of the people," an act of worship to the living God.

Not only will God take care of our parish if we commit ourselves to this spiritual discipline, but we will also be able to take care of our Mother, the Church on the Archdiocese level, with the overflow of God's blessing. Is it not appropriate that as our mother (the Archdiocese) cares for our spiritual nurture, we would in turn, care for her material needs? She is our mother.

Shall we get down to brass tacks? Fr. Peter Gillquist of blessed memory was once asked, "Should I tithe on my gross income or my net income?" Fr. Peter responded, "Which one do you want God to bless?" Enough said.

Maybe beginning to tithe ten percent is just too big of a leap. If so, why not get there with baby steps? What if I were to commit to a plan to tithe one percent this month, two percent next month, three percent the following month, and so on, until ten months later I was really tithing the whole ten percent? We can do this. Remember God's promise. Remember the feeding of the five thousand. Remember this saving commandment and offer God's own of God's own in behalf of all and for all.

Fr. John D. Finley, Chairman
Department of Missions and Evangelism

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The Children's Relief Fund



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Alternatively, you may send a check payable to: **Children's Relief Fund, P.O. Box 90072, Brooklyn, NY 11209**



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Be very generous in your contribution to this campaign. As we practice the virtues that cleanse our souls, let us not forget or refrain from the "greatest of the virtues." As important as prayer and fasting are, they are of no avail to us if we fail to give to those in need.



You can give your gifts to the hungry in honor of a loved one on any occasion such as a birthday, baptism, anniversary, thank you, retirement or any other special event. "A Gift from the Heart" is also a thoughtful memorial. We will send a personalized icon card to the person you designate to inform them of the gift you gave in their honor.

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