

*We would like to welcome all parish visitors and invite you to join us after the Liturgy for Coffee hour.*

# Orthodox Church of the Mother of God

OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson

Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



**Sunday, February 5, 2017**

Gospel: Luke 18:10-14

**Tone 8**

Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15

## *Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee*

**Afterfeast of the Meeting. Repose of St. Theodosius of Chernígov (1696). Beginning of the Lenten Triodion.** Holy Martyr Agatha of Palermo in Sicily (251). Martyr Theodula of Anazarbus in Cilicia, and with her Martyrs Helladius, Macarius and Evagrius (ca. 304). Icon of the Most-holy Theotokos, "SEARCH OF THE LOST".

### **Troparion – Tone 8**

*By Thy Cross Thou didst destroy death. To the thief Thou didst open Paradise. For the Myrrhbearers Thou didst change weeping into joy, and Thou didst command Thy disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that Thou art risen, // granting the world great mercy.*

### **Kontakion – Tone 4**

*Let us flee from the pride of the Pharisee! / And learn humility from the Publican's tears! / Let us cry to our Savior, / have mercy on us, / only merciful One!*



*Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee Beginning of the Lenten Triodion*

## **Prayer Requests**

### **For Health of:**

**Nicole**, on her birthday, offered by her godmother Tammy Zimmerman.

**Jennifer Inferrera**, on her birthday (Feb. 3), offered by her family.

**John Felenczak**, recovering from surgery, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

**Matushka Barbara Baz**, undergoing surgery on Wednesday, February 8 offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

### **In Memory of:**

**Pauline Prinz**, offered by her daughter Lore Stefy.

**Joseph Sheehan**, offered by his daughter Maribeth Romanofsky.

**Igor**, offered by Luba & the Inferrera family.

**Eugene**, offered by his sister Liz Pastor.

**Steven Moskaluk**, pillar of SS. Peter and Paul Church, Buffalo, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

**Daniel Markewich**, Presbyter Matthew and Matushka Rebekah Markewich and their Family, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

**Matushka Juliana Schmemann**, mother of Matushka Mary and Archpriest John Tkachuk, offered by Archbishop Michael, the Diocese of NY/NJ & the OCA.

**Newly Departed Servant Michael**, the father of Father Michael Speck, offered by Archbishop Michael & the Diocese of NY/NJ.

### *Liturgical Schedule*

#### **Sunday, February 5<sup>h</sup>**

9:30 am: No Sunday School  
9:45 am: General  
Confession  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

#### **Sunday, February 12<sup>h</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday, February 18<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

#### **Sunday, February 19<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

#### **Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup>**

6:30 pm: Vespers

#### **Sunday, February 26<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 am: Sunday School  
9:40 am: Hours  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

### *Bulletin Sponsors*

**Tammy Zimmerman, Liz  
Pastore, Lore Stefy,  
Maribeth Romanofsky, Luba  
& the Inferrera Family**

### *Readings:*

#### **The Prokeimenon in the 8<sup>th</sup> Tone:**

Pray and make your vows / before the Lord, our God!  
*(Psalm 75:12)*  
vs. In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel.  
*(Psalm 75:2)*

#### **Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15**

**Timothy**, my son, you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconion, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

#### **Alleluia in the 8<sup>th</sup> Tone:**

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior!  
*(Psalm 94:1)*  
vs. Let us come before His face with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him  
with songs of praise!  
*(Psalm 94:2)*

#### **Gospel: Luke 18:10-14**

**The Lord said this parable**, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."



### *Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee Beginning of the Lenten Triodion*

The Sunday after the Sunday of Zacchaeus is devoted to the Publican and the Pharisee. At Vespers the night before, the TRIODION (the liturgical book used in the services of Great Lent) begins.

Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee who scrupulously observed the requirements of religion: he prayed, fasted, and contributed money to the Temple. These are very good things, and should be imitated by anyone who loves God. We who may not fulfill these requirements as well as the Pharisee did should not feel entitled to criticize him for being faithful. His sin was in looking down on the Publican and feeling justified because of his external religious observances.

*“Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Joy of all the Sorrowful” founded in 1966*

The second man was a Publican, a tax-collector who was despised by the people. He, however, displayed humility, and this humility justified him before God (Luke 18:14).

The lesson to be learned is that we possess neither the Pharisee’s religious piety, nor the Publican’s repentance, through which we can be saved. We are called to see ourselves as we really are in the light of Christ’s teaching, asking Him to be merciful to us, deliver us from sin, and to lead us on the path of salvation.



**Bulletin Sponsor:** Use the sign-up sheet at the candle stand for the health of, eternal memory of or a Pannikhida for a loved one or friend, for a donation of \$10. Sponsors will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

**Memorial Candles:** Candles be purchased at the candle stand, suggested donation of \$10 for a large one.

**Private Confessions:** Can be heard a half hour before any service. See Father Matthew for other times.

**General Confession:** Will be at 9:45 am on the first Sunday of the month.

**Pannikhida Service:** The third Sunday of each month there will be a Pannikhida after Divine Liturgy. If you would like your loved ones to be remembered please give a list of names to Father Matthew before that Sunday for those to be remembered in the month.

**Special Announcements** for the bulletin can be submitted by E-Mail:

[OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com](mailto:OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com)

**The Living Clean Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Friday from 8-9:15 pm downstairs in the community room.

**The Grey Book Step Meeting Group** of Narcotics Anonymous meets every Tuesday from 7-8:00 pm downstairs in the community room.



*Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Parish News*

*Annual Parish meeting: February 12, 2017 after Divine Liturgy*

[The Protection of The Mother of God Sisterhood will have their meeting on Sunday \(Feb. 5\) after the coffee hour.](#) This is our annual meeting. Also a reminder, dues are being collected if you have not paid them they are \$15 per member. See Linda Dantine if you have any questions.

Luncheons are being planned for the beginning of the Lenten period. Details will follow but keep Feb. 19 and Feb. 26 noted on your calendars for Meatfare and Cheesefare Sundays.

*NY/NJ Diocese News*



**THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK and NEW JERSEY 2017 – ANNUAL DIOCESAN ALTAR SERVER RETREAT – 2017**

**“The Mystery of the Diaconate”  
GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY FOREVER!**

Greetings to all of you, your families, and the faithful of your parishes. As we begin this New Year, with the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop MICHAEL, we are preparing for the Annual Diocesan Altar Server Retreat, which will be held at Saint Basil Academy, Garrison NY from February 10-12, 2017, for altar servers of all ages. The main focus of this annual retreat is to bring the young men of our Diocese together in prayer, Christian fellowship, education, and lots of fun!

Under the guidance and direction of Archbishop Michael, the participants will learn the importance and role of the order of the Diaconate in the life of the Church – both in a liturgical function, and as a servant of God’s people, ministering to the outside world. Based upon the recommendation of the participants at last year’s event, we have designed a weekend retreat with guest speaker Protodeacon Peter Skoog of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Pottstown, PA. Protodeacon Peter, who served alongside Archbishop Michael for many years when His Eminence

*"Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Joy of all the Sorrowful" founded in 1966*

was a parish priest, will discuss his life as a deacon, his life as a professional person in the world of business, and how the two go hand-in-hand. As this is a Diocesan sponsored event, Archbishop Michael will be joining us for part of the weekend, at which time the participants will be able to spend some time with His Eminence in prayer and in fellowship.

Please refer to the enclosed materials which contain the schedule of events for the Retreat, as well as other important information and required forms that must be completed for each participant.

Since we are looking to have as many of our young men present for this event as possible, we will also need chaperones. If you know of any fathers or male youth leaders in your parishes who are accompanying the participants and are able to offer their time as chaperones, we would greatly appreciate it. We especially need chaperones on Saturday Evening! Please contact Fr. Stephen Evanina at (845) 462-3887 or [stephenevanina@gmail.com](mailto:stephenevanina@gmail.com) as soon as possible so that we can begin to make arrangements. All chaperones will need to fill out a chaperone registration form and return it to Fr. Stephen prior to their arrival at St. Basil Academy.

In preparing for this event, please find enclosed with this letter a registration form, permission form, and photo release waiver for your children. If you would please fill out, sign and return the forms to us no later than **FEBRUARY 6**, we would greatly appreciate it. **We also now offer easy on-line registration through the Department of Youth Ministry Website: <http://nynjoca.wixsite.com/nynjocayouth/upcoming-events>**

If you have any questions about the retreat, or if you are eager to personally participate in this labor of love alongside Archbishop Michael, then please do not hesitate to contact either one of us. We thank you for your cooperation, and we look forward to hearing from you. May GOD continue to bless and guide you, your families, and the faithful of your parishes!

With Love in Christ,  
Rev. Jason Vansuch  
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**Congratulations & "Many Years!"**

**Deacon Nicholas Garklavs**, ordained to the Holy Priesthood, by His Eminence, Archbishop Michael; on Sunday, January 29, 2017; in Saint Mary Magdalen Church, New York NY. "Axios! Axios! Axios!" Father Nicholas is assigned as Acting Rector of Saint Nicholas Church, Whitestone NY, effective February 11, 2017.

***Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News***

**Metropolitan Tikhon to open Villanova Exhibit February 8**



His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon will preside at ceremonies marking the opening of an exhibit commemorating the 100th Anniversaries of the Enthronement of Saint Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow and the 1917 Russian Revolutions on Wednesday, February 8, 2017.

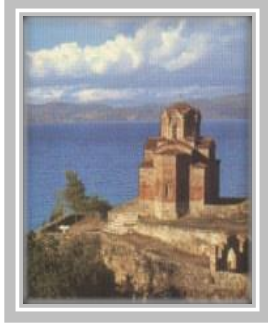
The exhibit, titled "Blood & Soul: The Russian Revolutions of 1917," will run at Villanova University's Falvey Memorial Library through September 1. The exhibit is open to the public.

Metropolitan Tikhon will celebrate a Memorial for the Revolutions' victims at Corr Hall Chapel at 4:00 p.m. The exhibit will officially open one hour later. The Imperial Icon of the Feodorovskaya Mother of God will be present during the service.

Co-curators of the exhibit are Archpriest John J. Perich, Curator of the Metropolitan Museum of the Orthodox Church in America, South Canaan, PA, and the Rev. Richard G. Cannuli, Curator of the University's Art Gallery.

"The exhibit will include a number of Saint Tikhon's personal items, including his family icon, vestments, relics from Moscow's Donskoy Monastery, and other items related to his tenure as Bishop and later Archbishop in North America, where he served before his election as Patriarch of Moscow in 1917," said Father John. "Throughout the duration of the exhibit, several lectures and guest talks on Patriarch Tikhon and other important personalities of the time will be offered, together with a number of documentary films."

An illustrated life of Saint Tikhon is available on the OCA web site.



*Prayers by the Laker, St. Velimirovich, XCIII:*

*The One wished for has come, and will come again, and yet you ask: "Who will prove to us that He is God?"*

I shall ask you, somber brethren, and you respond to what I ask: "If you were to have God come to earth, in what form would you wish to see Him?"

"We should wish to see Him as a man, fairer than all the sons of men, mightier than all the sons of men in word and mightier than all the sons of men in deed. We should wish to see Him as an exceedingly handsome prince; not haughty but as meek as a lamb; someone who would come under our roofs, eat and drink with us, and share everything in common with us except our weakness and sin."

Then I tell you: "You yourselves have already proven that God was among us."

"We should wish to see Him as a man, although He can reveal Himself in any fleshly form. When He speaks, He should speak mightily, as no man has ever spoken. When He walks through this world, He should not walk as a hireling and a slave but as a Lord. Water and winds should listen to Him, people should follow Him, evil spirits should flee from Him. He should be of assistance to people every day: comforting those who mourn, healing the sick, resurrecting the dead. We should wish Him to be this sort of God among us."

Then I tell you: "You yourselves have proven that God was among us."

"We should wish for Him to come to us not as a king with a wealth that perishes, with an army that vanishes, or with a luster that tarnishes -- not as a king but as One greater than kings. And we should wish for Him to come to us not as an ordinary prophet, but rather as the One who was prophesied from the beginning of time, as One who would dare to say that He is older than time, as One who would prophesy to us what will happen at the end of time and after the end of time. And we should wish for Him to come to us not as a priest but as a high priest, in whom all three appear together, God, priest, and sacrifice. This is how we should wish for God to manifest Himself among us."

Then I tell you: "You yourselves have proven that God was among us."

"We should wish for Him to come and go quickly, for we should not be able to endure Him for long. Once He were to come, however, we should wish for His word to reverberate throughout time and space, never ending or stopping; and we should wish for the earth to be kindled by His steps and to burn with heavenly fire, as long as the earth lasts."

Then I tell you: "You yourselves have proven that God was among us."

The One wished for came among men in whatever way men could have wished, and even better still, and mightier still, and fairer still, and even so, even then people said: "Who will prove to us that this is God?"

The One wished for will come again, my soul. Like a fiery dragon He will fly up to you and, if you do not recognize Him, He will fly away, and truly you will see Him no more. Arise, my soul, do not sleep but keep watch. Implant in yourself the image of the One wished for, what He is like, so that you may recognize Him when He comes.

Let the images of all worlds leave you, my soul, and let His image fill you entirely, from east to west, from north to south --so that you may recognize Him when He comes.

For He will come and go like a fiery dragon, and yet you will be dozing and saying: "Who will prove to us...?"

If you do not prove it to yourself, no one will ever prove it to you.

If your everlasting life does not prove Him to you, your everlasting death will.

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*Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church, XCIII:*

**III. Us and Our Neighbors  
Relationships With Other People**

If you cannot close the mouth of one who reviles his brother, at least avoid conversation with him.

**St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 89**

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## The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon

### The Struggle for Holiness

*Holiness comes only to those who struggle*

Not an hour should pass without taking time to examine our heart, for the hour of judgement can come at any time, and we must be ready to give account to God for our life.

There is no spiritual improvement if we do not seek to please God with holiness of life. If we find good in our deeds, we must attribute it to God. If we find we’ve neglected our spiritual struggle, and acted with foolish abandon, we, in our weakness, must turn to God in repentance.

We must resolve to turn ourselves around, with God’s help, and fight against the enemy of our souls. Holiness comes only to those who struggle.



### Daily Reflection Pride Scatters

*“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud (ὑπερηφάνους) by the imagination/thought (διανοίᾳ) of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the humble; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” (Lk 1: 51-53, Song of the Theotokos)*



Here the Mother of God mentions “the proud,” which means me, when I am not embracing humility. Because pride is not so much “a thing” as it is the absence of “a thing,” and that is the grace of humility. Pride means stepping out of contact with God to manage things on my own. In effect it means stepping out into the cold, nay, into a blizzard, of my own thoughts and “imagination,” which, without God’s humbling grace, in the long run renders me “scattered” and ineffective. So it is “by” or “through” their very own thoughts and imagination (διανοίᾳ) that, as the Mother of God notes here, He scatters the proud.

But let me not be alone with my various thoughts today, because I don’t need to be. There is One greater and more powerful than me, willing to lift me up, and fill my heart “with good things,” when it’s not cluttered and preoccupied with my own “imagination.” Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life, come and abide in us. Amen!

### Holy Orthodox Quotes

“Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.”

+St Anthony the Great

#### Matthew 18:15-17

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.† But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.†

#### John 15:12-13

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

#### 1 Corinthians 8:9, 11-13

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

**Romans 13:8-10**

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Galatians 5:13-15**

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.† For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

**Ephesians 4:1-3**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,† with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,† endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**Hebrews 10:24**

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,†

**1 Peter 4:8-10**

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

**1 John 4:7-8, 20-21**

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.† He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

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*The Philokalia: Daily Readings*

Be full of reverence for our Lord's sufferings, for the self-emptying of the divine Logos for our sake and, above all, for the sacrifice of the divine, life-creating body and blood and their interfusion with us.

+ **St Theognostos, On the Practice of Virtue**

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*Ancient Christian Wisdom*

It is a kind of self-projection of our own when we insist on other people becoming good. In reality, we wish to become good, but because we are unable to, we demand it of others and insist on this. And whereas all things are corrected through prayer, we often are distressed or become outraged and pass judgment on others.

+ **St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia**

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*Wisdom of the Church Fathers*

"What is sweeter than the Mother of my God?"

**Saint John Damascene  
(676-749)**

"Mother of God does not need our praise. It is we who need her glory. How indeed can glory be glorified, or the source of light be enlightened? We are weaving a crown for ourselves in the doing. "I live," the Lord says, "and I will glorify those who glorify Me."

Wine is truly pleasant to drink, and bread to eat. The one rejoices, the other strengthens the heart of man. But what is sweeter than the Mother of my God? She has taken my mind captive, and held my tongue in bondage. I think of her by day and night. She, the Mother of the Word, supplies my words. The fruit of sterility makes sterile minds fruitful”.

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*Through the Grace of God – Orthodox Christianity*

**St John Chrysostom: Afflictions**

“Of all the afflictions that burden the human race, there is not one, whether spiritual or bodily, that cannot be healed by the Holy Scriptures.”

**St John Chrysostom: Supplication To God**

“It’s not an abundance of words that supplicate God, but a pure soul which manifests good deeds”

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*Living In Hope*  
**The Tension of the Unseen**

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans that hope is something unseen. Once we see it, it is no longer hope. So hope inherently involves a patient waiting for a thing yet to be realized.

On this, the feast of our Lord's presentation in the temple, my mind always goes back to the Prophet Symeon, and the moment of having his hope actualized. He held Christ in his arms and saw the salvation and light of the world.

His journey strengthens my sense of hope. And hope is not easy. Our lives are filled with the tension of waiting for goodness that we do not possess. To live with hope requires a great deal of patience, conviction and strength of character. Of course, this much better than living with the opposite - despair. But better is not easy. Hope involves an often painful yearning and desire for something more true, holy and beautiful than what is before our eyes. It is something that can only be sustained by God's grace.

The Prophet Symeon reminds me that God's grace abounds. Our memory of God is the key to keeping hope alive. So we remember the times that God's grace has been evident in our lives. And moving outside ourselves, we look to the experience of God in community. We remember what God has done in the lives of our family, friends and parishes - not to mention the great saints, mystics and prophets throughout the centuries. St Symeon is one such example. A man who was promised to see Christ, and had that hope fulfilled in extreme old age.

Christ promises that He will meet with any and everyone, if they are willing. This is the hope, joy and central truth of the Kingdom of God. To be forever with God Who is Life, Light and Love. This hope reveals itself in countless ways here and now. Sometimes through a word of conviction while reading Scripture, sometimes through a kind word from a friend. Sometimes it comes through being challenged to grow by our own failures, and sometimes through an unexpected miracle. These are all pledges of an ultimate promise yet to be fulfilled.

As we wait for it, we have to have the spiritual eyes to spot these moments, and a disciplined mind that can remember them. No, it is not an easy thing to live in hope, but it is a worthy thing. I would add, a necessary thing. But if our hope is tied to the immovable character of God (as revealed in Christ), and ultimate issues of salvation, then it is something that is sure not to disappoint.

**God be with you  
Blessed Feast!  
Unworthy Seraphim**





**From Complete Ruins to Unexpected Development  
by OCMC Communications (1/31/2017)**



*The following is an article titled "From Complete Ruins to Unexpected Development" written by Albanian Daily News which interviews His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios about how the Orthodox Church in Albania has endured and overcome hardships throughout the past three decades:*

**It was the beginning of 1991 when His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania was appointed to be Patriarchal Exarch in Albania. In an exclusive interview with Albanian Daily News His Beatitude reveals details of his endeavor to resurrect the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania fully destroyed by the Communist Regime in this Balkan country starting in 1967.**

"In general, we gathered in ruins of churches, under trees, or in the open air throughout the country, and I witnessed despair and expectation," says Archbishop Anastasios dwelling on the challenging enterprise for the development of the Orthodox Church of Albania, which, as he confesses, turned him into an 'International Beggar'.

"I knew clearly that always I begged for something very essential and not for myself," he says explaining that to realize the necessary projects he had to run in different directions: to explain, to persuade, and to beg. "I reached out to all my friends in Europe, the United States and Australia searching for support from various foundations and individuals. Thanks be to God, help came from directions that I never expected," says Archbishop Anastasios. He speaks of suspicion, especially due to his Greek origin, tribulations, misunderstandings, accusations and slanders faced many times throughout all these years. "In all trying and difficult situations our refuge and consolation is the certainty that "If God is with us, who can be against us?" His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios admits with determination in the following interview:

**Your Beatitude, how did it happen that you were chosen to be Primate of Tirana, Durrës and All Albania, and what was your reaction at the beginning when religion was being reborn in Albania after the fall of the Communist Regime?**

"Surprise was my first reaction. It was the beginning of 1991 when I received a call in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, that has the responsibility to care for and support the Orthodox Churches in difficulties, asked me to be Patriarchal Exarch in Albania. At this time, I was full Professor of the History of Religion in the National University of Athens, Acting Archbishop in East Africa for the organization of the Orthodox Mission, and Moderator (Chairman) of the "Commission and Conference on World Mission and Evangelism" of the World Council of Churches (my post-graduate studies in Germany and subsequent writings focused on world religions and Christian witness).

I arrived in Tirana in July of 1991. After my first contact with the political leadership I began to visit the major towns and numerous villages where traditionally there were Orthodox communities. In general, we gathered in ruins of churches, under trees, or in the open air throughout the country, and I witnessed despair and expectation. My first message was: "We dare to hope. The God of Love will not abandon us!" The first words that I learned in Albanian – I was already 62 years old – were the Paschal greeting: "Krishti u Ngjall (Christ is Risen)!" The place of the

Archbishop in a church, especially in the unique case of a church that had been fully destroyed, as in the case of Albania, was not a throne of comfort, power and glory, but a place of service with the spirit of the cross. Jesus Christ described very clearly his duty: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all."

**What were the first steps to resurrect the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania at that time and where did you get the strength to carry out your mission? Who were your supporters morally and financially?**

We started to celebrate, preach, and circulate the Bible and Christian literature in the Albanian language. We organized a committee with the help of an elderly priest and a lay person from each of the main districts in order to represent the Orthodox Church in public relations. We created a seminary for the preparation of local clergy. Since we did not have the necessary buildings and facilities, we rented a hotel in Durrës and we began there with many difficulties. We accepted people that had, at minimum, finished high school. By the grace of God, during my service here, I have educated, ordained and supported more than 160 Albanian citizens to priesthood.

When I started, I did not have any promises for either a financial budget or a team of people to help me. I accepted this challenging adventure with spontaneous faith in God and free obedience to the Church. The only thing that was sure for me financially was my pension from the University of Athens. To realize the necessary projects, I had to run in different directions: to explain, to persuade, and to beg. I reached out to all my friends in Europe, the United States and Australia searching for support from various foundations and individuals. Thanks be to God, help came from directions that I never expected. For the sake of the development of the Orthodox Church of Albania, I became an 'International Beggar,' throughout this, I knew clearly that always I begged for something very essential and not for myself.

As far as the question, 'from where do you get the strength to carry out your mission,' I have to remind you that the whole of my life is based in the certainty that the Supreme Reality in the universe is the God of Love. I always recall this wonderful verse from Saint John the Evangelist, "God is Love and who abides in love abides in God and God in Him." I am persuaded that this definition about the Supreme Reality is the most significant and is always relevant and a source of inspiration. Of course I know that there are many people that do not believe in God let alone a God of Love, and perhaps these people are suspicious when they hear us speak about our beliefs. I respect their freedom to have their ideas, but I do not stop to be inspired by my Christian faith, by the certainty of the presence of Christ in every step of our efforts. I believe with all my heart that the most important thing that we can offer and experience in life is love, that the most essential effort of the Church is to be a workshop of love radiating the love of God.

Many times throughout all these years we have faced suspicion (especially due to my Greek origin), tribulations, misunderstandings, accusations and slanders. In all trying and difficult situations our refuge and consolation is the certainty that "If God is with us, who can be against us?" and especially the experience of Saint Paul who wrote, "I can do all this through Christ who strengthens me." I understand that this language may be strange for people that have different religious persuasions; I mentioned this only as a sign that there is an area of faith and experience that offers the spiritual power to overcome obstacles and tribulations. Faith and prayer remain the secret strength of everyone who tries to have a relationship with God and to serve. In these endeavors, I was not alone. During these 25 years we had various excellent coworkers, the majority local people, but also approximately 4-6 clergy and 5-8 lay persons from foreign countries, persons with a spirit of love and sacrifice.

**It is an important historical fact that with the creation of the Albanian state in 1912, a new phase began for the Orthodox Church. The coming of political independence brought repeated demands requiring the independence of all religious communities by the centers that were in other countries. How do you consider that period?**

It was a natural expectation (since other Balkan nations had received this Autocephality from the Ecumenical Patriarchate). It was also imperative that this Autocephality be realized through the proper

Ecclesiastical Tradition and procedure. It was necessary to keep both the global historical identity as a member of Orthodoxy, as well as her local expression in the Albanian State. The solution was finally formulated after mutual agreement from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Albanian authorities with the Canonical offering of Autocephality in April, 1937. As it is written clearly in the first article of her Constitution: "The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, having as her Founder and Head our Lord and God Jesus Christ, is a divine institution in space as a presence and manifestation of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, remaining integrally united with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and all the sister Autocephalous Orthodox Churches and

unwaveringly safeguards the sources of faith, namely Holy Scripture, Holy Tradition and the Holy Apostolic and Synodal Canons.”

In the Orthodox tradition, we have a Synodical system; no “Autocephalous” church is independent in the sense of a secular institution. There are a lot of continuous internal relations and interdependence. As it was emphasized in the Holy and Great Synod of Orthodoxy, in 2016 in Crete, “The Orthodox Autocephalous Churches do not constitute a federation of Churches, but the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Each local Church as she offers the holy Eucharist is the local presence and manifestation of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” The unity of the Orthodox Church is primarily based upon the Eucharist and upon the continued apostolic succession of her bishops.

In this theological frame the restoration of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, after her complete destruction brought by the atheistic regime, was necessary to be carried out according to the Orthodox Tradition and ethos. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, which had granted Autocephality to the Church of Albania, took the initiative for the restoration of the annihilated Church. Everything has developed in the proper ecclesiastical manner; this is well known, not only in the Orthodox circles, but generally in the Christian world.

**On November 22nd, 1967, Albania was officially proclaimed an Atheist state – the only one of its kind in the world and in history. In this state, all forms of religious expression were constitutionally forbidden. Hundreds of churches were pulled down, and many more repurposed. How did you experience that hard time the Albanian people were passing through? What were some of the efforts and achievements in your endeavor for the restoration of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania?**

Living outside of Albania, I followed with great pain and concern the awful atheistic persecution in Albania. To destroy not only the religious buildings but also the faith in the heart of the people was the most terrible injustice. To uproot from the conscious of the people religious faith was truly a crime against humanity. I kept the certainty that God would perform a miracle, that religious freedom would be offered once again to Albania.

As far as my effort is concerned, I add to what I mentioned before about the preparation of Albanian citizens for the service of the Church, that in following years we erected the “Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy” in Shen Vlash, Durrës, and two high schools named after the “Holy Cross,” all with boarding facilities, as well as a school for Byzantine music. A main priority according to the standards of Orthodoxy was the creation and development of the Holy Synod. Today it consists of: the Archbishop, six metropolitans and one bishop. Two other important steps were the ratification of the Statutes of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania and the agreement with the government of Albania which became State Law nr. 10057 on January 22nd, 2009. Both constitute the basic legal documents of our Church.

Throughout this period, we succeeded in erecting more than 150 new churches, large and small; in addition, another 60 cultural monuments - churches and monasteries - were restored and over 160 additional churches have been repaired. Also, more than 70 buildings have been constructed or renovated to make nurseries, schools, youth centers, workshops and clinics. All together there have been more than 450 building projects. Dozens of books on Theology and Spirituality as well as various periodicals have been published by our private printing press. Fellowships of youth, women and intellectuals were established as well as a radio station to further develop the Christian life and witness.

During all these years one crucial issue remained: to secure the financial continuation of all these efforts for the future. This dream was more difficult to realize. By the power of God, in 2016, we succeeded in the completion of a hydro-power plant near Librazhd. This project has four key features: it fully meets all environmental standards, it uses only renewable energy sources, it aids in the development of the infrastructure of Albania by contributing to the available electricity, and has a clear social perspective: by its income we will be able to continue our spiritual, philanthropic, educational and social endeavors.

**Besides religion, did you get involved in other projects to support the ordinary people whose situation was hard at that time?**

During periods of great crisis (1992, 1994, 1997, etc.) we tried to alleviate the suffering of the people. We offered extensive humanitarian aid providing thousands of tons of food, clothes and medicines. We have placed a strong emphasis on general education evidenced by the establishment of approximately 30 schools of all levels: nursery, elementary, high schools, institutes of technical education and a university-college (with the name Logos). During these years we offered over 30,000 yearly scholarships, and more than 11,000 children and students were aided in their studies.

*“Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Joy of all the Sorrowful” founded in 1966*

In the field of healthcare, our “Annunciation Medical Diagnostic Center” in Tirana, offers health care services with the contribution of renowned doctors and modern medical equipment. More than two million visits and millions of analyses have been carried out during the 17 years of its operation. Other medical programs have been organized to serve people in some cities and the countryside. We have also developed and supported a number of social programs including development projects in mountain areas.

A very important effort was undertaken in 1999 when thousands of refugees arrived in Albania from Kosovo. Our Church, in cooperation with other European Churches, aided and housed over 33,000 refugees. These are only a portion of the concrete efforts we have realized, but it is not possible to go into more detail in this interview (additional information is available on our website [www.orthodoxalbania.com](http://www.orthodoxalbania.com) and through relevant church publications).

In the various departments, foundations and institutions created by the Church, over 800 people are employed and have worked through these years. Adding the people who have worked for the construction companies used for the various programs of the Church through the last 25 years, that number rises significantly and this gives a glimpse of the social and financial contribution of the Church for the development of the country. In summary, our Church has substantially contributed to the reconstruction and to the social and spiritual development of Albania.

**What are the links and cooperation of the Orthodox Church of Albania at an international level?**

We participate fully in all the activities of the Orthodox churches. Our Church’s contribution was very important in the “Synaxes”(special meetings) of the primates of the Orthodox churches of the last years and particularly in the Holy and Great Synod of Orthodoxy that took place in Crete in June of 2016. Our Church also became a member of the Conference of European Churches (Geneva), the World Council of Churches (Geneva) and also of the inter-religious World Conference for Religions for Peace (New York). It is known that in all these international organizations we had an active participation (in the Conference of European Churches I have been Vice President, in the World Council of Churches, President and in the inter-religious Religions for Peace honorary President).

**Albania is lauded for the religious harmony among different religious communities and people of other faiths across the country. How do you consider this, what is your role in this endeavor?**

Even before coming to Albania, I was a member of the “Working Theological Group for Dialogue with People of Other Faiths and Ideologies” of the World Council of Churches. Here in Albania we are in a continual “dialogue of life,” with deep respect for every human person irrespective of his or her religious or philosophical ideas or persuasions. From the first year, we worked for cordial relations among the heads of the other religious communities. We took the initiative for the creation of the Interdenominational Bible Society. Also we established the Inter-Religious Council of Albania and we became a member of the World Conference on Religion for Peace. In general, we tried to promote not only tolerance but brotherly collaboration and harmonious coexistence. This was recognized publically by state authorities. Religious harmony in Albania is a concrete fruit of conscious and diligent efforts during all of these years from all religious communities. It must continue to be a spiritual asset of the Albanian people.

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