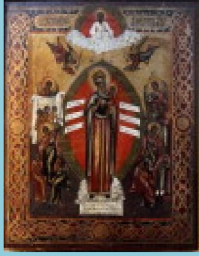


Greeting: *"Christ is Risen!"* Response: *"Indeed, He is Risen!"*



# Orthodox Church of the Mother of God

OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson

Reader Charles Gallagher

Parish Council President: Trudy Ellmore

Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



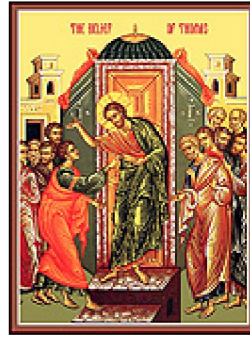
**Sunday, April 19, 2015**

Gospel: John 20:19-31

**Tone 1**

Epistle: Acts 5:12-20

*Antipascha 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pascha; St Thomas Sunday*



Antipascha: St Thomas Sunday

*Христос  
Воскресе!*

*Восстину  
Воскресе!*

*Thomas touched Your life-giving side with an eager hand, O Christ God,  
When You did come to Your apostles through closed doors.  
He cried out with all: You are my Lord and my God!*

## *Today the Church Remembers*

Antipascha: St Thomas Sunday • Venerable John of the Ancient Caves in Palestine  
• Martyrs Christopher & Theonas at Nicomedia • Martyr Anthony at Rome •  
Hieromartyr Paphnutius of Jerusalem • St George the Confessor and Bishop of  
Antioch, in Pisidia • St Tryphon the Patriarch of Constantinople • Venerable  
Nicephorus the Abbot of Catabad • Monkmartyr Agathangelus of Esphigmenou of  
Mt Athos • Venerable Simeon of Philotheou • St Matrona of Moscow

## *Weekly Bulletin Sponsors*

### *For Health of:*

**Andrew Morris** on his birthday, offered by his grandmother Lore Stefy.

**Robert Morris Sr.** on his birthday, offered by his mother-in-law Lore Stefy.

**Father Matthew** on his birthday, offered by his family.

**Maria & Sylvia Bachinsky** on their birthday, offered by Steve Bachinsky.

### *In Eternal Memory of:*

**Anthony Daniel Jankowski** on his birthday, offered by parents Linda &  
Paul, brothers Adam, Andrew & Alex Jankowski.

***Liturgical Schedule:***

**Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup> – NJ Deanery**  
10:00 am: Bright Saturday Divine  
Liturgy with Archbishop Michael,  
Paschal Buffett and Fellowship @ St.  
Andrew's Camp, Jewell, NY

**Saturday, April 18th**  
6:30 pm: Vespers

**Sunday, April 19<sup>th</sup>**  
9:30 am: Church School  
9:40 am: Hours  
9:45 am: Choir Rehearsal  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

**Saturday, April 25th**  
6:30 pm: Vespers

**Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>**  
9:30 am: Church School  
9:40 am: Hours  
9:45 am: Choir Rehearsal  
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

***Readings:***

**Epistle:** Acts 5:12-20

**In Those Days,** many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high honor. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, "Go

and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

**Gospel:** John 20:19-31

**On the evening of that day,** the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him: "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them: "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said: "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to Him: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

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



**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 and \$2 for a small 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:

[Bulletin@ChurchMotherOfGod.org](mailto:Bulletin@ChurchMotherOfGod.org)

**Volunteers** are needed to clean the church. Please use the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board downstairs or candle stand, to indicate when you can help.

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

*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: Parish News***

**Reader Charles** has accepted the call to once again serve with an **OCMC Youth Outreach Mission Team** going to Albania June 15 to July 1, 2015 and to go on a pilgrimage to **Mt. Athos** (the Holy Mountain) in Greece July 1 to July 9, 2015. Please remember him in your prayers in his many preparations. If your heart is moved to support him financially, please speak to him for information on how to do so. Every dollar donated over the cost of the trip will be given to the orphanage (Children's Home of Hope on the grounds of the Shen Vlash Monastery and Resurrection of Christ Theological Academy in Durres, Albania).

**The Parish Council** will be meeting on Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup> downstairs in the community room right after Divine Liturgy and Coffee Hour.

**As you can** see in the financial snapshot, our expenses have not exceeded our offerings. Though we entered 2015 with a deficit of almost \$3,600, your generosity has almost eliminated that deficit. Glory to God! May He bless you for your generosity! Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak to our Treasurer, Andy Romanofsky or Council President, Trudy Ellmore.



Financial Snapshot				
	January	February	2014 Deficit Carried over	1st Quarter To date
<b>Income</b>	\$3,157.00	\$2,770.00		\$5,927.00
<b>Expense</b>	<u>\$1,836.96</u>	<u>\$1,854.65</u>		<u>\$3,691.61</u>
<b>Balance</b>	\$1,320.04	\$915.35	<b>-\$3,560.80</b>	<b>-\$1,325.41</b>



### ***Sisterhood of the Protector of the Mother of God News***

New section, information and news to follow.



### ***NY/NJ Diocese News***

**Celebration of Archbishop Michael’s 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his Consecration on Saturday May 9, 2015.** Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 9:30 am, St. John the Baptist Church, 170 Lexington Avenue, Passaic NJ 07055. Followed by a luncheon at 1 pm ay The Brownstone, 351 West Broadway, Paterson, NJ 07522. Reservations Required, \$50 Adults, \$10 Children, 5 years & under free. Reserve on-line at

[form.jotform.us/form/40903603006139](http://form.jotform.us/form/40903603006139) or contact Father Joseph Lickwar at 201-434-1986 or by email at [josephlickwar@gmail.com](mailto:josephlickwar@gmail.com)



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

#### **St. Tikhon’s Monastery announces Memorial Day Pilgrimage schedule**

The community of Saint Tikhon’s Monastery and Seminary extends a cordial invitation to all to attend the 111th Annual Pilgrimage over Memorial Day weekend, May 22-25, 2015.

“It is always a blessing to welcome hierarchs, clergy and faithful from the Orthodox Church in America, other Orthodox jurisdictions and guests from near and far,” said Archimandrite Sergius, the Monastery’s Abbot.

The Pilgrimage will officially open on Friday, May 22 at 3:30 p.m. with the greeting of the Hawaiian Myrrh Streaming Icon of the Mother of God and the celebration of a Molieben, followed by Vespers and Matins, in the Monastery Church of Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk. The icon will be available for veneration throughout the Pilgrimage.

**A detailed schedule of divine services for the weekend is available below.** Updates will appear on the Monastery’s web site.

Saint Tikhon’s Monastery is the oldest Orthodox Christian monastic community in North America. In related news, Saint Tikhon’s Seminary will hold its 73<sup>nd</sup> annual Commencement on Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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

The day will open with the celebration of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at 9:00 a.m. and continue with graduation ceremonies at 1:00 p.m. Additional information will be posted as it becomes available.

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### **St. Tikhon’s Monastery Memorial Day Pilgrimage**

Friday, May 22, 2015

3:30 pm Official Opening of the 111th Pilgrimage Greeting of the Hawaiian Myrrh Streaming Icon with Moleben in the Church.

4:00 pm Vespers and Matins in the Monastery Church. All pilgrims are invited to dinner in the monastery dining hall following the services.

Saturday, May 23, 2015

9:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy A meal for all pilgrims in the Monastery dining hall following services, 1:00 pm 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Academic Commencement of Saint Tikhon’s Theological Seminary

4:30 pm Resurrection Vigil in the Monastery Church. Dinner in the monastery dining hall for all pilgrims following the services.

Sunday, May 24, 2015

9:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. A meal for all pilgrims in the Monastery dining hall following services.

4:00 pm Vespers and Matins in the Monastery Church.

Monday, May 25, 2015

7:30 am Divine Liturgy – Monastery Church

10:00 am Hierarchical Divine Liturgy

12:15 pm Veteran’s Pannikhida and Memorial Service, All Saints Bell Tower

1:30 pm Akathist to Saint Alexis Toth in the Monastery Church

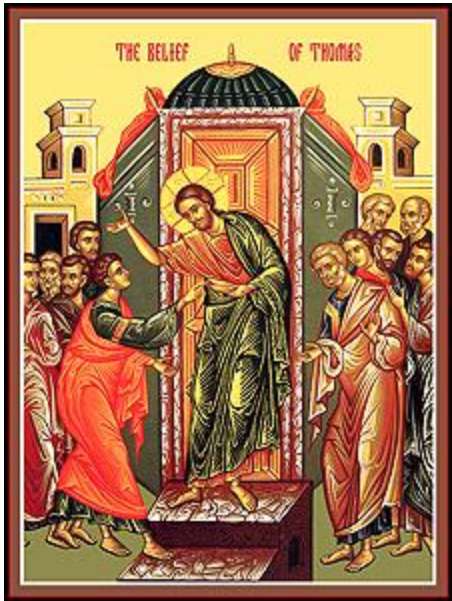
2:30 pm Moleben to the Most Holy Theotokos and Anointing of the Sick, Infirm and all Pilgrims at the Monastery Bell Tower

4:00 pm Vespers and Matins in the Monastery Church





## Antipascha: St Thomas Sunday



Some icons depicting this event are inscribed “The Doubting Thomas.” This is incorrect. In Greek, the inscription reads, “The Touching of Thomas.” The Slavonic inscription is, “The Belief of Thomas.” When St Thomas touched the Life-giving side of the Lord, he no longer had any doubts.

This day is also known as “Antipascha.” This does not mean “opposed to Pascha,” but “in place of Pascha.” Beginning with this first Sunday after Pascha, the Church dedicates every Sunday of the year to the Lord’s Resurrection. Sunday is called “Resurrection” in Russian, and “the Lord’s Day” in Greek.

### Patristic Wisdom for Daily Living with the Church Fathers:

#### See God in the beauty of creation

*The marvelous perfection of creation, where everything fits and works together to bring about God’s plan, should help us keep God always in mind, says St. Basil. If we remain ever aware of the beauty of God’s creation, we’ll give sin no opportunities.*

“And God saw that it was good.”

God does not judge the beauty of his work by the charm of the eyes, and he does not form the same idea of beauty that we form. What he finds beautiful is what, in its perfection, shows all the fitness of art, and what works toward the usefulness of its purpose. So God, who planned an obvious design in his works, approved each one of them, because it fulfilled the purpose for which it was created.

A hand, an eye, or any part of a statue lying apart from the rest, would look beautiful to no one. But if each part is restored to its own place, the beauty of proportion, unto now almost unperceived, would strike even the most uneducated. But the artist, before uniting the parts of his work, distinguishes and recognizes the beauty of each of them, thinking of the purpose that he has in view.

This is how Scripture depicts to us the Supreme Artist, praising each one of His works. Thus earth, air, sky, water, day, night, all visible things, remind us of our Benefactor. We shall not therefore give occasion to sin, we shall give any room to the Enemy within us, if by constant recollection we keep God ever dwelling in our hearts.

—St. Basil, *Hexameron*, 3.10

#### In God’s Presence, consider....

When sin tempts me, does it help to remember that the object of my temptation was created good by God, and for a special purpose?

#### Closing Prayer:

*Father, I praise and thank you that you have created order in a world without shape, giving every creature a place in your creation.*

### Prayers by the Lake, St. Nikolai Velimirovich:

*Are there days gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return? They all attracted you like silk, and now remain behind you like a cobweb. Like honey they greeted you, like stench you bade them farewell. All were totally filled with illusion and sin.*

See how all the pools of water in the moonlight resemble mirrors; and how all the days that were lit up with your levity resemble mirrors. But as you stepped from one day to the next, the false mirrors cracked like thin ice, and you waded through the water and mud.

Can a day that has a morning and an evening as doorways be a day?

O luminous Lord, my soul is burdened with illusions and longs for one day—for the day without doorways, the day from which my soul has departed and sunk into the shifting shadows—for Your day, which I used to call my day, when I was one with You.

Is there any happiness gone by, O man, to which you would wish to return?

Of two morsels of the same sweetness the second is the more trite. You would turn your head away in boredom from yesterday's happiness, if it were set out on today's table.

Moments of happiness are given to you only in order to leave you longing for the happiness in the bosom of the everhappy Lord; and ages of unhappiness are given to you, to waken you out of the drowsy dream of illusions.

O Lord, Lord, my only happiness, will You provide shelter for Your injured pilgrim?

O Lord, my ageless youth, my eyes shall bathe in You and shine more radiantly than the sun.

You carefully collect the tears of the righteous, and with them You rejuvenate worlds.

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### *Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church*

#### **God and Us – Happiness:**

The soul that loves God has its rest in God and in God alone. In all the paths that men walk in the world, they do not attain peace until they draw nigh to hope in God.

St. Issac the Syrian,  
*Homily 56, 89*

### *Is Your Parish a Cruise Ship or Battleship?* *Fr. Aris P. Metrakos*

Some leaders of our parish spent a couple of hours with professional church consultant Rev. Dr. Roy King. Roy (as he likes to be called) put parish-based ministry into crystal clear focus. He told us that 85% of all churches are cruise ships that need to become battleships.

Cruise ships and battleships. What could be more simple and clear?

Think about what happens on a cruise ship. We don't do any work. Someone takes care of every need. Every event (except for lifeboat training) is optional. We have no responsibilities and no accountability.

Isn't this the way most people approach Church? Developing and executing services and programs is someone else's job. We go to services once or twice a year and still call ourselves "members." All work falls under the job description of the paid staff or core volunteers so we have no responsibilities.

Even our duty to support the Church is mitigated through "stewardship," which often means: "So what if I pledge \$52 per year, that's between me and the Almighty!"

Then there's the battleship. The warship has a life or death mission. Every member of the crew has a job that must be executed at the top of his ability. Everyone must work together because they depend on one another for the success of the mission and mutual survival.

A healthy parish must see itself as a battleship. The mission of the Church is life and death. We are called to bring the Gospel to the world and to provide for those in need. No other vocation is as critical or crucial. Each member of the "crew" has a divine calling to define and fill his particular niche in the life of the parish. And when members do not work together, they jeopardize both the work of the Church and their salvation.



Anyone who has spent time aboard a cruise ship and battleship knows that the way of life onboard the two vessels are polar opposites. Cruise ship passengers are relaxed, tanned, and well-fed. Battleship sailors are sleep deprived, grungy, and edgy. No one in his right mind would vacation on a battleship.

But the life of the Church isn't a vacation. It's life and death combat with the evil one. And just like the cruise ship passenger that can't fit into his wardrobe after three nights and four days of stuffing his face, "members" of cruise ship churches are unfit for spiritual warfare.

Perhaps this is why so many parishes are afloat but bloated.

There are few things as satisfying as being part of a focused, disciplined, hard-working team that knows its mission, understands and fulfills its responsibilities, is well-trained, and strives constantly to improve its knowledge and skills.

God is calling us to find our place among the crew of a spiritual battleship.

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*Rev. Aris P. Metrakos is the pastor of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He is frequent retreat leader and speaker for both teens and adults. Prior to attending seminary, Fr. Aris was an aviator for the US Navy. He travels annually to Romania to help the Romanian Orthodox Church establish ministries for Romanian youth. You can contact Fr. Aris at [FrMetrakos@orthodoxytoday.org](mailto:FrMetrakos@orthodoxytoday.org).*

### ***Glory to God for All Things***

*The Work That Saves by Fr. Stephen Freeman*

Do we cooperate in our salvation? Do our efforts make a difference?

These questions lie at the heart of a centuries-old religious debate in Christianity. Classically, the Protestant reformers said, “No,” to these questions, arguing that we are saved solely and utterly by God’s grace, His unmerited favor. The Catholic Church replied that “faith without works” is dead and that faith alone is insufficient.

This debate, with various twists and turns, has continued down through the centuries of Christian culture. At one point, there were complaints of “cheap grace,” where the exaltation of pure grace over works led to a very complacent and lazy Christianity. There were also periods of extreme reaction, with guilt-driven excesses of devotion.

Eastern Orthodoxy is a late-comer to this debate, but it is not a stranger. Contemporary Orthodox are quick to latch on to the doctrine of “synergy” and take sides against the cheap grace of Protestant Evangelicalism. Classically, Orthodox thought holds both that we are saved through the action of God (grace), but that we necessarily cooperated in that work (synergy=cooperation). For many converts, this balance has seemed attractive and a needed corrective to the feel-good theology of contemporary Christian culture. But it has a dark side.

That dark side is found in the echoes of the guilt-ridden specters of works-righteousness. How much cooperation is enough? For it is obvious that we do not pray as we should or give as we should – or do anything as we should. If our cooperation is required, are we failing? For many in our culture the answer is inevitably, “Yes.” They never do enough, anywhere at any time. Their lives are haunted with disapproval and shame, well-worn paths that rarely let them venture into joy.

But it is a mistake to embrace synergy as part of the classical Protestant/Catholic debate. It was an answer to a question asked in a very different context and in centuries that long-predated the modern conversation. Synergy is not a talking-point within the grace-versus-works debate. Synergy is certainly an affirmation of the human role in salvation. Its most famous example is found in the ‘yes’ of the Mother of God in the Incarnation of Christ. Her acceptance and embrace of the heavenly announcement are seen as *necessary* components in God-becoming-man. God does not impose Himself upon human freedom. Our free response is required for the life of true Personhood that is the hallmark of salvation.



Synergy is properly seen as *response* rather than *work*. The whole life of salvation is marked by grace and is gracious in all its aspects. Consider this statement in St. Paul: Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness... (Rom 4:4-5).

There is a kind of work that has no wages and does not belong to the world of debt described by St. Paul. And it is this sort of work that is encompassed in the term *synergy*. That work can be described as *gracious response*. It is worth noting two instances in which the *work* of our spiritual lives is described: Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (Joh 6:28-29) and rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1Th 5:16-18)

In the first case, “work” is equated with believing. It means that the work we do is to love Christ and to keep His commandments. In the second case, the “will of God” is fulfilled in giving thanks for all things. The dynamic of saving grace in our lives is marked by becoming like God. God gives graciously and freely. We receive graciously and freely by giving thanks for all things.

In this manner, our own “work” is itself marked by a kind of grace. We cannot hear the meaning of grace in English, but in the Greek, it also carries the meaning of “gift” (it’s the same word). Gifts are never given with an expectation of return – they are gracious and free. But they are only rightly received with thanksgiving. This is true of the life of grace in the believer.

There is a highly moralized version of synergy, in which God is seen to give us grace, but we must do something in our lives to make it effective. In this model we are always judging the “results” of our “cooperation” with grace, and assuming that the lousy outcomes we see are simply our fault. This experience becomes a

self-fulfilling prophecy of failure and remorse. It is a distortion of grace-filled synergy.

I have written (and been criticized for it) about the “unmoral Christian.” My intention has been to unmask and disarm this false notion of synergy. We indeed are not saved through the “works” that Protestants tend to criticize. The “work” we do is largely a state of heart from which all subsequent grace-empowered actions flow. That state of heart is best described as “grateful thanksgiving.” The Eucharistic life is the true existence of the Christian. The giving of thanks is the first of all works and the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life. Everything that proceeds from the giving of thanks works to our salvation. That which does not proceed from the giving of thanks tends to work to our destruction.

There has grown up a virtual cottage industry of Orthodox commentary (particularly on the internet where all of us can self-publish). This commentary (including that by some priests) is often marked by poor theological training or understanding, by argument and debate, and by an extreme lack of experience in the actual guidance of souls towards healing and salvation. That is to say – much of it is worthless and some of it is actually damaging.

This can especially be true in discussions of synergy. The wrong treatment of such pastoral matters can produce despair and distrust in naive readers whose expectations have been raised through the reading of the lives of the saints and yet whose experience is marked by the same repeated moral failures that they have always known. Well-intentioned but ignorant writers argue that what is needed is yet more moral goading. I have been criticized for possibly lightening the moral load or suggesting that all moral effort is of no use.

One form of moral effort (the most common) is indeed of no use. It belongs to the same category as the works criticized by Protestant theology. We pray, with no understanding, laboring to complete a prayer rule that amounts to little more than “going through the motions.” We fast as though every slip were a matter of sin in need

of confession. Some go so far as to carefully search through the labels on every grocery product, seeking for tale-tell signs of “milk products,” having invented for themselves a new yoke of bondage that turns Orthodox fasting into a new version of kosher. In short, there is a form of asceticism that is ill-taught and ill-practiced and produces either despairing Christians or oppressive Pharisees (sometimes in one and the same person).

The grounding of the Christian life is thanksgiving. If you cannot fast with thanksgiving, your fast will be of little use. The same extends to all Christian practices and commandments. The essential work of the Christian life is grateful thanksgiving. It is for this reason that Fr. Alexander Schmemmann wrote: “Anyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation.”

There are very deep forms of asceticism, but even these are rightly rooted in the giving of thanks. In the 20th century, perhaps no saint is better known for his ascetical achievements than St. Silouan of Athos. He is known to have endured some 15 years of the experience of hell in his prayers. At its depth, he heard Christ say, “Keep your mind in hell and despair not.” His interpreter and biographer, the Elder Sophrony of Essex, however, is reported to have said, “If you will give God thanks always and for all things, you will fulfill the saying, ‘Keep your mind in hell and despair not.’”

The first duty of a spiritual father is to lead a soul into the practice of giving thanks. In this manner they will acquire the Spirit of Peace and be able to sustain the Christian life. But without thanksgiving, they will only fall into despair or delusion. Thanksgiving is the foundation of the Christian life. When this is understood and in place, other things can be properly understood.

For example, it is common to read in the spiritual writings of Orthodoxy (and to hear in the services) terms such as “self-loathing.” This is quite common, for example, in the Elder Sophrony’s work. It is very easily taken in the wrong way and those without a proper

foundation will likely come away with a terrible distortion.

“Self-loathing,” in the sense that it is used, is not brought about by the contemplation of our sins (a moral condemnation and disgust with the self). It is rather brought about by the contemplation of God’s love and His fullness of being. It is only as we see ourselves in the light of God Himself, that we can “achieve” the “self-loathing” that Sophrony describes. But even this is *joyful*, because it takes place in the gracious presence of the grace-giving God.

Thanksgiving, as gracious gift, draws us into the very life of the Trinity. For it is that Life that is described by St. John Chrysostom in his Liturgy: The priest prays: “...but account me, Your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer gifts to You. For You are the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received, O Christ our God, and to You we ascribe glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.”

It is this gifting life of the Offerer and the Offered, the Receiver and the Received that we enter as we rightly give thanks always for all things. This is our work, our true synergy, without which we cannot be saved.

About Fr. Stephen Freeman

Fr. Stephen is a priest of the Orthodox Church in America, serving as Rector of St. Anne Orthodox Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He is also author of *Everywhere Present* and the Glory to God podcast series.

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## *The Prologue of Ohrid*

*St. Nikolai Velimirovic*

### **Reflection**

An elder and spiritual father said: “Arising in the morning, say to yourself: Body, work in order to feed yourself; soul, be vigilant in order to save yourself and inherit the Kingdom!” These are not empty words, but this has been the rule of many thousands of monks throughout the centuries—their daily rule of life. By labors they



fed themselves; through prayer they remained vigilant. Why only for monks? Cannot this be the rule of every follower of Christ? Did not Christ Himself give us a clear example of this—an example of physical effort and constant vigilance in prayer?

### **Contemplation**

Contemplate the resurrected Lord Jesus:

1. How He, in His glorified body, is close to His disciples; close to them who are seeking Him (Mary Magdalene in the Garden); close to those who are in fear (the disciples in a closed room); close to those who are hungry (those on the shore of the lake);
2. How He is close, even now, to every one of us who seeks Him, who is in fear, and who is hungry.

### **Homily:**

**On being cautious toward all that is not according to Christ**

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*  
(Colossians 2:8).

Brethren, let us not be enslaved by philosophy, which by conjecture says that there is no eternal life or resurrection from the dead. For we do not arrive at the truth through man’s conjecture, but by God’s revelation. That which we know about the truth, we know from Truth Itself, which was revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and which was communicated to us through the faithful and wise witnesses of this Truth: the apostles and the saints. If we, because of our sins, reject these witnesses and accept the conjecture of humans, we will fall into dark and bitter slavery to nature, to the body, to sin, and to death.

Brethren, let us not be deceived by the empty myths of men, created by men and according to men, that say that another world does not exist, or, if another world does exist, that we do not know anything about it. Behold, we know with confidence that another world does exist. We know this not from conjecturers or deceivers but

from the Lord Jesus Himself Who appeared to His disciples on Mount Tabor with Moses and Elias (who had long before departed this world), and Who Himself appeared to many of His followers after His death. We also know this from the apostles, saints and numerous seers to whom, because of their chastity and sanctity. God revealed the ultimate truth about the other world. If, because of our sins, we do not believe these holy and truthful witnesses, we will then have to believe those unholy and false men, and we will be slaves to darkness, sin and death.

Brethren, let us not be led astray by worldly teaching, which examines animals, plants and stones and says that it has not found God among these things, and thus arrogantly asserts that there is no God. Behold, we know that the Creator cannot be as a thing among things; rather He is above all things and different from all things. We know this as much by spiritual understanding and conscience as by the clear revelation of the Lord Jesus Himself, Who appeared in the body of a man as the lord of all created things—as well as by the testimony of the apostles and many other holy and discerning men. Rather, let us glorify the Lord Jesus resurrected from the dead.

O resurrected Lord, to Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.