

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: Trudy Ellmore Parish Council Vice President: Holly Dawson



Sunday, December 13, 2015

Tone 3

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

28th Sunday after Pentecost (12th of Luke); Repose of the Venerable Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America and Sunday of the Forefathers



**Glory to
Jesus Christ!**

**Glory
Forever!**

*Repose of the Venerable
Herman of Alaska,
Wonderworker of All
America*

*O blessed Father Herman of Alaska, North star of Christ's holy Church,
The light of your holy life and great deeds guides those who follow the
Orthodox way. Together we lift high the Holy Cross You planted firmly in
America. Let all behold and glorify Jesus Christ,
Singing his holy Resurrection.*

Today's Commemorated Feasts and Saints

28th Sunday After Pentecost — Tone 3. Repose of Ven. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of all America (1837). Sunday of the Forefathers. Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius, and Orestes, at Sebaste (4th c.). Virgin Martyr Lucia (Lucy) of Syracuse (304). Ven. Arkády (Arcadius) of Novotorsk (11th c.). Ven. Mardárii (Mardarius), Recluse, of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—13th c.). Ven. Arsenius of Latros (8th-9th c.). Ven. Nicodemus (Romanian).

Weekly Bulletin Sponsors

For Health of:

Robert Morris, on his birthday, offered by his grandmother Lore Stefy.

Valentina Markevich, on her birthday, offered by her daughter Tatsiana Markevich DaGrosa and her family.

Aunt Jean, on her birthday, offered by Linda and Richard.

For Memory of:

Walter Vladimir Kantor, beloved father of Father Vladimir Kantor and Tanya Kantor Fletcher (and brother-in-law of Father John and Father Joseph Chupeck) fell asleep in the Lord following a long illness on Tuesday afternoon, offered by Diocese of NY/NJ.

Liturgical Schedule:

Sunday, December 13th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy
After Liturgy: Nativity Gift Basket
Raffle

Saturday, December 19th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, December 20th

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

Thursday, December 24th

7:00 pm: Divine Liturgy

Saturday, December 26th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, December 27th

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

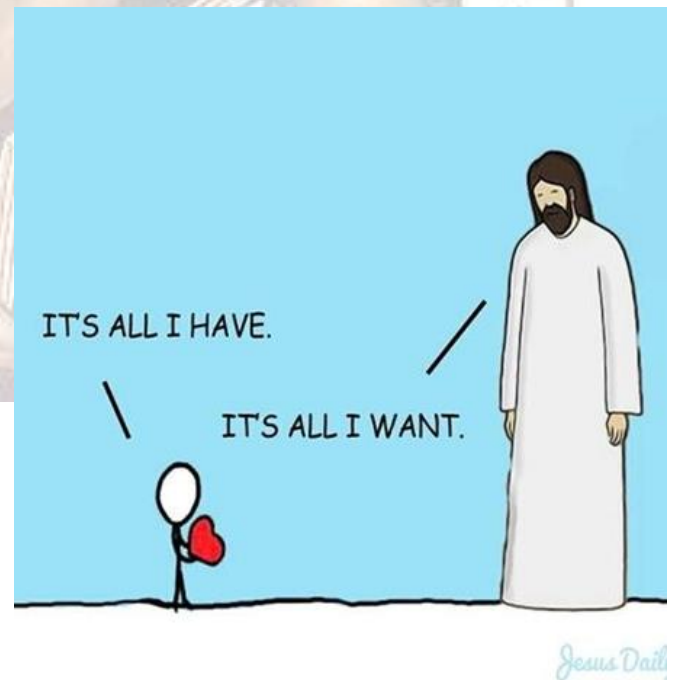
Readings:

Epistle: Colossians 3:4-11

BRETHREN, when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24

The Lord said this parable: "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. For many are called, but few are chosen.'"





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 and **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

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

There will be a parish council meeting December 20th immediately following coffee hour.

"On Saturday December 12th 5:30 – 8:30pm, Mays Landing Open House. Our parish participated again this year. We welcomed 46 visitors to our church home this year.

Christmas Divine Liturgy will be held at 7:00pm on the 24th of December (Christmas Eve).



Sisterhood of the Protector of the Mother of God: Announcements

"The Sisterhood will be raffling off a Nativity gift basket on December 13th. Tickets are \$1.00, and each family is asked to sell ten tickets. Please see Lore Stefy for tickets. If you wish to contribute an item to the basket, there is a list posted downstairs regarding items needed."

NY/NJ Diocese News



News from the Diocesan Ministry Network

With the blessing of his Eminence, Archbishop Michael, our diocese has begun this Network with the goal of strengthening and assisting the development of parish



ministries throughout the diocese. Already, parish representatives have been contacting me about their many ministry activities and I pray that more representatives will volunteer or be appointed! I hope to have a conference call in early January 2016, so please contact me if you are interested: diana.pasca@comcast.net or 609-953-4705.

Two efforts are underway this month: (1) **Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in East Meadow NY** is collecting and distributing 75+ Christmas Care Packages to the homeless on the streets of Manhattan; (2) **The Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford NJ** is collecting and distributing, through "Covenant House," 50 Christmas Care Stockings to homeless teens in Camden NJ. These concrete acts of service and ministry lead us to a deeper solidarity with our Lord, with one another, and manifest our love for those in need.

With love in Christ,
Diana Pasca

The **6th Annual Altar Servers Retreat** will take place at **Saint Basil's Academy in Garrison NY on 12-14 February 2016**. Last year over 50 participants attended the retreat where they enjoyed fellowship, education, and spiritual enrichment under the guidance of Archbishop Michael. We look forward to another successful retreat where altar servers learn the basics and fundamentals of assisting at Divine Services. A special feature at this year's retreat will be learning how to serve a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy along with how to read and chant in church. Those servers who are interested in attending the retreat should contact their parish priest for information and registration forms. There are no accommodations for women to participate in this event. **Registration is now open!**

Please remember in your prayers:

The handmaiden of God, **Anna Zablotskyy**, mother of Father Volodymyr Zablotskyy. *May the Divine Physician touch her with His healing power, grant her restoration of soul and body, and protect and preserve her for many blessed years! "Mnogaya Lyeta!"*

Please note that the surgery date for **Father John Udics** has been changed from Monday, December 14 as previously announced, to Monday, December 21. Kindly remember Father John in your prayers as he prepares for and undergoes this operation. *May the Divine Physician guide the hands of his doctors, grant him a swift recovery, and protect and preserve him for many blessed years! "Mnogaya Lyeta!"*



Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News

End-of-the-year giving opportunities: Join the Stewards of the OCA now!

In 2013, the “[Stewards of the Orthodox Church in America](#)” was initiated. Since that time, some 300 individuals and parishes have responded positively by joining the Stewards.

“With the end of 2015 just weeks away, we are renewing our invitation to join the Stewards now, in light of the advantages realized through end-of-the-year gifts and donations,” said Raymond Boyd, OCA Stewardship Assistant. “In the weeks and months ahead, we anticipate increasing the number of Stewards to 500 with the aim of raising \$50,000.00 to help ‘expand the Mission’ of the Orthodox Church in America.”

To this end, a redesigned “[Become a Steward](#)” page to encourage on-line donations made its debut in mid-December.

“The ‘Stewards of the OCA’ aims at continuing and expanding a sense of voluntary stewardship to provide financial support for the Church’s departments and ministries,” said Archpriest John Jillions, OCA Chancellor. “In recent years, these essential components of Church life had been underfunded, with assessments only providing for the OCA’s administrative needs. Despite numerous other parish, diocesan, inter-Orthodox, charitable and humanitarian causes that need support, we are confident that those who share the common vision of what the Orthodox Church in America can—and should—do to expand its mission will step forward in the weeks and months ahead to help reach our goal.”

Gifts to the Stewards of the OCA will be earmarked to support the OCA’s Departments—[Christian Education](#), [Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid](#), [Evangelization](#), [Institutional](#) and [Military Chaplaincies](#), [Liturgical Music and Translations](#), [Pastoral Life and Ministries](#), and [Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministries](#); [Archives](#) and Charities—as well as the Church’s efforts in the areas of Communications, [Continuing Education](#), [Diaconal Vocations](#), [External Affairs](#), and [Seminaries](#) and [Theological Education](#).



Teach leaders in Albania as Part of an OCMC Mission Team

A meaningful way to spend spring break in 2016 will be to join an OCMC Mission Team to Albania. The goal of this Team will be to teach youth leaders and influence college students with the Word of God, that they might be part of fulfilling the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20).

Help the next generation of leaders in Albania live, preach, and spread the Gospel. Train youth leaders to provide leadership in every sphere of influence: in their lives, in the Church, in school, the community, the family, education, missions, and all areas of life.

Work with youth leaders to host a conference for young adults, engage college students at the University of Tirana, and minister alongside OCMC missionaries to Albania. The dates are March 19 - 27, 2016.

***Repose of the Venerable Herman of
Alaska, Wonderworker of All America***



Venerable Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker of All America. A spiritual mission was organized in 1793 with volunteers from the monks of the Valaam Monastery. They were sent to preach the Word of God to the native inhabitants of northwestern America, who had come under the sovereignty of Russia only ten years before. St Herman was one of the members of this mission. St Herman came from a family of merchants of Serpukhov, a city of the Moscow diocese. His name before he was tonsured, and his family name are not known. There is a possibility, however, that his baptismal name was Gerasimus. He had a great zeal for piety from his youth, and he entered monastic life at sixteen. (This was in 1772, if we assume that Herman was born in 1756, although sometimes 1760 is given as the date of his birth.) First he entered the Trinity-Sergius Hermitage which was located near the Gulf of Finland on the Peterhof Road, about 15 versts (about 10 miles) from St Petersburg. He also spent time at at Sarov, where he first met Fr Nazarius, who became his Elder at Valaam. Later, St Herman followed him to Sanaxar where St Theodore (February 19) was their igumen.

***Repose of the Venerable Herman of
Alaska, Wonderworker of All America***



The Sunday that falls between December 11-17 is known as the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. These are the ancestors of Christ according to the flesh, who lived before the Law and under the Law, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God said, “In thy seed shall all of the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3, 22:18).

***Prayers by the Lake, St. Nikolai
Velimirovich, XXXV:***

Martyrs of the true faith, pray to God for us.

Your faith has brought you near to the radiant throne of glory, adorned with the shining seraphim and the overpowering cherubim. You are nearer to immortality than we, and your prayer is more pure and audible.

Remember us in your prayer also, so that you may be ever more acclaimed throughout heaven. Bring us with you also, and you will more swiftly and easily fly to the throne of glory. Whoever brings himself alone, walks more

slowly and stumbles more often. The greater the load of your brothers you haul, the faster you fly.

I have said to people: You are all martyrs, but not all of one martyrdom. Martyrs for the true faith are not the same as martyrs for a false faith. Truly, their bones are similar but not the soul. For the soul transfers power and weakness even to the bones.

You who suffer for the true faith, are suffering for what your spiritual vision sees. You who suffer for a false faith, are suffering for what your physical eyes see. You former suffer for faith in reality and truth; you latter suffer for a dream and a fantasy.

Spiritual vision calls its knowledge by a humble name--faith. Physical eyes call their faith by a boastful name--knowledge. Both the one and the other are seeing: the first is a seeing of the peaceful and sparkling essence of creation; the second is a seeing of flickers of that essence through the darkness.

Your martyrdom is the most inevitable of all things, O sons of heaven and sons of earth. Your being martyred lies in your fleeing from light toward darkness. If you are fleeing from darkness toward light, you will stir up the world against yourself. If you are fleeing from light toward darkness, Heaven will remove itself from your convulsions and destruction.

The paths of the sons of men meet, and conflict is inevitable. For some are journeying toward the East, while the others are journeying toward the West. The Lord is merciful, and sends His angels to them all.

My soul is full of martyrs like a fertile field full of wheat and tares. The first are facing the East, while the others are facing the West.

I whisper to my soul at midnight: "How long will you be crucified between paradise and hell? Take hold of yourself, and face only the direction where the martyrs of the true faith have journeyed."

I whisper to my neighbor at dawn: "Do not take the heavily traveled road, for many stinking corpses are strewn along it. Let us take the trail up the mountain, which is rugged but does not reek of corpses."¹

I whisper morning and evening to you, O martyrs of the true faith: "Pray to God for us."

Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church, XXXIV:

Unbelief

The Lord does not show Himself to a proud soul. The proud soul, no matter how many books it reads, will never know God, since by its pride it does not give place for the grace of the Holy Spirit, while God is known only by the humble soul.

St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, III.11

The Prologue of Ohrid

St. Nikolai Velimirovic

1. The Holy Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius and Orestes

These five courageous men shone like five shining stars in the dark days of the Christ-persecuting Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. St. Eustratius was a Roman commander in the city of Satalionus; Eugene was his companion in the army; Orestes was likewise a distinguished soldier; Auxentius was a priest; and Mardarius was an ordinary citizen who came, like Eustratius, from the town of Arabrak. The imperial deputies Lysias and Agriculus tortured Auxentius first since he was a priest. Seeing the innocent suffering of Christians, Eustratius appeared in front of Lysias and declared that he was also a Christian. While Eustratius was being tortured, Eugene appeared before the judge and cried out: "Lysias, I too am a Christian." When Eustratius was led through the town of Arabrak with the other martyrs, Mardarius saw them from the roof of his house. He took leave of his wife and two young children and rushed after the martyrs, shouting into the faces of the

tormentors: "I too am a Christian, like my lord Eustratius." When St. Orestes was target-practicing in the presence of Lysias, the cross he was wearing fell from his chest and Lysias realized that he was a Christian, after which Orestes openly confessed his faith. Orestes was a young and handsome soldier and towered above all the other soldiers in stature. Auxentius was beheaded, Eugene and Mardarius died while being tortured, Orestes expired on a red-hot iron grid, and Eustratius died in a fiery furnace. St. Blaise (February 11) administered Holy Communion to St. Eustratius in prison before his death. Their relics were later taken to Constantinople and buried in the church dedicated to them: The Holy Five Companions. They were seen alive in that church, and St. Orestes appeared to St. Dimitri of Rostov (October 28). A beautiful prayer by St. Eustratius is extant, which is read at the Midnight Service on Saturday: "Most highly do I magnify Thee, O Lord."

2. The Holy Martyr Lucy the Virgin

With her mother, Lucy visited the grave of St. Agatha in Catania, where St. Agatha appeared to her. Her mother, who had dropsy, was then miraculously healed in the church. Lucy distributed all her goods to the poor, and this embittered her betrothed, who accused her of being a Christian before Paschasius the judge. The wicked judge ordered that she be taken to a brothel in order to defile her. However, by the power of God she remained immovable, as if rooted to the earth, and not even a multitude of people was able to move her from that spot. Then an enraged pagan pierced her throat with a sword and she gave up her soul to God and took up her habitation in the Kingdom of Eternity. Lucy suffered in the year 304 A.D.

3. The Hieromartyr Gavriilo, Patriarch of Serbia

During the terrible period of Turkish rule over Serbia, this great hierarch traveled to Russia, where he participated in the Moscow Synod of 1655 A.D. Upon returning, he was accused of high treason. Certain evil Jews also accused him of having converted several Jews to the

Christian Faith. In their accusation, the Jews cited that he was attempting to convert the Turks. The Jews did this to enrage the Turkish authorities even more. Brought before the tribunal, he was condemned and sentenced to embrace Islam. Since Gavriilo would not even hear of this, he was, after a period of imprisonment, sentenced to death and hanged in Brusa in the year 1659 A.D. Thus, he departed for his beloved Christ to receive from Him a double crown, that of a hierarch and that of a martyr.

Hymn of Praise

*The Holy Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius,
Eugene, Mardarius and Orestes*

O Five Companions, soldiers of Christ,
Fearless heroes, honorable martyrs--
Mockery and tortures, fire and scaffolds
Were merely childish games for you.
None of you consented to the wantonness of
Rome.
With joyful hearts you suffered for Christ.
Eustratius, the wonderful and heroic
commander,
Despised imperial clemency and this weeping
world.
With him, as with a living fire that burns leaves,
The other companions went to torture.
Auxentius the priest, a faithful servant of Christ,
Endured much mockery for the sake of Christ.
Eugene the soldier and wondrous Orestes
Ridiculed death, being conscious of the
Resurrection.
Mardarius left his wife and children,
So that both they and he would be forever
glorified.
O heroic clan, children of grace,
Only the Church can give such men as you;
Only the Spirit of God creates such hearts as
yours--
He that transforms the dark abyss into flame!
Glorious martyrs, remember us also;
And by your prayers, strengthen the Church.

Reflection

To give alms out of that which one needs: this is true almsgiving. Not to sin when one is most exposed to sinning: this has value before God.

When St. Lucy saw her sick mother miraculously healed, she suggested to her that she use her possessions as alms for the needy. To this her mother replied that she did not want to part from her possessions until her death, but she agreed that after her death her possessions could be used for the good that Lucy wished. "First, cover my eyes with earth," her mother said, "and then do what you wish with my possessions." Lucy said: "It is not very pleasing to God for a person to give to Him that which he cannot take with him to the grave or which he himself does not need. But if you want to do a God-pleasing deed, give to Him that which you yourself need. Otherwise, after death, when you need nothing, you will be offering Him that which you could not take with you. But while you are still alive and healthy, give to Christ what you possess, and all of that which you intended for me begin even now to give to Him." The good mother of the wise daughter agreed to this. When the torturer Paschasius was attempting to force this holy virgin to carnal sin, Lucy did not, even in thought, assent to this. And when the torturer threatened that his men would defile her by force, saying with a smirk, "When you become defiled, the Holy Spirit will flee from you," Lucy, full of grace, replied: "The body cannot be defiled without the consent of the mind." Thus St. Lucy went to her death, having distributed all her goods beforehand and guarded her young and pure body from defilement.

Contemplation

Contemplate the fulfilment of Noah's words upon his descendants (Genesis 9):

1. How the sons of Japheth spread throughout the whole world;
2. How they settled in the tents of Shem, that is, in the Church, in the spiritual tent of Christ, which began with the Semites, the Jews.

Homily: on Isaac

And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not,

for I am with thee, and will bless thee (Genesis 26:24).

Brethren, from time immemorial, the path upon which the righteous walk has always been difficult. From time immemorial, they have been hard pressed either by those who do not believe in God or by those who maintain an incorrect belief. Abel was hard pressed by his brother Cain; Noah and Lot, by a completely corrupt generation; and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, by the pagans. However, God does not forsake the righteous to walk the difficult path alone. This we also see with Isaac: *I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not.* Isaac understood these very meaningful words. By these words, God encouraged and reminded him. He was saying: "Because of Abraham, I will bless thee also; and, as I protected Abraham among the pagans, so in a like manner will I protect thee." And further: "Be faithful to Me as was Abraham thy father." Isaac followed the example of his father and did not turn away from God at any time in his life. Isaac was a farmer and a cattle-breeder as was his father; he was righteous and meek, avoiding strife with men and doing good for people. *We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee* (Genesis 26:28), as his haters and persecutors finally had to admit. And Isaac was made worthy that God be called His God: just as God was called the God of Abraham, so later He was called the God of Isaac.

O Lord, wondrous in Thy saints, remember our names also along with the names of Thy righteous ones and saints in Thy Kingdom.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration with Abbott Tryphon



Laughter

Joy is the infallible sign of God’s presence

Although we have no written evidence that Our Lord Jesus Christ laughed, I am personally convinced that he did. How could He not have shared in our humanity with perfection had he not had a sense of humor, and shared moments of laughter with His disciples? Laughter is such a precious gift, for it allows us to share circumstances in our lives in a special way. When we allow ourselves to see with joy those often funny events that take place around us, we are able to put ourselves in a proper perspective. Our ability to laugh at ourselves helps reduce our sense of self-importance.

That a Christian can laugh in no way suggests it is proper to smile at dirty humor, or make light of another person’s infirmity or failure. Our humor must never be based on ridicule, or the demeaning of another. Christ used humor when He depicted a camel struggling to get through the eye of a needle. (Matt. 19:24). And we read in Proverbs 17:22, “that a merry heart does good, like medicine”.

A sense of humor demonstrates to others that we live with joy and gladness in our hearts, because we have reason to be happy. We believe the gift of salvation is good reason to be happy, since the Lord’s ministry did not end on the Cross, but was followed by His Holy Resurrection. Living with a joyful heart adds value to our faith because it makes others want to share in the joy they see in us.

We can laugh because we know that all will work out in the end because God loves us, and we believe His providential hand is at work in our lives. We believe that God knows there is plenty of sadness, sorrow, and sickness in this life, but that it will not prevail, because His plan for our salvation is at work. The old Celtic saying, “Life is all about loving, living, and laughing, not about hating, dying, and moaning,” has as its basis the Orthodox Christianity of the Celtic people. That is why it is an oxymoron for a Christian to be crabby, griping, and whining, and why “Joy is the infallible sign of God’s presence”.

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon

Coffee with Sister Vassa – Daily Reflection



Fruits vs. Fathers

“John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’ And the crowds asked him, ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’” (Lk 3: 7-11)

So as John the Baptist prepares us for the coming of Christ, one of the first things he tells us (after leading with “brood of vipers!” 😊) is, “Do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our ancestor.” Don’t even “begin” to do that. Whatever long tradition of faith you come from, however Orthodox your Fathers were yesterday, you must “bear fruits worthy of repentance” in the here and now. This means sharing what I have, be it extra coats or food or something else, “with anyone who has none.”

Today I will contemplate this message a bit more in my heart. It is indeed possible to be, like me, of Orthodox ancestry, officially to “belong” to an Orthodox tradition, an Orthodox nationality, and yet be one of “a brood of vipers.” Let me hear this word today, offered to

me by the Forerunner of Christ, and focus on what he is telling me to do: "Bear fruits worthy of repentance." Share what you have, he says, "with anyone who has none." Let me continue my journey of this Nativity Fast in the Spirit of self-giving and sharing, bearing fruits worthy of repentance in the here and now.

The Atheist is the most misfortunate person (St. Nektarios)

Of all people, the atheist is the most misfortunate person because he has been deprived of the only good thing upon the earth: faith—the one true guide toward the truth and happiness. The atheist is a most misfortunate person because he is deprived of hope: the essential staff needed to journey through life's lengthy path. The atheist is a most misfortunate person because he is deprived of human love, which caresses the aching heart. The atheist is a most misfortunate person because he has been deprived of the divine beauty of the Creator's image, which the Divine Artist has etched within man and which faith unveils.

The eye of the atheist sees in creation nothing other than the operation of natural processes. The brilliance and magnificent beauty of the Divine Creator's image remain hidden and undetectable to him. As he glances aimlessly at creation, nowhere does he discover the beauty of God's wisdom, nowhere does he see God's omnipotence, nowhere does he observe God's goodness and providence, nowhere does he discern the Creator's righteousness and love for creation. His mind is neither capable of ascending higher than the visible world nor reaching beyond the boundaries of physical matter. His heart remains anesthetized and indifferent before God's ever-present divine wisdom and power.

Within it, not even the slightest desire to worship the Lord exists. His lips remain closed, his mouth silent, and his tongue frozen. His soul voices no

hymn, doxology, or praise as an expression of gratefulness to God.

The peace of the soul and the serenity of the heart have been removed by disbelief; instead, mourning has inundated the depth of his being. The delight, which the faithful person experiences from executing God's divine commandments, and the great pleasure that he enjoys from an ethical way of life are unknown feelings for the atheist. The elation which faith bestows to the believer has never been felt by the atheist's heart.

The assurance that arises from faith in God's providence, which relieves man from the anxiety of life's worries, is a power unknown to him.

St. Nektarios of Pentapolis

The Philokalia: Daily Readings

An intelligent use of conceptual images and their corresponding physical objects produces self-restraint, love and spiritual knowledge; an unintelligent use produces licentiousness, hatred and ignorance.

- St Maximos the Confessor, 400 Chapters on Love



December – 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social	30	1 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	2	3	4 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	5 6:30 Vespers
6 9:40 Hours 9:45 Gen'l Confession 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social After Liturgy: Annual St. Nicholas Day Festivities	7	8 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	9	10	11 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	12 No Vespers Mays Ldg. Open House 5:30 – 8:30pm
13 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social After Liturgy: Nativity Gift Basket Raffle	14	15 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	16	17	18 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	19 6:30 Vespers
20 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy / Social 12:15 Council Mtg.	21	22 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	23	24 7:00pm–Divine Liturgy/Christmas	25 8:00-9:15pm – Living Clean NA Group Mtg.	26 6:30 Vespers
27 9:30 Sunday School 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy/ Social	28	29 7:00-8:00pm – The Grey Book Step Mtg. NA Grp	30	31		