

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

The Most Reverend Michael, Archbishop of NY & the Diocese of NY/NJ

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Temporary Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky

Parish Council Vice President: Dean Inferrera

HYMNS OF THE DAY

Resurrectional Troparion in the Tone 3

Let the heavens rejoice! Let the earth be glad! For the Lord has shown strength with His arm. He has trampled down death by death. He has become the first born of the dead. He has delivered us from the depths of hell, and has granted to the world great mercy.

Troparion for Forefathers in Tone 2

Through faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers, betrothing through them the Church of the gentiles. These saints exult in glory, for from their seed came forth a glorious fruit: she who bore Thee without seed. So by their prayers, O Christ God, have mercy on us!

Kontakion for Forefathers in Tone 6

Ye did not worship the graven image, O thrice-blessed ones, but armed with the immaterial Essence of God, ye were glorified in a trial by fire. From the midst of unbearable flames ye called on God, crying: "Hasten, O compassionate One! Speedily come to our aid, for Thou art merciful and able to do as Thou dost will!"

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Matushka Emily Shuga, on her birthday, offered by Bill & MaryAnn Kuzemchak.

MaryAnn Kuzemchak, offered by the Kuzemchak family.

Maribeth Romanofsky, on her birthday, offered by the Romanofsky family.

In Memory of:

Michael Bodulow, Sr., who fell asleep in the Lord 5 yrs. ago, offered by the Bodulow & Inferrera families.

Archpriest Alvian and his Matushka Helen Smirensky. Both Father Alvian and Matushka Helen were hospitalized and fell asleep in the Lord within hours of each other, on Sunday, December 10, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

John Holowiak, who reposed on Thursday, December 14. Beloved father and grandfather Matushka Barbara and Archpriest John Shimchick and their children, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Bulletin Sponsors

Bodulow & Inferrera Families; Bill & MaryAnn Kuzemchak; Kuzemchak Family; Romanofsky Family

Help make our church beautiful this nativity season! Each church family is asked to please bring in one poinsettia plant to help decorate our church. Thank you!

SAINTS AND FEASTS OF THE DAY

DECEMBER 17, 2017

28TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (13TH OF LUKE)



Sunday of the Forefathers

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).



Prophet Daniel

The Holy Prophet Daniel is the fourth of the major prophets.

In the years following 600 B.C. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians, the Temple built by Solomon was destroyed, and many of the Israelite people were led away into the Babylonian Captivity. Among the captives were also the illustrious youths Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon ordered that they be instructed in the Chaldean language and wisdom, and dressed them in finery. Handsome children of princely lineage were often chosen to serve as pages in the palace. For three years, they would be fed from food from the king's table. After this they would be allowed to stand before his throne. Daniel was renamed Baltasar, Ananias was called Shadrach, Misael was called Mishach, and Azarias was known as Abednego. But they, cleaving to their faith, disdained the extravagance of court, refusing to defile themselves by eating from the king's table and drinking his wine. Instead, they lived on vegetables and water.

The Lord granted them wisdom, and to Saint Daniel the gift of insight and the interpretation of dreams. The holy Prophet Daniel preserved his faith in the one God and trusted in His almighty help. He surpassed all the Chaldean astrologers and sorcerers in his wisdom, and was made a confidant to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Once, Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream which terrified him (Daniel 2:1-6). He summoned magicians, sorcerers, and Chaldeans before him to interpret the dream. When they asked him what he had dreamt, the king refused to tell them. He said, "If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins." The Babylonian wise men protested that no magician or sorcerer could be expected to do this. Only the gods could reveal the dream and its meaning, they told him.

The king ordered all the wise men of Babylon to be executed. When they sought Daniel and his companions to put them to death, Daniel asked that the king's sentence not be carried out. He said that he could tell the king what he dreamt, for it had been revealed to him in a vision. Daniel was brought before the king and was able to reveal not only the content of the dream, but also its prophetic significance. After this, the king elevated Daniel to be ruler of the whole province of Babylon, and the chief of all the wise men.

During these times King Nebuchadnezzar ordered a huge statue to be made in his likeness. It was decreed that when people heard the sound of trumpets and other instruments, they should fall down and worship the golden idol. Because they refused to do this, the three holy youths Ananias, Azarias and Misael were cast into a fiery furnace. The flames shot out over the furnace forty-nine cubits, felling the Chaldeans standing about, but the holy youths walked in the midst of the flames, offering prayer and psalmody to the Lord (Daniel 3:26-90).

The Angel of the Lord appeared in the furnace and cooled the flames, and the young men remained unharmed. This "Angel of Great Counsel," as he is called in iconography, is identified with the Son of God (Daniel 3:25, Isaiah 9:6). In the first Canon for the Nativity of the Lord (Ode 5), the Church sings: "Thou hast sent us Thine Angel of Great Counsel." The emperor, upon seeing this, commanded them to come out, and was converted to the true God.

Under King Baltasar, Saint Daniel interpreted a mysterious inscription ("Mane, Thekel, Phares"), which had appeared on the wall of the palace during a banquet (Daniel 5:1-31), foretelling the downfall of the Babylonian

kingdom. Under the Persian emperor Darius, Saint Daniel was slandered by his enemies, and was thrown into a den with hungry lions, but they did not touch him, and he was not harmed. The emperor Darius then rejoiced over Daniel and ordered people throughout his realm to worship the God of Daniel, “since He is the living and eternal God, and His Kingdom shall not be destroyed, and His dominion is forever” (Daniel 6:26).

The holy Prophet Daniel grieved deeply for his people, who then were undergoing righteous chastisement for a multitude of sins and offenses, for transgressing the laws of God, resulting in the grievous Babylonian Captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem: “My God, incline Thine ear and hearken; open Thine eyes and look upon our desolation and that of Thy city, in which Thy Name is spoken; for we do not make our supplication before Thee because of our own righteousness, but because of Thy great mercy” (Dan 9:18). Because of Daniel’s righteous life and his prayers for the people’s iniquity, the destiny of the nation of Israel and the fate of all the world was revealed to the holy prophet.

While interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, the holy, glorious Prophet Daniel spoke of a great and final kingdom, the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ (Dan 2:44). The prophetic vision about the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24-27) speaks about the signs of the First and the Second Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is connected with those events (Daniel 12:1-12).

Saint Daniel interceded for his people before King Cyrus, who esteemed him highly, and who decreed freedom for the Israelite people. Daniel himself and his fellows Ananias, Azarias and Misael, all survived into old age, but died in captivity. According to the testimony of Saint Cyril of Alexandria (June 9), Saints Ananias, Azarias and Misael were beheaded on orders of the Persian emperor Chambyeses.

Saint Daniel and the three holy youths are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, and on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers (Sunday before the Nativity).



Holy Youth Ananias

The Holy Youth Ananias (“God is gracious”) was a companion of the Holy Prophet Daniel. He was chosen to serve in the king’s palace with Daniel, Azarias, and Mishael (Daniel 1:6), who were all from the tribe of Judah. They gave Ananias the Chaldean name Shadrach (“royal”). They were thrown into a fiery furnace when they refused to worship the golden idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar, but the angel of the Lord preserved them (Daniel 3:25).

The Seventh and Eighth Odes of the nine Biblical Odes at the back of the Psalter are taken from The Song of the Three Holy Youths (found in the Septuagint text of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church).

The Three Holy Youths and the Prophet Daniel are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers.



Holy Youth Azarias

The Holy Youth Azarias (“whom God helps”) was a companion of the Holy Prophet Daniel. He was chosen to serve in the king’s palace with Daniel, Ananias, and Mishael (Daniel 1:6), who were all from the tribe of Judah. They gave Azarias the Chaldean name Abednego (“servant of Nego”). They were thrown into a fiery furnace when they refused to worship the golden idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar, but the angel of the Lord preserved them (Daniel 3:25).

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The Three Holy Youths and the Prophet Daniel are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers.



Holy Youth Misael

The Holy Youth Misael (“Who is what God is?”) was a companion of the Holy Prophet Daniel. He was chosen to serve in the king’s palace with Daniel, Azarias, and Ananias (Daniel 1:6), who were all from the tribe of Judah. They gave Misael the Chaldean name Meshach (“guest”). They were thrown into a fiery furnace when they refused to worship the golden idol set up by King Nebuchadnezzar, but the angel of the Lord preserved them (Daniel 3:25).

The Seventh and Eighth Odes of the nine Biblical Odes at the back of the Psalter are taken from The Song of the Three Holy Youths (found in the Septuagint text of the Old Testament used by the Orthodox Church).

The Three Holy Youths and the Prophet Daniel are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and the Sunday of the Holy Fathers.

Venerable Daniel the Confessor (in Schema Stephen) of Spain, and Egypt

Saint Daniel the Confessor, (in the schema Stephen) lived in the tenth century. He was a Spanish dignitary, and prefect of the island of Niverta. Disdaining worldly glory, he became a monk in Rome and went on pilgrimage to the holy places at Constantinople and Jerusalem, where he received the Great Schema and the name Stephen. He received the crown of martyrdom after he refused the Saracens’ demand that he renounce Christ and become a Moslem.



Venerable Dionysius of Aegina

Saint Dionysius of Zakynthos, the Bishop of Aegina was born in 1547 on the island of Zakynthos. Though born into a noble family, he was determined to flee the world and set his mind upon heavenly things. He entered the monastery of Strophada, and after the prescribed time, he was clothed in the angelic schema by the abbot. Though young in years, he surpassed many of his elders in virtue, and was found worthy of ordination to the holy priesthood.

Although he protested his unworthiness, Saint Dionysius was consecrated Bishop of Aegina. In that office he never ceased to teach and admonish his flock, and many were drawn to him in order to profit from his wisdom. He feared the praise of men, lest he should fall into the sin of vainglory, so he resigned his See and returned to Zakynthos.

In 1579 the diocese of Zakynthos was widowed (when a bishop dies, his diocese is described as “widowed”), and Dionysius agreed to care for it until a new bishop could be elected. Then he fled from the worldly life which gave him no peace, and went to the Monastery of the Most Holy Theotokos Anaphonitria, twenty miles from the main village.

A certain stranger murdered the saint’s brother Constantine, an illustrious nobleman. Fearing his victim’s relatives, the stranger, by chance or by God’s will, sought refuge in the monastery where Saint Dionysius was the abbot. When the saint asked the fugitive why he was so frightened, he confessed his sin and revealed the name of the man he had murdered, asking to be protected from the family’s vengeance. Saint Dionysius wept for his only brother, as was natural. Then he comforted the murderer and hid him, showing him great compassion and love.

Soon the saint’s relatives came to the monastery with a group of armed men and told him what had happened. He pretended to know nothing about it. After weeping with them and trying to console them, he sent them off in the wrong direction. Then he told the murderer that he was the brother of the man he had killed. He admonished him as a father, and brought him to repentance. After forgiving him, Saint Dionysius brought him down to the shore and helped him to escape to another place in order to save his life. Because of the saint’s Christ-like virtue, he was granted the gift of working miracles.

Having passed his life in holiness, Saint Dionysius reached a great age, then departed to the Lord on December 17, 1624. Not only are the saint’s relics incorrupt, but he is also one of Greece’s “walking saints” (Saint Gerasimus and Saint Spyridon are the others). He is said to leave his reliquary and walk about performing miracles for those who seek his aid. In fact, the soles of his slippers wear out and must be replaced with a new pair from time to time. The old slippers are cut up, and the pieces are distributed to pilgrims. On August 24, we celebrate the Transfer of his Holy Relics. Through the prayers of Saint Dionysius, may Christ our God have mercy upon us and save us.



Martyr Avakum the Deacon of Serbia

The holy New Martyr Avakum (Habakkuk) was born in Bosnia in 1794, and was named Lepoje by his parents. Lepoje's father died when he was still a young boy, so his mother took him to the Mostanica monastery, where his uncle was the spiritual Father. He grew up in the monastery, and later became a monk with the name Avakum. When he was eighteen, he was ordained a deacon by Metropolitan Joseph (Sakabenta).

In 1809, the monks took part in an unsuccessful revolt against the Turks, and had to flee for their lives. They settled in the Annunciation monastery in Trnava near Cacak, where the igumen was Saint Paisius.

After the collapse of Karageorge's revolt in 1813, the Turks began a reign of terror against the Serbs. Disease also swept the area because of the many bodies left unburied. The people attempted another revolt under Hadj-Prodan Gligorijevic, and the monks of Trnava became involved in it. The rebellion took place on the Feast of the Cross (September 14), but it was crushed by the Turks. Many people were captured, and some were executed on the spot as a warning to others.

Some of the prisoners were sent to Suleiman Pasha in Belgrade, among whom were Saints Paisius and Avakum. The holy deacon Avakum sang "God is with us" (from Compline) in the prison cell, while Saint Paisius prayed. The Turks offered to free anyone who would convert to Islam. Some of the prisoners agreed to this, but the majority refused to deny Christ, and so they were put to death.

The Turks tried to pressure Avakum to save himself by embracing their religion, but he refused even to consider it. His former spiritual Father, Gennadius, accepted the offer of the Turks and urged Avakum to follow his example. The courageous deacon declared that he was a warrior of Christ, and preferred to die rather than deny Christ.

Saint Avakum was sentenced to be impaled on a stake, which he was forced to carry to the place of execution. His own mother urged him to embrace Islam, then to seek forgiveness later because he had been forced into it. The saint thanked her for giving him life, but not for her advice.

At the place of execution, the Turks asked him one more time to consider his youth and not to die before his time. Avakum laughed and asked, "Don't even Turks eventually die?"

They replied, "Of course they do."

"Well then," he said, "the sooner I die, the fewer sins I will have."

Because of his courage and steadfastness in his faith, the Turks decided not to impale him. They killed him quickly by stabbing him in the heart with a sword on January 27, 1815.

Saint Avakum the deacon is commemorated on December 17 with Saint Paisius.



Blessed Angelina Brankovich the Princess of Serbia

Saints Angelina and Stephen were the parents of Saint John of Serbia. The life of the Serbian ruler Stephen Brankovich and his family was filled with instability and misfortune. After Serbia was seized in 1457 by the Turks, the then Serbian ruler's middle son, Stephen (October 9), distinguished by a meek disposition and fine knowledge of Holy Scripture, went to the capital of Turkey after his sister had been given to Sultan Murat in marriage. Learning that the Turks had burned the Milieshevsk monastery with fanatic cruelty, Saint Stephen rose up to defend Serbia from oppression.

When he married Angelina (July 1 & 30), the daughter of the Prince of Albania, the Turks threatened Saint Stephen and his family with punishment. With his wife and three children he was forced to hide first in Albania, and then in Italy, where he died.

Saint Angelina transferred the incorrupt relics of her spouse to Kupinovo. At the end of the fifteenth century, their son Saint John, became ruler of Serbia. The incorrupt relics of Saint John and his parents were afterwards glorified by many miracles.

St. Paisius

The holy New Martyr Paisius was igumen of the Annunciation monastery in Trnava near Cacak, Serbia. After the collapse of Karageorge's revolt in 1813, the Turks began a reign of terror against the Serbs. Disease also swept the area because of the many bodies left unburied. The people attempted another revolt under Hadj-Prodan Gligorijevic, and the monks of Trnava became involved in it. The rebellion took place on the Feast of the Cross (September 14), but it was crushed by the Turks. Many people were captured, and some were executed on the spot as a warning to others.

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Saint Paisius was taken from prison and forced to carry a stake to the place of execution. He was impaled, and the stake was set into the ground. The holy martyr exclaimed, “Glory to God.” Then the vizier clapped his hands to signal his soldiers to draw their swords and begin killing some of the other prisoners. Forty-eight people were killed, and their bodies were raised up on posts. After suffering for some time, Saint Paisius surrendered his soul to God, thereby obtaining the crown of martyrdom on December 17, 1814.

No information available at this time for the following saints:



Righteous Benjamin



Righteous Deborah



St Ezra



Righteous Isaac



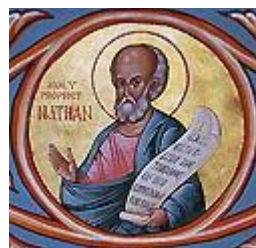
Righteous Jacob



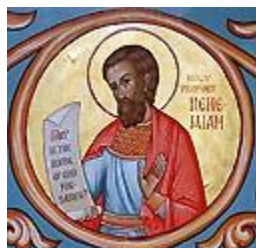
St Judith



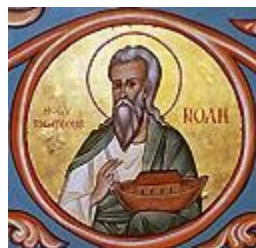
St Miriam



Prophet Nathan



Prophet Nehemiah



Righteous Noah



Righteous Rebecca



St Sarah



Righteous Priest Aaron



St Susanna



Prophet Solomon

GOSPEL AND EPISTLE READINGS

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon, Tone 4:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers / and praised and glorified is
Thy name forever! (*Song of the three Holy Children*, v. 3)
vs. For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the 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.

Alleluia, Tone 4:

Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. (*Psalms 98:6*)
vs. They called to the Lord and He answered them. (*Psalms 98:6*)

Gospel Reading

13th Sunday of Luke

The Reading is from 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.'"

PARISH NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

[Because the Eve of the Feast is on a Sunday and the Feast itself falls on a Monday, the correct prescribed rubrics call for:](#)

Christmas Eve, Sunday morning, December 24: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
Feast of the Nativity, Monday morning, December 25: Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Sunday, December 17th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, December 23th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Feast of the Nativity, Monday, December 25th

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Saturday, December 30th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, December 31st

9:30 am: Sunday School
9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
After Communion: Sunday School pre-K - Grade 3

Request & 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 will be remembered during Divine Liturgy for the day/week that you signed up for.

Memorial Candles: Candles can 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.

Receiving Holy Communion: Holy Communion is offered to those baptized Orthodox Christians who have prepared themselves for the reception of the Sacrament by prayer and fasting. Blessed Bread is available for all our visitors at the very end of the Divine Liturgy.

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

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 Quote of the Day

Faith is not an issue of great knowledge and learning but humble submission not to the prevailing knowledge but to the truth of the Church, timeless and eternal.

Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis



The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon

How to be Happy

All we need for happiness is right in front of us

It is easy to resist taking care of oneself if we run at full speed as though we are the only one who can get things done. We all need to set priorities, making sure we focus on Christ and not let that which is transitory rule our lives. If we pay attention to our health, family and spiritual life, everything else will take care of itself. We shouldn't let life be so full of work that we don't have time to focus on the things that bring us joy. We must pay attention when the Lord is calling us to slow down.

If we focus only on the things that haven't been done and ignore the little things that bring joy to our life, we'll find ourselves in a rut. If we are constantly thinking of where we'd rather be living, or the job we'd rather have, or the work that still needs to be completed, we'll wake up one day and realize all we've needed for happiness has been right in front of us. We don't want to wait to enjoy what we already have.

How to Become Whole

We must embrace our material self, together with our soul

Unlike angels, who are entirely spiritual beings, God has made each of us as creatures dwelling in a material world. To be whole, we must worship God both in body and soul. This teaching is central to our Christian faith and is an affirmation of the sacramental nature of this material world. Because of this truth icons have played a central role in Christian history, for they proclaim Jesus Christ's physical reality as God Incarnate.

Our Lord told his disciples that "he who has seen me, has seen the Father". Icons depicting the Holy Virgin show the Christ Child with bare feet, reminding us that he walked the earth among us. He (the Logos) through Whom all that is was brought into existence, condescended to take on our flesh and walk among us. He joined His divinity to our humanity, that we might become gods.

The Lord Jesus Christ was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in this material world. He broke bread with disciples, ate fish with his friends, and invited His Disciple Thomas to feel the wound in his side, after His holy resurrection. Most of the miracles He performed were in the nature of physical healing.

At the Last Judgment the Lord's words, "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was naked and you clothed me, I was homeless and you gave me shelter, I was sick and you cared for me, I was in prison and you came to visit me", will echo in our minds. It is through our care for others that we will be judged. It is in our demonstrated love for others that we show forth our own personal love for God. The Lord asked the question, "How can you love God Whom you've not seen, when you do not love your neighbor?"

Because of the Incarnation, our prayers must not be allowed to be centered in the head. Our use of icons while praying, allows us to behold the beauty of God's creation, and brings our whole nature, both body and soul, into the material world wherein we were born. This physical nature of prayer is what connects us to our true self, composed of both body and soul. This is where God reaches down to embrace us. Cutting off the physical world, with our eyes closed, does not bring us closer to God.

Icons are wonderful aides in our communion with God because they serve as bridges to Christ and links with the Holy Virgin and the saints. They are by no means necessary, for sitting on the top of a mountain, or walking on the seashore, eyes open, allows us to behold the beauty of God's creation, and His love for us, His children. The beauty of an icon and the glory of God's creation can all be windows for us into eternity.



Daily Reflection

Love and Suffering

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom 8: 35-37)



Love somehow always involves suffering, in this world. Why? Because love is a God-given gift and power, a divine force or will, which strives toward oneness (with the beloved). So it comes up against, and is invariably opposed by, “other” wills and drives in this world, which strive for division and separateness. These “other” wills seek to destroy and/or distort our God-given capacity to love; to turn it into pure and potentially-eternal “suffering” (i.e., into “passion,” like jealousy, envy, lust, despondency, or merely-human fear).

But in Christ’s love, in communion with Him, this “suffering” we undergo in love is not eternal, because it was taken on by Him and overcome. Christ handed Himself over to all those death-bringing forces opposed to love in this world, and overcame them, in His resurrection. Hence His suffering was not eternal, while His love, and ours in Him, “never ends” (1 Cor 13: 8). So today let me not fear “all these things,” which now and then rise up against my God-given capacity to love, and let me hand them over to Him, our one-and-only Lord. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Thank You, Lord, for that.

Christianity & “Sacrifice”

“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice (θυσίαν ζῶσαν), holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (λογικὴν λατρείαν). Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed (μεταμορφοῦσθε) by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12: 1-2)

The term “sacrifice” is often misunderstood in Christian theology in general, and in liturgical theology in particular. Here St. Paul characterizes not only our liturgy (“logike latreia,” a term that the Byzantine tradition refers to the Divine Liturgy), but Christian life in general, as sacrificial.

What is “sacrifice” (literally meaning “to make sacred,” from “sacer,” sacred, and “facere,” to make), properly understood in the Christian sense? It is not, as many of us tend to think, something that we, as human beings initiate and then direct toward God, Who then accepts it (or doesn’t). No. “Sacrifice” or the “making sacred” of anything is a divine capacity, initiated and inspired by the Self-offering love of God, “Who so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3: 16). “Sacrifice” begins in the loving Self-giving of the Father, of His Son to us, and in the “response” or Self-offering “obedience” of the Son to His Father’s will, in the Spirit Who rested upon Him, and consequently pours His grace abundantly upon us, as the Spirit wills. It is by His grace, or “by the mercies of God,” and not on our own, that we participate in this “sacrificial,” self-offering love and life of the Holy Trinity. We do this when we offer ourselves up to communion with Him, responding to God’s love with love, and thus letting ourselves “be transformed.”

So let me let myself be transformed today, a little bit more, from my merely-human mistrust and fear of God’s love, to surrendering to it, in His grace.

