

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

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
OCA – Diocese of New York-New Jersey

V. Rev. Dr. Matthew Searfoorce, Rector

Sub-Deacon Edward Dawson Sub-Deacon Vlashi

Parish Council President: Andrew Romanofsky Parish Council Vice President: Dean Inferrera



Sunday, September 24, 2017

Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1

New Martyrs of Alaska: Luke 21:12-19

Tone 7

Epistle : 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

New Martyrs of Alaska: Romans 8:28-39

16th Sunday after Pentecost (1st of Luke): Synaxis of All Saints of Alaska; Holy New Martyrs of Alaska, Hieromonk Juvenaly (ca. 1796) and Peter the Aleut (1815)

Holy Protomartyr and Equal-to-the-Apostles Thecla (1st c.). Ven. Nicander, Hermit, of Pskov (1581). Monk Martyr Galacteon of Vologdá (1612). Ven. Coprius of Palestine (530). Ven. Abramii, Abbot of Mirozh (Pskov). St. Vladislav of Serbia (1230-39). Ven. Dorothy of Kashin. Ven. Silouan of Mt. Athos (1938). The “MIROZH” (1198) and “THE YRTLE TREE” Icons of the Most-holy Theotokos

Troparion – Tone 4

*Today Alaska rejoices and America celebrates,
/ For the new world has been sanctified by
martyrdom / Kodiak echoes with songs of
thanksgiving, / Iliamna and Kenai observe the
festival of faith. / The Apostle and martyr
Juvenaly is glorified, / And Peter the Aleut is
exalted by his voluntary sacrifice, / In their
devotion and love for the Lord / They willingly
endured persecution and death for the Truth, /
Now in the Kingdom of Heaven they intercede
for our souls!*

Kontakion – Tone 4

*Today Valaam joins Alaska / In celebrating this
joyous feast, / As her spiritual son Juvenaly /
Embraces the new martyr Peter with love. /
Together they suffered for the Lord in America
/ And united the old world with the new by their
voluntary sacrifice. / Now forever they stand
before the King of glory and intercede for our
souls.*



Synaxis of All Saints of Alaska

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Gabrielle Guedes, on her birthday, offered by her godmother Trudy Ellmore.

Doug Inferrera, on his birthday, offered by his family.

Dale Mast, on his birthday, offered by his cousin, Sub-Deacon Vlashi.

The Philokalia: Daily Readings

Thus we need discernment in all things if we are to know how to act so as to do the will of God. For God, as the Creator of all things, knows our nature thoroughly and has ordered all things for our benefit.

- St Peter of Damascus, A Treasury of Divine Knowledge

Liturgical Schedule

Sunday, September 24th

9:30 am: Sunday School
grades 4-8

9:40 am: Hours

10:00 am: Divine Liturgy
After Communion: Sunday
School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, September 30th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, October 1st

9:30 am: No Sunday School

9:40 am: Hours

9:45 am: Genertal
Confession

10:00 am: Divine
Liturgy/Panikhida: Barbara
Funk

After Communion: Sunday
School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, October 7^h

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, October 8th

9:30 am: Sunday School

9:40 am: Hours

10:00 am: Divine Liturgy
After Communion: Sunday
School pre-K - Grade 3

Saturday, October 9^h

6:30 pm: Vespers

Bulletin Sponsors

***Trudy Ellmore; Infrerra
Family***

Readings:

The Prokeimenon in the 7th Tone:

The Lord shall give strength to His people! / The Lord shall bless His people with
peace! (*Psalm 28:11*)

vs. Offer to the Lord, O ye sons of God! Offer young rams to the Lord!
(*Psalm 28:1*)

Another, Tone 4 (New Martyrs of Alaska):

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
(*Psalm 15:3*)

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Brethren, working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation." Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

New Martyrs of Alaska: Romans 8:28-39

Brethren, we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 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 killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Alleluia in the 7th Tone:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High!!

(Psalm 91:2)

vs. To declare Thy mercy in the morning and Thy truth by night!.

(Psalm 91:3)

Another, Tone 4 (New Martyrs of Alaska):

The righteous cried, and the Lord heard them and delivered them out of all their troubles.

(Psalm 33:18)

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

At that time, Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he was astonished, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

New Martyrs of Alaska: Luke 21:12-19

But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls

Orthodox Quote of the Day

I believe that Thou wilt come to judge the living and the dead,
and all will stand in order, old and young, lords and princes,
priests and virgins. Where shall I find myself? Therefore, I cry:
Grant me, O Lord, repentance before the end.

The Canon of Repentance



***Synaxis of All Saints of Alaska: Holy New Martyrs of Alaska,
Hieromonk Juvenaly (ca. 1796) and Peter the Aleut (1815)***

On the anniversary of the arrival of the Russian missionaries in Alaska (1794), we remember the New Martyrs Saint Peter the Aleut, Protomartyr of America, and Saint Juvenal.



Martyr Peter the Aleut

Saint Peter the Aleut is mentioned in the Life of Saint Herman of Alaska (December 13). Simeon Yanovsky (who ended his life as the schemamonk Sergius in the Saint Tikhon of Kaluga Monastery), has left the following account:

“On another occasion I was relating to him how the Spanish in California had imprisoned fourteen Aleuts, and how the Jesuits (actually Franciscans) were forcing all of them to accept the Catholic Faith. But the Aleuts would not agree under any circumstances, saying, ‘We are Christians.’ The Jesuits argued, ‘That’s not true, you are heretics and schismatics. If you do not agree to accept our faith then we will torture all of you to death.’ Then the

Aleuts were placed in prisons two to a cell. That evening, the Jesuits came to the prison with lanterns and lighted candles. Again they tried to persuade two Aleuts in the cell to accept the Catholic Faith. ‘We are Christians,’ the Aleuts replied, ‘and we will not change our Faith.’ Then the Jesuits began to torture them, at first the one while his companion was a witness. They cut off one of the joints of his feet, and then the other joint. Then they cut the first joint on the fingers of his hands, and then the other joint. Then they cut off his feet, and his hands. The blood flowed, but the martyr endured all and firmly repeated one thing: ‘I am a Christian.’ He died in such suffering, due to a loss of blood. The Jesuit also promised to torture his comrade to death the next day.

But that night an order was received from Monterey stating that the imprisoned Aleuts were to be released immediately, and sent there under escort. Therefore, in the morning all were sent to Monterey with the exception of the dead Aleut. This was related to me by a witness, the same Aleut who had escaped torture, and who was the friend of the martyred Aleut. I reported this incident to the authorities in Saint Petersburg. When I finished my story, Father Herman asked, ‘What was the name of the martyred Aleut?’ I answered, ‘Peter. I do not remember his family name.’ The Elder stood reverently before an icon, made the Sign of the Cross and said, ‘Holy New Martyr Peter, pray to God for us!’”

We know very little about Saint Peter, except that he was from Kodiak, and was arrested and put to death by the Spaniards in California because he refused to convert to Catholicism. The circumstances of his martyrdom recall the torture of Saint James the Persian (November 27).

Both in his sufferings and in his steadfast confession of the Faith, Saint Peter is the equal of the martyrs of old, and also of the New Martyrs who have shone forth in more recent times. Now he rejoices with them in the heavenly Kingdom, glorifying God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, throughout all ages.



Martyr Juvenal of Alaska

Saint Juvenal, the Protomartyr of America, was born in 1761 in Nerchinsk, Siberia. His secular name was John Feodorovich Hovorukhin, and he was trained as a mining engineer. In a letter to Abbot Nazarius of Valaam (December 13, 1819), Saint Herman says that Saint Juvenal “had been an assistant at our monastery and was a former officer.” After his wife died in 1791, John entered a monastery at Saint Petersburg (Saint Herman’s Letter of December 13, 1819) and was tonsured with the name Juvenal. Three years later, he went to Alaska as a missionary.

During 1794, the hieromonks Juvenal and Macarius spent two months in the area around Kodiak teaching the inhabitants about Christ and baptizing them. They traveled in small boats of hide in all sorts of weather, dividing up the territory among themselves. Saint Herman tells of a conversation he heard one day as he walked with the hieromonks to a small hill on the south side of the harbor. They sat down facing the sea, and spoke of various things. Soon they began to discuss where each of them should go to preach. Aflame with zeal and eager to set out on their journey, a friendly argument ensued between Father Macarius and Father Juvenal. Father Macarius said he intended to go north to the Aleutian Islands, and then make his way to the Alaskan mainland, where the inhabitants had invited him to visit. The monks had a map of Captain Cook’s which indicated that some Russians were living near a certain river in that particular area, and Father Macarius hoped to find them.

Father Juvenal interrupted, saying that he believed that the Alaskan mainland was his territory. “I beg you to yield to me and not offend me in this,” he told Father Macarius, “since the ship is leaving for Yakutan. I shall begin preaching in the south, proceeding north along the ocean, cross the Kenai peninsula, then from the port there I shall cross to Alaska.”

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

Father Macarius became sorrowful and said, “No, Father. Do not restrict me in this way. You know the Aleutian chain of islands is joined to Alaska, therefore it belongs to me, and also the whole northern shore. As for you, the southern part of America is sufficient for your whole lifetime, if you please.”

As he listened to their apostolic fervor, Saint Herman says he “went from joy to rapture” (Letter to Abbot Nazarius, May 19, 1795).

In 1795, Father Juvenal baptized over 700 Chugatchi at Nushek, then he crossed Kenai Bay and baptized the local people there. In 1796, according to native oral tradition, Saint Juvenal came to the mouth of the Kuskokwim near the present village of Quinahgak, where he was killed by a hunting party (There is a forged diary attributed to Ivan Petroff which gives a slanderous version of Father Juvenal’s death, and alleges that he was martyred at Lake Iliamna).

The precise reason for Saint Juvenal’s murder by the natives is not known. However, they later told Saint Innocent something about his death. They said that Saint Juvenal did not try to defend himself when attacked, nor did he make any attempt to escape. After being struck from behind, he turned to face his attackers and begged them to spare the natives he had baptized.

The natives told Saint Innocent that after they had killed Saint Juvenal, he got up and followed them, urging them to repent. They fell upon him again and gave him a savage beating. Once more, he got to his feet and called them to repentance. This happened several times, then finally the natives hacked him to pieces. Thus, the zealous Hieromonk Juvenal became the first Orthodox Christian in America to receive the crown of martyrdom. His unnamed guide, possibly a Tanaina Indian convert, was also martyred at the same time.

It is said that a local shaman removed Saint Juvenal’s brass pectoral cross from his body and attempted to cast a spell. Unexpectedly, the shaman was lifted up off the ground. He made three more tries with the same result, then concluded that there was a greater power than his own at work here. Years later, a man showed up at the Nushagak Trading Post wearing a brass pectoral cross exactly like the one worn by Saint Juvenal.

A column of light arose from his holy relics and reached up to Heaven. It is not known how long this phenomenon continued.

Saint Juvenal, in his tireless evangelization of the native peoples of Alaska, served the Church more than all the other missionaries combined.



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

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

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

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

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

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

OrthodoxChurchMotherOfGod@outlook.com ; reader.charles@hotmail.com or sub-deacon.vlashi@outlook.com

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

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



Orthodox Church of the Mother of God: Parish News

Council Meeting: Today, September 24th immediately after coffee hour.

Sisterhood news: ...The Sisterhood will be sponsoring a fundraiser selling gourmet popcorn and snacks. The fundraiser will run from this Sunday, Sept. 17th, through Oct. 1st. One half of all the costs for items purchased will be returned directly to the Sisterhood. We are asking that all parish families participate in this fundraiser. Please see Tammy Zimmerman for more information.

This year, our feast day celebration will be held outside of church at Cousin Mario's restaurant on Harding Highway. The celebration will be on Sunday Oct. 8th at 12:15 PM. All Sisterhood members in good standing are invited to attend. The Sisterhood will be covering the cost of the luncheon. Alcoholic beverages are not included. Please see Linda Dantine for more information, and to RSVP.

There will be a special collection taken today to aid the victims of both hurricane Harvey and hurricane Irma. Please be generous in your donations.

Panikhida: Sunday, October 1st for Barbara Funk with a luncheon to follow. Everyone one is invited.

Wisdom of the Church Fathers

"No matter how much you want to live. Live as long as God has decided. Not a single minute more..."

Elder Dionysios of Colciu, the Athonite
(1909-2004)



NY/NJ Diocese News



PRAYER FOR RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Our newest mission parish community, **Saint Simon of Cyrene in New Brunswick NJ**, will host an Akathist service ("To the African Saints") with prayers for racial reconciliation on **Sunday, 1 October 2017 at 6:00 p.m.** Following the service which will include pastors and members of faith communities in the area, Archbishop Michael will offer a brief address on the themes of racism, prejudice, and reconciliation. The faithful of the diocese are encouraged to attend!

Beloved in the Lord:
Christ is in our midst!

It is with great joy that I invite you to be part of a very special upcoming event, hosted by the newest mission parish community of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey – Saint Simon of Cyrene Orthodox Mission:

Akathist Service to the African Saints: Prayer for Racial Reconciliation

Sunday, October 1, 6:00 PM
Hosted by Saint Simon of Cyrene Orthodox Mission
80 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, New Jersey

(in the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church)

Following the Akathist Service, I will give a brief address, together with other invited speakers who will reflect on themes of racism, prejudice, and reconciliation. It is my hope that this event may bring together Orthodox Christians with other people of faith and good will, in a spirit of unity – giving a worthy witness of “the love of God in Christ Jesus” to a world urgently in need of that love and reconciliation.

In order that we may plan accordingly, I ask that you kindly RSVP to Deacon Samuel Davis, at 732-277-0854 or e-mail samuel.davis339@gmail.com, with the number of people attending, by Wednesday, September 27. However, all guests will be warmly welcomed, whether you have sent an RSVP or not.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I ask the Lord’s blessings on you and your loved ones; and I look forward to seeing you on October 1.

Devotedly yours in His service,
+ Michael
Archbishop of New York and the
Diocese of New York and New Jersey



Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News

OCA Diocese of Mexico assessing earthquake damage in parishes, missions

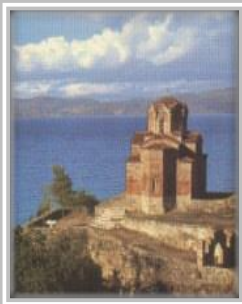
As central Mexico slowly embarks on the long road to recovery in the aftermath of the massive 7.1 earthquake that struck the region on Tuesday, September 19, 2017, early reports from the Orthodox Church in America’s Diocese of Mexico indicate that, while no major damage has been experienced at Mexico City’s Ascension Cathedral or other parish properties, many faithful have suffered damage to—or the complete loss of—their homes.

While communications have been understandably slower than usual due to power outages and infrastructure damage, His Eminence, Archbishop Alejo reported that Ascension Cathedral had suffered a number of cracks. Whether they are structural or not has yet to be determined. The cathedral is located near the Mexico City airport, which was closed for several hours after the earthquake struck. Archbishop Alejo added that a mission chapel had suffered significant damage, the extent of which had yet to be fully assessed as of Wednesday, September 20.

The parish in Cuernavaca, the earthquake’s epicenter, also did not suffer major damage, although the homes of some parishioners were damaged or destroyed. Details are still being gathered.

“We thank God for all His blessings, but we also pray for those who suffered greatly and for the lives that were lost,” Archbishop Alejo said. It will take time to fully assess how the earthquake has affected the faithful in each parish and mission throughout the expansive diocese.

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon and members of the OCA Chancery staff will be working in conjunction with Archbishop Alejo to determine and assess the needs of Mexican faithful most impacted by the earthquake. Further information will be made available as it is received.



Prayers by the Laker, St. Velimirovich, XXV:

You souls of the dead, join me in glorifying the Heavenly Triad. What other way do you have to spend your time except either to cringe for fear far from God or to soar for joy close to God?

You have left behind your bodily ashes, your favorite concern, and now you only have to worry about your nakedness. Surely you realize now that the body does not give fragrance to the soul, but the soul to the body.

How difficult it is for a sinful soul when it is undiluted by flesh and unhidden by flesh! Truly, a wheel does not go into the mud by itself, but only if a coachman drives it there. Surely you realize now that the wheel became sullied by the coachman's own will.

The wheel has received its payment, and the coachman will receive his.

You sinful souls, yearn no longer to return to the body, as though you could supposedly flee from the evil stench that is suffocating you where you are now. You would only bring that same stench back with yourselves, and would increase it in a new body.

You sinful souls, yearn no longer to enter the body, as though you could flee the fire that is roasting you and the smoke that is smothering you! You would only bring the fire and smoke with yourselves, and your body would not be your rescuer but your burnt offering.

Rather direct all your attention to the eternal Virginity of God, which can cast out the evil stench from you, and to the Son of the Virgin, who would illuminate you with the flame of the wisdom of the Trinity, and to the All-Holy Spirit, who would give you the strength and the wisdom to elevate you to the choirs of angels.

You purified souls, who smell more captivating than all the balsams on earth, do not separate yourselves from those of us still on earth, who for another hour or two are still wandering over your paths of suffering and your ashes. All those who are pure on earth will be pure in heaven also, and will be your companions, perfumed with the balsam of paradise and clothed in the whiteness of virginity.

Strengthen your love for us and your prayer for us. For between you and us is no partition other than the frail veil of our flesh. For even though you have gone ahead while we have remained behind, the path is the same and the city at the end of the path is the same.

You righteous souls, we pray to the Lord for you as well, so that He may make your passage to Him easy and swift. Even though we are weaker than you, we nevertheless pray to God for you. We pray out of the love with which our heart burns for you, even as a younger and weaker brother reaches out to help his older and stronger brother.

For just as younger and older brothers are one flesh in the eyes of the love that gave them birth, so also are we and you one flesh in the eyes of the exceedingly wise and exceedingly strong IQve of the Most High.

You countless flocks of souls of the dead, do not be dis-traught and confounded, and have no more regard for the cold island of life on earth, to which we, being few in number, are still stuck for another hour or two until we come to join you for the summer in warmer and brighter regions.

For all of you, both righteous and sinful, we who are half-dead, half-alive pray to the Mercy of Heaven, so that you may not be confounded, so that you may not be afraid and look back, but may, in the fullness of summer, head ever forward and ever higher--

toward light and joy
toward peace and plenitude.

300 Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church, CXXV:

III. Us and Our Neighbors

Love Toward Enemies

I ask you to try something. If someone grieves you, or dishonors you, or takes something of yours, then pray like this: "Lord, we are all your creatures. Pity your servants, and turn them to repentance," and then you will perceptibly bear grace in your soul. Induce your heart to love your enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, shall help you in all things, and will Himself show you experience. But whoever thinks evil of his enemies does not have love for God and has not known God.

St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.21



The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon

Correcting Oneself

Changing our bad behavior

We often become frustrated with ourselves, wanting to change bad behavior, but seemingly incapable of making the changes we desire. Each week we confess the same sins over and over. We know the priest has heard the same confession, week after week, and we're aware that he could probably say our confession for us, having heard it that often. What we don't seem to know is that there is a simple reason for our repetition.

These bad behaviors only seem to be unchangeable because we don't really struggle with the passions in a way that will bring about successful change.

For the person who always flies off the handle in anger, there is the matter of habit. Their temper flares up because of what the other person has done, so the outburst is really not about them, but about the other person.

Change, therefore, becomes almost impossible. The person who is always stretching the truth is aware of their sin, but the habit is so strongly held, they find themselves lying before even realizing their confessed sin is being repeated. The over eater makes a commitment to lose weight, but makes no attempt to empty the refrigerator of the very leftover cake that was a temptation the night before. So, while watching television, the thought comes into their mind that there is that one piece of cake remaining, and they rush forth that final consumption. Almost like magic, there is another cake sitting on the counter by the next afternoon.

We all have had moments like this, when we seemingly can’t stop the bad behavior that we confess over and over, almost like a litany. Our captivity to this bad behavior seems permanent, and change impossible. Yet if we make a concerted effort to change, little by little, we will find we really can master those stubborn behaviors that seem so insurmountable. Instead of beating ourselves up each time we fall, we take those little baby steps, and little by little, we make progress. That cake we consumed becomes our last piece, because this time we don’t go near the row in the grocery store where we know the bakery goods are displayed. We manage to curb our temper because we made a commitment to get through just two hours around that person in the office who pushes our buttons, and when the two hours passes, we have reason to pat ourselves on the back. We pass half a day without inventing a new story about ourselves, and before long, we are no longer confessing that sin. Little by little, we find we can change bad behavior.

“A man cannot correct himself all of a sudden, but it is like pulling a barge – pull, pull, and let go, let go! Not all at once, but little by little. Do you know the mast on a ship? There is a pole to which is tied all of the ship’s lines. If you pull on it then everything gradually pulls. But if you take it all at once, you will ruin everything (St. Ambrose of Optina).”



Daily Reflection **Are We “Worthy” of Holy Communion?**

“I believe and confess, Lord, that You are truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first. I also believe that this is truly Your pure Body and that this is truly Your

precious Blood. Therefore, I pray to You, have mercy upon me, and forgive my transgressions, voluntary and involuntary, in word and deed, in knowledge and in ignorance. And make me worthy/proper (ἀξιῶσόν με), without condemnation, to partake of Your pure mysteries for the remission of sins and for eternal life...” (Byzantine Liturgy, Pre-Communion Prayer)



Now, you may disagree with me, but I find the English word “worthy,” in the context of receiving Holy Communion, utterly confusing, unhelpful, and even unorthodox. It seems to pose a question about my “worth” in the eyes of a Lord Who has already died for all of us, “while we were still sinners” (Rom 5: 8); and Who said to each and every one of us, “Drink from it, ALL of you...” (Mt 26: 27). Undoubtedly, He already decided that each and every one of us was “worth” that.

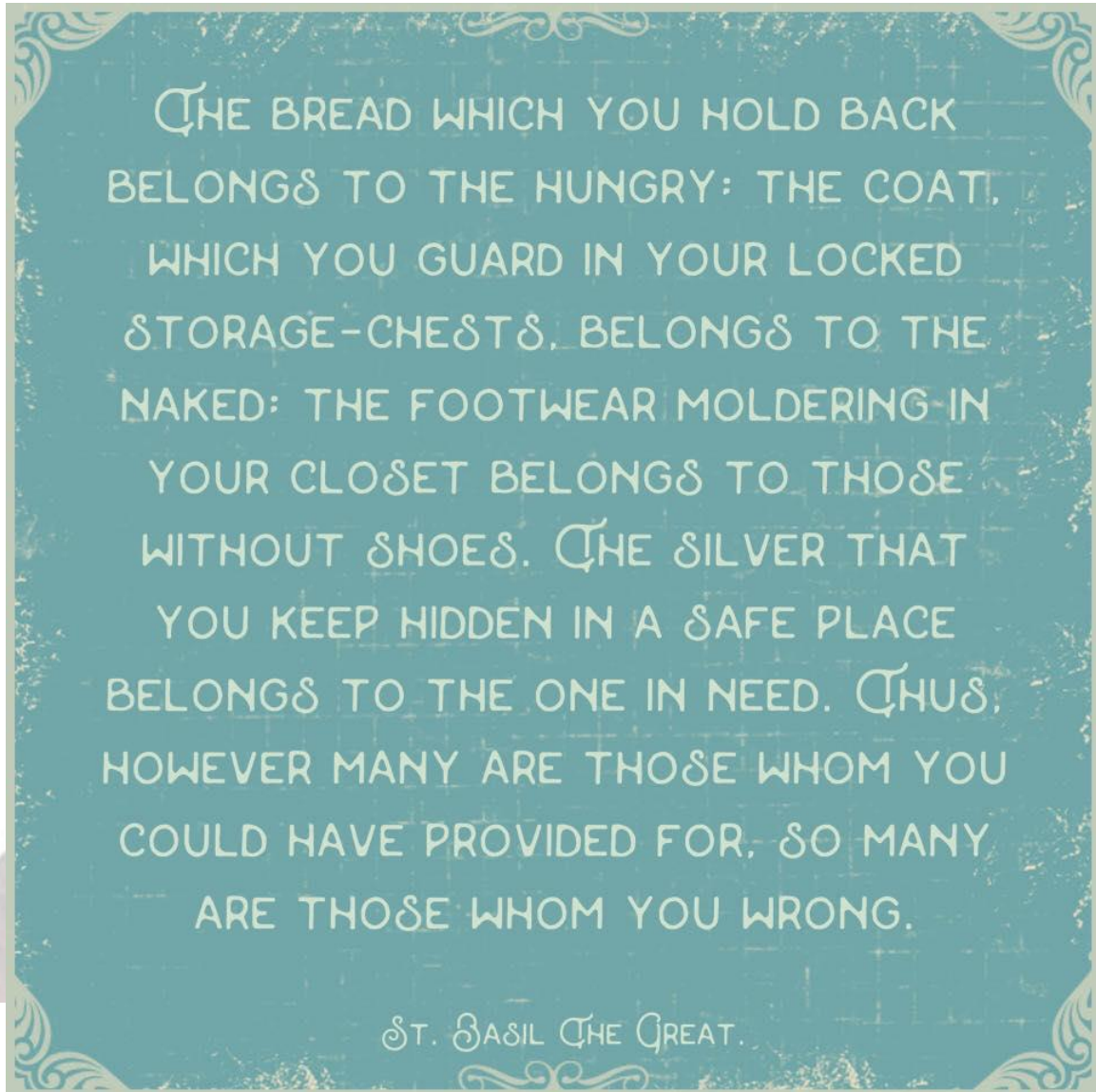
So, I understand the expression, “make me worthy” (ἀξιῶσόν με, сподоби мя), to mean “make me proper” or “right” for this occasion. In other words, make my heart and mind appropriate for communion with You, meaning, at peace with You and others, despite my shortcomings and resulting conflicts, which I must take care to resolve before approaching You (as we are commanded to do in Mt 5: 23-24, “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you...”). After all, we translate the same Greek word (ἄξιος) at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, “Ἀξιον καὶ δίκαιον, / Достойно и праведно есть” as, “It is ‘proper’ and right.”

So, when I “examine myself,” as St. Paul instructs us to do, before approaching Holy Communion (1 Cor 11: 28), let me ask the right questions, rather than the false ones. I do not ask myself whether I am “worth” the Self-Offering of the precious Body and Blood of my Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. No. Because He already answered that question, having died for me, and all of us, and having descended into our hell and overcome it, in His resurrection. What I need to ask of myself, and what He asks of me, is that my heart and mind, despite my shortcomings, are “properly” in line with His peace and His mercy, embracing forgiveness of myself and others. Lord, have it Your way; Have “mercy”! And let me have it as well, that I may be “proper” and “right” as I approach communion with You.

Ancient Christian Wisdom

When people are empty of Christ, a thousand and one things come and fill them up: jealousy, hatreds, boredom, melancholy, resentment, a worldly outlook, worldly pleasures. Try to fill your soul with Christ so that it's not empty.

+ St. Porphyrios



Through the Grace of God – Orthodox Christianity

St Porphyrios: Christian Struggle

“Don’t wage your Christian struggle with sermons and arguments, but with true love.”