

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 3, 2017

Gospel: Matthew 19:16-26

Tone 4

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 16:13-24

13th Sunday after Pentecost: Hieromartyr Anthimus the Bishop of Nicomedia

Martyrs Theophilus—Deacon; Dorotheus, Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Indes, Gorgonius, Zeno; the Virgin Domna, and Euthymius (302). Ven. Theoctistus, fellow ascetic with Ven. Euthymius the Great (467). Blessed John “the Hairy”, Fool-for-Christ at Rostov (1580). St. Phœbe, Deaconess at Cencreæ near Corinth (1st c.). Martyr Basilissa of Nicomedia (309). Martyr Aristion, Bishop of Alexandria (2nd c.). St. Joannicius, Archbishop of Serbia (1349).

Troparion – Tone 1

You protected your flock with your blood, / Not fearing your adversaries. / Now you rejoice in heaven standing before the throne. / Glory to Christ who has strengthened you; / Glory to your courage; / Glory to your endurance, O holy Hieromartyr Anthimus!

Kontakion – Tone 4

Illustrious priest and steadfast martyr, / Anthimus, worthy of praise: / You assailed the worship of idols, / And championed your flock which fervently cries to you: / By your prayers deliver us from dangers!



Hieromartyr Anthimus the Bishop of Nicomedia

Prayer Requests

For Health of:

Archbishop Michael, on his birthday (Aug. 29th), offered by the Orthodox Church of the Mother of God and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Xavier & Nicole, on their birthday, offered by their godmother Trudy.

Brianna, on her birthday, offered by her mother & father Trudy & Phil.

Julian, on his birthday, offered by his family.

Kiera & Dan Dangle, on their birthday, offered by their family.

Florence Smith, offered by her son Sub-Deacon Edward and family.

Prof. Aleksei Shipovalnikov, & Archpriest James Parsells, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

Sandra Macaulay, of St. John the Baptist Church, Alpha, NJ, presently in intensive care, offered by Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

In Memory of:

Anthony Lickwar, brother of Archpriest Joseph Lickwar, Chancellor of the Diocese, who fell asleep in the Lord on Sept. 1st, Archbishop Michael and the Diocese of NY/NJ.

The Philokalia: Daily Readings

Let him who wants to act rightly entreat God in prayer, and at once knowledge and power will be given him

- St Peter of Damascus, A Treasury of Divine Knowledge

Liturgical Schedule

Sunday, September 3rd

9:40 am: Hours
9:45 am: General
Confession
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Saturday, September 9th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, September 10th

9:40 am: Hours
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Saturday, September 16th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, September 17th

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

Saturday, September 23rd

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, September 24th

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

Saturday, September 30th

6:30 pm: Vespers

Sunday, October 1st

9:40 am: Hours
9:45 am: General
Confession
10:00 am: Divine Liturgy

Bulletin Sponsors

*Trudy & Phil Ellmore;
Sub-Deacon Edward;
Searfoorce Family*

Readings:

The Prokeimenon in the 4th Tone:

O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! / In wisdom hast Thou made them all!!
(Psalm 103:24)
vs. Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great!
(Psalm 103:1)

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Brethren, be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. Now, brethren, you know that the household of Steph'anas were the first converts in Acha'ia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Steph'anas and Fortuna'tus and Acha'icus, because they have made up for your absence; for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such men. The churches of Asia send greetings. Aqu'ila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brethren send greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Alleluia in the 4th Tone:

Go forth, prosper and reign, for the sake of truth, meekness and righteousness.
(Psalm 44:5)
vs. For Thou lovest righteousness, and dost hate iniquity.
(Psalm 44:8)

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-42

The Lord said, "Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"

Orthodox Quote of the Day

He who wants to do something and cannot is, in the eyes of God who sees our hearts, as though he has done it. This should be understood as being so in relation to good and evil alike.

St. Mark the Ascetic



Hieromartyr Anthimus the Bishop of Nicomedia

The Hieromartyr Anthimus, Bishop of Nicomedia, and those with him suffered during the persecution against Christians under the emperors Diocletian (284-305) and Maximian (305-311). The persecution became particularly intense after a fire at the imperial court at Nicomedia. The pagans accused the Christians of setting the fire and reacted against them with terrible ferocity.

In Nicomedia alone, on the day of the Nativity of Christ, as many as twenty thousand Christians were burned inside a church. However, this monstrous inhumanity did not frighten the Christians, who firmly confessed their faith and endured martyrdom for Christ.

Sts Dorotheus, Mardonius, Migdonius, Peter, Indes and Gorgonius died during this period. One of them was beheaded by the sword, others perished by burning, or being buried alive, or by drowning in the sea. The soldier Zeno boldly denounced the emperor Maximian, for which he was stoned, and then beheaded.

Then the holy Virgin Martyr Domna, a former pagan priestess, perished at the hands of the pagans, and also Saint Euthymius, because of their concern that the bodies of the holy martyrs should be buried. Bishop Anthimus, who headed the Church of Nicomedia, hid himself in a village not far from Nicomedia at the request of his flock. From there he sent letters to the Christians, urging them to cleave firmly to the holy Faith and not to fear tortures.

One of his letters, sent with Deacon Theophilus, was intercepted and given to the emperor Maximian. Theophilus was interrogated and died under torture, without revealing to his torturers the whereabouts of Bishop Anthimus. After a while Maximian managed to learn where Saint Anthimus was, and sent a detachment of soldiers after him.

The bishop met them along the way, but the soldiers did not recognize the saint. He invited them to join him and provided a meal, after which he revealed that he was the one they sought. The soldiers did not know what to do. They wanted to leave him and tell the emperor that they had not found him. Bishop Anthimus was not one to tolerate a lie, and so he would not consent to this.

The soldiers came to believe in Christ and received holy Baptism. The saint ordered them to carry out the emperor's instructions. When Bishop Anthimus was brought before the emperor, the emperor ordered that the instruments of execution be brought out and placed before him. "Do you think, emperor, to frighten me with these tools of execution?" asked the saint. "No indeed, you cannot frighten one who wishes to die for Christ! Execution is frightening only for the cowardly, for whom the present life is most precious." The emperor then directed that the saint be fiercely tortured and beheaded by the sword.

Bishop Anthimus joyfully glorified God with his last breath, and received the crown of martyrdom. (See December 28 for another account of the Nicomedian martyrs.)



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

Sunday School news: Sunday School will begin for the 2017-18 school year on Sept. 17th. If your child is a returning Sunday School student in our parish, please sign the sign-up sheet located at the candle stand in the vestibule. If your phone number has changed within the past year, please include that information as well. If your child is new to Sunday School in our parish, please complete a new student information form, also found at the candle stand in the vestibule.

Times for Sunday School classes will remain the same as last year: Grades 4 through 8 will meet before the Divine Liturgy at 9:30 am in the community room. Grades K through 3, and pre-school will meet immediately after communion, also in our community room.

Thank you, and we are looking forward to a great year!

Sisterhood news: The Sisterhood of the Protection of the Mother of God will hold their next meeting on Sunday, September 10th immediately after coffee hour.

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

Wisdom of the Church Fathers

“Whoever wants to become a Christian must first become a poet. That's what it is! You must suffer. You must love and suffer--suffer for the one you love. Love makes effort for the loved one. She runs all through the night; she stays awake; she stains her feet with blood in order to meet her beloved. She makes sacrifices and disregards all impediments, threats, and difficulties for the sake of the loved one. Love towards Christ is something even higher, infinitely higher.

And when we say 'love', we don't mean the virtues that we will acquire, but the heart that is pervaded by love towards Christ and others. We need to turn everything in this direction. Do we see a mother with her child in her arms and bending to give the child a kiss, her heart overflowing with emotion? Do we notice how her face lights up as she holds her little angel? These things do not escape a person with love of God. He sees them and is impressed by them and he says, 'If only I had those emotions towards my God, towards my Holy Lady and our saints!' Look, that's how we must love Christ our God. You desire it, you want it, and with the grace of God you acquire it.”

**Saint Porphyrios the Kapsokalivite
(1906-1991)**

NY/NJ Diocese News



ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL: "Happy Birthday!"

The clergy and faithful of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey convey love, admiration and sincere gratitude to His Eminence, our **beloved Archbishop Michael, as he celebrates his birthday on August 29th.** His love, leadership, determination and wisdom have strengthened, inspired and encouraged dedicated service of the diocesan clergy and laity, and various institutions throughout the Church. We pray that the Lord will give him strength of soul and body, and many good and blessed years. *Eis polla eti Despota!*

**60TH
ANNIVERSARY OF
ST. ANDREW'S CAMP**

Saturday, September 23, 2017

**COME JOIN THE
CELEBRATION OF
ST. ANDREW'S
PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE**

LOCATION
1280 State Route 49
Cleveland, NY 13042

SAINT ANDREW'S CAMP: 60th Anniversary

Sixty years ago there was a vision: to combine a traditional camping experience with education and fellowship in the Orthodox Faith. From this came **Saint Andrew's Orthodox Camp**, serving campers from around the Church for the past six decades. In celebration of our 60th year, the board and staff invite you to join us on **September 23, 2017** as our honored guests. The day will begin with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at 9:00 am celebrated by Archbishop Michael. A festive meal, fellowship, and tour of the camp will follow.

ARCHPASTORAL CALENDAR:

Archbishop Michael's calendar has been updated on the diocesan website:
<https://nynjoca.org/schedule.html>

Don't forget that a wonderful series of "Lesson in Our Faith" by Archbishop Michael is available for viewing on the diocesan website. These very brief and concise videos are excellent for catechumens and "seekers."
https://nynjoca.org/lessons_in_our_faith.html

PASTORAL CHANGES:

Presbyter James Worthington, at his own request, was granted a Personal Leave of Absence from active parish ministry, by Archbishop Michael, effective August 12, 2017.

Holy Trinity Church in Elmira NY, will be administered by **Archpriest Alexey Karlgut**, Dean of the New York State Deanery, and serviced by Deanery clergy, effective August 12, 2017.

Deacon Paul Fedoroff is attached to Christ the Savior Church, Ballston Lake NY, effective August 19, 2017.

Deacon Ivan Bazarov is attached to Holy Apostles Mission in Lansing NY, effective August 20, 2017



Orthodox Church in America (OCA) News

Metropolitan Tikhon: Day of Prayer for Creation, Hurricane Harvey

On Friday, September 1, 2017—the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year and the annual Day of Prayer for Creation—His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon issued a statement that included words of hope for the countless individuals and families who have been suffering as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

The complete text reads as follows and also is available in PDF format.

**Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude
Metropolitan Tikhon
on the Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year, the Day of Prayer for Creation
September 1, 2017**

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America and to all who are suffering as a result of Hurricane Harvey,

It was on September 1, 1989 that His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I of blessed memory proclaimed the first day of the Ecclesiastical Year as a "Day of Prayer for Creation." Since that day nearly 30 years ago, faithful the world over have offered prayers for creation, for its healing and good estate, for the welfare of those who inhabit it, and for the inspiration to serve as wise and faithful stewards over the many gifts and blessings God has so freely given to His People.

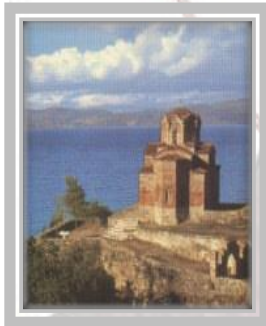
This message is especially poignant at this time in history, as we ponder the tragedy of Hurricane Harvey, which during the last week of August had devastated southeastern Texas and many other points along the Gulf Coast. The storm—considered to be the worst in US history—relentlessly visited the region with a record amount of rain, causing widespread flooding and other damage that in time will experience its own "healing." Countless individuals and families—many of whom have lost everything as a result of the storm—are also in need of healing as they patiently pursue the means by which life might once again return to "normal." And those who have lost their lives in the storm stand, above all, in our prayers, that they may receive eternal rest "where there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting."

While grieving with those who have been devastated beyond measure by Hurricane Harvey and its lingering effects, we proclaim boldly the hope that our Lord, Jesus Christ, offers as He says, “Behold, I make all things new” [Revelation 21:5]. Our most compassionate God grieves with us as we pray for the renewal of ourselves and the creation of which we are called to be stewards. The unmatched assistance rendered by first responders and an endless array of volunteers, who continue to provide a supreme example of compassion for one’s neighbors, is a sign of God’s presence in the midst of tragedy. And, while all of us are called to intensify our prayers for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, we are likewise called upon to put our faith into action by contributing to organizations such as International Orthodox Christian Charities, whose representatives have been “on site” in Texas for several days. Those who are in a position to contribute in other ways—by collecting and delivering essential items, clothing, food and water, and cleaning supplies, for example, or by partnering with local and regional agencies—surely will play an important role in “making all things new” for those who otherwise might hold little hope in the days ahead.

And so our prayers for God’s creation have taken on a new meaning this year—one that is quite personal and immediate. Our thoughts and love are with those who have suffered—and who continue to suffer—as a result of Hurricane Harvey. Our faith, put into action, can truly “move mountains” as we grieve with those who suffer while revealing in our own lives and response that our Lord indeed is watching over them—and us—as He makes “all things new.”

May our loving and compassionate Creator bless us now and in the days to come, and may He inspire us to do all that we can, regardless of our personal circumstances, to bring about the renewal of His creation and His People!

**With paternal love and blessings,
+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada
Primate of the Orthodox Church in America**



Prayers by the Laker, St. Velimirovich, XXII:

O Only Son of God, receive me into Your wisdom. You are the head of all the sons of men. You are their heavenly comprehension, illumination and jubilation.

You are the One who thinks the same goodness in all men: the same thought and the same light. A man recognizes another man through You. A man prophesies to another man through You. Through Your voice men hear each other. In Your language they understand. Truly, You are the Ultimate Man, for existentially all men are in You and You are in each.

You build the mind of man, and Your shadow demolishes it.

You have formed all forms, and You have stamped all of them with the seal of Your wisdom. You have fashioned all vessels from clay and have filled them all with the song and joy of the Holy Trinity, but Your shadow has dripped a drop of sorrow into each vessel, with which the sorrowful inscribe griefs on You.

O Majestic Lord! You dance on Your Mother's lap, quickened by the All-Holy Spirit. Direct my mind to Your mind, and with Your radiance cleanse it of sorrowful thoughts, of sorrowful forebodings, of sorrowful intentions. O my Majestic Lord!

You fill the whole soul of Your Mother, all Her virgin breast; and there is nothing in Your Mother's soul except You. You are Her radiance and Her voice, truly Her eye and Her song.

You are the pride of the Holy Spirit Lord--His activity and His fruit--His fascination and His admiration! You, my Majestic Lord, who dance on Your Mother's lap, quickened by the Holy Spirit!

You are the courage of the Holy Trinity, Its heroism and Its history. You dared to let one triune ray into chaos and darkness, and the world became--a miracle, that the eye cannot see nor the ear hear, O Creator of the eye and the ear.

And this whole miracle is just a pale picture of You, just a copied and distorted likeness of You in pieces of a half-darkened mirror.

My heart yearns for Your complete image, O Son of God. For it is bitterness to be a fragment of Your image, drifting in-securely on an ocean of darkness.

Shatter the narrowness of my soul, O expanse of the triradiate Godhead!

Illuminate my mind, O light of angels and creatures. Make my life logical, Most Wise logos of God. Make my soul a virgin, and be her eye and her song.

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

III. Us and Our Neighbors

Love Toward Enemies

Whoever will not love his enemies cannot know the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies in such way that we pity their souls as if they were our own children.

St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, I.11



The Morning Offering – Daily Inspiration by Abbott Tryphon

The After Life

Thoughts on the oneness of creation

There is no formal doctrine in the Orthodox Church concerning the afterlife for animals, including our pets. Those Fathers of the Church who have expressed themselves on this matter were simply expressing theological opinions that have not become universally accepted, and remain known as “theologoumena” (personal opinion).

The Church has wisely refrained from pronouncing conclusively regarding the afterlife, for much remains unknown. We will not truly understand what awaits us after this life until we have entered into the afterlife. As Orthodox Christians, we simply accept the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed, reciting the words, “I look for...the life of the world to come.”

By God’s grace and our cooperation with this grace, we expect to inherit eternal life. We believe that all beings who have been a part of our lives will also be there. Some of us would even hope, along with C.S. Lewis, that it might be possible Paradise will also include our beloved pets, and even the animals that have contributed in a myriad of ways to our own well-being. Would it be possible that the cow that provided milk for our children, and cheese for our table, might one day join us in a Paradise where there is no death and no pain?

C.S. Lewis describes something like this in his book “The Great Divorce” in which a sanctified lady in paradise is accompanied by a myriad of animals as she walks in glory through the fields of Paradise. As I have enjoyed the affection and loyalty of our monastery’s wonderful Norwegian Forest Cat, Hammi, it would seem to me a Paradise without this loving little creature, would be wanting. Even the eternal loss of our hens, who’ve provided us with so many wonderful, fresh eggs, and given me so much delight, as I’ve watched them enjoying their free range lives, would seem sad to me.

This is simply my opinion, and I look forward to the possibility of meeting with the many beloved dogs and cats whose lives I have shared, over my sixty-eight years. The saints saw animals as creatures of God, created as gifts of God’s love, and therefore resisted negligence or indifference when these animals were under their charge.

Saint Paul of Obnora was known to converse with birds, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov made friends with a bear. Saint Anthony the Great had a friendship with a lion. Saint Modestos viewed animals as sublime and mysterious gifts from God, and would often bless the livestock of the faithful – praying for their health and survival and glorifying in the vastness and beauty of all that God made. I myself, for some thirteen years, have blessed our cat Hammi, as I’ve let him out of the library after his night of sleep.

The traditional lands of Britain, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, all lands of the Celtic peoples, which, until the 11th century were part of the unified Orthodox Catholic Church and whose saints and spiritual life have much to offer the contemporary world, saw all of reality as a single unity. These saints knew, as all of the holy saints of the Church have known, that the wholeness of creation had been torn apart by the sin of Adam, and was restored by the saving act of Christ. In their lives they embodied the restoration of wholeness in creation, whether by communication with angels and spirits, or by kinship with all of the natural world.

Saint Athanasius said, “(God) provided the work of creation also as a means by which the Maker might be known ... Three ways thus lay open to them, by which they might obtain the knowledge of God. (First), they could look up to the immensity of heaven, and by pondering the harmony of creation come to know its Ruler, the Word of the Father.” Thus, the natural world, seen in the light of Christ, remains a way to know God, that is, a way of salvation.

The oneness of our relationship with Creation is brought to life with the story of Saint Kevin of Glendalough. While standing at prayer in a traditional Celtic monastic position with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross, a blackbird built a nest on his arm and laid her eggs. Saint Kevin, not wanting to disturb her nest, stayed in the position until the eggs were hatched. The saint is said to have stated, “It is no great thing for me to bear this pain of holding my hand under the blackbird for the sake of heaven’s king.”

In the beginning of the restoration of the unity in the entire fallen cosmos, Christ went out into the desert and “He was with the wild beasts, and the angels served Him” (Mark 1:13). These heavenly and earthly creatures who were destined to become the new creation in the God-Man Jesus Christ were assembled around Him. There is a pointed reference to this restoration in the life of St Isaac of Syria, when he wrote:

The humble man approaches wild animals, and the moment they catch sight of him their ferocity is tamed. They come up and cling to him as their Master, wagging their tails and licking his hands and feet. They scent as coming from him the same fragrance that came from Adam before the transgression, the time when they were gathered together before him and he gave them names in Paradise. This scent was taken away from us, but Christ has renewed it and given it back to us at his coming. It is this which has sweetened the fragrance of humanity.

In other words, the state of likeness to God in Christ to which he had risen enabled him to be with the wild beasts just as Adam was in his naming of them. And, I suspect the reason pets are so important to we humans is that they aid in our journey into the restoration of kinship between two different parts of creation. Our pets become like all the animals were in the beginning, when Adam was charged with naming them.

When the human can lie down with the cat, or the dog, or the chicken, (to paraphrase Isaiah) we aid the advancement of the Kingdom just a little, work to recreate Paradise just a little, and so give new meaning to such menial tasks as cleaning out the chicken coop, or the litter box. Finally, as one of my favorite bishops said, “Animals were with Adam and Eve in Paradise, so why on earth wouldn’t they also be in Heaven (Metropolitan Kallistos Ware)?”



Daily Reflection **The Favorable Year of the Lord**



“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable/favorable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Lk 4: 16-21)

Having read aloud to us “this scripture,” this prophecy from chapter 61 of Isaiah, Jesus tells us that “today” it has been fulfilled “in our hearing.” He is the One sent to “preach good news to the poor,” and to “proclaim release to the captives,” and to “proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” Heeding the voice of Christ in my life means looking upon any given “year” as a “favorable” one; It means opening up to His “good news” and His freedom, which liberates me from bondage to “other” voices that are “bad news.”

This morning let me open up to the Spirit of the Lord, Who strengthens me and encourages me, through the light and lightness of His word. Rather than immersing myself in “bad news,” available to me in various forms, whether from external voices in the media, or internal, merely-human fears, let me immerse myself at least a bit in God’s word, which brings new “sight to the blind” and new freedom to “those who are oppressed,” as we often are when engrossed in merely-human voices. “For You are a good God and You love mankind, and to You we ascribe glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.” Amen!

Holy Orthodox Quotes

“Grant me the heart of Jesus, around which darkness waited in vain to enter, but never could.”

- St. Nikolai Velimirovich

Ancient Christian Wisdom

Do not be despondent when the clouds of hell, one darker than the other, descend upon your soul; when infernal malice, envy, doubt, obstinacy, and other passions, rise up in your soul; know surely that the gathering of these dark clouds upon your mental horizon is inevitable; but they are not always there and will not remain long; they are like the appearance of dark clouds on the sky in nature – they pass over and disappear, after which the mental atmosphere of the soul is cleared up again. In nature there must be clouds on the sky, and the darkening of the light of day; but these clouds are not constant, they soon pass away, and then the light of the sun shines again with renewed power.

+ **St. John of Kronstadt**

Through the Grace of God – Orthodox Christianity

St Seraphim of Sarov: Spirit of God

“When the Spirit of God descends upon a man and overshadows him with the fullness of His outpouring, then his soul overflows with a joy not to be described, for the Holy Spirit turns to joy whatever He touches. The Kingdom of Heaven is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Reflections in Christ

Transitioning to the Eucharist: Collision and Coalescence

by Fr. Lawrence Farley

Try to imagine what the Great Entrance looked like during the time of Chrysostom and of Maximus the Confessor a couple of centuries later. In that time, while the catechumens were being prayed for and dismissed, and then as the prayers of intercession were offered, deacons exited the church through the north door to enter the little building adjacent to it where the holy vessels were kept. There they gathered up the bread and wine, the chalices, cloths, spoons, spears, and everything needed for the Eucharist and came back with them to the altar, where the episcopal celebrant was waiting for them. While they were gone, the bishop and his presbyters were preparing themselves for the Eucharist: they washed their hands and moved to take their places around the altar. Today the priestly celebrant stands at the altar for the entire service, but originally their place during the readings was sitting on their seats in the far east end of the apse, on the synthronon. Thus the transition from the service centered on the Gospel to the service centered on the Eucharist had a distinctly visual component, for one could observe the clergy leave their seats where they had sat throughout the readings to gather around the altar table.

The prayers accompanying this transition express what they are doing, and may be aptly described as prayers of access to the altar. Today these prayers are mistitled the “Prayers of the Faithful,” since they come at the place where the Prayers of the Faithful for the world — i.e. the Great Litany — once stood. But they are clearly not the prayers of the people, but the private devotional prayers of the clergy. Even a quick look at the prayers themselves reveals this: the clergy pray that God Who “have accounted us worthy to stand even now before Your holy altar” may “enable us whom You have placed in this Your service, blamelessly and without offence to call upon You at all times and in every place.” The second prayer asks that God would “grant us to stand blameless and without condemnation before Your holy altar” and would “grant also to those who pray with us [i.e. the laity] growth in life and faith and spiritual understanding.” The silent prayer which the celebrant offers while the Cherubic Hymn is being sung says the same: “Enable me who am endowed with the grace of the priesthood to stand before this, Your holy Table, and perform the sacred mystery of Your holy and pure Body and precious Blood.” Yet another prayer, offered after the Great Entrance has taken place, is yet another prayer of access to the altar: “Accept also the prayer of us sinners, and bring us to Your holy altar, enabling us to offer unto You gifts and spiritual sacrifice for our sins and for the errors of the people.”

Why such a plethora of prayer all begging the same thing? Because it is a great and fearful thing for mortal man to stand before the consuming Fire of the Holy God. We tend to imagine that a church service is simply a matter of us on earth sending up our prayers “upstairs” and of launching our supplications to heaven. It is much scarier than that: it is a matter of inviting the Lord of all, before Whom even the glorious cherubim and the fiery seraphim veil their faces in awe, to come “downstairs” and to dwell in our midst. “Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire?” asked the sinners of Zion with trembling [Isaiah 33:14]. Who indeed? Yet we sinners in the Eucharist invite the devouring Fire into our midst, inviting a collision of sinful man with the Holy God. In this collision (with the clergy in the front seats — hence all those prayers of access to the altar), we take a tremendous

risk. Some found this to their cost, as Saint Paul reminded his Corinthian converts who received unworthily [1 Corinthians 11:30]. But if we all approach in penitence, in humility, forgiving others with contrite hearts and asking for our own forgiveness, this collision does not destroy us, but heals us. We are not consumed by the devouring fire, but illumined, warmed, transformed. These prayers of access to the altar reveal that the Eucharist to which we now transition is a daring epiclesis, invoking the fire of God upon us and inviting into our midst both judgment and salvation.

This Eucharist is not only a collision, but also a coalescing, as heaven joins with earth. In the days of Chrysostom and Maximus, the gifts of bread and wine were brought into the church to the accompaniment of a psalm — almost certainly Psalm 24:7-10. It was an obvious choice, since the psalm speaks not only of the Lord of glory coming in (i.e. Christ coming to us in the Eucharist through the chalice), but also of doors and gates. What better psalm could serve for the procession as it re-entered the nave through the doors and gates leading to and from the sacristy outside? And the refrain of the psalm expressed the nature of the Eucharist which followed — originally the refrain was simply a triple “Alleluia,” but later was added to it the words “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim and who sin the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity now lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all Who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic hosts.” The refrain was sung over and over between the verses of the psalm until the procession reached the altar and placed the gifts upon the table. (Eventually the psalm dropped out, leaving the refrain all by itself, which was later split in half in mid-sentence to allow for intercessions during the procession.)

But however it is now sung, the words of the refrain reveal the true nature of the Eucharist as a joining of heaven and earth, an intersection of time and eternity. It is not simply a matter of us on earth singing like the cherubim while the cherubim themselves sing in heaven. No: Christ comes upborne by those angelic hosts, and we represent the cherubim by giving audible earthly expression to their spiritual songs as they accompany Christ when He comes to us in the Eucharist. Heaven joins with earth, and earth is lifted up to heaven. That is what the celebrant means when he says to the people, “lift up your hearts!” He is not exhorting them to cheer up, but to ascend into heaven. It is easier than it sounds, for in the Eucharist heaven comes down to us on earth. We serve and receive the Eucharist with the angels of heaven, with the saints, and with all the faithful who have gone before. Our Christian dead may indeed be described as “the dearly departed,” but in the Eucharist we find that they have not departed very far. They are with Christ, and so with us as well.

All this is revealed in this original transition to the Liturgy of the Faithful. That Liturgy is a collision and a coalescence, and it brings the potential for both judgment and salvation into our very midst.

