

THE PROPHET

monthly newsletter of

St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church in America
Archdiocese of Pittsburgh

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Entry of the Mother of God (Nov. 21)

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RECTOR'S REPORT:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Christu!

It has been my continued joy to be with you all, and to get to know many of you better. As we continue our growth together, I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your patience with me as I learn how best to minister to you all; your prayers have been much appreciated as well. Your love and support have been crucial during this period of transition.

This period of growth is best served by learning from each other, and I thank you all for your comments and concerns. I have succeeded in some areas and failed in others, and you all are the best advisors as I strive to serve our needs.

As we enter into Advent together, my prayer is that we can support each other as we prepare to receive the coming of our Lord, who has come in the flesh in Bethlehem, who comes daily into our hearts, and who will come again in glory at the end of time.

As has been the custom at St. John's in the past, when not interrupted by the liturgical calendar, we will be having Small Compline followed by Confession on Wednesday and Friday evenings during Advent. May we all take advantage of this opportunity to better prepare ourselves for Christmas.

In Christ, with thanks and love,
Fr. John Joseph Kotalik IV, Acting Rector

PS: I would like to clarify how I have been handling Pannikhida (Parastas) services. While we will be having General Pannikhida/Parastas services on the third Saturday of each month before Vespers, individual memorials can be scheduled at any other time, especially on the anniversaries of the repose of our loved ones. However, I do not feel able to do them before Sunday Divine Liturgy, as I prepare to serve the Holy Eucharist. If you would like to schedule a full service or the shorter Litiya for the Departed, however, I am happy to serve these services after Liturgy. Praying for the departed is one of our highest Christian duties, and I hope to facilitate that prayer to the best of my abilities.

MEMORY ETERNAL:

(Вѣчная память)

We continue our 40 days of prayer for:

Rr. Robert Neufer (10/5)

John Rusinko (10/11)

We commemorate the anniversaries of:

Steven Drochak (11/1/2011)

Sophia Matyuf (11/2/1998)

Anthony Udodow (11/3/2016)

John Kirr (11/4/1983)

John Sapp (11/5/1986)

Mary Chobany (11/6/1976)

Frank Kotyk (11/7/2006)

George Uram (11/8/1987)

Daniel Oleynik (11/11/1951)

Ann Matyuf (11/12/2015)

Elizabeth Zubenko (11/12/2010)

Samuel Sapp (11/14/2012)

William Brookman (11/15/2011)

Peter Karmazin (11/15/1983)

Michael Telesko (11/16/1982)

Katherine Mcracken (11/17/2004)

George Otov (11/17/2004)

David Sweda (11/17/2018)

Martha Laucius (11/18/1995)

Val Prescop (11/22/2008)

Apr. John Oleynik (11/28/1993)

MANY YEARS:

(Многая и благая лѣта)

Namedays:

Michael Galis (11/8)

Michael George Pazuchanics (11/8)

Michael John Pazuchanics (11/8)

John Migyanko IV (11/13)

Katherine Helinski (11/24)

Kathleen Kolarsky (11/24)

Kathryn Pazuchanics (11/24)

Katherine Ruffing (11/24)

Katherine Signorini (11/24)

Catherine Thompson (11/24)

Carol (Catherine) Sweda (11/24)

Catherine Weber (11/24)

Birthdays:

Joseph Cario (11/1)

Zachary Strennen (11/2)

Olga Rusinko (11/3)

John Simko (11/6)

Michelle Campbell (11/6)

Gabe Ruffing (11/6)

Nancy Udodow (11/12)

Susan Horosky (11/18)

Aimee Eismont (11/19)

Gabriel Prince (11/21)

Lillian Janousek (11/21)

Luke Ruffing (11/22)

Mat. Myra Oleyynik (11/24)

Joseph Havrilak (11/25)

Chris Petronka (11/28)

Anniversaries:

Kevin & Kira Rudolph (11/2/96)

Michael & Susan Pazuchanics (11/4/20)

Joseph & Mary Ann Zupancic (11/12/65)

*If you or a loved one are missing, please let
Fr. John know so that we can correct our records!*

PARISH PRAYER LIST:

**We pray for the health and salvation of ALL our
parish family members, and especially for:**

Met. Theodosius (Lazor)

Apr. John (Horosky)

Apr. Paul (Lazor)

Apr. John (Reeves)

Apr. Stephen & Mat. Emily (Shuga)

Apr. Gregory (Hatrak)

Dn. Gregory (Jewett)

Dn. Mark & Mat. Kelly Elizabeth (Oleynik)

Mat. Alexandra (Safchuk)

John (Boschuk)

Darcie (Burkholder)

Elaine (Gwen Bushko)

Eleanor (Comstock)

John (Petronka)

Anastasia (Rudolph)

Carol (Sweda)

Dennis (Sweda)

Justin & Alexis, and the child to be born of her

(DeArmitt)

Joseph & Katherine and the child to be born of her

(Helinski)

Randy & Katherine and the child Nora born of her

(Udodow-Roberto)

THIS MONTH'S COMMEMORATIONS:

(Any Quotations are from the OCA's Website)

Nov. 1st, Ss. Cosmas & Damian: The Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenary Physicians Cosmas and Damian were brothers – likely Arabs – from the city of Cyrrhus, which now lies in ruins due to the Crusades, but which was once a major city on the border of Syria and Anatolia. Having been raised by their pious mother, St. Theodota (whom we also commemorate this day), in both the Christian faith and in medicine, they made a pact together to use the talents and skills given them by God for His glory alone and they therefore steadfastly refused any payment or reward for their medicinal labors. This is why we call them ‘unmercenary’, for they healed out of love for God and man rather than out of a desire for earthly reward. This devotion to God made them great healers, for they relied not just not on medicine, but fervent prayer both for and with the sick; thus, countless souls were healed of seemingly incurable diseases and – more importantly in the eyes of the brothers – put their faith in the God who had healed them through these wonderworkers. Due to their unconditional love for the sick and suffering, they became witnesses of the love of our God and many were baptized in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, with their skill came fame and great notoriety, and thus they became an early target at the outbreak of the Great Persecution of the Church under the wicked Emperor Diocletian. Rounded up by the Prefect of Cilicia, they refused to turn from their faith in Christ under progressively worse torture. They were first crucified (as a means of torture rather than execution), then shot with arrows, and when they still remained faithful to Christ, they were beheaded by the sword. Of course, their great witness only worked to spread the faith, especially as their love and unmercenary healing had become so well-known. Having gone to dwell before the throne of God, their fame continued to grow as they entreated the Lord to work countless miracles of healing over the centuries. Their names are still the first invoked when we pray our service for the sick, and the Sunday after their feast is dedicated to the Synaxis (Gathering Together) of the Holy Unmercenary Physicians, when we celebrate all of the saints

who worked to cure sickness and disease out of their love for God and their fellow man, seeking a heavenly reward rather than an earthly one.

Nov. 1st, St. John of Kronstadt: On the first of November we also commemorate the glorification of the Righteous John of Kronstadt, as he was canonized on this day in 1964 in Utica, NY, by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR). The church in which he was glorified was originally named after St. Nicholas, but it now bears the name of St. John of Kronstadt and it the church which Mat. Janine attended while a student at Utica College. This act of canonization was later confirmed by the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1990, once the Church began to be made free of Communist oppression (St. John had spoken out strongly against the Bolsheviks during his life, and thus the Church in Russia was unable to glorify him despite a great devotion to him from the remnant faithful). Because he reposed in the Lord on January 2nd – a day already over-laden with celebrations for the beloved St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. Juliana of Lazarevo – Nov. 1st has become his major commemoration here in America. One of the most beloved of the “modern” saints, St. John was born in 1829 and in 1855 at only 25 years old, was assigned as the priest for St. Andrew’s Naval Cathedral (St. Andrew being the patron of the Russian Navy) in St. Petersburg’s port city of Kronstadt. His charisma, devotion, and love began to quickly manifest themselves. He would go about the city, visiting the sick and poor, and visiting them for hours each day, and called everyone back to Church and to repentance. An advocate of frequent Confession and Communion at a time when most Russians only confessed and communed once or twice per year, he served the Divine Liturgy each and every day, and would often have a thousand communicants present, to whom he would preach impassioned and heartfelt sermons, calling all to repentance and faith in Christ. Controversially at the time, he would commune women on their periods, which was usually seen as forbidden at that time in Russia, and helped to move the Russian Church away from this Judaizing prohibition. What’s more, it was not merely his love, serving, and preaching which caused his fame to grow, but also that his prayers led to the miraculous healing

of many of the sick and poor of that poor district by the docks. After his peaceful repose on Jan. 2, 1908, St. John's prayers continued to work miracles for the sick, and he quickly became venerated as a Saint, with the Holy Tsar-Martyr Nicholas issuing a decree that every church in Russia should serve a Pannikhida (Parastas, or Memorial Service) on the anniversary of his repose. However, because he so fervently stood against the Bolsheviks, any devotion to him was suppressed in Russia, and thus it fell to the faithful emigres in America to canonize him a saint. While this devotion has returned to Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, St. John has ever been beloved by the Russian Orthodox faithful in America since his repose, especially amongst the sick, unemployed, and those suffering from addiction to drugs and alcohol. Our devotion in America has been aided by the fact that, even during his lifetime, he became known to English-speaking peoples due to a translation of his spiritual autobiography, "My Life in Christ", in 1897. While it is a meaty text, in the '60s St. Vladimir's Seminary published a digest version (still available) under the title of "The Spiritual Counsels of Father John of Kronstadt", and a new and improved translation of the original text has been recently published by Jordanville's Holy Trinity Publications. In 2015, St. John's lenten homilies were published in English and have quickly become one of the most popular lenten devotions amongst the faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, and so Fr. John is considering instituting a book club with these homilies during our upcoming pre-lenten and lenten season. Please let him know if this is something which might interest you!

Nov. 8th, St. Michael and All the Bodiless Powers:

While our Latin Christian neighbours celebrated Michealmas back on September 29th due to that being the anniversary of the dedication of the Church of St. Michael at Rome in 610 AD, our Byzantine tradition keeps St. Michael's Day – on which we commemorate not only the Holy Archangel Michael but also all the heavenly powers – here on November 8th due to it being the 9th month of the Old Roman year, in honor of the nine ranks of angels, and on the 8th day, for we will behold them in heaven on the 8th Day of Creation, when the Risen Lord comes again His glory. Our tireless defenders

in battle against both material and spiritual adversaries – most especially our firm and constant defenders against the wiles of the devil and his minions – what more can be said about the Holy Angels under the command of their Chief Captain, St. Michael? Especially given the fact that it falls after the harvest, Michaelmas has always been a feast of great merriment, and to that effect our brother, Michael Galis, will be hosting a pizza party in honor of his patron, St. Michael, after Vespers on the eve of the feast.

Nov. 9th, She Who is Quick to Hear: Originally painted at around the time of the founding of the Dochiariou Monastery of St. Michael in the 10th Century on the wall over the door of the refectory's kitchen, Our Lady first manifested her miraculous prayers through this icon when the cook, who had gone blind, was healed in 1664. Because she would quickly hearken to the prayers of the brothers who prayed before her image, they named the icon "She Who is Quick to Hear" and indeed she is, for pilgrims began to have their prayers answered in response to their vigils before this icon. In particular, Russian pilgrims to this Greek monastery began to bring back copies and soon it became one of the most beloved images of Our Lady in both Greece and Russia. Because the Dochiariou Monastery which houses the original began to take Our Lady as a second patron, the feast day of this icon was established on the day after St. Michael's. Because a wonder-working copy resides at St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Penna. (originally gifted from the Dochiariou Monastery at St. Tikhon's founding in 1905), this proves to be one of the most popular devotions to the Mother of God in America, and especially in our Orthodox Church in America due to many of our clergyman graduating from St. Tikhon's Seminary with a firm devotion to this image of Our Lady, having personally experienced the speedy power of her prayers while worshipping at the monastery during their studies.

Nov. 9th, St. Nectarius of Aegina: Our Lady shares November 9th with her devoted servant and modern wonderworker of the Lord, the Holy Hierarch Nectarius of Aegina, Metropolitan of Pentapolis. Born in 1846 to a poor Greek family in Thrace, his family recognized his smarts and thus sacrificed greatly so that he might be educated in his youth.

At 14, he left home to move to Constantinople in order to further his education, for which he worked at the docks. At the age of 20, after completing his studies, he took a teaching job on the isle of Chios (the ancestral land of Fr. George Livanos of our sister parish of All Saints). However, he had long desired to devote his life to God as a monk, and so he entered Chios' "New" Monastery (from the 11th Century) at the age of 30, where he was soon ordained to the diaconate. After a number of years of service, he was sent to the University of Athens and graduated in 1885, where he began to pen his first pamphlets and biblical commentaries. He was then sent to serve the Orthodox of Egypt under the Patriarchate of Alexandria, first as the Bishop of Cairo and then as the Metropolitan Bishop of Pentapolis in Cyrenaica (today's northwest Libya) due to his popular preaching and manifest love for the faithful. Because he had become so popular among the people, some of the other Alexandrian bishops – fearing that he would be chosen as the next Patriarch of Alexandria – spread false rumors that he sought to force the Patriarch into retirement and take the title for himself. Though the Patriarch believed these slanders and had him removed from his post, St. Nectarius bore all these blows with the meekness of Christ, never speaking an ill word against any of his accusers, nor willing to call the faithful who so loved him to his aid, lest the Church be rent asunder by internal strife. Instead, he returned to Greece in 1891 and became an instructor for seminarians in Athens, later being named the director of the seminary in 1894. While still teaching, a group of nuns asked him to help them establish a monastery on the island of Aegina in 1904, and in 1908 St. Nectarius retired to this convent as its chaplain. From there, he published many works and sermons, and became famed as a confessor who could cure the sick by his prayers. On November 8th, 1920, St. Nectarius died of prostate cancer, and when his shirt was taken off to examine him and accident placed over the body of a paralytic in the next bed over, and he was instantly cured of his paralysis. Famed in life for his prayerfulness, humility, purity, virtue, preaching, and teaching, he became famed as one dwelling with the Lord as a healer of cancer and other serious illnesses. He was canonized in 1961 and, perhaps

because cancer remains such a deadly threat to the faithful, St. Nectarius has become one of the most popular saints in the Church today, including here in America, and we should all remember to ask him to help those suffering from cancer. Even if we are unfamiliar with his life, many of us might be familiar with his hymn to the Mother of God, 'O Pure Virgin' (*Agni Parthene*), which has been translated into many languages and become a popular devotion among the faithful around the world: "O pure and virgin Lady, O spotless Theotokos: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride...". Because he died on the feast of St. Michael, his commemoration was moved to the following day.

Nov. 11th, St. Martin of Tours: One of the most beloved saints of the Church, St. Martin of Tours was born into a military family in Pannonia, in a city located in today's southwest Hungary, in 336. That he was given the name Martin "of Mars [the God of War]" attests to this military heritage. Against his parents' firm wishes, he decided to become a catechumen at the age of 10; because Christianity had been made legal by the Edict of Milan in 313, they could do nothing to stop him. Being the son of an officer, however, he was bound to serve and joined the Imperial Cavalry at the age of 15, soon becoming an officer in an elite cavalry unit. While still a catechumen, while on a campaign in Gaul, his unit came to the city of Amiens, outside of which was a beggar, naked despite the winter cold. Without hesitation, St. Martin was moved to compassion and cut his cloak – the sign of his rank and prestige of an officer – in two, so that the beggar would not freeze to death. That night, Christ appeared to Martin in a dream wearing the half cloak he had given to the poor man, and when he awoke his cloak was found to be whole. This confirmed his faith, and at the age of 18, in 354, he finally received baptism. Two years later, on the eve of a battle and now under the command of an anti-Christian general, St. Martin's conscience led him to declare that, as a soldier of Christ, he could not continue to fight and kill as a soldier of the Emperor, and so he sought to leave the army. When he made this request, however, he was charged with cowardice, to which he responded by offering to lead the men, with himself unarmed, into battle to prove that he desired to resign from the army out of devotion to

Christ rather than cowardice. Miraculously, the enemy decided to surrender without a fight just before St. Martin was to lead the charge. He was then given his leave and became a disciple of St. Hilary of Poitiers, and later becoming a hermit, living the life of the monks which he encountered in the East while serving in the army. Under St. Hilary's direction, in 361 he then established one of the first monasteries in Western Europe, at Ligugé. From here, St. Martin evangelized the countryside of Western Gaul, and became known as a great preacher and teacher who loved the poor and suffering. Knowing that he would flee from the episcopacy, St. Martin was made Bishop of Tours in 371 by a ruse: he was called to Tours to minister to a sick man, but in reality it was to consecrate him a bishop. When he discovered the ruse, he tried to flee. Hiding in a barn full of geese, he was given away by their honking and forced to accept the bishopric of Tours. He soon established the monastery of Marmoutier – in which he resided – across the Loire River, as well as numerous other monasteries throughout Western Gaul. He also fiercely evangelized the people, and converted countless souls to Christ. In one instance, a group of pagans agreed cut down their sacred fir tree if St. Martin would stand in its path; with his customary bravery, he agreed to do so, and yet the tree miraculously missed him. At this, the pagans accepted the Christ who had kept St. Martin from being crushed by the tree. Through from an aristocratic background, St. Martin was beloved by the common folk, for whom he showed much mercy and care. Likewise, St. Martin was so dedicated to the freeing of prisoners that when authorities, even emperors, heard he was coming, they refused to see him because they knew he would request mercy for someone and they would be unable to refuse. Together with St. Ambrose, he also boldly stood before the Emperor, insisting that the death penalty not be employed, especially towards Arians and other heretics, as this would leave them unable to repent. In 397, St. Martin reposed in the Lord and soon became one of the most beloved saints throughout all of Europe, especially in the military. His life also lends us the words 'chapel' and 'chaplain': the half of the cloak (*cappa*) he had given the beggar began to be piously venerated by the faithful, who called

it the *cappella* (little cloak). It would be carried in military kings by the Kings of France, who would construct a small church specially for it in cities along the way. These small churches were named after the half-cloak, *capella*, from which we get 'chapel', while the priests who were assign to attend to these small churches were called *cappellani*, from which we get 'chaplain'. Such was the military devotion to St. Martin that, during the Great War (World War I), soldiers on both sides fervently prayed that he would entreat Christ to put an end to the conflict. Thus, it is seen as no accident that the armistice which ended the war was signed on his feast. Armistice Day (Nov. 11) became, after the Second World War, Veterans Day, as a remembrance for all our Veterans rather than just those who served in the First World War. Additionally, St. Martin is seen as a patron of vintners because wine grapes are harvested around his feast, especially in France, and so Fr. John and Mat. Janine will be hosting a wine and cheese party in honor of our veterans on the evening of St. Martin's/Veterans Day. All are welcome, but we especially invite our veterans! May the prayers of St. Martin ever keep the armed forces of the United States – and of every country – safe from harm and at peace!

Nov. 13th, St. John Chrysostom: Nicknamed '*Chrysostomos*' (the 'Golden-Mouthed'), St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, is seen as one of the greatest preachers, teachers, and bishops in church history. The normal Divine Liturgy which we celebrate is named after him, for he composed the Eucharistic prayers of this Liturgy, but there is so much behind his name, of which we might not be aware. Like St. Martin, St. John was born into a military family at Antioch around the year 347 or 349; his father died shortly thereafter, and his widowed mother decided not to remarry, but to instead dedicate her life to raising her son. Given the finest education in logic, rhetoric, and philosophy under the famous pagan rhetorician Libanus, it was assumed that St. John would likewise become a great rhetor; however, he turned to Christ, leaving pagan philosophy for studies of the scripture. Taken in as a son and catechized by St. Meletius, Archbishop of Antioch, St. John was baptized in 367 or 373, and ordained as a reader shortly thereafter. According to the Christian historian

Sozomen (c. 400-450 AD), Libanius was supposed to have said on his deathbed that John would have been his successor "if the Christians had not taken him from us". After his mother's death in 375, St. John was to be consecrated a bishop, but instead fled to the wilderness to escape the episcopacy, living in extreme asceticism as a hermit for a number of years, until his failing health necessitated his return to the city in 381, at which time he was ordained a deacon. It was as a deacon in Antioch that he began to preach his famous sermons, and in 386 he was ordained to the holy priesthood. It was during this time that he was given his nickname: Chrysostom, the Golden-Mouthed, for his exegesis of the Scriptures and his preaching of Christian ethics, especially on the subject of the care for the poor. Desiring religious reform and believing that the fiery preacher of Antioch was the one to offer it, the Emperor bid St. John come to be the new Archbishop of Constantinople in 397. Due to his popularity in Antioch, St. John had to be secreted away at night for Constantinople, lest a riot erupt. In Constantinople, his efforts against corrupt clergy and for the poor, such as funneling most of his stipend into the upkeep of hospitals and hospices for the poor, made him incredibly popular with the faithful, but his denouncing of the rich and his unwillingness to attend lavish social gathering left him unpopular with the ruling class, as well as much of the clergy, who had fallen into simony (charging a fee for the sacraments) and other forms of corruption. In particular, he made an enemy of the Empress Eudoxia: "The saintly hierarch denounced the dissolute morals of people in the capital, especially at the imperial court, irrespective of person. When the empress Eudoxia connived to confiscate the last properties of the widow and children of a disgraced dignitary, the saint rose to their defense. The arrogant empress would not relent, and nursed a grudge against the archpastor. Eudoxia's hatred of the saint blazed forth anew when malefactors told her that the saint apparently had her in mind during his sermon on vain women". This led to her working to have him deposed and exiled. She succeeded in calling a robber council of his enemies, but on the night of his arrest the faithful rose up and threatened the royal palace, there was also a great earthquake, which caused the

Empress to repent. However, peace didn't last long, for she had a large silver statue of herself erected outside the entrance to the Cathedral, which caused St. John to again preach against her sinful excesses and the pagan dedication ceremony for the statue. In reference to the beheading of St. John the Baptist, he said: "Again Herodias raves; again she is troubled; she dances again; and again desires to receive John's head on a plate." St. John's sermon against her led to her renewed wrath, and the saint was exiled to Armenia. From there, his supporters sought aid, including St. John Cassian, who led a mission to Pope Innocent of Rome, but these were to no avail. Despite his exile, St. John continued to write pastoral letters (245 are preserved) to the faithful, encouraging his spiritual children. "In the winter of 406, Saint John was confined to his bed with sickness, but his enemies were not to be appeased. From the capital came orders to transfer Saint John to desolate Pityus in Abkhazia on the Black Sea. Worn out by sickness, the saint began his final journey under military escort, traveling for three months in the rain and frost. He never arrived at his place of exile, for his strength failed him at Comana. At the crypt of Saint Basiliscus (May 22), Saint John was comforted by a vision of the martyr, who said, "Despair not, brother John! Tomorrow we shall be together." After receiving the Holy Mysteries, the hierarch fell asleep in the Lord on September 14th, 407. His last words were, "Glory to God for all things!" Because he reposed on the Feast of the Cross, his feast was transferred to November 13th.

Nov. 14th, St. Philip: The Holy Apostle Philip of the Twelve is not to be confused with St. Philip the Deacon, of the Seventy. Together with Peter and Andrew, he was born in Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. Instructed in Holy Scripture from his youth, St. Philip immediately recognized Christ as the long-awaited Messiah and followed him, as well as bringing Nathaniel and Bartholomew to him, who likewise became Apostles. After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, St. Philip began to preach the Good News throughout Greece, Syria, and Phrygia, where many miracles were manifested through Philip, which testified to the power of Christ, including especially miraculous healings. While spreading the Gospel in the

Phrygian city of Hierapolis with his sister St. Mariamne and the Apostle St. Bartholomew, the came across a city which worshiped an enormous snake as a God, as well as many who suffered from snake bites. By their prayers, the snake “god” was killed and those suffering from bites were healed, but the wicked pagans seized them and crucified them; at this, the earth quaked, but St. Philip and his companions began to pray from their crosses that God might have mercy on the unenlightened people. The Lord hearkened unto their prayers with only the unrepentant pagan priest being killed by the earthquake; seeing this, the people of the city rushed to take the holy ones down from their crosses, but St. Philip had already breathed his last. St. Bartholomew baptized the people of the city and Stachys, who was healed of 40 years of blindness when Bartholomew baptized him, was ordained and left there as bishop of the city by St. Bartholomew, who would go on to receive his own martyrdom in Armenia. Meanwhile, St. Mariamne buried the body of St. Philip with reverence and went on to preach the Gospel in nearby Lycaonia, where she suffered martyrdom.

Nov. 15th, BEGINNING OF ADVENT: While traditionally called the Nativity Fast or St. Philip’s Fast (because it begins after St. Philip’s Day, and we are to be as prepared to receive the coming of the Lord as he was) in Orthodox cultures, in English we usually refer to this pre-Christmas fast by its Roman Catholic name: Advent. ‘Advent’ means ‘coming’, and it refers to our preparation for the coming of the Lord in the flesh at Bethlehem, which is made mystically present for us in and through our celebration of the Feast of Christmas; however, we are also meant – through this preparation – to prepare for the Lord’s coming daily in our hearts, and in glory at the end of time. This fast was the last of the four fasting seasons to be firmly established; in the Byzantine tradition it was only fixed as this 40-day period we have today in 1166, while in the Latin tradition (so common among our friends and neighbors) it was only established, as beginning on the Sunday nearest St. Andrew’s Day, in 1362. Before it was established as the 40-day period we now have, in imitation of the Lord’s forty days of fasting in the wilderness, the most common practice in Constantinople was to fast for 33 days, after the 33

years of Christ’s earthly life, while in other places it was as short as the five-day Prefeast of Christmas (Dec. 20-24). In the West, it was sometimes as long as six weeks, beginning the Sunday after St. Martin’s Day. Regardless, we should not see this fast as something to bother us, but as an opportunity to more fully prepare to receive ourselves for the Lord who has come in the flesh, who comes daily into our hearts and lives, and who will come in glory at the dread and last judgement. Let us rejoice in this change to more fully focus on our Christian lives, and thus our celebration of Christmas will be all the more joyful and meaningful. During this fast, we are called to try to abstain from meat, dairy products, fish, wine & hard alcohol, and luxurious foods. Up until the Prefeast of Christmas (Dec. 20), fish, wine/hard alcohol, and oil/fatty & luxurious foods are permitted on weekends and, in the Russian tradition, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Wine/hard alcohol, and oil/fatty & luxurious foods, and in some traditions fish, are permitted on Christmas Eve after sunset; we traditionally abstain from any solid foods until, by folk custom, the first star is visible in the sky (the Church simply says until after the afternoon Vespers Liturgy, though we usually begin this service earlier than appointed). There is an implicit dispensation from abstaining from these foods on Thanksgiving in the OCA, so that we might participate in the very worthy celebrations of Thanksgiving with our family and friends. Following this Christian calling is not always easy, especially given the fact that our culture has turned Advent into a time of celebrating the Feast of Christmas before the Feast, rather than during the appointed ‘Twelve Days of Christmas’ of feasting between Christmas and Theophany/Epiphany. More so, the Church has never developed a great cycle of services for Advent as she has for Lent, and so we receive less Liturgical support in our efforts from the Church. However, we are all encouraged to put forward our best effort; the Lord knows our frame, and will accept whatever we can offer with love and mercy for us, his servants who await His coming.

Nov. 16th, St. Matthew: The Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew, Son of Alphaeus (and thus brother of the Holy Apostle James the Less), was a publican – someone who held the public contract

with the Roman Empire to collect oppressive and taxes and customs on their behalf, all while making a tidy profit – at the Galilean city of Capernaum. Despite living a life of extravagance and great sin towards his fellow Jews, the Lord addressed him as he sat at the custom house: “Follow me.” And Matthew arose and followed Jesus, leaving his sin behind. He then prepared a reception for the Lord at his house, inviting his family, friends, and acquaintances so that they might also hear the Lord and repent; many likely followed Christ after hearing his words, such as St. James the Less, but it caused the Pharisees to attack Christ before his followers: “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” To which Christ replied: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. ... for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” St. Matthew had been one of the sick, but was made whole by Christ in his repentance, becoming one of the greatest disciples of Christ and preachers of the Gospel. It is said that in giving up the oppressive life of luxury as a publican, he gave up all luxurious foods as well, only eating fruits and vegetables until the end of his days on earth. He was the first to recognize the need to record the sayings of Christ, which he originally wrote down in his native Aramaic tongue, which was likely the language Christ most normally used (Hebrew having fallen into disuse as a spoken language with the Babylonian Captivity; it was only used as a liturgical language at the time of Christ). This book of Christ’s sayings, called the “Q” Source by many biblical scholars and “Aramaic Matthew” by the Church, was utilized by Ss. Mark & Luke in their Gospel narratives. St. Matthew later translated his saying into Greek and placed them within the Gospel narrative which has come down to us today. Sadly, the last known copy of Aramaic Matthew was destroyed in 640 when the Muslims burned the city of Caesarea, the capital of Roman Palestine, in their initial conquests of the Holy Land. Having preached originally in Judea, as indicated by the fact that his account of the Gospel has the Jews as its primary audience, St. Matthew later preached the Good News in Syria and among the Parthians and Medes of western Iran, and then among the Ethiopians. There, he baptized the wife and son of a local prince, Fulvian,

which enraged the prince and led to St. Matthew’s martyrdom. When the prince went to apprehend St. Matthew, however, he was blinded by the great light of Christ which shone through the saint. Matthew, being of a compassionate heart, prayed for the prince and his sight was returned, which turned many of his subjects to Christ. However, the prince remained blind with his spiritual eyes and was all the more enraged: he had St. Matthew burned alive. “They put St. Matthew head downwards, piled up brushwood and ignited it. When the fire flared up, everyone then saw that the fire did not harm St. Matthew. Then Fulvian gave orders to add more wood to the fire, and frenzied with boldness, he commanded to set up twelve idols around the fire. But the flames melted the idols and flared up toward Fulvian. The frightened Ethiopian turned to the saint with an entreaty for mercy, and by the prayer of the martyr the flame went out. The body of the holy apostle remained unharmed, and he departed to the Lord.” This turned many more souls to Christ, but despite it all and having been shown such mercy, Fulvian remained unrepentant and ordered that St. Matthew’s body be sealed in a lead coffin and thrown into the sea. The saint then appeared to his disciples and told them where his body could be found. Witnessing this final miracle, Fulvian finally repented and accepted Christ, giving up his riches and taking the name Matthew at baptism. This new Matthew, repentant like unto the Matthew whom he slew, was then ordained a priest and later bishop. The Apostles body resided in Ethiopia until 954, when it was secreted away to Salerno, Italy, in order to safeguard it from the Mohammadans.

Nov. 21st, ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS: While an event celebrated from the earliest days of the Church, this Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple only received its great liturgical commemoration around the year 1000, beginning in Constantinople. It was placed on Nov. 21st in order to be a day of celebration and preparation before the beginning of Advent, which at that time in Constantinople usually was 33 days long and thus began on Nov. 22nd. While the Advent Fast was later lengthened to 40 days, this Great Feast of the Mother of God still begins our liturgical preparation for Christmas. It is at Matins of the feast that

we first hear “Christ is born; glorify Him!”, as each Biblical Ode is concluded with the hymns from the Canon of Christmas, which will continue at Matins until the Feast of the Nativity itself. It was placed just before the start of Advent because it is our celebration of the Virgin Mary’s entry into the Temple at just three years old, wherein she is set to become the living Temple of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. This feast is drawn from the narrative found in the Protoevangelion, or Pre-Gospel, of James. It is attributed to St. James the Just, the Brother of the Lord and first Bishop of Jerusalem, but even the early Church recognized that it was not actually of Apostolic authorship, coming instead from the 2nd Century, and thus it was not included by the Church in her canonical books of the Bible. However, it is still seen as divinely-inspired and forms much of the basis for our celebrations of the life of the Mother of God. While we could look at the text of the Pre-Gospel as such, Met. Kallistos Ware’s summary of the text is easier to follow: “When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anne decided that the time had come to fulfil their promise [that if they would be granted a child, they would bring it as a gift to the Lord God, to minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life] and offer her to the Lord. Joachim gathered the young girls of the neighbourhood to form an escort, and he made them go in front of Mary, carrying lighted torches. Captivated by the torches, the young child followed joyfully into the Temple – [later hymnographic traditions even have her running ahead of the torches to the Temple] – not once looking back at her parents nor weeping as she was parted from them. Such was precisely Joachim’s plan: he wished her to go to her new home in gladness, not in sorrow. The High Priest Zachariah – the future father of John the Baptist – received her and set her to dwell in the Holy of Holies, where she was fed miraculously by the hand of an angel. In the words of the *Protoevangelion*, ‘The Lord put grace upon her.’ So she remained in the Temple until the age of twelve, when Zachariah betrothed her to Joseph.” (*Festal Menaion*, 51). Whether we accept the full and accurate historicity of this event is beside the point, as Met. Kallistos continues: “what matters is not the historical exactness of the story but its inner meaning. This account of Mary’s Entry into the

Temple and of her dwelling there signifies her total dedication to God, in readiness for her future vocation as Mother of the Incarnate Lord. At the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit overshadowed her at the word of the angel and she conceived the Saviour; but the Spirit had also dwelt within her from infancy, preparing her in body and soul to be a fitting tabernacle for the Deity – a living temple, a personal Holy of Holies.” (*Festal Menaion*, 51-52). As indicated by Met. Kallistos, the Church has interpreted this event not merely as the entry of a young woman into the Holy of Holies, but as the Living Temple coming to take her place as the true Tabernacle of Heaven. We see this in the Kontakion of the Feast: “The most pure Temple of the Saviour, the precious Bridal Chamber and Virgin; the sacred treasury of the glory of God, is presented today in the House of the Lord. She brings with her the grace of the Divine Spirit; of her the angels of God sing in praise: truly she is the Tabernacle of Heaven.” And, in the first Litiya verse, “Within the tabernacle of God, within His place of propitiation, she shall be brought up, to become the dwelling place of Him who was begotten of the Father without change before all ages, for the salvation of our souls.” St. Paul reminds us, in the Epistle reading for the feast, that “the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the showbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. Which stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come as a high priest of good things to come, by a

greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Heb 9:1-12) The Theotokos is herself this "more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands", and provided the structure – the historical structure, if you will – of the once-and-for all Sacrifice of Christ; He brought Himself forth by means of her, and through her was able to offer Himself upon the Cross, obtaining for us eternal redemption. If the purpose of the Old Covenant is to prepare the way for Christ, then the Theotokos is the culmination of these offerings and is thus herself placed in the Holy of Holies so that Christ could come to dwell in that Tabernacle – the living, Incarnate Law in the living Ark, rather than the tablets of stone in a material container. More importantly, Mary is therefore the icon or representation of a more perfect Israel, who is able to bear Christ into the world for its life and salvation.

Nov. 23rd, St. Alexander Nevsky: The patron of our Archdiocesan Cathedral, St. Alexander is both a beloved saint and Russian national hero. At the time of St. Alexander's birth, Kievan Rus had devolved into various small states, centered around the several major cities. The various princes – all distantly related Rurikids (descendants of the Viking Rurik, the first Prince of Kiev) – were constantly at war with each other over the nominal title of "Grand Prince of Kiev", to which the remaining princes theoretically had to submit themselves. This internecine conflict led to devastation of Kiev and its environs, and thus many of its inhabitants chose to abandon their homes and colonize the lands to the northeast (including present-day Moscow). One of these cities, Vladimir, rose to prominence, and its prince sacked Kiev in 1169-70; unlike previous conquests, the Prince of Vladimir didn't merely claim the title of 'Grand Prince', but moved the throne of the Grand Prince to Vladimir. While those who intermittently took Kiev from Vladimir would lay claim to having authority over all of Russia, the Prince of the devastated and depopulated Kiev would never again wield such authority. Sadly, this hardly meant political unity – there were simply now two Grand Principalities to fight over –

and so Russia was easily overcome by the Mongol Invasion of 1237-1242. Kiev was utterly destroyed, and the once grand city became little more than a village for centuries, while Vladimir had chosen to submit to Mongol vassalage and thus became the unquestioned center of Russian authority. During the Mongol Invasion, the Swedes and Teutonic Knights hoped to take advantage of Russia's weakness and launched invasions. In 1240, the Swedes were the first to attack, when the 19-year-old Alexander had been left as the Prince of Novgorod by his father, the Grand Prince of Vladimir, while the Grand Prince himself went south to attend to the Mongol threat. The young Alexander led the outnumbered Russians to victory at the Battle of the Neva, driving the Swedes away in a complete victory, and was thus given the name "Nevsky" ('of the Neva'). He then saved Novgorod from the numerous and well-armed forces of the Livonian Order (a branch of the Teutonic Order) at the Battle of the Ice – west of Pskov, on frozen Lake Peipus – in 1242. Following his father, he then submitted Novgorod to Mongol domination, rejecting offers from the Pope of Rome to be crowned King of Ruthenia (the Latin name for Russia), together with military and financial aid against the Mongols, on the condition that he bring the Russian Church under the Pope. Preferring instead the relative religious freedom of Mongol vassalage to betraying the faith, he instead worked with Metropolitan Cyril of Kiev (who moved the see to Vladimir while retaining the Kievan title), the head of the Russian Church, and together they were able to gain a charter from the Khan which guaranteed the legal inviolability and exemption from taxes for the Orthodox Church. Because Prince Alexander laid the groundwork for the future Russian state which would be able to throw off the Tartar Yoke in the following centuries, and because he guaranteed the freedom of the Church under the Mongols while refusing to submit the Church to the Papacy, he is venerated as a saint; without his efforts, the Russian Orthodox Church would have likely been wiped. The saint reposed in 1263 while returning from his final diplomatic mission to the Tartars, whereby he was able to exempt the Russian people from military service in the Mongol ranks. As he was also known as a great ascetic, his personal sanctity was seen as

manifested in that his body remained incorrupt for the remaining nine days of the journey back to Vladimir. For many centuries thereafter, his body remained incorrupt, and his prayers were seen as instrumental at the Battle of Kulikovo (1380), whereby the Grand Duchy of Moscow – the successor state to the Grand Principality of Vladimir and the fruit of St. Alexander’s political efforts – led Russia to its first victory over the Mongols, which marked the beginning of the end of Tartar dominion in Russia. Over time, the veneration of St. Alexander Nevsky spread far beyond the borders of Russia, and he became seen as a saint to call upon in order to guarantee the safety and independence of the Church, such as St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria, which serves as the Patriarchal Cathedral for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and is one of the largest churches in the world; it was so named because of the saint’s intercessions in the final overthrow of the Turkish Yoke and independence of Bulgaria in 1878, as well as to honor the soldiers of the Russian Empire who died to guarantee that freedom from the Ottomans. When the founders of our cathedral first came to Pittsburgh, they no doubt called upon St. Alexander Nevsky to help our Church – new to Western Pennsylvania – remain strong and faithful. May we not forget to ask the same of him today, for our entire archdiocese is under his protection.

Nov. 24th (25th), St. Catherine of Alexandria: St. Catherine was the daughter of Constus, the Governor of Egypt, at the time of the Great Persecution of the Church under the Emperor Diocletian. Being raised in “the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Catherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Catherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.” At that time, the Emperor Maximian – Diocletian’s lieutenant in the East, who thoroughly despised the Christians – “was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial

animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blazing of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, those who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. The saint’s love for the Christian martyrs and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings compelled Catherine to speak to the pagan priest and to the emperor Maximian. Introducing herself, the saint confessed her faith in the One True God and with wisdom exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the emperor. In order to convince her and to show the superiority of pagan wisdom, the emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. Saint Catherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burned alive by order of the emperor. Maximian, no longer hoping to convince the saint, tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Receiving an angry refusal, the emperor gave orders to subject the saint to terrible tortures and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrius to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The empress was impressed by the strong spirit of Saint Catherine, whose face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian teaching to them, and they were converted to Christ. On the following day they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, they urged that she renounce the Christian Faith and offer sacrifice to the gods. The saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she herself approached the wheels; but an angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby. Having beheld this wonder, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrius with 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ in front of everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian again tried to entice the holy martyr, proposing marriage to her, and again he

was refused. Saint Catherine firmly confessed her fidelity to the heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and with a prayer to Him she herself lay her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword." Her body was then taken to Mount Sinai, where it still rests. Because of the saints popularity - attested by the fact that we have so many Catherines (or variants thereof) in our parish! - the Russian Church moved the saint's feast day to November 24th, as the Leavetaking of the Entry of the Mother of God had developed on the 25th so that St. Catherine's celebration was completely obscured. However, the rest of the Christian world continues to celebrate her memory on the 25th.

Nov. 26th, St. Innocent of Irkutsk: Born in 1680 into a Volhynian noble family who had fled the Polish Yoke to Chernigov, St. Innocent - born John - had been very well educated in Kiev and became up an instructor at the Moscow Theological Academy, ending up as the assistant administrator of the great St. Alexander Nevsky Monastery, outside of St. Petersburg. His prayerfulness and administrative skills being made manifest, he was consecrated a bishop in 1721 and assigned to be the first bishop of the Peking Ecclesiastical Mission to China. However, due to blunders by the Russian diplomatic corps, the Chinese forbid his entry, and he languished at the border for three years. Tired of waiting and wanting to serve the Lord, he began to spread the Gospel among the peoples there in southern Siberia, such as the Buryats and Mongols, and the Russian Church in 1727 thus made him the Bishop of Irkutsk, a city off Lake Baikal in Buryatia, and of the Missionary Diocese established under him there. Because of Russian bureaucratic errors, St. Innocent never received any stipend as bishop, nor the diocese any money until after the saint's death, and he thus suffered terrible want. Yet, St. Innocent still managed to spread the faith, establishing a monastery and two schools, one for the Buryats and Mongols, the other for the Russian colonists. "The constant concern of the saint was directed towards the schools: the selection of worthy teachers, and providing the necessary books, clothing and other provisions for students. The saint toiled tirelessly at organizing the diocese, and strengthening its spiritual life. His many sermons, pastoral letters and directives bear witness to this.

In his work and deprivations Saint Innocent found spiritual strength, humility, and insight. In the spring of 1728, the Baikal region began to suffer a drought. Famine from a poor grain harvest had threatened the diocese already back in 1727. With the blessing of the holy hierarch, in May within the churches of Irkutsk and Irkutia they began to include a Moleben for an end to the drought at each Liturgy. On Saturdays they sang an Akathist to the Mother of God, and on Sundays they served a Moleben. 'The supplications,' said the saint, 'should end on the Feast of Saint Elijah' (July 20). Indeed, on that very day a storm raged at Irkutsk with such strong rains, that in the streets of the city water stood up to people's knees, and thus the drought ended." Suffering many deprivations, the saint's health failed and he reposed in 1731, but his efforts established a firm spiritual and material foundation which would lead to Irkutsk becoming a great missionary center; from it, many of the first clergy to Alaska came, including St. Innocent, who was born in raised in a missionary family there. When he was sent to establish the Diocese of Alaska, he took St. Innocent of Irkutsk as his heavenly patron, and a great love for St. Innocent of Irkutsk was spread to Alaska and, by later Russian immigrants who came through Siberia, to the early parishes established on the West Coast. Due to our love for St. Innocent of Alaska, many in the OCA also have a great love for the saint's own patron, St. Innocent of Irkutsk, as well. At the very least, he is an example to us all that even with very little, the Church can grow immensely through the mercy and love of God and the prayers and efforts of our saints and God's servants.

Nov. 27th, Kursk-Root Icon of the Theotokos: Our Lady of Kursk, Found Among the Roots, is one of Russia's greatest wonderworking icons. So named because it was found by a hunter in the roots of a tree outside of the city of Kursk in 1259, the pious hunter enshrined it in a nearby church of Our Lady, and it soon became a major place of pilgrimage, especially for those seeking deliverance from the Tartar Yoke. It ending up becoming, together with the Kazan Icon, one of the protective images of Russia. When the remnants of the White Army fled Russia in 1920, they took the Kursk-Root Icon with them, and Our Lady of Kursk began to be

seen as the Great Protectress of the Russian Diaspora. St. John of San Francisco reposed in the Lord before this image of Our Lady whom he so loved, while bringing it on a visit to Seattle. Since 1951, it has been enshrined at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, though it continues to make trip around the United States and abroad, including regular trips to Kursk with the fall of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Tikhvin Icon, which the Orthodox Church in America had similarly been safeguarding from the Bolsheviks, which was returned to Russia in 2004, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia has elected to maintain possession of the Kursk-Root Icon. God willing, Fr. John will be able to arrange a visit to our parish the next time it is passing through the area, but he strongly encourages anyone visiting Upstate New York to arrange a visit with this miraculous and grace-bearing icon.

Nov. 30th, St. Andrew: Throughout the Christian world, St. Andrew's Day has historically been a major day in our preparations for the coming celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord. For the modern Church, this feast remains such a day, and it serves as our first liturgical "stop" along our Advent journey to Christmas. In fact, so liturgically important is St. Andrew's Day that it is one of the few saints' days which the Priest's Service Book assumes will be celebrated. St. Andrew, the First-Called Apostle, is so named because he was the first of the Twelve Apostles to respond to the call of our Lord. Like St. Peter, whom he brought to Christ with himself, St. Andrew was a fisherman from the town of Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. He was prepared for the coming of Christ by the preaching of St. John the Baptist, for he had been one of St. John's closest disciples. After Pentecost, St. Andrew preached from Asia Minor to Thrace, Macedonia, Epirus, the lower Danube, the shores of the Black Sea (such as the Crimea), and as far as Scythia; some traditions even have him having gone up the Dnieper to Kiev, which is why he is seen as a patron of Russia. St. Andrew returned from Scythia to Greece and would be martyred at the city of Patras in Achaia. There in Patras, the Lord worked many miracles of healing through the prayers of St. Andrew, and much of the city was converted to Christ. "Few pagans remained at

Patras, but among them was the prefect of the city, Aegeatos. The Apostle Andrew repeatedly turned to him with the words of the Gospel. But even the miracles of the Apostle did not convince Aegeatos. The holy Apostle with love and humility appealed to his soul, striving to reveal to him the Christian mystery of life eternal, through the wonderworking power of the Holy Cross of the Lord. The angry Aegeatos gave orders to crucify the apostle. The pagan thought he might undo Saint Andrew's preaching if he were to put him to death on the cross. Saint Andrew the First-Called accepted the decision of the prefect with joy and with prayer to the Lord, and went willingly to the place of execution. In order to prolong the suffering of the saint, Aegeatos gave orders not to nail the saint's hands and feet, but to tie them to the cross." Not deeming himself worthy to be crucified like Christ, St. Andrew requested that he be crucified on a cross in the shape of an X, a 'saltire', which is now commonly known as "St. Andrew's Cross". "For two days the apostle taught the citizens who gathered about. The people, in listening to him, with all their souls pitied him and tried to take Saint Andrew down from the cross. Fearing a riot of the people, Aegeatos gave orders to stop the execution. But the holy apostle began to pray that the Lord would grant him death on the cross. Just as the soldiers tried to take hold of the Apostle Andrew, they lost control of their hands. The crucified apostle, having given glory to God, said: "Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit." Then a blazing ray of divine light illumined the cross and the martyr crucified upon it. When the light faded, the holy Apostle Andrew had already given up his holy soul to the Lord." The Emperor St. Constantine had St. Andrew's relics transferred from Patras to Constantinople, and together with St. Luke and St. Timothy, were interred in the Church of the Holy Apostles there. Due to the resting place of his relics and St. Andrew having gone through the area of Constantinople, in the 9th Century the Patriarchate of Constantinople began to claim that they were the successors to St. Andrew, who founded it as an Apostolic See like unto the other ancient Patriarchates, but this has been thoroughly disproven: historical records reveal that the first bishop of the city was Metrophanes I (r. 315-325), who was under the

Metropolitan of Heraclea on the Black Sea. St. Andrew's body was taken by the Italians after the Sack of Constantinople (1204) and interred at the cathedral in Amalfi. Meanwhile, St. Andrew's skull was returned to Patras in the 9th Century, but it was brought to Italy by Greeks fleeing the Ottomans and ended up at the Vatican in 1461. As a gesture of good will, the Roman Catholic Church returned St. Andrew's skull and much of his body to Patras in 1964 & 1980, where they now reside. As for why St. Andrew's Day is given such liturgical significance, we hear in the hymns of his feast, he was ready of receive the coming of the Lord at his mere word, and we are called to be like him: spending our lives preparing to receive the Lord whenever he might come to us, and then to follow him even unto death upon the Cross. Until the Pre-feast of Christmas, St. Andrew's is one of the few days with any hymns which lead us to Christmas, and for this reason along it is often celebrated. However, given its proximity to Thanksgiving, it is often not observed in America as fervently as it is in the lands of the fathers of this parish.

Nov. 30th, St. Sebastian of San Francisco: While his liturgical commemoration is obscured by the great commemoration of St. Andrew, St. Sebastian (born Jovan/John) was the first American-born man ordained to the Holy Priesthood. Growing up in a pious Serbian immigrant family in San Francisco, in whose home the first parish in the Continental United States was established, St. Sebastian was well educated in letters and piety and longed to serve the Church, first becoming a church teacher in San Francisco, he was then sent to the Kiev Theological Academy. There in Kiev he was tonsured a monk, with the name Sebastian, and ordained to the diaconate in 1887, after which he returned to San Francisco and served as the deacon of the Holy Trinity Cathedral (where Fr. John was once assigned to serve as a deacon, an unworthy successor to the saint), which had grown out of the house church in his family home. In 1892, St. Sebastian was ordained to the priesthood and was sent to Minneapolis to relieve St. Alexis Toth from his responsibilities at St. Mary's, so that St. Alexis could begin his missionary efforts among the Carpatho-Russians of Pennsylvania. There in Minneapolis, St. Sebastian also worked at the Missionary School

(which was later to be transferred to New Jersey and become our first seminary: St. Platon's). After only a year, he requested to return to the West Coast, where he began to be sent out to groups of Orthodox Christians wishing to start a parish: he would arrive and establish the parish for a time, and once it was stable enough a permanent priest would be sent so that St. Sebastian could move on. Doing this, the parishes of St. Sava in Jackson, CA (now part of the Serbian Church); St. Spiridon Cathedral, in Seattle, WA; Holy Trinity in Wilkeson, WA; St. Nicholas in Portland, OR; and Holy Trinity in Butte, MT (also with the Serbian Church today). In 1902, he returned to Alaska to establish parishes there and to serve as the dean of the Sitka Deanery. With a great increase of the number of Serbs coming to America, St. Sebastian was asked by St. Tikhon to lead the newly-established Serbian Mission of the North American Missionary Diocese, and so he did so from its headquarters in Chicago, overseeing the establishment of many Serbian parishes. In 1910, St. Sebastian requested to be released from this administrative position so that he could return to missionary work among the people, but in 1913 was asked to join the faculty of St. Platon's Seminary (the first in America, and the predecessor of St. Vladimir's and St. Tikhon's seminaries) in Tenafly, NJ. However, shortly thereafter, he was sent back to Serbia to negotiate his consecration as the bishop of a Serbian Vicariate under the North American Missionary Diocese (as St. Raphael was the vicar bishop for the Syrians/Antiochians). Sadly, the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 put these plans to the side, while St. Sebastian volunteered to become a chaplain for the Serbian Army. Having seen the horrors of war and with the Bolshevik Revolution leading to the breakup of the North American Diocese along ethnic lines, including the establishment of a separate Serbian Diocese for North America, St. Sebastian elected to remain a monk in Serbia, at the Monastery of Žiča. Tended to by St. Nicholas of Žiča (who would end up being exiled to America after the Communist takeover of Yugoslavia, where he would die as the rector of St. Tikhon's Seminary on March 18, 1956), St. Sebastian reposed in the Lord on Nov. 30, 1940. In 2007, his relics were translated to the graveyard of the parish of St. Sava in Jackson, CA, which he had

established, and in 2015 he was glorified at a service in California, making him America's newest canonized saint.

The Vespers Entrance

by John Nichiporuk

In addition to the entrances of the Liturgy, there is also an entrance of Vespers in the Orthodox practice. The Little Entrance of the Liturgy corresponded to the arrival of clergymen at the church and the beginning of the Liturgy of Catechumens, and the Great Entrance was a ceremony of bringing bread and wine to the altar of the Lord. What, then, is the meaning of the similar ritual at the evening service? What are the symbolic and early Christian meanings of this ceremony in the divine service?

History of the Rite. The Vespers Entrance already existed in the 4th century in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem. The bishop entered the cave of the Holy Sepulchre (there was no iconostasis yet) to pray and bless the faithful from there. Interestingly, this was done at all services, including the Hours, but initially there was no entrance to the altar during the Vespers. A possible explanation is that there was an entrance performed during the Liturgy, which was still celebrated in the evening at that time. This rite repeats and builds upon the entrances of the Liturgy. The focus of the Vespers Entrance is on the priest himself, who serves as the icon of Christ in the figurative sense. In this way, the procession with the censer and candles honors Christ through the figure of the priest.

Antique Form, Christian Content. The very idea of entrances, incense burning, and carrying lamps had existed for a long time both in Judea and in the Roman Empire. Thus, torches were carried in front of the Roman Caesars during processions. These customs were also adopted by Christians, who filled the antique form with a new Christian content. A special official known as the *lampadarius* also carried a candlestick with a golden lamp in front of the Christian emperor on special occasions. A similar lamp was carried before the Patriarch. It is known that twelve monks with candles marched in front of the Patriarch of Jerusalem on solemn occasions in the 8th and 9th centuries,

and this practice was also observed in the ancient Russian Church. According to the *Typikon* of the Great Church of Constantinople, the evening entrance of the clergy was accompanied by three lamps.

Rich Symbolism. According to St. Symeon of Thessalonica, the entire rite of the vespers entrance is a visible expression of the wisdom of our salvation. The entrance of the priest is the coming of Christ to us; the priestly garments are the incarnation; and his lowered hands symbolize humility and humiliation of Jesus. Standing in the midst of the church with a bowed head (the practice of the times of the Thessalonica saint) means the death of Christ on the cross — “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psalm 74:12) — and His descent into hell. Frankincense symbolizes the fragrant soul and life of the Savior. Returning to the altar signifies the bodily Ascension of the Lord to where He had come from for our salvation and theosis. It is worth noting that Symeon of Thessalonica was the first in the Orthodox East who interpreted the evening entrance in this way. We do not know any similar interpretations prior to it.

The Rite of Light. We should not forget about the original meaning of the Vespers Entrance, which is closely connected with the rite of lighting the lamps in the evening and offering the so-called thanksgiving light to God. This tradition comes from the Old Testament worship, when the Jews, at the command of the Lord (Leviticus 24:1-4), set up a lampstand in the Tabernacle every evening, and brought evening praise to God by burning incense. This rite was so sacred to the Jews that it was preserved in spite of the destruction of the Temple. The Orthodox Vespers Entrance also repeats in detail the ancient ritual of the Old Testament Church, when during the evening ritual meal the mother of the family entered the dining room with a lamp and put a candle on the table saying, “May the eyes of my children be enlightened by the light of the Torah” Interestingly enough, when a candle is carried out at the Vespers entrance, the choir sings a *Dogmaticon* — a hymn in honor of the most important Lady in the Church, the Mother of God. Christians have continued this evening sacrifice of praise and the kindling of lights, linking this ritual

to their faith in Christ, the Gladsome Light that enlightens everyone.

Therefore, the core and central meaning of the Vespers Entrance, which is the culmination of the evening praise, is the confidence of Christians that Christ is invisibly present in the thickening darkness, and that He came into the world through the obedience of the Virgin Mary, the Senior Lady in the Christian house. The gloom of night is coming, but “for the sons of light even nights are as bright as days”, St. Cyprian of Carthage assures us. “For how can the one who has light in his heart ever be without light? How can there be no sun and no day for those whose sun and day is Christ?”

The Joy of Podvig

*A talk given by Abbot Hilarion (Lupulović) of Draganac Monastery in Kosovo on March 18, 2018 in the Crypt of the Church of Christ's Resurrection, Podgorica, Montenegro.
Translated by Monk Sophronius (Copan)*

The Church is an endless movement, and this is in fact the root of the word “podvig.” Actually, we could even say that man is a being of movement, that man is a being who must surpass his own limits, that he must come out of himself. Man must step forward outside of himself in order to be joyful, to feel the fullness of life. Man must live in ecstasy, which is a word that denotes this stepping outside of oneself. “Ecstasy” is a Greek word that is used to describe the spiritual experiences of great ascetics, yet it also a word which can be used to describe our efforts and attempts to reach out to the other, to our neighbor.

A married man, for example, in order to preserve his marriage, must live in a sort of ecstasy, as he must come out from his own being, and give himself as a gift to those with whom he loves, be it his wife or his children. He has to step out of himself and give himself away. It is movement; he has to come out of his internal world in which it is indeed quiet and peaceful, and yet in which he is also a dead man. Man is truly dead if there is no communication with others, if there is no movement, as it is precisely for this that we have been created.

It could be said that the image and likeness in which we have been made is actually the possibility to imitate the very existence of God insofar as

this is possible for us as created beings; and in essence, this means that we are to exist as community. God Himself is revealed to us in Jesus Christ as a community, that of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Even before this revelation, the three were gathered together in the Old Testament at the Oak of Mamre, where God revealed Himself to Abraham through three visitors, and then Abraham addressed them in the singular as “Lord.” Thus, God is a community and man is created that he would also exist as community. Man has this possibility, as this is his image; and as for his likeness, man realizes it if he fulfills his calling and realizes the potential in this image. This is why movement is necessary. In Slavonic we have the words “dvig” or “dviženije,” and this means precisely “movement.” Thus, if “dvig” means movement, taking into account the Slavic root “po,” “podvig” would mean “upward movement.”

We have said already that man is created, and thus by the very nature of having been created, he is limited. He has his “limits,” his “boundaries,” as people say today. However, man is unique in that he has the particular characteristic of being created in order to surpass those boundaries and limitations. How does man break through his limitations? He does this when he enters into the realm of existing as community, when he begins to enter into what we could call his “Churchly,” or his “liturgical,” or even more precisely, his “Eucharistic” personhood. This is what we get when we begin to exist in communion, or, in the community of the saints, when I am no longer just myself, but rather I am only really me because you have recognized me as such, when you say “amen” to my existence. It’s only when you accept me that I truly begin to exist.

In this state, we arrive at a great mystery, at an unconfused mixing of persons, as in the Church we are one body of many members. This is one of the deepest Eucharistic mysteries. Through our relationships with each other, we have a constant impact on one another and even change one another, either for better or for worse. After a conversation with another person, both of us are changed. Both of us exist, to a certain extent, in different ways, and here we find a sort of podvig, an upward movement, and maybe this is even the most essential podvig: the struggle to come outside of

ourselves and attain to a communion of persons, to participate in the lives of other free beings and for them to participate in our lives, and then, having arrived at such a communion, to maintain this relationship through which we exist outside ourselves.

This is, perhaps, even the greatest virtue, and in fact, this is what we call "love." Love is a way of existence that is community, it is the experience of life in communion with other persons. Love is not just a passing phenomenon or an abstract feeling that will simply evaporate into the air later. No, rather, love is that experience when a specific person, with a first name and a last name, loves another specific person, with a first name and a last name. It is precisely through this experience that a man, to a certain measure, becomes like God, and slowly, as time passes, he grows into the fullness of Christ. This is something that man in and of himself cannot attain to. A man, alone, by himself, cannot be perfect. Yet, together, gathered as one in the Divine Liturgy, we can together taste of the perfection of Christ. This is something we can only accomplish through others and by having relationships with them. This is why I believe that the most essential, most significant, and most important podvig is our podvig to maintain this community, which is in fact a communion of persons, and in this vein, we maintain friendships, we maintain good relations and joy with our neighbors, we try to have understanding for the weaknesses of our boss at work, students try to have understanding for the personal failings of their professors. Or to put it in other words, this podvig is to struggle so that our passion for isolation and separation will always be less than the common threads which bind us together.

Monastic life is conceived of precisely in such terms. On the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent we celebrated the memory of our holy father John of the Ladder, who is one of the most significant writers of the Christian tradition. His book *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is actually the most translated and the most read book in the Orthodox world after Holy Scripture. In medieval Serbia, all educated people were familiar with *The Ladder*, not just monks but lay people as well, and of course, the rulers themselves. *The Ladder* speaks of spiritual formation and development through thirty different rungs of a ladder, which is often interpreted as

the thirty years in which a person attains to maturity. It is also the age at which Christ began to preach. In any case, St. John, in his book, enters into the dynamics of this ascent, this race of the drama of life.

The word "drama," etymologically, relates to a quick movement. Even the Greek word "dhromos," or "road," a road one travels down quickly, is related to the word "drama." It's not always a bad thing for life to be dramatic, and if there is no drama in the positive sense of the word, if our lives have no endeavoring or surge of energy, if we lack enthusiasm, then we fall into lethargy, and a man becomes dead inside. We must have enthusiasm; we must have youthfulness, joy, and dedication in order to truly live. This is why it's such a beautiful thing to see an older person who still has a youthful joy about him.

St. John of the Ladder saw such joy in the monasteries in which he lived, where he marveled, for example, at how old men energetically ran to their obediences as though they were still young men. At the request of his friend, the abbot of Raithu Monastery, he wrote this book about asceticism, about this spiritual ascent, about this race towards the Lord. Some people consider certain things in *The Ladder* to be "too much," to be going too far, (and even I did when I read it the first time) and then they fall into depression and think this is all just impossible. This happened to me when I read it as a young man and I thought it was all just too dark, too difficult. But, some people get this impression because they have not properly understood the text.

This is why when we read spiritual books, it is helpful if we have a certain level of hesitancy, if we read with the mindset that we cannot be totally sure what the text is really saying to us. We must read with the intention that we have to take counsel from others in order to understand; after all, it is written that wisdom is in the counsel of many. If we come to hasty conclusions all on our own, most often this will not be good, both generally in life and in the spiritual life. Especially in the spiritual life, it is of utmost importance that a person does not believe himself or his own conclusions, and this is why, among other things, podvig is a humbling of our minds, putting our thoughts in their proper

place. Our rational faculty of course has its proper uses, but, we cannot permit it to reign over us all the time. Dostoevsky said that reason is only twenty percent of a man, that a man is much more than just his rational mind.

Man is a being that begins to exist only when he has the strength to cut off his own qualities for the sake of living in community with others. Thus, deep urges within us to maintain communion with others are often much more “intelligent” than what our rational, calculating minds tell us to do. Thus, at times, in a given situation, a man’s mind tells him to do one thing, while deep within himself, he has the deep urge, maybe even the instinct, to do something entirely different, for the sake of maintaining love for others. This latter urge, which is focused on existing in a state of love for others and with others, must win out over the thoughts our rational minds tell us. Love must prevail over all else, and this is one kind of podvig, this mastery of oneself, and this is what is known in monasteries as “obedience.” The cutting off of one’s will is one of the monastic vows.

However, in fact, every person needs to live in some kind of obedience. Every person needs to pay attention to and listen to what his family, friends, and neighbors are saying to him, what they think of him, and how he lives. We need to always strive to please others, in the positive sense; we need to strive to relieve others, to give them a rest. As St. Paisios the Athonite said about our relations with our neighbor, we must always seek to do whatever gives our brother rest, not because we want to please him as a man, but because by serving your brother, you serve Christ Himself. This is because through your brother, through the people with whom you live, Christ reveals Himself to you. This is how you serve Christ. This is not a metaphor, this is just reality. In actuality, every man is Christ, since we participate in the Eucharist. Having participated together in the liturgical gathering of the Eucharist, we need to look at one another in light of this, as participants in this great mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. We must see the face of Christ in every person. It is said that every man is created in the image of Christ, who, at that man’s birth, in a sense, becomes incarnate. In Dečani, for example, in the fresco depicting the creation of the

world, it is Christ Who is depicted creating the world in its historical reality. Christ is the Word of God upon Whom both the heavens and the earth are established.

Thus, every man is a little god, but a little god covered in mud, as St. Justin of Ćelije said. Our podvig, then, lies in looking upon everyone around us in light of these truths. This can be very difficult, as all of us deviate from this reality of being, and yet, this is our task, to see Christ in everyone. We see the weaknesses of others, their failures, and yet, we accept each person together with all these weaknesses, and we love each person, even with their weaknesses. As it is often said, hate the sin but love the sinner.

It isn’t unusual that certain people in our lives irritate us, and a Christian shouldn’t become an idiot and live in some kind of fake bliss in which he simply doesn’t notice the weaknesses of those around them. No, if we sense something wrong, if we sense unrighteousness in what goes on around us, we must despise that unrighteousness, but we must not despise the person committing it. The most ideal situation would be if when we sense a weakness in our brother, we make this into a podvig, and try to correct our brother with love. As it is written, If your brother sins against you, reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. And yet so often, all we do is gossip about our brother. We take the easy path which leads to our demise, and in fact, this is a more difficult path because our suffering is not relieved, it has no end, when we take the “easy” way out. Our suffering comes to an end only when we gather the courage to set out upon the path of salvation, on the narrow path which leads to life. For example, that narrow path we must take is saying to ourselves that we won’t go out and tell five different people what our brother did to us, but rather, we will go directly to whoever wronged us and tell him what he did, what his weakness is. In that moment, this is of course very difficult, but really, through honesty and openness comes relief.

Of course, everyone must discern how strong they really are, what they can really do, and set out upon a podvig in accordance with their capabilities. What we really need to ask ourselves is: How much love do we truly have? We will find out how

much love we have by looking at how much we are ready to sacrifice ourselves. We all must struggle, we all must engage in podvig. Everyone who engages their podvig is an ascetic struggler in some sense, and even if we are all far from the ascetics that we read about in monastic literature, we still should not despise the podvigs that we have before us now, we should not despise the great riches that God offers us even though our podvigs are, in comparison, so small.

St. John Climacus says that the enemy often puts it into the minds of beginners to desire ascetic feats that they won't be able to accomplish so that when they fail, they will become disappointed and give up on doing even lesser things that they could have actually accomplished. Thus, it is good to always have in view what we can actually do, what we can accomplish. We should begin to engage in our podvig not just as a discipline, but we should see our podvig also as a kind of sport. Maybe this seems like a banal way to look at it, but I think it is an adequate comparison. The Greek word for podvig, "ascesis," actually means exercise, and it is used to refer precisely to physical exercise or practicing a sport. An ascetic is one who engages in physical labors, and monks too engage in physical endeavors in their obediences, and in doing prostrations, but also they engage in spiritual endeavors.

Now that we are in the midst of the Great Fast, people must discern not just how much they are able to fast, but how much they can fast and not lose their joy. Fasting is useless if our faces are not joyful. Christ tells us that when we fast, we are to pour oil on our heads and wash our faces, for the grace of God to help us and that we should be light and cheerful. We should not look sorrowful, as the hypocrites do, so that people will notice we are fasting. Fasting, then, must be a joyful discipline.

We read in books about how monks didn't eat for two weeks, for forty days, and of course, we say to ourselves that we cannot do that. Then we say, "Well, if I cannot fast exactly as these monks in The Ladder did, then I cannot fast at all; there is no point in any of my fasting." Such a view, in my opinion, is completely mistaken. It's the same as if we cannot run at the Olympics, but we still run a little every day because of our health. The first day,

it will be a great struggle to run even a half mile, and after two weeks you will be able to finish a mile quite easily, and then after a while, you will actually feel the need to run. Running will give you joy, and you will be healthy. It's the same with both fasting and with prayer. A person needs to begin to fast and pray.

We need to find someone to help us in this, not someone whom we will slavishly follow, but someone who will, like a father, advise us and help us to figure out how much we can do, what is within our capabilities, and help us to grow and advance in our podvig. We then give ourselves over to the battle before us in the arena of life, and this battle will be neither a small nor easy one, because our awareness of what podvig is often goes only as far as the external manifestations of podvig: Did I fast? Was I quiet? Did I read all the prayers? And yet, if we see things only in these limited, external terms, it is actually possible for us to lose our most basic, essential humanity: our relations with the people around us. Thus, the best indicator of having a healthy spiritual life is having good relations with the people around us—the best indicator of our spiritual success is love. As St. John the Theologian says, For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

Thus, in this forest of rules, since Orthodoxy is a rich and full tradition, a man can actually get lost. He can be blinded from his true goal by endless rules and instructions, with questions like, "Do I have to fast with or without oil today? Do you pray this way or that way? Do you have a spiritual father?" All of this can really confuse a person very easily. In this mountain of information, we can very easily lose the joy we had at the beginning, when we didn't know much except that we wanted to begin to live life with God. That primordial joy and simplicity is something we need to always remember, the "first grace," as the Fathers say. Even when we learn something new and useful, we need to return to the mindset that we know nothing. In order to truly pray, we need to come to a state where we see that we don't really know how to pray at all. If you have already developed a technique for yourself, then that technique or routine can begin to limit you. While there are rules in art, for example, when an artist begins to think that he has mastered

the rules, then very often he begins to be caught in simple mimicry and copying. Instead, we need to always be pushing our boundaries, engaging in a kind of risk, that we don't just do what seems safe.

And so, in the spiritual life, very often we need to return to that "beginner's ignorance." Why is this necessary? It's necessary because the law we must fulfill, and to which our prayers and fasting and attendance at the Divine services and forgiveness of others all lead us, is ultimately leading us to the mystery of mysteries, to something which is limitless, the very mystery of our existence, the law of perfect love. Our Lord Jesus Christ set this law down as the most basic criterion. When He was asked what are the greatest commandments, he answered that the greatest commandments are love towards God and love towards man, towards one's neighbor. So, no matter what podvig we set out upon, we must always return to this law of love; this must always be our most basic criterion of success.

It is impossible for someone to stay in the monastery if they do not grow together with the other people with whom they live. Life only begins when we stop having other plans besides the present, other "options." Life begins when a person stops comforting himself, when he is ready to endure anything, when he says to himself, "Christ reveals Himself to me through these people with whom I am living now; Christ speaks to me through them; I cannot have salvation apart from these people, and whatever I think or feel is of secondary importance."

This is why it can be so damaging how some people today get too wrapped up in their own psychology and mental states. They get stuck in an endless cycle of their own interior life and they cannot live, they cannot grow. Joy is something which begins in encountering other people, in going outside of that closed interior world. And so we get stuck in our minds, asking ourselves what bothers us, what hurts us, thinking about what our problems are. People today get far too involved with these kinds of thoughts. And really, what is it that we need to do? We need to leave all that behind. We need to die for Christ, and that means dying to our feelings and emotions, to lose our souls, as Christ says, for he who loses his life for Christ's

sake shall find it, while he who tries to hold on to his life, to grasp at it, will be the one who loses it. It's similar with soldiers who go into war. An old man who fought in World War II in Russia and who later became an abbot said that the soldiers who were the most afraid of dying in battle, who worried about having enough to eat and carried extra food around in their backpacks, were the ones who died, while the soldiers who took no care for themselves were the ones who were victorious, who lived.

It's similar in the spiritual life, as Christ Himself said, For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. This is the foundation of our lives, and the foundation of any kind of podvig. We must constantly return to this: I fast, but do I have love in my heart? Am I concerned with my neighbor and his well-being? Do I feel his pain? Is his joy my joy? Or instead, do I think that I have my prayer rule and I complete it and then I have fulfilled my spiritual obligations? We may find that, with such a way of doing things, with such a mindset, our prayer will not be unto our salvation. But, if we begin the race with another "leg," with that of love for our neighbor and concern for him, that even if we didn't take on as great of labors in fasting or prayer, with this second "leg," we will cover much greater distances in this race and finish much further along.

Lord Have Mercy

by Apr. George M. Benigsen

"LORD, HAVE MERCY." How frequently these three words are repeated in our churches and in our personal prayers. They are repeated in litanies, which consist of short petitions, each of which ends with the words "Lord, have mercy." At evening services and during the reading of the Hours we repeat these words sometimes 3, sometimes 12 and sometimes even 40 times. How marvelous is the score of the Russian composer Lvovsky for the multiple "Lord have mercy" sung at the Elevation of the Cross. And there are many other services during which "Lord have mercy" is repeated many times, insistently, repentantly...

Let us not be disturbed by such frequent repetition of some of our short prayers, in particular the prayer "Lord, have mercy." The object of such repetition is to imbue our hearts, our minds, and our souls with the prayer. The aim is to focus our attention on the topic of the prayer, which the Church considers of particular importance for our spiritual growth. This repetition, as leitmotif in music, penetrates our consciousness and remains long in our memory, staying with us even as we leave the church for our everyday existences.

"Lord, have mercy." Three words, but what depth of meaning do they hold. First, by calling God "Lord", we confirm His rule over the world, the mankind and, most importantly, over ourselves, over those who speak these words. "Lord" means master, ruler. This is why we call ourselves the "servants" of God. This appellation has nothing offensive about it, as is readily suspected by some of those who would fight the Lord. Servitude by itself is negative as it deprives the human being of the original gift - the gift of freedom. But, as this gift was given to man by God, only in God can man find the plenitude of freedom. It follows, therefore, that service to God is in fact the perfect freedom in God.

Our service to God is far from perfect. Every day, every hour we flee from that blessed Servitude. We flee to where there is neither light, nor love, nor joy, nor life-which we can only find in God. We flee from perfect joy to the bottomless pit of sorrow. Then, we awake spiritually, we return to our senses, we begin to understand that we have nowhere to go, when we flee God, except to death. As King David said: "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit and from Thy countenance whither shall I flee?" We return to God -- some of us after a momentary absence, some after many years of alienation. And, in order to reestablish our filial servitude to Him, the servitude, which we are constantly fleeing, we beg for forgiveness and repeat: have mercy, have mercy.

So there they are, these minor words, these few words of prayer with which we can pray in all places and at all times: "Lord, have mercy." It is good to value them, cherish and nurture them. They are our praying beads made up of words and they link our hand with the right hand of the Lord.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Nov. 7, Thursday - St. Michael's Day Party

After Vespers for the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, Michael Galis will be hosting a pizza party in the parish hall. Please come and fellowship with us and help Michael to celebrate his nameday! This is a great idea, and one which Fr. John would greatly encourage others to emulate. It is not only a wonderful way to celebrate your heavenly patron, but also to help build up love for each other!

Nov. 9, Saturday - Basket Party: Invite your friends!

Our annual Basket Party is coming November 9! It will begin at 11 and there will be a lunch at noon. If you are interested and able to donate a basket (or part of a basket), please see Julianna Cario for ideas and basket contents forms. Basket value should be around \$50, and baskets need to be returned by **November 3rd.**

Nov. 10, Sunday - Annual Parish Assembly

After Liturgy we will be having our Annual Parish Assembly; please make sure to mark your calendars and try to be present for this very necessary part of our shared parish life.

Nov. 11, Monday - Veteran's Day/St. Martin's Day Wine & Cheese Social

Fr. John & Mat. Janine will be hosting a wine and cheese social at 7:00pm. If the rectory remodel is not completed by then, we will gather in the parish hall.

Nov. 11 & 12, Mon/Tues - Ladies' Altar Society Bread Baking for Christmas

Please consider joining Shirley Brookman and the Ladies' Altar Society to bake our Christmas breads to sell; 8 AM both days.

Nov. 16, Saturday - Archdiocesan Advent Retreat

Held at St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, 150 Elmtree Rd, New Kensington, beginning with a Moleben and light lenten meal, followed by a presentation by Fr. Thomas Soroka (of our sister parish of St. Nicholas in McKees Rocks) from 11 to 1, on the topic of "*Spiritual Growth and the Body of Christ*". Please join Fr. John and Mat. Janine in supporting this archdiocesan event with your presence! If you would like to come, please let Fr. John

know so that he can give a rough count to the Archdiocese, or if you would like to carpool with him.

Nov. 23, Saturday – Ladies’ Altar Society Thanksgiving Bake Sale

Our Ladies’ Altar Society will be having their bake sale, from 11 to 1, of rolls for Thanksgiving. Please invite your friends as well!

Nov. 29, Friday – Black Friday Charity Opportunity

After a day of giving thanks, the Outreach Committee would like to invite you to put that thanksgiving into action by giving back to those in need. Please consider joining them in helping to pack over one million meals for the hungry at the third annual “Amen to Action”, from **9am to 12:30pm** downtown at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, 1000 Fort Duquesne Boulevard. Registration is required, and slots fill up quickly: www.amentoaction.org. Please see Marcie Killmeyer (412-445-8482; map_turtle@hotmail.com) for more information.

Dec. 6-8, Fri/Sat/Sun – St. Anna, Canonsburg Old-Fashioned Christmas Outreach Opportunity, and Christmas Concert.

The weekend of Dec. 6-8 is going to be filled with outreach opportunities:

- Friday, Dec. 6th, 4-9 PM: We will have a tent and be handing out hot cocoa at our town’s Old Fashioned Christmas festival. Please see Fr. John or Juliana Cario if you would like to join or sponsor hand-out materials.
- Saturday morning, Dec. 7th, 10 AM: Visitation of the myrrh-streaming icon of St. Anna from St. Tikhon’s Monastery, beginning with a Moleben and followed by light lenten meal and talk by Fr. Sergius, abbot of the monastery.
- Saturday, Dec. 7th, Noon-9PM: We will again be manning a booth and handing out hot cocoa.
- Saturday evening, Dec. 7th, 5 or 5:30 (time TBD), the festival committee has asked that we and All Saints’ Greek Orthodox Church lead the town in song for the tree-lighting ceremony. Fr. John will be directing a combined choir.
- Later that evening, at 8:30 PM, Fr. John has been asked to lead a choir in showcasing our Carpatho-Russian Carols, for which we will be

assembling a pan-parish choir. If you are interested in singing, please see Fr. John.

- On Sunday, Dec. 8th, at 4 PM, to “crown” the weekend and the town’s festivities, we will be hosting a Christmas Concert sung by “Prayer Arise”, our Church’s regional men’s choir under the direction Rd. Peter Merella of Holy Resurrection in Belle Vernon. This also happens to be World Choral Day, which makes such a concert all the more able to be advertised!

Please see Fr. John if you are able to help in any way. Rehearsals for the Saturday evening concert will begin after Compline on Friday evening, November 15th.

Dec. 9-10, Mon/Tues – Kielbasa Making.

Please join the Men’s Group in making our Christmas kielbasa.

Dec. 14, Saturday – Ladies’ Altar Society Bake Sale

Our Ladies’ Altar Society will be having their bake sale for Christmas goodies. Please invite your friends as well!

Dec. 14, Saturday – Men’s Group Kielbasa Sale

Our Men’s Group will be selling our home-made kielbasa (fresh, hot, and smoked). Make sure to come and get ‘em!

Dec. 18, Wednesday. – Archbishop Job Memorial Liturgy

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Archbishop Job’s passing. A Memorial Divine Liturgy will be held at St. John’s Orthodox Church in Black Lick (Blairsville) on Wednesday, December 18, 2019. Archbishop Job is interred behind the altar of St. John’s. The Liturgy will begin at 10:00 AM with Archbishop Melchisedek presiding. An Advent luncheon will follow at the Black Lick Volunteer Fire Department social hall. The church is located at 785 Blaire Road, Blairsville, PA 15717. If you are interested in hitching a ride with Fr. John, please RSVP soon!

Dec. 22, Sunday – Christmas Caroling

Diane and the choir will be caroling around to different homes and nursing homes. Fr. John and Diane should have more details about this shortly, but in the meantime mark your calendars and please consider joining!

Jan. 3, Fri. – St. John’s Community Night

St. John’s, led by the Outreach Committee, will be hosting a parish community night on this FAST FREE Friday, from 6-9pm. Details are still in the works, but it will likely involve a movie and activities for the kids, and a mini-retreat for the adults. All with food, of course! Mark your calendars!

Jan. 24, Friday – March for Life (Washington, D.C.)

The Archdiocese of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania is sponsoring a bus trip to Washington DC, on Friday, January 24, to participate in the March for Life, organized by St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. We are encouraged to join in making our Christian stance clear regarding the sanctity of life! The bus will depart from St. Alexander Nevsky (8290 Thompson Run Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15237) at 6:00 a.m. and will leave Washington DC at 3:15 p.m. to return. Water will be provided on the bus; please pack your own lunches/snacks, folding chairs, etc. **Tickets are \$50/person (remaining costs are being defrayed by the Archdiocese and the St. Alexander Nevsky Women’s Association).** For questions, contact the Chancery at 724-776-5555 or Eileen Glisan (glisan@iup.edu; 724-272-1552). To register, please see Fr. John. **Envelopes must be postmarked by Monday, December 2, 2019. The bus can only accommodate 56 people – first come, first served!**

If you would like anything corrected or added to this list of events, please contact Fr. John!

GREETERS:

Sunday	Individual/Family
Nov. 3	Susan Horosky
Nov. 10	Shirley Brookman
Nov. 17	Schenken Family
Nov. 24	Helene Emerick
Dec. 1	Ruth Ann Esaias

Please find a replacement or see Mat. Myra Oleynik (724-366-0678) if you are unable to make your scheduled Sunday.

READERS:

Sunday	Hours:	Epistle:
Nov. 3	Leah Stockman	Tony Cario
Nov. 10	Mat. Janine K.	Tony Cario

Nov. 17	Layla Killmeyer	Chris Weber
Nov. 24	Rd. John T.	Rick Pierce
Dec. 1	Evan Petronka	Chris Petronka

Please find a replacement or see Fr. John (425-503-2891) if you are unable to make your scheduled Sunday.

CANDLE HOLDERS:

Nov. 3	Troitsa: Dan Basso Dr. Dennis Davis Greg Matyuf	Al Davis Cirio Signorini Tom Fudala Michael Tarbuck
Nov. 10	Troitsa: Alex Schenken Bob Schenken Nick Schenken	Kevin Rudolph Nick Schenken Steven Schenken Don Marsico
Nov. 17	Troitsa: Mike Killmeyer Todd Geer Steve Simko	Chris Weber Lee Klingensmith Rich Eismont Joseph Helinski
Nov. 24	Troitsa: David Stockman Steve Udodow Chris Petronka	Kip Yarosh Evan Petronka Jerry Strennen Mark White
Dec. 1	Troitsa: Jn. Migyanko III Joseph Havrilak Steve Udodow	Mike Pazuchanics Joe Migyanko Joe Migyanko, Jr. Dennis Sweda

The Troitsa holder is the ‘team leader’ and is responsible for organizing the candle holders and/or finding replacements for those absent.

COLLECTION BASKETS:

Nov. 3	Bridget Onest Nina Onest	Luke Phillis Katie Pazuchanics
Nov. 10	Luke Ruffing Eric Bell	Gabe Ruffing Gideon Rufing
Nov. 17	Andrew Davis Ethan Davis	Lydia Davis Evan Davis
Nov. 24	Aubrie Eismont Analise Eismont	Megan Geer Sarah Simko
Dec. 1	L. Killmeyer M. Killmeyer	Stephen Schenken Nick Schenken

ATTACHMENTS:

- November Parish Calendar (Emailed)