

THE PROPHET

Monthly Newsletter of

St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church in America (OCA)

Archdiocese of Pittsburgh

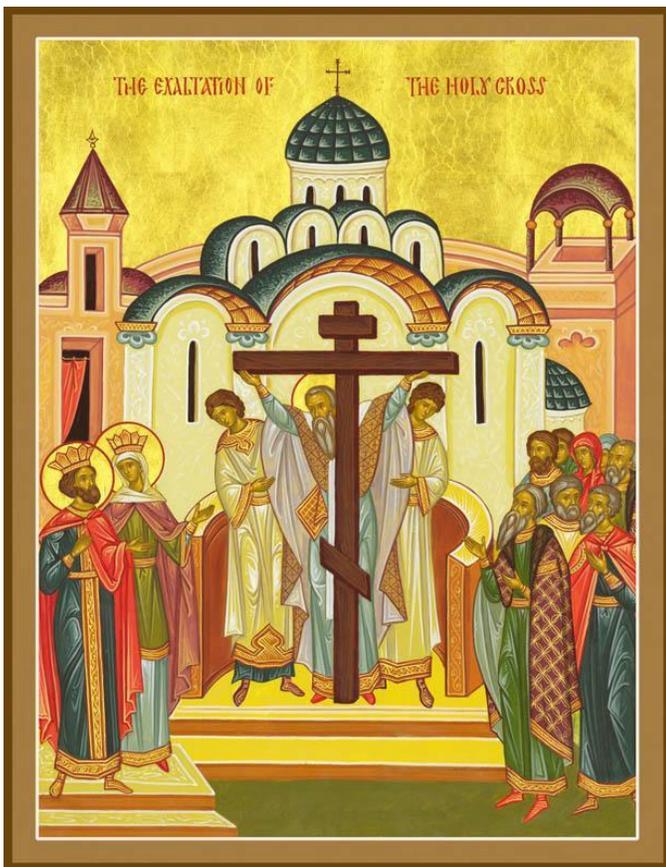
His Eminence, Most Rev. Melchisedek

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September 2021



The Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Sept. 14

Rector, Fr. John Joseph Kotalik

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RECTOR'S REPORT:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Christu!

Happy AM 7530 (*Anno Mundi*, years since the creation of the world)! September 1st is the first day of the Ecclesiastical New Year, and is the Christianization of the Jewish Feast of Rosh Hashanah. Historically, Sept. 1st was also the civil New Year's Day in the Byzantine Empire from 691, and in Russia until 1700. Not only is Sept. 1st the start of the month of harvest (the month of 'Tishri' on the Hebrew Calendar) and the traditional Hebrew day of the world's creation, but Jewish tradition also maintains that Noah - through whom the re-birth of the world was accomplished - was born of Tishri 1. Noah thus becomes the father of the preserved human race, the father and symbol of the new age of the world after the flood. Therefore, on this day, we celebrate the creation of the world and, following the Old Testament, we ask God to bless the crown of the new year with his favour. In fact, this tradition of Sept. 1st being the day on which the new year of creation was celebrated was so strong in the Old Covenant that Tishri/September 1st was the day on which David and the Kings of Judah following him were crowned. In other words, the earthly king who was meant to lead us to the Heavenly King was crowned on this day, and so we ask God to lead us to the Heavenly King through the coming year. Following this ancient custom of the People of God, the Orthodox Church continues to celebrate September 1st as its New Year's Day.

Let us enter the new church year with joy, and resolve to better enter into the life of the Church!

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

MEMORY ETERNAL:**(Въчна память!)****We commemorate the anniversaries of:**

Mary Chupinsky (9/2/2001)
 George Duneshko (9/3/1942)
 Albert Johnson (9/3/1942)
 Edward Danyo (9/3/2011)
 Mary Bedey (9/4/1980)
 George Ezerski (9/5/1954)
 William Sohyda (9/5/2004)
 Joseph Chobany (9/5/2005)
 Leonty Emelianenko (9/6/1921)
 Theodore Koval (9/6/1940)
 Steve Simon (9/7/1932)
 Michael Dunda (9/7/1954)
 Julia Gabowsky (9/7/1998)
 Julia Kochanski (9/8/2019)
 Margaret Dichak (9/10/1994)
 Anne Roskowski (9/10/2008)
 Andrew Voskreskov (9/11/1925)
 Anna Zotov (9/11/1971)
 Metro Bobble (9/11/1994)
 Patricia Macieko (9/11/2011)
 Richard Sweda (9/12/1959)
 Ann Marty (9/13/2004)
 Rd. Michael Povich (9/13/2019)
 Samuel Zulick (9/15/1980)
 John Sevak (9/15/1995)
 Eleanor Boettcher (9/15/2016)
 Dolores Soroka (9/17/1993)
 George Semnick (9/18/1957)
 John Zotov (9/18/1966)
 Christine Zedlovich (9/18/2002)
 Boris Martynuk (9/18/2007)
 Maria Skavronsky (9/19/1919)
 Peter Kopy (9/19/1955)
 Xenia Poznikov (9/20/1925)
 Michael Tegza (9/20/1932)
 Mary Telesko (9/20/1941)
 Helen Zhovna (9/21/1923)
 Anna Koncha (9/21/1932)
 Steven Sebastian (9/21/1966)
 Andrew Beba (9/22/1952)
 Helmut Weber (9/22/2017)
 Michael Gavchak (9/23/1925)
 Nicholas Fecycz (9/24/1961)
 John Melnyk (9/24/1970)
 Andrew Blyshak (9/26/1935)
 George Savage (9/26/1985)
 Julie Kern (9/26/2017)
 Pelagia Soroka (9/27/1966)
 Geneva Doll (9/28/2008)

George Vorobey (9/29/1939)
 Mary Artemko (9/29/1952)
 Mary Furman (9/29/1965)
 Helen Zulick (9/30/1973)
 Michael Haverlack (9/30/2000)

MANY YEARS:**(Многая и благая лѣта!)****Namedays:**

Zachary Strennen (9/5)
 Ashley Elizabeth Wright (9/5)
 Dr. Ruth Ann Esaias (9/9)
 Chelsea Anne Geer (9/9)
 Marcie Ann Killmeyer (9/9)
 Melina Anne Killmeyer (9/9)
 Anita Prince (9/9)
 Mary Ann Reck (9/9)
 Annabelle Ruffing (9/9)
 Anna Marie Spetek (9/9)
 Mary Ann Zupancic (9/9)
 Sonia Blaha (9/17)
 Sophie Germaine Helinski (9/17)
 Sonya Klingensmith (9/17)
 Pr. John Joseph Kotalik (9/26)

Birthdays:

Chelsea Anne Geer (9/1)
 Julie Simko (9/9)
 Evelyn Davis (9/11)
 Gregory Oleynik (9/13)
 Anita Prince (9/13)
 Kristy Paradise (9/14)
 Catherine Thompson (9/14)
 Christopher Weber (9/18)
 Rachel Royer (9/20)
 Patricia Kolarsky (9/24)
 Danie Yarosh (9/25)
 Jacob Ruffing (8/26)
 Luke Phillis (9/27)
 Joseph Helinski (9/28)
 Richard Blaha (9/29)
 Nina Onest (9/30)

Wedding Anniversaries:

Jason & Natalia Grimm (9/1)
 Chuck & Kathy Caligiuri (9/1)
 Lee & Sonya Klingensmith (9/15)
 Jonathan & Courtney Stadelman (9/25)
 John & Geraldine Petronka (9/26)

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

Archpastoral Message of
His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon
for the beginning of the
Ecclesiastical New Year

September 1, 2021

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My beloved children in the Lord, and to all who read this encyclical at the beginning of the Ecclesiastical New Year, on the day when the Church also reflects on the created world: I greet you in the Name of the Lord, and pray that God bestows upon you “every good and perfect gift from above” (James 1:17). May the God who has revealed Himself to us as “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6) once again have mercy on us and upon His whole creation.

Just a few days ago, Hurricane Ida slammed into the Gulf Coast of the United States, and inflicted untold damage to property, and—to our great sadness—human life. This hurricane happened while at the same time unrelenting fires have likewise cut a swath of death and destruction throughout this same country, as well as in Canada, Europe, Russia, and Turkey. Even further, we hear that parts of our world have suffered from either extreme drought or unprecedented rainfall. We mourn those who have died in these tragedies, and ask that God keep them eternally in His memory. We grieve with their friends and families. We are also concerned for those who have been displaced, or lost property or homes; we have become saddened by what has befallen them. As always, as Christians, we should stand with them and seek ways to support any and all who have been afflicted by these natural disasters.

With these events that have taken place in just the past few days, we witness the awesome power of nature, and also the fragility and preciousness of human life. We should be reminded not only to fulfill our Christian vocation of love, of mourning, and of standing in solidarity with the weak and the vulnerable; but also that we should “number our days, so that we get a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). When we learn the painful and heart-wrenching lessons that we are not invulnerable, we are not almighty, we are not immortal, we learn that we are men and women who are called to love one another as God

has loved us, according to the teaching of the very Wisdom and Word of God, Jesus Christ (Jn 13:34; 15:12, 17).

At the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year, on the day when we consider the created world, I call upon the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America to remember those who have died, and those suffering from these recent natural disasters, and to seek ways to support them. May the God of every consolation and compassion be with you!

With my archpastoral blessings and love in the Lord,

+ TIKHON

*Archbishop of Washington,
Metropolitan of All America & Canada*

Entering the Year of Grace

*from “The Year of Grace of the Lord” by
“A Monk of the Eastern Church” (Archim. Lev Gillet)*

The Significance of the Liturgical Year

Each year, at the beginning of September, the Churches of the Byzantine Rite lead their congregations into a cycle of prayers and commemorations that constitutes the ‘liturgical year’ or the ‘church year’. What does this liturgical year mean, exactly?

One could think of the liturgical year as if it were a picture of the services and feast days during a cycle of 365 days, from September to September: in short, the liturgical year could be reduced to a practical diagram, to a calendar. The liturgical year is, in fact, expressed as a calendar, but simply to identify it with a calendar would be totally inadequate. One could also say that the purpose of the liturgical year was to bring to the minds of believers the teachings of the Gospel and the main events of Christian history in certain order. That is true, but this educational, pedagogical, function does not exhaust the significance of the liturgical year. Perhaps we could say that its aim is to orient our prayer in a particular direction and also to provide it with an official channel which is objective, and even, in a certain way, artistic. This, too, is true, but the liturgy is more than a way of prayer, and it is more than a magnificent lyric poem. The liturgy is a body of sacred ‘signs’ which, in the thought and desire of the Church, have a present effect. Each liturgical feast renews and in

some sense actualises the event of which it is the symbol; it takes this event out of the past and makes it immediate; it offers us the appropriate grace, it becomes an 'effectual sign,' and we experience this efficacy to the extent that we bring to it an inclination of our soul. But still, this does not say everything. The liturgical year is, for us, a special means of union with Christ. No doubt every Eucharist unites us intimately with Christ, for in it he is 'both he who offers and who is offered', in the same way that every prayer, being the prayer of the members of the mystical body, shares in the prayer of him who is the head of the body and the only one whose prayer is perfect. But, in the liturgical year, we are called to relive the whole life of Christ: from Christmas to Easter, from Easter to Pentecost, we are exhorted to unite ourselves to Christ in his birth and in his growth, to Christ suffering, to Christ dying, to Christ in triumph and to Christ inspiring his Church. The liturgical year forms Christ in us, from his birth to the full stature of the perfect man. According to a medieval Latin saying, the liturgical year is Christ himself, *annus Christus*.

It is not only the commemoration Lord Jesus that forms Christ in us. In addition to the cycle of feasts that bear directly on our Lord, the liturgical year includes the cycle of feasts of the saints. These two cycles, however, should not be thought of as two strands that run parallel to, or separate from, each other, for the saints are the glorified members of the body of Christ. Their sanctity is but an aspect, a shining ray of the holiness of Christ himself. To celebrate the feast of a saint is to celebrate a special grace that flows from Christ to that saint and so to us; it is to celebrate that aspect of our Lord which is specially evidenced by the saint, it is to enter (for our profit) into the relationship of prayer which unites that saint to Christ. It is still more. In the same way that the feasts of our Lord in a mysterious way renew the events of his life, so the feasts of the saints make their lives, their merits and their deaths mysteriously actual, in as much as they participate in the life, the merits and death of the Lord Jesus. Thus commemorations of the martyrs somehow renew the grace of their violent deaths, so that, as these were a participation in the passion of Christ, it is this passion which is relived in remembering year has but one and the same object, Jesus Christ; whether we the contemplate him directly, or whether we

contemplate him martyrs. The liturgical year has but one and the same object, Jesus Christ; whether we contemplate him directly, or whether we contemplate him through the members of his body.

Great graces and great spiritual opportunities are offered us during the course of the liturgical year. It provides a frame and support for Christian piety; it gives it a style which is sober and objective; it maintains a bond of unity among believers. And, above all, it communicates an inspiration, it transmits a life. One should, however, beware of excessive 'liturgicalism' which would seek to enclose prayer in ritual frames. The liturgical way is not the only way. Saints and mystics have sometimes reduced outward forms to a minimum; solitaries have done without them altogether. Liturgical life is not an end in itself; it is but a means - amongst other means of reaching the kingdom of God which 'is within us'. Our taking part in the liturgical year is empty and illusory if the outward cycle is not matched by an inner cycle, and if the events of Christ's life that each feast represents do not find themselves mysteriously renewed in our soul. The liturgical year acquires its true meaning to the extent that it becomes an adoration in spirit and in truth.

The First Day of the Liturgical Year

The Byzantine liturgical year starts on September 1st. A quick look at the texts which are read during the services for this day will show us the inner attitude that the Church wishes to instill in us at the start of the year.

During vespers for September 1st (which, according to the Byzantine custom are celebrated in the evening of the previous day - therefore, on August 31st), we hear three lessons from the Old Testament. The first is taken from the prophet Isaiah (61. 1-9): 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me. . .' etc. This is the passage that our Lord read - and which applied to himself in the synagogue at Nazareth, just as we will hear it in the liturgy on the morning of September 1st. Some words of Isaiah's, which do not come into the passage quoted by our Lord, are nevertheless worthy of special attention: 'And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities'. In this there is a message of hope for those who are aware of bringing to the threshold of the new year a soul

full of desolations and of waste: our spiritual waste can be salvaged during the year which is starting. The prophet also tells us what God will do for the afflicted: our spiritual waste can be salvaged during the year which is start he will give them 'beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness'.

The second lesson for vespers is taken from Leviticus (26. 3-12, 14-17, 19-20). This is a serious warning that God gives to his people, whose destiny will be very different depending the covenant between God and Israel is honoured or violated. From this comes the antithesis: 'If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them ... But if ye will hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And not if ye shall despise my statutes ...'. In either case, the divine answer will affect the material well-being of the people - well-being that is expressed in terms of agricultural prosperity or scarcity: 'I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit ... Your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits'. God is the creator and the master of physical nature, as he is of souls; our material life depends on his goodness, and he does not leave the just without bread or a roof. Moreover two verses of the same text promise us much more than our daily bread: 'I will set my tabernacle among you ... and I will walk among you and will be your God'.

The third lesson is taken from the Wisdom of Solomon (4. 7-15). In it, the unknown author reacts against the Jewish concept which more or less identified moral perfection with longevity: 'For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years'. To be old, in the best sense, was to have known how to please God. 'He pleased God, and was beloved of him': for 'an unspotted life is old age'. At the threshold of the new year, we are thus invited to meditate on a concept which is no longer material, but purely spiritual, of time and age.

At matins for September 1st, we hear one of the gospel texts of the resurrection which are read at matins every Sunday. The chosen text is Luke (24. 1-12). Perhaps the reason for this choice lies in the words relating to the holy women: 'The first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto

the sepulchre ...'. We, too, are invited to turn our thoughts to the risen Lord at the break of day, at the first light of the year which is beginning, *on the first day of the week* - the week, in this case, being the year.

The epistle read at the liturgy on September 1st (1 Tim. 2. 1-7) reminds us of the duty we have to pray for our brothers: 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men'. It is particularly suitable that, on this first day of the year, we should bring to our Lord's heart all those whom justice or charity bind to us. Let us look at the words 'giving of thanks'. St Paul wrote them here, at the end, with a definite purpose. Perhaps we do pray often enough for the needs of others; but most believers rarely think of thanking God for the individual graces he bestows on our brothers.

The central scriptural text for this day is the gospel read at the liturgy (Luke 4. 16-22). Jesus, returning to Nazareth, enters the synagogue. He is asked to read the portion of Scripture appropriate to that sabbath. He opens the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and reads: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to read the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord'. Jesus folds up the scroll, sits down and says: 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'. Jesus addresses this same solemn declaration to us at the start of each year. I am poor - perhaps materially, but certainly spiritually. I am captive - captive of my egoism and of my sin. I am blind - for my eyes do not know how to perceive the divine light. I am wounded - perhaps by the external circumstances of my life - but much more so by my repeated spiritual failures. And all the time, Jesus is there in front of me, and offers me deliverance. He, himself, is the embodiment of all deliverance and of all forgiveness. If at this moment I accept his word, his salvation, everything can become new for me. *Today*: on the first day of the year this offer is made to me. I have heard this divine promise so many times already, at the start of so many years: and have abused this grace so many times, wasting in sin those opportunities opened for my conversion. But, in spite of this accumulation of infidelities, Jesus still renews his offer to me; this year which is starting can

still be for me 'a year of grace of the Lord'. I do not know if I shall have the strength and the grace to persevere; but at least, on this first day, I can look towards our Lord in a spirit of faith and consecration. The gospel says: 'And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him'. Would that on this first day of the year my eyes might turn away from the defilements in which they take pleasure and fasten themselves on Christ - and remain fixed on him. For, if I have the courage to keep my eyes on Jesus alone, if I do not turn them aside, I shall no longer fall. Lord Jesus, I look at thee. I have listened to thy promises. Let me now hear, in a way personal and intimate, the assurance: 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in *thy ears*'.

The Challenge of St Simeon the Stylite

The Byzantine calendar assigns to September 1st, as 'saint of the day', the earliest and best known of the 'stylites' - those ascetics who, on top of a pillar, lived a life separated from the world. Such was the extraordinary life of Simeon in the 5th century. The Church seems to throw down a challenge to the world deliberately in inviting us, on the first day of the year, to contemplate a case so extreme that it constitutes a paradox. For the life of a stylite appears to be a negation of all the values honoured by 'reasonable', 'civilized', 'modern' man. The history of Christian sainthood is full of such cases, which are in some way a scandal. Of course, sainthood adapts itself to the conditions of each age and usually takes on some of the features of contemporary life. But it is good that, from time to time, a voice cries in the desert and sends out a strong call to renunciation and penitence. This call has never ceased being heard, and even in our day, hermit life still has a number of followers. In honouring Simeon the Stylite on the first day of the year, eastern Christianity takes a clear stand; it shows that it neither disowns nor abandons heroic forms of sainthood. The world does not understand; it either jeers or is indignant. For these belong to the kind of things Jesus spoke of when he said: 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes'. (Matt. 11. 25).

The Nativity of the Virgin Mary

As we have already indicated, the liturgical year comprises, in addition to the cycle of Sundays and

the cycles of the feasts that commemorate our Lord directly, a cycle of feasts of the saints. The first great feast of this cycle of saints to come after the start of the liturgical year, is the feast of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on September 8th. It is appropriate that, during the first days of the new religious year, we should be brought into the presence of the highest example of human holiness that the Church recognizes and venerates - that of the mother of Jesus Christ. The texts that are read and the prayers that are sung on the occasion of this feast throw a lot of light for us on the kind of worship that the Church accords to Mary.

During vespers, celebrated on the eve of September 8th, several lessons from the Old Testament are read. First of all there is the account of the night which Jacob spent at Luz (Gen. 28. 10-17). While Jacob slept, with his head pillowed on stones, he had a dream: he saw a ladder reaching up from earth to heaven, and the angels ascending and descending along this ladder; and God himself appeared and promised that he would bless and keep Jacob's seed. Jacob, when he awoke, blessed the stone on which he had slept with oil, and called the place Beth-el, that is to say 'house of God'. Mary, whose motherhood was the human condition necessary for the Incarnation, is, in herself, a ladder between heaven and earth. As the adoptive mother of the adopted brothers and sisters of her Son, she says to us what God said to Jacob: 'I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest ...'. She, who carried her God in her womb, is truly that place, Beth-el, of which Jacob could say: 'This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'. The second lesson (Ezek. 43. 27-44. 4) refers to the future temple which is shown to the prophet Ezekiel: a phrase from this passage can well be applied to the virginity and to the motherhood of Mary: 'This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut' 43. The third lesson (Prov. 9. 1-11) presents us with a personified divine Wisdom: 'Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars ... She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city'. The Byzantine and the Roman Church have both established a link between holy Wisdom and Mary. She is the house built by Wisdom: she is, in the highest degree, one

of the virgins sent forth by Wisdom to men; she is, after Christ himself, the highest manifestation of Wisdom in this world.

The gospel read at matins for September 8th (Luke 1. 39-49, 56) describes Mary's visit to Elisabeth. Two phrases from this gospel express the attitude of the Church towards Mary very well, and indicate why she has, in some way, been set apart from and above all other saints. First, there are her own words: 'From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done unto me great things'. Then there are the words spoken by Elisabeth to Mary: 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'. Anyone who wished to take us to task for recognizing and honouring the fact that Mary should be 'blessed amongst women' would gainsay Scripture itself – so we shall continue, like 'all generations', to call Mary 'blessed'. Moreover, we shall never separate her from her Son, and shall never say 'blessed art thou' to her without adding, or at least thinking: 'and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'. And, if sometimes it is given to us to feel the gracious approach of Mary, it will be of Mary bearing Jesus in her womb, Mary in as much as she is mother of Jesus, and, with Elisabeth, we shall say to her: 'Whence is this to me, that the *mother of my Lord* should come to me?'

At the liturgy for the same day, we read, joined together (Luke 10. 38-42 and 11. 27-28), two passages of the gospel which the Church repeats at all the feasts for Mary, and to which this repetition itself gives the weight of a particularly important declaration. Jesus praises Mary of Bethany, who is seated at his feet, and listens to his words, for having chosen 'that good part, which shall not be taken away from her', for 'one thing is needful'. It is not that the Lord blamed Martha, who was so preoccupied with serving him, but that Martha was 'troubled about many things'. The Church applies this approval, given to Mary of Bethany by to the contemplative life, in as much as it is distinct from (we do not say: opposed to) the active life. The Church also applies this approval to Mary, the mother of the Lord, who is considered the model of all contemplative life, for we read elsewhere in the gospel according to Luke: 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart ... his mother kept all these sayings in her heart' (Luke 2. 19, 51). Let us not forget, too, that the Virgin Mary had previously consecrated herself, like

Martha, and to a much greater extent than Martha, to the practical service of Jesus, for she had nourished and brought up the Saviour. In the second part of the gospel for this day, we read that a woman lifted up her voice and said to Jesus: 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee and the paps which thou hast sucked', to which he answered: 'Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it'. These words must not be thought of as dismissal of the praise that the woman accords to Mary, or as under-estimating her holiness: rather, they bring things into exact focus, and show where the true merit of Mary lies. That Mary became the mother of Christ was a free gift, it was a privilege that she accepted, but that her personal will had no part in originating. On the other hand, it was through her own effort that she heard and kept the word of God. It is in this that Mary's true greatness lies. Certainly, Mary is blessed, but not principally because she bore and nourished Jesus; above all she is blessed because, to a unique degree, she was obedient and faithful. Mary is the mother of the Lord; she is the protector of men: but, first and foremost, she is the one who listened to, and kept, the Word. In this lies the 'gospel' foundation of our devotion to Mary. A short verse, sung after the epistle expresses this well: 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear' (Ps. 45. 10).

The epistle for this day (Phil. 2. 4-11) does not mention Mary. In it Paul speaks of the Incarnation: Jesus, who 'being in the form of God ... made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men'. But it is clear that this text has the very closest bearing on Mary, and has been chosen for this day because of her. For it is through Mary that the descent of Christ in our flesh became possible. We therefore come back to the woman's exclamation: 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee ...'. And consequently the gospel that we have read, 'Blessed are they that hear the word ...', answers and complements the epistle.

One of the troparia for this day establishes a link between the conception of the Christ-light, so dear to Byzantine devotion, and the blessed Virgin Mary: 'Thy birth, O virgin mother of God, announced the joy of the whole world, for from out of thee has come, and shines, the Sun of Justice, Christ our God'.

The feast of the nativity of Mary is, in a way, carried over into the next day, September 9th, by the

feast of St Joachim and St Anna, ... the parents of the Virgin.

The Exaltation of the Cross

At the threshold of the liturgical year, we encountered the Blessed Virgin Mary, and there we also encounter the cross of the Saviour. These two themes could not be omitted from our prayer and our meditation without impoverishing them. The Church celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14th), a few days after the nativity of Mary. Let us look beyond the wood of the cross, and the historical circumstances which led to the worship of the cross, and concentrate on all that is spiritual and eternal in the very idea of the cross of Jesus.

The Church starts to prepare us for the feast of the Cross a week in advance. On the Sunday preceding it, in addition to the epistle and the gospel that are proper to the Sunday, another epistle and gospel are read that have a special connection with the cross. In the epistle (Gal. 6. 11-18), St Paul says that a Christian does not know how to glorify himself 'save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world'. In the gospel (John 3. 13-17), we read: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.

As the feast of the Cross draws near, it is not useless to remember that the cross which it concerns is the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified for our salvation. The decision to 'bear our cross' - which is so deeply evangelical, and without which this feast of the Cross would somehow remain an abstract idea - is an essential aspect, though a secondary one, of the mystery of the cross. The principal aspect, is that we are saved by the Passion of Jesus. The attention of eastern Christians, which is given so easily and enthusiastically to the incarnation of Christ, must not overlook the mystery of expiation. Christ is God made man; he is the conqueror, and he who rose from the dead. But he is also the crucified Redeemer. The feasts of the Cross give us an opportunity to meditate on what the Blood of Christ means in our spiritual life, and on the death of the

Saviour as a reparation for our sins, and on the relationship between the cross and love. They are precious as an opportunity for us to deepen our understanding of that article in the Nicene creed when we confess that Jesus died 'for us men and for our salvation'.

During the vespers that are celebrated on the evening of September 13th, three readings from the Old Testament show us that the shadow of the cross is already cast over the history of Israel. The first of these readings comes from the book of Exodus (15. 22-16. 1). When the Israelites were in the wilderness of Shur, they found there bitter waters which they could not drink; they murmured against Moses. He then 'cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet'. Thus the tree of the cross, plunged into our bitterness, can make it sweet. The second reading is drawn from Proverbs (3. 11-18). It begins thus: 'My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord ... For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth'. These words throw light vividly on Jesus as he bears the punishment for the sins of the world, and on the relationship between the Father's love for the Son and for the Son's cross: they also indicate to us the spirit in which we must accept - and look for - the punishment of our own sins. Then, having praised wisdom, the author of Proverbs concludes: 'She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her'. The cross, which seems to the world 'folly', is wisdom herself: it is identified with the tree of life of the earthly paradise. The third reading (Isa. 60. 11-16) is about the glory that is coming to Zion; the passage seems to have been chosen because of a verse in which are mentioned various trees which will contribute to the beauty of the Temple: 'The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious'. But the true, invisible, wood of the sanctuary is the wood of the Cross.

At matins for September 14th, the gospel which is read (John 12. 23-36) and which is the start of the speech that follows the Last Supper, does not seem to bear directly on the Cross. Yet Jesus's saying: 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified ...' has a mysterious link with the Lord's Passion and with today's feast. So do Jesus's words to Peter:

‘Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards’. Let each one of us find out for ourselves what this phrase contains for us.

After the great doxology for matins, a special rite is performed for this day. The cross which is normally kept on the altar is placed on a salver and surrounded by flowers; the priest, holding this over his head, comes out of the sanctuary preceded by the servers with incense and lights. But today the cross leaves the sanctuary by one of the side doors of the iconostasion, the north door, and not, as is usual, through the central or ‘royal’ door. This signifies that the way of the cross is a way of abasement and of humility. The procession, having left the iconostasion, stops in front of the ‘royal door’ and faces the east. The priest proclaims (as is usual during the liturgy, when the book of the gospels is solemnly carried to the altar): ‘Wisdom! Stand aright!’. For the cross, this seeming folly, is the symbol of divine wisdom. Then, the procession turns to the west. The cross put in the middle of the church and decorated with flowers. The congregation come up to it, they prostrate themselves, and then kiss the cross. In cathedrals and monasteries, another rite is added to this one. The choir begins to sing the invocation ‘Lord, have mercy!’ This is repeated a hundred times. The priest, holding the cross, blesses the four cardinal points of the compass, then he bows down very slowly and, as he bows, the choir continues the invocations on a descending tone. When the choir reaches the fiftieth invocation, the priest is bowed very low, very close to the ground, always holding the cross (Oh, that this cross might descend thus towards all those who have fallen the lowest, towards all extremes of misery; and that thus it might come down to me, and into me – gradually being plunged into my heart). Then the priest rises as slowly and, while the choir sings the remaining invocations on a tone which now rises more and more, he lifts the cross, he ‘exalts’ it (‘I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me ...’). The priest blesses the people again with the cross, then replaces it on the stand, where it stays until the liturgy.

In this day’s gospel for the liturgy (John 19. 6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30-35), we read a somewhat abridged account of the Passion. In the epistle (1 Cor. 1. 18-24), Paul proclaims the Great Christian paradox that we have heard so often that it may, perhaps, no

longer give us the vital shock that it should: ‘Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ... We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness ... Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God ... Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men’.

Three of the chants for this day call specially for our attention. While the congregation kiss the cross, the choir sings: ‘We fall down before Thy Cross, O Master, and we praise Thy holy Resurrection’. The Church is concerned never to dissociate the cross from the tomb, the crucifixion from the resurrection, death from life. The grief of Holy Friday ends in the joy of Easter. Another chant connects the elevation of Christ on the cross and the shining forth of divine light: ‘The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, spreads out over us’. This attitude to the Passion is profoundly Greek and Byzantine. Finally, another chant associates Mary with the cross. For Mary is the ‘mysterious paradise’ in whom was brought about the growth of Christ, and Christ himself ‘planted on earth the life-giving tree of the cross’.

On the Sunday which follows September 14th, the epistle and the gospel consist – as they did for the Sunday preceding it – of passages which have a bearing on the cross. The epistle (Gal. 2. 16-20) has been chosen because of Paul’s saying: ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live ...’. In the gospel (Mark 8. 34-9.1), we hear the warning given by our Lord: ‘Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it’. In this is found the practical outcome of the feast. It is not to some chosen disciples only that Jesus addresses these words, it is to all of us: ‘When he had called the *people* unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them ...’. Our Lord establishes an instructive gradation, if we know how to meditate on it, between these three acts – of self-renunciation, taking up one’s cross, and following Christ. Each one of us must take up his own cross; not the cross of his choice, but the cross – that is to say the portion of suffering and trial – that God has assigned to him especially, and which is one of the aspects of the cross of Jesus himself. In the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, let us exalt and enthrone in our heart the cross of Jesus, let us apply to the

Passion of our Lord, and even to our poor efforts (which are our share in the Passion) this saying, through which the mystery of the cross receives its highest and most complete interpretation: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life ...'.

Is Your Church Worth Saving?

*by Anastasia Ellis, Elementary School Teacher, and
Choir Director of a Parish Which Just Lost its Priest
September 1, 2021*

It is no secret. In fact, it's a problem that plagues all jurisdictions of Orthodox Christian churches throughout America: The Orthodox Church in America, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Antiochian Church, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and so forth.

There is a priest supply shortage in Orthodox churches in the United States. Now. We can argue the many reasons why this is: pay, student loans, emotional, physical, and spiritual burden, and so forth. However, these are issues that lead to another question: Is your parish worth saving?

The fact is that whenever there are multiple openings available and few priests to fill them, this leads to a priest and his family the ability to pick "their choice of the liter." So again, I ask, what makes your parish "the cream of the crop?" Because the fact of the matter is a Bishop or Archbishop is not going to send a priest to a parish that cannot support a priest.

So if you are a parish, who like us, is facing uncertainty of when or if ever will we get a priest, here are some questions to ponder.

1. First and foremost can you support your priest? Now, what does it mean to support your priest? Is your salary the equivalent of working 3 + jobs. In essence, your priest is more than someone who serves on Saturday, Sunday, and the occasional Feast Day. He is there for weddings, baptisms, funerals. He leaves his family in the middle of the night to make a hospital run when a parishioner is dying. He is a doctor, healing and praying for the souls of those who are ill. He is a counselor, offering advice and help in times of need, hearing confessions and offering his help so you can be closer to God. He is a teacher, offering Bible studies and catechumen classes. In some parishes he is a webmaster

or baker. And the list goes on. Does your financial package take care of the priest and his family after he retires, offering pension packages, medical insurance, etc.? If your parish has a rectory instead of a housing allowance, how does this help your priest when he retires? Where will he live? If your priest has a young family, is the rectory in a neighborhood, or is it secluded from other houses and people not allowing children to grow up like most kids do?

2. What does your parish offer in terms of liturgical services? After all, the priority is to offer thanksgiving and service to God. Are you a Sunday-only parish or do you offer the full range the liturgical life of the church? Do you offer Vespers or Vigils? Do your parishioners come to Feast Days and weekday services? At the Ordination of a Deacon to a Priest, the Bishop or Archbishop prays: "O God, great in might and inscrutable in wisdom, marvelous in counsel above the sons of men: Thou the same Lord, fill with the gift of Thy Holy Spirit this man whom it has pleased Thee to advance to the degree of Priest; that he may become worthy to stand in innocence before Thine altar, to proclaim the Gospel of Thy kingdom, to minister the word of Thy truth, to offer to Thee spiritual gifts and sacrifices; to renew Thy people through the font of regeneration, that when he shall go to meet Thee, at the second coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Thine only-begotten Son, he may receive the reward of good stewardship in the order given to him, through the plenitude of Thy goodness." A priest hears his calling to serve before the altar. How would it feel to go to a parish and not be able to offer those prayers and have those feast days because no one shows up? Can your parish help your priest answer his call?

3. What is your parish's potential for growth? Does your parish have a history of growth or is it on the decline? Have you had more funerals in the last year than baptisms or chrismations? Have you consistently had the same number of people every Sunday? To echo the statement in the previous point, does your parish come to weekday services or Festal services or is your parish mainly a Sunday-only parish? The life of the church is continuous, and the liturgical year helps us come closer to Christ. A parish may have 200 on Pascha, but only 40 on their Patronal feast day. Whereas another parish may only have 50 parishioners, but are faithful in that they

come not just on Sunday but also on Saturdays and midweek services.

4. Additionally, do you have people who are willing to step up to the plate. In many parishes, the parish expects the priest to bring people to church, to bake prosphora, to run the bulletin, to set up the choir books, to figure out the fundraisers. The priest's responsibility is to grow the life of the church, not to create it. Furthermore, are some parishioners burned out because there are only one or two people who volunteer to "make things happen?" I know in one church, there are two prosphora bakers who bake for 100+ services. This can quickly become overwhelming. Do parishioners share in growing the church is the responsibility on the "young ones" who may also have other responsibilities and obligations. Does your church share the responsibility of taking care of the House of our God?

5. Finally, what makes your parish unique? What separates your church from any other Orthodox parish? Would someone who is visiting feel welcomed or would he/she feel uneasy? Do you offer an outreach program to help your community or do you just collect canned food occasionally or throw a few bucks here or there?

All of these little things make a difference. The people of the church make up the foundation of parish life. The life of the church is contingent on how much and how far the people are willing to contribute their time, talents, and tithes.

So I ask again: is your parish worth saving?

Martyr Gorazd of Prague, Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia

Fr. Edward Pehanich

We were blessed to host Fr. Alexander Cadman's ordination to the holy priesthood on the feast of St. Gorazd, a summary of whose life is bellow.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" [John 10:11].

"O Lord, make this man also, who has been proclaimed a steward of the episcopal grace, to be an imitator of You, the true Shepherd, Who laid down Your life for Your sheep..." [Prayer of Consecration of a Bishop]. On September 25, 1921, these words were prayed over Father Gorazd Pavlik as he was

consecrated the Bishop of Moravia and Silesia. It is doubtful that anyone in attendance that day, including the new bishop, expected that he would be called upon to live that prayer in a literal way.

Matthew Pavlik was born in 1879 in the Moravian town of Hrubavrbka in what would later become the Czech Republic. He was born into a Roman Catholic family, completed the Roman Catholic seminary in Olomouc and was ordained a priest. With the end of World War I and the formation of the new nation of Czechoslovakia from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the laws requiring observance of the Catholic religion were loosened. Father Matthias, along with thousands of others left the Catholic Church with many seeking a home in the Orthodox Church, which in that region was then under the protection of the Orthodox Church of Serbia. Taking monastic vows, he assumed the name "Gorazd" who was a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius and who succeeded Saint Methodius as the bishop of Moravia. At the age of 42, Father Gorazd was consecrated an Orthodox bishop in Belgrade, Serbia by the Serbian Patriarch Dimitri along with the illustrious Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky of Kiev and several other bishops, including Bishop Dositheus of Zagreb. Bishop Dositheus was a key figure in the re-birth of the Orthodox Church among Carpatho-Rusyns and was glorified as a saint of the Orthodox Church in May, 2000.

Bishop Gorazd immediately set to work building up the Orthodox Faith, building eleven churches and two chapels, translating service books into the Czech language. He paid particular attention to the Carpatho-Rusyns in the eastern part of the Czech Republic who were also returning to the Orthodox Faith of their ancestors. In that region, in 1934 he took part in the 20th anniversary commemoration of the Marmarosh-Sigotsky trial. This trial occurred in 1914 when 94 Carpatho-Rusyn Orthodox, together with their priest, Saint Alexis Kabaluk, were tried for treason for renouncing the Greek Catholic Faith and embracing Orthodoxy.

For twenty years, the bishop faithfully cared for his flock as a good shepherd. He remained faithful to the Orthodox Faith despite attempts by many Catholics to persuade him to renounce Orthodoxy. When many Roman Catholic priests rose up against him, the Catholic Bishop Stoian said, "Leave Pavlik

alone, you are not worthy to tie his laces, it would be good if everyone were like Pavlik.”

When the German Nazis invaded and conquered Czechoslovakia in 1938, the Orthodox Church was placed under the Orthodox metropolitan of Berlin, Germany, Metropolitan Seraphim (Liade). The German ruler of Czechoslovakia, Reinhard Heydrich, was assassinated on May 27, 1942 by a group of Czech resistance fighters who then were allowed to hide in the crypt of Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Cathedral. When Bishop Gorazd learned of this he realized what great danger he and his flock were in if the Nazis uncovered this hiding place. Before leaving for Berlin to take part in the consecration of Father Philip Gardner as a bishop, he insisted that the resistance fighters leave the Cathedral and find another place of refuge. But on June 18, the hiding place was revealed after a betrayal and torture, and all members of the group were killed.

The Nazis immediately began massive reprisals. The two Cathedral priests and senior lay officials were arrested. Bishop Gorazd, trying to save his people and his church from destruction, wrote letters to the Nazi authorities taking the blame for the actions in the Cathedral, in which he stated, “I am giving myself up to the authorities and am prepared to face any punishment, including death.”

Bishop Gorazd was arrested on June 27, 1942, tortured and executed by firing squad at the Kobylisz Shooting Range on September 4. He was 63 years old. The two Cathedral priests were also shot. Along with the priests and bishop, a total of 550 people were executed by the Nazis in reprisal for the assassination. In one particularly heinous act, the entire village of Lidice was exterminated. All of the men were executed, the women and children placed in labor camps, and all village dwellings destroyed. Following the martyrdom of the bishop, the Orthodox Church in Bohemia and Moravia was suppressed and all churches closed. Orthodox priests were exiled to forced labor camps in Germany.

Because Bishop Gorazd willingly laid down his life in order to protect his flock, he was recognized by the Orthodox Church of Serbia as a new martyr on May 4, 1961. On August 24, 1987 he was glorified in the Cathedral of Saint Gorazd in Olomouc, Moravia. His feast day is observed on the day of his martyrdom, September 4. Today, at the site of his

martyrdom at the Kobylisz Shooting Range, a monument has been erected in his memory and those others who suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

The Doctrine of Christ:

A Layman's Handbook

by Abp. Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas, 1984

Orthodox Philosopher Teena Blackburn reminds us that *Christian teachings, especially Christian sexual teachings, will not make any sense if you don't know Christ first, and if you don't understand what the Faith says about anthropology: about who Jesus is, what a human is, what life is all about. All that has to come first, or you just get a long list of rules. Christians are following Someone; the pattern of our life is not arbitrary! It is, ideally, rooted in the idea (and experience) that nothing God asks of us is for anything but our good, our joy, our ultimate happiness* (adapted by the editor). In order to help us come to know who Christ is and what the Church teaches us about Christ's divinity and his humanity (a pattern for our humanity!), each month of 2021 we will be looking at a chapter of “The Doctrine of Christ” by the ever-memorable Abp. Dmitri of Dallas (+2011), renowned Orthodox biblical scholar, theologian, missionary, and pastor.

Chapter 8:

THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ is not only in the line of Jewish prophets and teachers of Israel; He is the last Prophet, in the sense that He both proclaimed, as did the prophets before Him, the truth and the will of God, and was also the fulfillment of all these prophecies.

A Biblical Truth

Moses foretold the prophetic office of the Saviour. In fact, it was he that placed Christ is the same line of prophets of Israel, of which he was the first. “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” (Dt. 18:15) The Apostle Peter, in his sermon to the people in the temple, declared that it was to Jesus, whom they had denied before Pilate, that this prophecy referred. (Acts 3:22, 23)

Jesus declared before Pilate the purpose of His coming. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (Jn. 18:37) In other words, He was identifying His own mission in this way with that of the prophets. He was often called prophet and master and never rejected this name for Himself.

At the time of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth." (Mt. 21:11) When He raised the widow's son from the dead, "there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us." (Lk. 7:16)

On the road to Emmaus, when Jesus met the two disciples who at first did not recognize Him, they asked Him if He was only a stranger since He did not seem to know of the things that had been happening in the city. When He said, "What things?" they said, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." (Lk. 24:19)

He actually called Himself a prophet, although usually in the third person. For example, "Nevertheless, I must walk to day and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." (Lk. 13:33)

There are many cases in the Gospels in which He allowed Himself to be called Master. One of the most notable was the occasion on which a young man said to Him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mk. 10:i7) Notice that the Lord did not reject the name "Master," but He did ask why the young man had called Him "good," knowing that he really did not know who He was. Finally, Jesus called Himself "Master," in an unequivocal way: "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ." (Mt. 23:10)

The Holy Fathers of the Church have not only taught that Jesus Christ was the great Prophet and Teacher, but they also have shown that this prophetic ministry of His was an essential part of His whole work. In other words, before He entered into His high priestly ministry, He set for Himself the task of rescuing mankind from idolatry and godlessness. In order to accomplish this, He revealed the truth about God and about man.

The Apostles give testimony to Jesus' having revealed this truth. For example, St. John in his First Epistle writes: "And we know that the Son of God is

come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ." (5:20)

The following paragraph from St. Athanasius is typical of the teaching of the Fathers concerning Jesus Christ as Prophet and Teacher:

"When the madness of idolatry and irreligion filled the world and the knowledge of God was hidden, whose part was it to teach the world about the Father? Man's would you say? but men cannot run everywhere over the world, nor would their words carry sufficient weight if they did, nor would they be, unaided, a match for the evil spirits. Moreover, since even the best of men were confused and blinded by evil, how could they convert the souls and minds of others? You cannot put straight in others what is warped in yourself. Perhaps you will say, then, that creation was enough to teach men about the Father. But if that had been so, such great evils would never have occurred. Creation was there all the time, but it did not prevent men from wallowing in error. Once more, then, it was the Word of God, Who sees all that is in man and moves all things in creation, Who alone could meet the needs of the situation. It was His part and His alone, Whose ordering of the universe reveals the Father, to renew the same teaching-and through His actions done in that body which He had taken to Himself, as it were on man's own level, He teaches those who would not learn by other means to know Himself, the Word of God, and through Him the Father." (*The Incarnation of the Word of God*, n. 14)

Jesus' earthly ministry as prophet opens with the exhortation to repent and the proclamation that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17) The essence of the preaching of His Forerunner, John the Baptist, had been the same: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mt. 3:2) Jesus received John's baptism in order "to fulfil all righteousness." (Mt. 3:15) In other words, it was to fulfill everything that the Law required and to show that He was the one to whom John had referred as the mightier one who was to come after Him. Jesus in fact brought the

Kingdom of Heaven to mankind, because He baptized with the Holy Spirit. (Mt. 3:11)

Jesus' prophetic and teaching ministry began at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. He was then about thirty years of age (Lk. 3:23), and He traveled throughout Judah "preaching the gospel of the kingdom." (Mt. 9:35) Afterwards, the disciples whom He had chosen (Lk. 6:13), prepared, invested "with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49), and sent "to preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15), carried His teachings throughout the world and taught them to all peoples (Rm. 10:18). They passed them on by word of mouth and in writing to the Church for all times. (II Th. 2:15)

The Kingdom of God, both as the ultimate vocation and destination of man, and as having already been initiated in this world, remained central in the teaching of Jesus from the first days until the end of His earthly life. Knowledge of God and attainment of the Kingdom are the basic themes of His ministry and everything else that He said refers to them.

Since St. John teaches that "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him [or, made Him known]" (Jn. 1:18), it is then the revelation of God that must be pointed to as the first purpose of Christ's coming into the world and of His teaching. Even though He mentioned the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit together only at the end (Mt. 28:19), His teachings about God the Father, about Himself and about the Holy Spirit can lead to no other conclusion than the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the One God in Three Persons.

Concerning God the Father, He taught that the Father is the most perfect and highest Spirit. "Be ye ... perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Mt. 5:48) "God is a Spirit ..." (Jn. 4:24)

By repeating a formula familiar to the Jews, Jesus taught that God is **one**: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord." (Mk. 12:29)

That God is a **Trinity** of Persons, we know from Matthew 28:29, referred to above.

He is **self-existent**: "The Father hath life in Himself ..." (Jn. 5:26)

He is **present everywhere**, as we understand from what Jesus said about the Father's being worshipped in spirit. (Jn. 4:23)

He is uniquely **good**: "There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mt. 19:17)

He is **omnipotent** or all-powerful: "With God all things are possible." (Mt. 19:26)

He knows all His creatures, especially man, and takes care of them; thus, we know of the providence and omniscience of God. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Lk. 12:6) "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Mt. 6:32)

With regard to Himself, He taught that **He is the only-begotten Son of God and One with the Father, who came into the world to reconcile and reunite man with God**: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn.3:16) "That they all may be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ..." (Jn.17:21)

He foretold His saving sufferings, His death and resurrection: "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day." (Mt. 16:21) **He would undergo all of this on behalf of all men**: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:45)

Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus taught that He is the **Comforter, who will teach His disciples all things**, and that He would be sent by the Father in Jesus' name: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (Jn. 14:26; cf. Lk. 12:12) He is the Spirit of Truth, who dwells in those who believe. (Jn. 14:17) He proceeds from the Father: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me." (Jn. 15:26)

It is important to note in the verse from John cited above the joint action of the three Persons of the Trinity. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father; the Holy Spirit will testify of Jesus.

Christ's Teachings about Salvation

For the attainment of the Kingdom, that is, man's salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ rather clearly taught as essential two things: faith and works. Passages of the New Testament that emphasize one or the other have often been quoted to show that it is exclusively by faith or by works that one is saved. Yet the Lord Himself never excluded either in His teaching.

The essence of the "law of faith," Jesus expressed in these words: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16) The disciples also taught after Him that faith is necessary in order to have eternal life: "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." (Jn. 20:31)

To the question directed to Paul and Silas by the keeper of the prison, "What must I do to be saved?" they answered: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:30, 31)

St. Paul points out that it is by God's grace that we are saved: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8, 9) He refers to the "works of the Law," by which it was believed among the Jews that men were justified and by which they were identified with the chosen people of God in the Old Testament. These included circumcision and ritual sacrifices. He makes this reference clear in several places, for example, in the third chapter of Romans.

There is no contradiction to this in what James the Apostle says in his epistle: "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" He then goes on to show what kind of works are the natural consequence of belief in Christ's teachings: "If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ... Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only?" (Jas. 2:14-24)

The kind of works necessary for salvation, the "law of works," is expressed by the Lord in two principal commandments, that of self-denial and that of loving God and one's neighbor.

Just before He underwent the saving passion and death on the cross, Jesus said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Mk. 8:34) This commandment has as its purpose the rooting out of us the very foundation of all sin: pride and self-love (Sir. 10:15), and consequently our purification from "all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," (II Cor. 7:1). It is to put off from us the old man according to our former life, "which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts:" (Eph. 4:22) It is this "old man" which can never enter into the Kingdom of heaven. (Jn. 3:5)

Self-denial, according to the teaching of our Lord, must manifest itself **1)** by leaving our former life of sin and by a profound turning away or repentance of all sins, (Mt. 3:2); **2)** by a voluntary renunciation of all the things of this world, however dear they may be to us, as for example, our eye or our arm, if we come to see that they seduce us and lead us to sin (Mt. 5:29,30); **3)** by abandoning even a father or mother, or a family, if we perceive that otherwise it is impossible for us to withdraw from iniquity and attain salvation (Mk.10:22; Lk. 14:26); and, **4)** by constant efforts not to sin, not only in deed, but even in word and in thought (Mt. 5:28; 12:36).

The commandment to love God and our neighbor (Mt. 22:37-39) has as its purpose the implanting in us of the beginning of a **new** life, holy and pleasing to God, instead of the former life of sin (Jn. 13:34), of putting in us the **bond** of moral **perfection** (Col. 3:14), and of leading us, truly pure and renewed, to be one with God (Jn. 17:21).

Describing the characteristics of love for God, Jesus taught that it must **1)** be sincere, whole, and perfect (Lk. 10:27,28); **2)** manifest itself by submission to the divine will in the observance of His commandments (Jn. 14:15, 21); **3)** constantly glorify God (Mt. 5:16); and **4)** be so strong in us that we might be ready, in the name of God, **to lose ourselves** (Mk. 8:35).

Love of our neighbor is similar, for He taught that we **1)** love all men, not just our friends, but even our enemies (Mt. 5:44-48); **2)** not offend our neighbor in deed, or in word or in thought (Mt. 5:22; 7: 1,2,12); **3)** endure magnanimously all offenses and forgive trespasses, not only seven times, but even seventy times seven times (Mt. 5:38,39; 6:14; 18:22); **4)** always show mercy toward our neighbor, to help him in his

needs (Mt. 5:7, 42; Lk. 6:35); and 5) be ready, if it is necessary, **to give our life for our friends** (Jn. 15:13).

On the third Sunday of the preparation for the Great Fast, Meatfare Sunday, we read from the Gospel of St. Matthew (25:31-46) of the Last Judgment. There we see how men shall be judged on that day, that it will be on the basis of how men have received and fulfilled both the law of faith and that of works. The Lord shows how intimately related are the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (v. 40) The consequences of not doing those works of charity that He enumerated, feeding the hungry, taking care of the sick, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison are just as serious. In the Incarnation of the Word of God, His taking upon Himself human nature, He identified Himself with the whole human race, and literally when we do good or when we do evil to one human being, all men and even the God who became one with us are affected.

We see how the Lord's work of salvation has spared us the inevitable consequences of sin. His grace, His gift to us is this salvation. Yet it is also clear from what He teaches that man has the freedom of will to reject His gift to us, and thus, will deserve the results of sin and corruption. That is, Christ teaches that we will suffer eternal torments should we choose to reject His grace.

The Prophets of God

While the major function of prophecy is to make the will of God accessible to man, it must be emphasized that God makes use of man for the accomplishment of that purpose. In other words, the voice of prophecy is a human voice. Of course, this **human** voice is speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is why we find the words "who spake by the prophets" in that section of the Creed dealing with the Holy Spirit. (The Prophet Micah says, for example, "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord." [3:8])

This is also why we have said that Jesus was "in the line of the prophets of Judah." He, the God-Man, spoke directly to man in man's language by the power of the Holy Spirit. In His works, which include His miracles, as He Himself testifies, He accomplished these things by this power, "the Spirit of

God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him." (Mt. 3:16)

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Christ read from the prophecy of Isaiah (61:1, 2): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Then He directly applied this scripture to Himself: "This day is this scripture fulfilled." (Lk. 4:18, 19, 21)

We know that Jesus had been led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Mt. 4:1), that Jesus returned from that temptation "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk. 4:14), and "from that time [He] began to preach" (Mt. 4:17). Thus, it is the God-Man in that unconfused and inseparable union of the divine and human natures, that sets out on the prophetic ministry, to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to make God's truth known to men by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It must be noted that it would not be accurate to think of the human in Christ as a kind of passive companion to the divine in this work of prophecy, a work which includes the proclamation of the will of God and the performance of miracles. His prophet forerunners, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit, had also spoken in God's name, passing judgment on Israel, and a number of them had even worked miracles.

Not only was Jesus in the line of the prophets of Judah, but He was the last of the prophets and His prophetic ministry was foretold by the others. In this respect, there is a unity between the prophets of the Old Testament beginning with Moses, and Jesus. Jesus, Himself, confirmed the indestructibility of the Law. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Mt. 5: 17, 18)

Hence, Christ's fundamental relation to the Law was to complete, perfect and deepen it. Jesus' modification of the Law supercedes it, as we understand from His repeated declaration: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time ... but I say unto you ..." (Mt. 5: 21, 22; 27, 28; 33, 34; 38, 39; 43, 44) He was the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law and the law He

gave was in this sense a new law, the essence of which is contained in this statement: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (Jn. 13: 34)

The Law: Old and New

There is, however, a basic difference between the Lord Jesus Christ and the prophets of the Old Testament: the Word of the Lord came to them; He was the Word. They taught about Him, and He was the fulfillment of what they taught. All of them spoke once in their lifetime; He as the eternal Prophet speaks eternally in His Church.

Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets, and then by giving a new law, He in fact replaced the old law. Jeremiah foretold this: "Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt ..." (31:31, 32)

In the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, this passage from Jeremiah is quoted and introduced by this declaration: "But now hath He [Jesus Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises ..." (8:6) The author goes on to show that the old law was replaced by Christ's new law: "In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." (v. 13)

§ Principal elements distinguishing the new law from the old:

In order to distinguish between the new law and the old, let us first take what Jesus taught about Himself.

He was the Messiah promised to Israel from antiquity. "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (Jn. 5:39; cf. Lk. 24:27)

He was the only begotten Son of God who became incarnate for our salvation. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16)

The response on man's part imposed by these facts is just as clearly indicated by Him.

One must believe in Him in order to be saved. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." (Jn. 14:1) "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." (Jn. 6:47; cf. Jn. 6:29).

One must love Him and keep His commandments. "Continue ye in my love." (Jn. 15: 9) "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (Jn. 14:15)

One must worship Him as he does the Father. "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him." (Jn. 5:23)

Second, Jesus replaced the ritual requirements of the old law with the Holy Mysteries.

St. Paul shows that the Baptism which Jesus declared necessary for salvation (see Mk. 16: 16 and Jn. 3: 5) **replaces circumcision.** "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." (Col. 2: 11,12)

The Eucharist which Christ instituted takes the place of the sacrifices and oblations of the Old Testament. "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Mt. 26:28; cf. I Cor. 11: 25)

Christ taught the indissolubility of marriage. In the Old Testament, divorce was permitted to the Jews "because of the hardness of their hearts." "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (Mt. 19: 6; cf. Mk. 10: 2-9)

Christ changed the Old Testament priesthood. (see Lk. 6: 13; Eph. 4: 11) In Hebrews, we read: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." (7: 12)

As we look at each of these distinctions between the old law and the new law, in no instance can we find an abolition of the old law but its fulfillment. In this way the new law supersedes it.

The Work Christ

The prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ is what He Himself called His **work**. This work includes all those things that He taught and did before He entered into His priestly ministry, when He gave His life on the cross for the sins of the world.

However, it is impossible to establish exact boundaries between the ministries of Christ. The prophetic ministry is not without its sacrificial side, since His taking upon Himself the sins of the world begins with the Incarnation. He accepted for Himself the life of fallen man, and lived the consequences of the fall, without, of course, sinning Himself. This emptying of Himself, this "taking the form of a servant," this humiliation, is sacrificial too.

The body of what Christ taught about God, about His own role as the Redeemer, about man and about man's relationship both to God and to his fellowman, is often called the **new law**, as noted above.

From this, we must conclude that both the **link** between the old and new laws and their **differences** are equally important. Jesus' teaching was the fulfillment of all the promises to the Hebrew people as well as the perfection of God's revelation to man.

According to St. Paul, the law of Moses prepared the way for man to receive the fullness of God's revelation: "The law was our school master to bring us unto Christ." (Gal. 3: 24) In Hebrews, He describes the events of the history of God's people and their moral precepts as a shadow of good things to come, and the Gospel as the very image of those things. (Hb. 10: 1) Thus, the Old Testament is filled with promises, prophecies and types; in the New Testament, we find the record of the fulfillment and accomplishment of them all.

In matters of doctrine, certain truths that are only hinted at or partially disclosed in the Old Testament, are revealed clearly and fully in the New. For example, the Hebrew writers made numerous references to the **Word** of God as well as to His **Spirit**. Thus, Psalm 32[33]:6 contains this statement concerning the creation: "By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath [Spirit] of His mouth."

Yet, the full doctrine of the Holy Trinity is understood only after the Incarnation of the Word. The Incarnation itself as well as the Redemption and the Regeneration are foretold in the Old Testament; but their full meaning, their universal and spiritual implications, become clear in the teachings and in the works of the Saviour.

Again, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His sanctifying grace figure in a number of the prophecies; the Holy Spirit did descend upon the disciples at Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection, and

He has been in the Church guiding her and sanctifying her members ever since.

In regard to man's moral behavior, Jesus reveals God's absolute demands on him in terms of love and purity of heart. Man's legalistic understanding of God's commandments is replaced by a law of unselfish love and generosity. The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) contains an extensive exposition of God's moral truths and the virtues expected of man: generosity, forgiveness of offenses, love of one's enemies, self-denial, humility, filial love for God as an infinitely good Father, purity of body and soul, love of Christians for each other, etc. Christ's actions and His judgments in particular situations reveal a view of life that is not at all consistent with the moral values and standards of this world, and they frequently amazed not only the multitudes but even His disciples.

St. Gregory the Theologian, in a **Sermon at Pascha**, summarizes this new moral law in these terms: "The law forbids the committing of sins and makes us liable for the causes almost as much as the acts. The law says: Thou shalt not commit adultery (Mt. 5: 27), but you, refrain even from the desire; let not passion be kindled in you by a curious and attentive look. It is said in the law: Thou shalt not kill (v. 21); but you, not only do not take revenge, but give yourselves to the one who strikes you. How much wiser is the second than the first! ...The law says: woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field (Is. 5:8), vexing the poor and needy (Ez. 22:29); but you, be ready to give even that which you have acquired justly, and deprive yourselves in favor of the poor, so as to take upon yourselves the Cross freely and enrich yourself with the invisible."

In the new law, higher and purer motivation is given to man for keeping and doing God's will. The literal understanding of the old law made the hope of receiving temporal rewards the incentive for observing it. (Ex. 20:21; Lev. 26:3, 4; Dt. 28:1-9) For those who observe those things which the Lord Jesus Christ commanded, the reward is eternal life, but the foundation for doing God's will is man's response to His love.

St. John Chrysostom says: "Here is promised, not a land flowing with milk and honey, not a great old age, nor many children, nor bread and wine, nor herds of sheep and bulls, but heaven and heavenly goods, adoption and brotherhood with the Only-

begotten, part in the inheritance, in glory and in the Kingdom, and infinite other rewards." (*On Matthew*, Homily 16)

The Lord said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (Jn. 14:15) And the Apostle James wrote: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him ... Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (Jas. 1:12: 2:5)

Another aspect of the law of Moses which has no parallel in Christ's law is its connection with the civil law. Death or some other punishment was threatened for violation of almost every one of the Ten Commandments, so that man was moved by fear to keep them. Thus, according to St. Paul, the Jews found themselves under a "yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1), and were guided by a "spirit of bondage ... to fear" (Rm. 8:15).

On the contrary, it is above all by love that the evangelical law, purely moral and religious, moves man to do good. (Jn. 3:16, 17; 15:9; 13:15) "Ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rm. 8:15) "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Gal. 4:7)

The law was given to the Jews, and it was through them that God prepared the salvation of the whole world. In Isaiah's prophecy (49:6), the Father speaks to His Son: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth." After the birth of the Saviour, when He was presented in the temple, the righteous Simeon took Him in his arms and called Him, "a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of [God's] people Israel." (Lk.2:32)

Thus Jesus taught that His message was for all people. "and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." (Jn. 10: 16) He specifically sent His disciples to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel ..." (Mt. 28:18, 19)

Further, this Gospel was not for one time and one place, but for all generations, "even unto the end of the world." (Mt. 28:20) The fact is that God wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of

the truth. (I Tm. 2:4) The universality of the Christian faith, its being for all peoples and for all time, and to which the believer must give himself wholly, make it the catholic faith. [This latter term, **catholic**, was apparently in use even in apostolic times. St. Ignatius calls the Church "catholic" in his *Epistle to the Smyrneans*. (viii)]

If there are any topics you would like covered in future editions of the Prophet, or if you have any articles which you found to be a blessing, please let Fr. John know!