

THE PROPHET

Monthly Newsletter of

St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church in America (OCA)

Archdiocese of Pittsburgh

His Eminence, Most Rev. Melchisedek

601 Boone Avenue, Canonsburg, PA 15317

724-745-8216 - www.frunner.org -

www.facebook.com/frunneroca/

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Entry of the Mother of God (Nov. 21)

Rector, Fr. John Joseph Kotalik

425-503-2891 - frjohnkotalik@gmail.com

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RECTOR'S REPORT:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Christu!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, yet another year as a parish community is drawing to a close, and our Annual Parish Assembly is an opportunity for us to look back at with self-reflection as a parish, seeking to identify the ways we have succeeded so that we can continue to grow in those areas, as well as to find the areas where we need to improve as a parish community.

Both anecdotal wisdom and scientific studies undertaken by the leadership of our Church here in America reveal that the marks of a faithful, vibrant, and growing parish are, in increasing order of importance: 1) beautiful worship, 2) friendly people, 3) outreach, and, the most important feature of a healthy parish, 4) liturgical life and faithfulness to the Gospel, as a community and as individuals.

Our church should speak to us - it should awe us with its beauty - reflecting something of the beauty of heaven. When we walk into a church, it should change us. It shouldn't look like a meeting hall. A hall could be a church. We could worship there, but it's not going to convert us; it's not going to change our hearts. However, when we speak of a beautiful church, we don't just mean the church building itself. Our forefathers in the faith sacrificed and laboured to give us a beautiful church building, and we should ever remember them in our prayers for their tireless efforts. For those of us today, it is perhaps the only thing we can really offer to God that is pure, that doesn't depend on our continuous and daily effort to be beautiful. It costs time, talent, and treasure to maintain, of course, and we thank

God that we have been able to do just that through the continued sacrifices of our faithful parishioners, but a beautiful church building is only the foundation of beautiful worship. A beautiful church building is something we inherited, but our job today is to continue to build on the foundation which was handed down to us, so that through our efforts those who walk into our parish church – both parishioners and visitors – might ever be inspired to a deeper Christian life by means of the beauty of our worship.

To this effect, after a period of transition when the choir was led by our own dedicated and talented interim director, Diane Yarosh, we have employed Joseph Helinski – a professional singer, music teacher, and voice coach – to help continue to grow our choir. We were truly blessed by Mat. Annice's years of leadership, which left us with such a firm foundation, and then by the efforts of Diane and other members of our parish who with so much love for Christ continued to offer themselves to the Lord. Our prayer is that Joseph can build upon this foundation, as well as to help develop additional members of the choir to assist in directing or singing services alone, so that the burden of leading us in singing doesn't fall to just two or three people.

Friendly people? Our parish is blessed to have them in spades. One thing that visitors routinely tell me is how friendly and welcoming are parishioners are, and how they feel like they are walking into a family. Without a doubt, it is one of the reasons we continue to attract new people to our parish. And this is not only converts, but Orthodox who have moved to the area or are seeking a more vibrant parish; one such family recently reported to someone at their home parish that they feel just as home here as at the parish where they grew up (and it came to my ears because the person they told is an old friend of mine).

However, this wouldn't be a healthy reflection if we just rested on our laurels. Though it was due to the friendliness of our long-time parishioners that so many people felt welcomed and decided to join our parish, having so many people join in a short time is not something we are used to. Sadly, this has led to a bit of a rift between long-time members and newer ones; something I think was made worse by the fact that we didn't have coffee hour for so long, which meant that instead of the rest of the parish getting to know our new members one by one, and they the

rest of the parish, we now have so many relationships we need to be built up at once. To help to mend this rift, I have been finding an increasing number of ways to bring the parish together in social settings, which is why we began having a bonfire after Saturday Vespers (now just a social, given the change in weather), and going to Primanti's for win night after Monday Vespers. However, these efforts can only so much; it ultimately falls to all of our parishioners – both old and new – to enter into real relationships with one another and to learn to love one another. To that end, as I have done individually, I encourage each and every one of us to get outside of our comfort zones and sit with someone different at coffee hour. I encourage our newer members to get to know our long-term members by coming and helping with events like the golf outing and basket party, and to get to know our parish where it is: it isn't just the responsibility of long-term members to bridge the gap. Likewise, I encourage our longer-term members to build open the initial and loving welcome which was offered to our newcomers and to invite them into our parish family, getting to know them where they are. Like any relationship, it takes two to tango.

Ultimately, however, a good Christian member of any parish community is one who sees the image and likeness of God in every human being. Even if we don't like him. It's not possible that we like everybody. It isn't. I try, but there's often something that I'm sure annoys me, and I'm quite sure I annoy other people. But the struggle there is to love each other anyway. We say in the Liturgy: "Let us love one another." Do you think they're empty words? It calls us all to look at each other and say, "I love you." But for some reason, our pride gets in the way, so we fail to embody of the love of Christ who said from the Cross to those who unjustly put him there "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do". That is our calling, brothers and sisters: to truly love each other as a family of Christians, sons and daughters of the Father by adoption, and like our natural families to love each other even when we find it a struggle. Until we can do that, we will always have some work to do in the area of being a parish of friendly, Christian people. So, let us love one another, brothers and sisters, recognizing that the person next to us – whether we've been going to church with them for our entire lives or for just a few

months – is truly our brother or sister in Christ, with the same blood of our Lord running through their veins, being called together with us to that same sonship by adoption in and through the Christ who showed us perfect love for each other.

The Carpatho-Russians who founded this parish also left us with their beloved folk hymn, based on the words of Christ: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love each other, even as I have loved you; by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for each other.” Let us heed these words, and show each and every person who walks through our doors – whether for the first time or for the thousandth time – that we are the disciples of the Lord by means of our love for each other.

This love shows itself also in the next feature of a healthy parish: outreach. The word “parish”, which comes from the Greek *paroikia*, originally referred to a waystation set up in a foreign land to help travellers from one’s country as they sojourned in that foreign land. In other words, we Christians are citizens of heaven and find ourselves sojourning here in the world until such time as well our Lord shall come again in His Kingdom, and our parish in the house set up here in the world to help us as we journey here in this foreign land. Yet, it is not just for us – not just for those who set up the house – but is here to help any and all travellers who may pass by. In Orthodox countries this reality even became part of the law of the land, with “parish” no longer referring to simply a local community of Christians, but to a particular area of geographic responsibility to which that community of Christians is called to serve as a waystation. Counties, cities, and towns were divided up into legal parishes which referred just as much to the community and its church building as it did to a geographic area. This is why, for example, Louisiana – due to its Catholic roots – has parishes instead of counties as the subdivisions of the state. In other words, each and every person in our surrounding community is the responsibility of our parish; we are called to love them all, and by our love show forth the love of God.

Thank God, our parish has been committed to outreach. For a number of years, we have set aside money in our budget for this cause. Next month, as in previous years, we will be offering free hot cocoa outside of the Canonsburg Senior Center for the annual Canonsburg Christmas celebration. Anytime

there is a tragedy in our community, our people are part of the response, and in the midst of COVID we started a regular food drive which has been wonderful. Additionally, many of our faithful offer their time to various area charities. This last September, our parish decided to set up a booth at the Canonsburg Oktoberfest celebration, and this was a tremendous success, already resulting in a new parishioner and planting the seeds within the hearts of countless others. However, we are called as Christians to always struggle to do more.

Christ himself tells us that we are to be “the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” We must always be struggling to find new ways to conduct and support local, national, and global charitable programs. We must always struggle to provide ministry to parishioners and non-parishioners alike. Too often we hear the infamous saying: “are they *our* people?” Who on earth are “*our* people”? Do our people have two heads? Aren’t all people our people? If we can’t say *yes* to that, then we’re not even thinking like Christians, because a Christian sees the image and likeness of God in every human being, a Christian sees every other human people are worthy of the love and mercy of God, and therefore of us who are called by the name of that God. If we live like this, and struggle to make this calling part of our parish life, then we truly will be a light to all people, and our church – which indeed sits on a hill – will not remain hidden from the people of our community. It isn’t about making converts. Those who seek the Lord shall find him here because we are shining forth with His light and love and mercy and grace. However, that others might be drawn into the net of salvation is only an additional blessing. We do this because if we don’t struggle to be a Christian community out in our community – if we don’t struggle to see the world around us as our parish – then we are failing to be the Christians we are commanded to be by Christ Himself. If we aren’t struggling to ever do more and more outreach, if we aren’t struggling to do works of mercy in the world, then our parish community is failing in one of the three basic Christian duties of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

This isn’t to say that we aren’t struggling to do outreach as a parish – we certainly are, and I am consistently blown away by everything that our parishioners are doing in our community – but I say these

things rather to emphasize just how important it is to strive to do more. It can't fall to me alone as the priest, but rather falls to all of us. We have a dedicated Outreach Committee led by Julianna Cario, and I strongly advise anyone with ideas to ask her to be included in the next meeting. More so, whenever our parish has outreach opportunities, I encourage us all to reflect on whether or not we might be able to offer a bit more of our time, talent, or treasure to make our outreach efforts both numerous and successful. All of us can be doing more, and I pray that together we can build on what we are already doing, while finding ways to do more as a parish community.

We now come to the final mark of a healthy and vibrant parish, and the most important one at that: faithfulness to the Gospel and liturgical life. By the grace of God, this parish has always been one where a full liturgical life – both Sundays and feast days – have always been faithfully kept, especially compared to smaller parishes which have struggled to maintain a full liturgical life. I strongly believe that this is why we have seen such a flood of new converts, as well as why life-long Orthodox have decided to make St. John's their home. In a virtuous cycle, this has led to me offering more services, as these newer members are hungry to more, and this only offers yet more to draw people into the life of the Church.

Importantly, this is not a phenomenon unique to St. John's. His Eminence, Abp. Melchisedek, says that across the archdiocese, he has seen more catechumens and converts in recent months than in his entire episcopacy beforehand. Even a smaller parish such as St. Nicholas in Donora currently has two catechumens. Likewise, some of our parishioners recently returned from a visit to Las Vegas, and reported that the parish there has twelve – yes, 12 – catechumens. Having come from the urban centers of the West Coast, where the world was very clearly going crazy, I have seen this phenomenon before. In the midst of an insane world, people are seeking truth and a rock upon which to ground themselves, which is why the parishes in our coastal cities have experienced such a boom in growth over the last three decades. In a place like Pittsburgh – or even more so Washington County – where we are blessed with people who have held to more traditional values, it seems to me that it took COVID to reveal just

how crazy the world has gotten. These young people – whether converts or cradles – are seeking the Orthodox Church's full Christian life and faithfulness to the Gospel, which is primarily shone forth in our community's ever-increasing liturgical life; a communal life which is only made possible by the sacrifices of many years of our faithful parishioners sacrificing their time, talent, and treasure (including those who are not able to make it, but make this liturgical life possible by means of their donations). In particular, I want to call out Diane Yarosh, Lara Galis, and Julianna Cario for coming and singing for us, so that the Divine Liturgy can be served during the week. Likewise, our wonderful and beloved deacons, who not only take a huge burden off my shoulders, but bring such joy and dedication into the altar.

Yet, this life-giving and beautiful liturgical life can only continue for the benefits of future generations if those of us here today actually show up; otherwise, there will be no one here to offer these services and to pray. Modern life is busy; of that there is no doubt. Likewise, people today don't have the luxury of taking much time off work. However, all of us are called to make church attendance a priority. While coming to daily services is a great blessing and an opportunity for us to ender deeper into our Christian life and faith, it is important for us to know that there are certain days when the Church calls us to come and worship, praise, and give thanks to God. They are as follows:

Vespers and Liturgy for the Lord's Day (Sunday)
each and every week.

The Feast of Feasts (Pascha/Easter):

- Vespers of Holy (Good) Friday (Fri. afternoon);
- Matins of Holy Saturday (Fri. night)
- Vesperal Liturgy of Holy Saturday
- Paschal Nocturn, Matins, & Liturgy (midnight)
- Agape Vespers (Sunday afternoon)

Vespers & Liturgy for Parish Altar Feast:

- Beheading of St. John (Aug. 29)

Vespers & Liturgy for the Twelve Great Feasts:

- Nativity of the Theotokos (Sept. 8);
- Exaltation of the Cross (Sept. 14)
- Entry of the Theotokos (Nov. 21)
- **Christmas** (Nativity of Christ; Dec. 25)
(incl. the Vigil service on the evening of Dec. 24)

- **Theophany** (Baptism of Christ; Jane. 6)
(incl. the Vigil service on the evening of Jan. 5)
- Meeting of the Lord (Candlemas; Feb. 2)
- Annunciation (Lady Day; Mar. 25)
- Palm Sunday (Sunday before Pascha)
- Ascension of Christ (40 days after Pascha)
- **Pentecost** (50 days after Pascha)
(incl. Kneeling Vespers)
- Transfiguration of Christ (Aug. 6)
- Dormition/ Assumption of Mary (Aug. 15)

The three in bold are most important to attend.

Vespers & Liturgy for the Lesser Great Feasts:

- Protection of the Mother of God (Oct. 1)
- Circumcision of Christ (Jan. 1);
- Nativity of St. John (June 24)
- Ss. Peter & Paul (June 29)
- Beheading of St. John (Aug. 29)
(conveniently our altar feast)

While most of us will be unable to come to the Divine Liturgy for these weekday feast days, many of us can and should at least struggle to come to Vespers on the eves of these feasts. These are days when, in the language of the Church, it is a sin to be absent “without a just cause”. What is a just cause? Well, some priests use the expression “without a cause worthy of a blessing” to explain it. Not that I – or any priest – wants to be asked by everyone for a blessing to be absent (though we are certainly more than happy to provide guidance if one is in need of it), but if one wouldn’t be comfortable asking for a blessing, one probably doesn’t have a just cause to fail to respond to the call of the Church to enter into the life of Christ which is made manifest by this cycle of feasts grounded on our Sunday celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord.

It may be difficult, but it is precisely because our forebears in the faith struggled to make church attendance a priority that we have the successful parish we have today. I hear countless stories about how the likes of JT Telesko, John, Rusinko, and Sam Sapp – despite being busy working men – could be found in church on the feast days, and those are just the ones I have heard about! Likewise, we can look at the Darr Mine Disaster in the Mon Valley on Dec. 19, 1907: Old Calendar St. Nicholas Day. Though it was the deadliest mine disaster in Pennsylvania history – killing 239 men and boys – not a single

Orthodox was killed because, despite being poor immigrants in need of every penny, they all decided to come to church to celebrate the great St. Nicholas. In sacrificing worldly goods in order to come to church – when not even one of the Great Feasts – they found their lives spared. It is because of the faithfulness of such forebears such as these that we have the liturgical life and faithfulness to the Gospel to offer the world, and it is only by our continued efforts to follow in their footsteps that we will have this Christian life to hand down to our successors. Most importantly, it is only by making church attendance a priority that we will show our kids that Christ is to be the center of our lives; if we don’t show up, there simply won’t be many left to succeed us. However, we thank God that we have many who faithfully come to weekdays feasts, and rejoice whenever one of our brothers or sisters shows up in church, whether frequently or infrequently. Remember that God loves us, and desires not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn from his way and live.

While an important part of making faithfulness to the Gospel a priority is coming to church, it doesn’t stop there. Ultimately we must take this home, into our personal and family lives, by making prayer, fasting, and almsgiving a daily priority. Know that if we do this, we will find ourselves and our parish life growing deeper and deeper, shining ever more brightly with the light of Christ. It is also the best way to keep our kids in the Church, and to attract others to our parish. If we aren’t struggling to live as Christians each and every day, then what are we offering our children, or the broader world?

Undergirding all these facts of vibrant parish life, however, is the harsh reality that such a vibrant parish life takes money to support. Without the proper funds to pay a custodian and groundkeepers, we can’t keep the church building beautiful, or pay a choir director to make our services as beautiful as possible. Without money we can’t have welcoming ministries like coffee hours which provide enough food to encourage people to stay for hours and thereby get to know each other. Without funds, doing outreach becomes much harder. Without the means to employ a priest and other pastoral helpers, we can’t have a vibrant liturgical life which draws us deeper into our faith.

Thank God, we are doing well financially; of course there is always room for improvement, but

because of the sacrifices and foresight of previous generations, we are not in any desperate situation. Special thanks are due here to Dr. John Chupinsky, our former parish warden, for having established the maintenance fund so that a leaky roof or broken air conditioner doesn't bankrupt the parish. Yet, the reality is that we are in a good a financial situation precisely because our forefathers here at St. John's gave sacrificially, often when they had nothing to give.

Let us not, however, fall into the trap of looking at less financially sound parishes and patting ourselves on the back. It is easy to compare ourselves to the struggling parishes on the Mon Valley, but it is much better for us to look at parishes which are doing better than us financially and ask ourselves how to get there.

Our Sunday attendance has been hovering between 90 and 1200, while our sacrificial giving and stewardship is at around \$170k. Thanks be to God for this, as it is nothing to shake a stick at. However, if we look to our Cathedral, we see that despite a slightly smaller Sunday attendance of 80-100, their stewardship is at \$250k/year, which allows them to pay \$1,400/month for a choir director. Or we can look at Holy Trinity in State College, which is similar to the Cathedral: 80-100 on Sunday, \$247k/year in offerings, and \$1,635/month in other employed positions (split between a choir director, secretary, and campus chaplain for Penn State University).

Both of these parishes were able to get to this level of stewardship by adopting a sacrificial pledge system, as the Orthodox Church in America directed its parishes to adopt in 2015. Accordingly, the archdiocese is asking us to slowly move towards requiring our parishioners to fill out a pledge card. This isn't mean to guilt anyone into anything, or force us to pay more than we can sacrifice, but to ask us to consider – each and every year – what we are giving and whether we can commit to giving more sacrificially.

The world says that money is the root of all evil, this is not the teaching of the Church. The misuse of money is rather what is evil, while pride is the mother of all sins. One of the worst children of pride is the desire to use the gifts God has given us for our own selfish pleasure, rather than for the glory of God and the good of our neighbour. This is why the biblical model of overcoming this sinful desire is not

only fasting throughout the liturgical year, but also the biblical commandment to tithe: to give 10% of our earning back to God in thanksgiving for His having delivered us from slavery to sin and death, just as Abraham offered 10% of the soils when God delivered his nephew Lot from slavery and death in the foreign land of the Elamites. By doing this, we conquer the hold which money and selfish desire have over us, and with faith and action put our life in God's hands, learning to trust him and not our own selves.

While the biblical commandment is to tithe, this is not what the intention of the pledge card is; rather it is to help us to consider what we are offering and pledging to do that for the coming year. If we have to back off, that is fine, just as if we are not able to tithe. God knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust, and will receive what we are able to offer so long as we are doing it with faithfulness, love, and thanksgiving. Ultimately, however, we pray that you see the good work our parish is doing, just as she has always done, and consider what you can sacrifice for the good of Christ's Holy Church, so that is – and we together with it – might continue to grow, building on the foundation which has been handed to us by the sweat and toil of our forefathers and mothers.

The ultimately reality is that Christian community isn't automatic anymore; we have to work at it. We no longer live in a village or neighbourhood with our fellow parishioners, but are scattered over the region. For our many recent empty-nesters, we no longer have our kids' church activities to bind us together. If we want our kids to stay in the church, we have to show them that church is a priority: we have to show up with them; we have to pray and fast at home, and we have to show them almsgiving, both works of mercy and sacrificial giving. If we want a vibrant parish life, where visitors continue to feel like they are being welcomed into a family, we have to work every day to maintain the community which was handed down to us. If we want our parish to be an earthly embassy of God's heavenly kingdom, with everyone walking into our church knowing that they are walking into a corner of God's kingdom, then we must continue to follow the example of our forebears and continue to build our parish with our daily sacrifices of time, talent, and treasure.

-Fr. John Joseph Kotalik IV, Rector

MEMORY ETERNAL:

(Въчна память!)

We commemorate the anniversaries of:

Yuri Sotanko (11/1/1922)
 Michael Sweda (11/1/1956)
 Alexander Elias Feyche (11/1/1975)
 Steven Drochak (11/1/2011)
 Vasily Opalenik (11/2/1947)
 Sophie Matyuf (11/2/1998)
 Anthony Udodow (11/3/1996)
 Anna Levkulich (11/4/1970)
 John Kerr (11/4/1983)
 Harry Stanko (11/5/1950)
 Harry Uram (11/5/1959)
 John Sapp (11/5/1986)
 Stepaneda Krasouski (11/6/1960)
 Mary Chobany (11/6/1976)
 Eva Sobrina (11/7/1918)
 Maria Moskal (11/7/1922)
 Frank Kotyk (11/7/2006)
 George Uram (11/8/1987)
 Theodore Srochich (11/9/1919)
 George Curtis (11/9/1963)
 Mary Madosky (11/7/2009)
 Eva Misnik (11/10/1922)
 Anna Shirchak (11/10/1949)
 Eva Dano (11/10/1974)
 Theodore Denis (11/11/1922)
 Daniel Oleynik (11/11/1951)
 Elizabeth Zubenko (11/12/2010)
 Ann Matyuf (11/12/2015)
 Simeon Samuel Sapp (11/14/2012)
 Wasil Semak (11/15/1960)
 Peter Karmazin (11/15/1983)
 William Brookman (11/15/2011)
 Mary Samloff (11/16/1944)
 Mary Mogor (11/16/1958)
 Michael Telesko (11/16/1987)
 Thekla Tomechko (11/17/1931)
 Anna Listevka (11/17/1932)
 John Bardovsky (11/17/1935)
 Theodore Frank Matyuf (11/17/1970)
 Katherine Mcracken (11/17/2004)
 George Zotov (11/17/2004)
 David Sweda (11/17/2018)
 Karl George Kendra (11/18/1939)
 Martha Laucius (11/18/1995)
 Apr. John Horosky (11/18/2020)
 Oleksii Raichenko (11/18/2020)
 Stephen Kosturiss (11/19/1968)
 John Gutin (11/20/1918)
 Nicholas Fecicz (11/20/1944)

Stephen Oluch (11/20/1952)
 Thekla Matyuf (11/20/1976)
 Walter Dluski (11/20/1982)
 Steven Sohyda (11/20/2008)
 Peter Chopak (11/22/1968)
 Valentine Prescop (11/22/2008)
 John Spetek (11/22/2010)
 Paul Fecicz (11/23/1939)
 Andrew Spahoush (11/23/1954)
 Pearl Sevak (11/23/2011)
 Andrew Peran (11/24/1991)
 Margaretha Johnson (11/24/1991)
 Peter Kolenka (11/25/1956)
 Joseph Holowatch (11/25/1970)
 Mary White (11/26/1930)
 Betty Jane Mosik (11/27/1932)
 Vladimir Zubkov (11/27/1947)
 Michael Leon (11/27/1953)
 Alexander Bushko (11/27/1978)
 Andrew Svidersky (11/28/1921)
 Andrew Kommenda (11/28/1946)
 Julia Haverlack (11/28/1959)
 Nicholas Anthony (11/28/1983)
 Apr. John Oleynik (11/28/1993)
 Norma Danyo (11/28/2005)
 Mary Chopak (11/28/2019)
 Dn. Gregory Jewett (11/29/2019)

MANY YEARS:

(Многая и благая лѣта!)

Namedays:

Daniel Michael Booth (11/8)
 Rd. Michael Galis (11/8)
 Lillian Michelle Janousek (11/8)
 Michael Killmeyer (11/8)
 Michael Pazuchanics (11/8)
 Michael Pazuchanics (11/8)
 Milana Sopko (Stefan of Dečani: 11/11)
 John Migyanko IV (11/13)
 Pdn. John Oleynik (11/13)
 Lara (Ilariana) Galis (11/19)
 Kathy Caligiuri (11/24)
 Kathleen Kolarsky (11/24)
 Kathryn Pazuchanics (11/24)
 Catie Roberto (11/24)
 Katherine Ruffing (11/24)
 Kathleen Signorini (11/24)
 Carol (Catherine) Sweda (11/24)
 Catherine Thompson (11/24)
 Catherine Weber (11/24)
 Katharine Helinski (11/25)

Birthdays:

Jo Fedorchak (11/1)
 Joseph Cario (11/1)
 Zachary Strennen (11/2)
 Olga Rusinko (11/3)
 John Simko (11/6)
 Gabe Ruffing (11/6)
 Nancy Udodow (11/12)
 Susan Horosky (11/18)
 Chrisia Buchovecky (11/18)
 Aimee Eismont (11/19)
 Lillian Janousek (11/21)
 Sdn. John Rahall (11/21)
 Luke Ruffing (11/22)
 Mat. Myra Oleynik (11/24)
 Joseph Havrilak (11/25)
 Chris Petronka (11/28)

Anniversaries:

Kevin & Kira Rudolph (11/2/96)
 Michael & Susan Pazuchanics (11/4/20)
 Ryan & Kyra Williams (11/6/2004)
 Don & Tammy Marsico (11/11)
 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!*

From “Make Straight the Paths for Our God”

Fr. Stephen De Young

Even when we’re talking about people like St. Elijah and St. John the Forerunner, who lived alone out in the wilderness for a good chunk of their life, they still experienced what they experienced and did what they did and were working toward the purposes of God in terms of a community, not just the community of the prophets ... but in terms of the people of Israel[. With St. Elijah, this was] the people of the northern kingdom who were apostates to paganism, essentially. The Prophet Elijah’s whole purpose, and these great spiritual victories he wins are all in an attempt to win them back to their first love, an attempt to bring them back to Yahweh. They are the important thing, that community, the people, that remnant within the broader community.

And we tend very much as modern Westerners to not think in terms of community. We tend to think

in terms of individuals, our self as an individual. When we think about family, we don’t think about a big extended family; we think about: mom, dad, kids. We think about the nuclear family, this small unit. And we have certain responsibilities within that small unit and nothing outside of it. Even when we approach salvation, even when we approach Church, we approach it as individuals, and sometimes even as consumers.

So for most of history, the church sat in the middle of a village, and the people who went to that church were the people who lived in the village. So their worship life, their ritual life, everything that happened in the church, was one with the rest of the life of the community. Everyone knew each other, and they were worshipping and praying together, and then doing business with each other and living next to each other as neighbors, participating in all the aspects of community life. We don’t have that any more in the United States. We live in cities— [cities] with dozens of churches. Those churches are broken up ethnically, racially, economically. There’s different groups that go to different churches. We look at religion as sort of like a hobby that some people have and some people don’t, and what they’re into is different depending on who they are. And they go as an individual to the place of their choice— or nowhere if that’s their choice— and try to get what they want out of the experience, and then kind of come home.

But that’s not how salvation works, because that’s not how God works. God doesn’t work just with isolated individuals by themselves, unrelated to anyone else or anything else. The work that God is doing involves everyone. It involves the whole community. To experience salvation is to be part of something, and to become part of something. So our lives as Christians have to become part of the life of a Christian community, and that doesn’t just mean staying for coffee hour and chit-chatting a little bit; that means really getting to know the people in our church and having our church become a community, become people we talk to, not just on Sunday, not just when we bump into each other at church; people who we know what’s going on in their life and they know what’s going on in ours; people who, when they see our kids acting up, straighten them out for us, or when they see us acting up, straighten us out; that we’re responsible to all the time; that

we're in communication with all the time; that we love all the time—so that what we do in worship is the fulfillment of that relationship and that love and that joy that we share with each other all the time every day, everywhere we go, because God doesn't save any of us as individuals, and he doesn't save us as individuals as an end in itself.

What God did in the life of St. Elijah, what he did in the life of St. John the Forerunner, was not just "Oh, he picked them to give them these special blessings and experiences and to have this role in heaven," but he picked them to bless the world. He picked them to proclaim a message to bring salvation to countless people, to countless generations of people in the case of those two men. So if we're working out our salvation and God is saving us and we're being saved, it's because God wants to use us to do a whole lot more than just try to get our own act straightened out. It's to get our act straightened out, and to do that by blessing the world, beginning with our community, beginning with our churches. So that's—if it was audible in its entirety, or near so—is my final comment.

On the Pillar of Stewardship

From the Book "Of What Life do we Speak? Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church" by His Beatitude, Met. Tikhon

"The first, the basic definition of man is that he is priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God — and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the "matter," the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament." (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 17)

Two years ago, I served the funeral for a remarkable young woman, whom I had previously only met once when I brought Communion to her and her family as she lay on her bed of recovery after an amputation. She was a gifted 11-year old who sang,

danced and played the piano and the violin on a professional level. The year before, she had been diagnosed with a rare form of terminal cancer and bore that cross until the Lord received her into His Kingdom. Even as she faced physical suffering, the difficulties of treatment, and the reality of her own death, she never lost the joy of living, nor did she grow bitter or angry. A few weeks before her falling asleep, she sent out a message: "It was snowing today [here]! The snow was so strong and the grass was white! It was majestic! I hope you can visit me soon. You are always welcome! Hope to see you soon!" Her courageous and joyful example, along with her Christ-like long-suffering, confirmed for me that truly the Glory of God is revealed in a human person, sometimes more brightly in the most trying of circumstances, and that there is no work that is more necessary than the caring for our broken and hurting fellows, all of whom, like us, are made in the image and likeness of that Glory. This is the foundation of genuine stewardship.

Stewardship is the application of our spiritual life to the realities of the fallen world. Creation itself is in need of healing, but those of us who dwell within that creation are also in need of healing, since it is on our account that creation fell. And healing requires a therapeutic method of treatment, which the Church offers to us through the Holy Mysteries and the liturgical and sacramental life by which we become true human beings and, by God's grace, saints. If Christ is the Divine Physician, then He is the Physician for all of us and for all of creation. His Body, the Church — reflected in her monasteries, parishes, and communities — serves as a hospital for the souls of all who are broken, beaten down or wounded.

"Let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (I Cor. 4:1)

Our spiritual life is not simply a routine that we follow; it is the foundation by which the human person finds healing. When we partake of the Holy Mysteries, not only our hearts, but our bodies also are filled with the life of the Holy Trinity; when we pray before our icons, it is not only our soul, but all of mankind which is transformed; and when we care for our fellows, we not only give value to their existence, but we become authentic human beings

ourselves, placed within a transfigured creation which we must care for as a garden planted by God Himself. This is the universal witness of all the saints throughout the ages, and a witness that has taken root in our North American soil and grown into a “trunk” by the experience and sacrifices of those who labored with the saints: the bishops, clergy, and faithful who carried forward the vision brought to these shores by Saint Herman and his fellow monastic missionaries. It is our responsibility to be the guardians of this witness, which is the patrimony of the Orthodox Church in America. It is a patrimony which it is our responsibility to guard, nurture, and develop, and is reflected in the saints, their lives and their teachings.

The Human Person and the Family

“It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek Him Who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die... Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being (anthropos). Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans, 6)

In April of 2018, the pop group *Abba* announced that it would be undertaking a world tour using holograms of the members of the group to simulate a live concert. Although some might characterize this undertaking as a crass commercial effort at generating millions of dollars in profit for an aging franchise, an even more sorrowful critique might view it as a valiant effort to stave off the inevitable process of aging and dying that all human beings must face. We now live in a world where the human person has been reduced to an avatar, giving the appearance of permanence and indestructibility, but in fact destined to vanish at the first power outage. And yet, as long as the power is restored to our virtual realities, there is always the illusion that our lives will resurrect, in the same manner as a video game character is instantly revived by finding a magic crystal.

One need only consider the many icons in the world of entertainment, sports, and government who have vanished as the result of various sexual, financial, or other abuse scandals in re-cent years.

Their oversized media images disappeared almost overnight, leaving barely a trace. Unfortunately, the victims in those cases also have tended to disappear, despite valiant efforts of various social and cultural movements to keep them and their causes alive in the public consciousness. In reality, movements and causes tend to generate more movements and causes: for every “black lives matters” there is a “blue lives matters”; for every #metoo movement, there is a Promise Keepers movement. Each of these causes and movements (whether one agrees or not with their motivations) seeks to provide an identity to its adherents and is frustrated when the wider culture does not pay attention or when counter-causes and movements arise in opposition.

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, having traveled there to support the sanitation workers during their strike. This particular strike was part of the larger civil rights movement, and those sanitation workers held up their own signs to express their grievance. Those signs were composed of four simple words: “I am a man!” These words speak clearly of the desire of human beings to be accepted and respected as human beings by others, which is perhaps the basic cry of all civil rights movements. But one might also suggest that these cries speak to a deeper longing for genuine person-hood, a recognition that the purpose of the incarnation and the economy of Christ is for all human beings to find healing in Christ and to become truly human, to become “a man” in the image of the archetype, the God-man Jesus Christ.

A nun once related to me that, on the day she was tonsured and clothed in the angelic schema, her elder called her to him-self and said to her: “Now you are a true human being.” He said this because she was completely clothed in the monastic habit except for her face: and it is in one’s face that our real humanity is revealed because it is an image of the face of Christ. All of our faces are marred and broken in some way, reflecting the brokenness in our hearts or in our bodies. We struggle with various addictions — alcohol, drugs, food, and pornography — as well as a whole range of emotional and psychological problems — depression, co-dependency, greed, and anger. In addition, our children have an increased source of confusion in the area of sexuality, with very public discussions relating to sexual orientation, and gender identity. Beyond this, we are

bombarded almost daily with temptations: coffee, sugar, sports, television shows, social media, and breaking news, which make it more difficult to know who we are as persons.

It is difficult not to become distracted by the media and public attention that is given to such issues, which often focus the discussion on the most extreme cases and engender divisive and polarizing debate. This public debate has a deep impact in our own communities, but it particularly impacts our families, where such struggles take place in the most personal setting. There, it is often anxiety that leads to further confusion about how to deal with these problems, and public debate is often less than helpful to parents and to families in sorting them out. In order to get to the root of these problems, it is not enough to debate the symptoms; rather, we must help provide the means for all of us to understand the causes of the brokenness we see too often today. We must return, calmly and with discernment, to the ancient therapeutic approach of the Orthodox Church which, in collaboration with the significant contributions of modern medicine and psychology, can most directly help all human beings regain their humanity.

The Orthodox understanding of the human person is a deep well from which we can draw much wisdom and knowledge. One of the reasons to nurture and preserve the spiritual health of our clergy is precisely so that they can serve as leaders in conveying the therapeutic approach of the Holy Fathers of the Church. Our priests and monastics can most effectively serve as spiritual guides and confessors when they themselves have received both the experience and the tools necessary for this sacred task. But all of us can draw from this well.

Through death and the resurrection, we enter into salvation, which is the healing offered by the Divine Physician to those who, without despair, accept their mortality and, with hope, undertake a genuine examination of their brokenness. Acceptance and examination are often difficult and painful, but inspired by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and nurtured through the scriptural, liturgical and ascetical experience of the Church, they lead us to hope and to receiving divine wisdom on the questions surrounding the mystery of the human person. The mystery of confession is a fundamental place to begin this process. But in addition, there are

a growing number of Orthodox professionals and institutions that offer help in the form of a balanced patristic and therapeutic approach to the healing of the person. Some of these professionals are in our local communities and we should not be afraid of seeking them out, in consultation with our spiritual fathers and confessors.

Creation and the Environment

Christ is “the source of life and immortality, and the Maker of all creation, both visible and invisible,” (Prayer of St. Basil the Great, First Pre-Communion Prayer) but today, the topic of creation is too often narrowly restricted to controversies surrounding the environment, to which only polarized and politicized answers seem acceptable: is global warming real? Are humans responsible for the melting of the ice-caps? Are we protecting endangered wildlife? But the relationship of humans to the creation is a fundamental relationship which finds its roots in Paradise, where the primary task of the first created man was to tend a garden, name the animals and live off of the fruit of certain trees.

“When it saw Adam leave Paradise, all of the created world which God had brought out of non-being into existence no longer wished to be subject to the transgressor. The sun did not want to shine by day, nor the moon by night, nor the stars to be seen by him. The springs of water did not want to well up for him, nor the rivers to flow. The very air itself thought about contracting itself and not providing breath for the rebel. The wild beasts and all the animals of the earth saw him stripped of his former glory and, despising him, immediately turned savagely against him. The sky was moving as if to fall justly down on him, and the very earth would not endure bearing him upon its back.” (St. Symeon the New Theologian)

The sacred hymns of the liturgical year overflow with references to the creation, not as a self-contained element, but always in relation to the Creator and, by extension, to humanity. In the beginning, it was creation that was first brought into existence by the Word and Spirit of God. Man, created at the conclusion of this work, and placed within this creation, as in a garden, fell and was unable to remain worthy

of God's blessing, turning away from Him through disobedience. As a result, the renewal of creation is dependent on the renewal of mankind:

"[The Creator] wills that all creation serve man for whom it was made, and like him become corruptible, so that when again man is renewed and becomes spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, then creation, too, now subjected to the rebel by God's command and made his slave, will be freed from its slavery, and, together with man, be made new, and become incorruptible and wholly spiritual." (St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, pg. 29)

In other words, we cannot express care for the creation unless we first take care for the healing of our own bodies and souls. An environmentalism that is concerned only for cute and furry animals, or for the financial impact of environmental policies, falls far short of the majesty of creation that we encounter in our liturgical hymns and in our actual day-to-day existence. This applies even more directly on the local level: our diocese, our deanery, our parish, and the wider community. It is in our local community that we can have the most direct impact on the creation that we inhabit.

The Saints and the History of the Orthodox Church in America

The greatest benefactors of the Orthodox Church in America are not the wealthiest donors or most generous contributors, but rather the saints who have lived and labored on this continent over the past 220 years. The history of the Orthodox Church is a rich history with which all of us should be familiar. The witness of the saints within that history is one of the primary windows by which we might gaze into that history. But there is much that surrounds those saints, including the struggles, successes and failings of our communities over the past 220 years. Those experiences can be an inspiration to us today as we continue the journey of our Orthodox Church in America.

The saints are not distant from us but bring us closer to God and to one another. It is the life of holiness that will bind our communities into a unity in Christ. As Archimandrite Vasileios writes: "Man is in the image of God because he exists as a person in

communion with others, in community." (Archm. Vasileios, *Ecology and Monasticism*, pg. 10) To become more fully in the image of God means to strive for sanctity. But sanctity is not a magical state that is given to a select few. It is the fruit of our genuine efforts to be humble and to love. "[The saints] do not pretend to be great — they really are. On the other hand, we who are not saints pretend to be saints, and for this reason debase others. A real saint is truly great, and the test of his greatness is that in his company we who are insignificant feel important." (Archm. Vasileios, *The Saint: Archetype of Orthodoxy*, pg. 17)

Just as all the saints, regardless of the nations within which they lived and died, convey the universal reality of holiness, so we honor the saints who sanctified our lands, regardless of their ethnic origin. It is in this unity among our North American saints that we ourselves will find unity for Orthodoxy on this continent. No matter how young our mission or parish community is, it has a history, just as every parish and community in the Orthodox Church in America has a history. This history is not simply a black and white record of past events, but a colorful painting of the lives and accomplishments of colorful people, some of whom were simply colorful and others who were genuinely striving for purification and for holiness. The Department of History and Archives is a good place to start in uncovering this rich history, and many have made use of its resources. But there are other local historical and archival repositories — sometimes in the homes of individuals — that are also available and should be more widely shared.

Financial Stewardship

Almost every aspect of this present document relating to the Four Pillars can be characterized as stewardship: the care and nurturing of the gifts that God has given to us. But in the world in which we live, there is no getting around the importance of financial stewardship. In the recent past, much attention has been devoted to proportionate giving between the Dioceses and the Orthodox Church in America, and between the parish and the Diocese. At the same time, we must also focus on the needs of the parishes, which requires attention to the need for nurturing stewardship between the individual and the parish. Many of our parishes are struggling

— some in danger of no longer being sustainable — and even those that are healthier are in constant need of support. Our Dioceses and our Autocephalous Church are only as strong as our parishes. Our people need to be encouraged to express their love for their parish, for the Orthodox Faith and for our Lord in a tangible way — sacrificial giving.

Enduring Goals
*for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work
of the Church in America*

- To address human brokenness by assisting in the healing of the human person and the strengthening of the family through the offering of our Orthodox experience of sanctification; to alleviate human suffering related to physical, emotional and mental illnesses by making use of the therapeutic tools and experience of the Church and judiciously incorporating the expertise of healing professionals.
- To care for the environment that we live in, recognizing the beauty and importance of God's creation as well as the local needs in our neighborhood, our parishes and diocesan communities, finding inspiration particularly in our monastic communities.
- To learn our history and patrimony as the Orthodox Church in America and to value the contributions of the many saints who labored and prayed on this continent, as well as the sacrificial efforts of our ancestors and the legacy that they have left us and all who will be led to embrace the Orthodox faith.
- To nurture a healthy culture of financial stewardship on the personal and parish level to support the broader stewardship of the Church and to provide for pastoral ministries that have the potential to transfigure the world.

A Question About Tithing

Answered by Fr. John Matusiak

Question

Why is 10% tithing being pushed by the OCA and some other church leaders? The reason I ask this is that although 10% is required in Old Testament times, so is stoning for adultery and other rules we don't follow now. How do we tell what is valid today and what is not?

Answer

Tithing, as you correctly observe, is the Old Testament injunction to set aside 10% of all one possesses for the work of the Lord. Many Christians, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, strive to achieve this level of giving, even though its origin is in the Old Testament and there are those who would say that the New Testament maxim would be to recognize that all we possess is in fact the Lord's and that we should return to Him all that we have, or at least the first portion of our treasures.

Two observations on your comments:

This blessed hunger is a hunger for God. St. Augustine is right in his Confessions before God: "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." The only guest who can make our soul happy is God. And if God is our paramount bliss, it is clear that which obstructs the way to God must be the greatest evil for us. Such an evil is sin.

While there are numerous parishes and dioceses which encourage individuals to tithe, the OCA has never issued an official decree in this regard. There have been a number of stewardship education materials that have been published which mention the tithe as a method of giving, but these materials primarily encourage people to set aside the "first portion" of their resources for the work of the Lord.

Even though tithing is from the Old Testament, it should not be seen as something that should not be practiced, such as stoning. Would one also recommend that Christians ignore the 10 Commandments because they are found in the Old rather than New Testament? Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. That which was worth saving from the Old Covenant was incorporated into the New.

In looking at the reality of some of our parishes—especially those with 50 members or less—tithing might be a reasonable means of keeping the parishes properly funded and, in some cases, alive. The "I'll give a buck a week" attitude in a small parish will ensure that there are not enough funds to keep the doors open, much less support a priest.

The thing that is critical is not the percentage—or the origin of the maxim—but, rather, that one is giving the first and the best of one's resources to the work of the Church—in honesty and out of a sense of thanksgiving to God for His many blessings. Remember—the widow who only gave two coins was

blessed because she gave everything she had to God. She overshot the tithe by 90%!

6 Reasons Why Tithing is Good for an Orthodox Parish

by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

Tithing is good for the Orthodox Christian and therefore good for the Orthodox parish. So why don't more Orthodox Christians tithe?

We know the usual reasons: We're not used to it. Back in the old country the government paid for the church. The parish was founded on the "dues" model. Tithing is "Protestant." Orthodox people are stingy. We just don't have it in our culture.

Those things are all true in one way or another, but I don't think those are the real reasons that we do not tithe very much as Orthodox Christians. There are some who do, of course, but it's not very many of us. So what is the reason why we're so terrible at tithing?

I believe that it is because we don't know why we tithe.

And because we don't know why, we don't do it. And when we don't do it, then we come up with the various reasons given above as the cause of our non-tithing. But those aren't the real reasons. It's because we don't know why we should tithe.

Now, the reasons I am going to list below are not all equally important. Indeed, if I had to answer the question, "Why should I tithe?" I would answer only with #1. That's the real reason. #2-#6 are essentially useful effects of tithing that should help us to focus on #1.

1. Tithing Enables Us to be Saved

As Christians, we want to be saved. We want to be healed. We want to "go to heaven" rather than to hell when we die (setting aside for the moment all the details). We want to become like Christ. Tithing doesn't purchase all that for us, but tithing is a powerful way that we give of ourselves, that we turn over what we have to God so that we are opened to receiving His healing and blessing.

It's a basic principle of Christian spiritual life that we cannot receive God's blessing if we are

holding back on Him. Why? We can't be filled with God if we remain full of ourselves. Tithing helps us to empty ourselves.

Don't get me wrong—giving money is not the *only* way that we work out our salvation and become open to receiving blessings. But whatever we have, we have to give to God. And if we have money, then we have to give money. If we don't have money, then of course we don't have to give it. But we have to give what we have, whatever it is, and with the way our culture is so grasping and possessive about money, it really is one of the best things for us to give if we can.

Money is one of the places where we spiritually hurt the most! So we need to pay attention to that wound.

2. Tithing Shows That We're Serious

When I speak of tithing here, I am referring most obviously to giving 10% of income, but for this article, you can define tithing as **serious giving**. 10% is serious for most of us. For some of us who are more affluent, 10% is not that serious, and we should do more because we can. And for some of us, 10% is unaffordable, so we need to be serious with another percentage. But the point is to be serious. So if you're not serious, get serious.

How do you know if you're serious? Well, to start with, if you're spending more on cable TV or other forms of entertainment every month than you're giving to the Church, it's a safe guess that you're not being serious about giving.

I love the phrase "put your money where your mouth is." It's definitely true. Jesus says almost exactly the same thing when He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34). Where we put our money proves where our hearts are. Where is *your* heart?

3. Tithing is Absolutely Orthodox

Some people say that tithing is not Orthodox. This is nonsense. Giving is Orthodox. Asceticism is Orthodox. Generosity is Orthodox. Ministry is Orthodox. Discipline is Orthodox.

The purpose in tithing is not because it is an "absolute requirement" in order to be saved. It's not. But how can we be saved if we do not nurture a truly generous heart? And how can we nurture that generous heart without becoming disciplined about giving all that we have? The Orthodox Church

understands how to become disciplined. We understand asceticism. This is one of the best ways to do it.

Tithing was a minimum set up in the Old Covenant (and there were multiple tithes, equaling about 23%). 100% is the standard in the New Covenant (Acts 4), and when the Fathers talk about tithing, they say that because the New is superior to the Old, we give more than the Old Covenant people did.

So perhaps it's true that "tithing is not Orthodox." But that's not because we are to give *less* than 10%, but because we are to give *more* than 10%.

God is merciful, of course, and if we're not ready to meet that standard, we can work toward it. But are we working toward it? If not, let's get on it.

4. Tithing Becomes Ministry

There are things that a parish would love to do but just can't because they don't have the money for it. Perhaps they could improve or repair the building or build a new one. They could start that iconography project. They could get an assistant priest. They could hire a youth director. They could give to charities. They could fund continuing education for the priest, the choir director, or other parish workers. They could bring in special speakers. They could sponsor kids to summer camp. They could sponsor people to go on pilgrimages. They could do a lot more outreach. They could feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

The possibilities really are almost endless. The point is that God takes what we give, blesses it, and then returns it to us for our sanctification. When we give our money, God turns it into *ministry*.

And sometimes ministry is just the most basic things, like keeping the priest from having an outside secular job, keeping health insurance in place for him and his family, paying the parish's utility bills, buying supplies, etc.

When we tithe, that's what God does with our money. It doesn't go to lining anyone's pockets. Most clergy – not just Orthodox, but all clergy – are actually rather underpaid for their level of education, experience and the labor they put in. And almost none of them ever get a raise for preaching about tithing. *And a lot of them are tithing themselves.* In many parishes, the priest is one of the top givers, and he usually does it on a salary far below the parish average.

5. Tithing Ends Money Problems for the Parish, Once and For All

If a mission parish has 25 tithing families who each make roughly the national average (\$50k/yr.), the collective income for the parish would be \$125k, which is usually plenty for a mission to function on.

If a parish has 50 tithing families who make that average, pledge income would be \$250k. We are now well above the income of most medium to small parishes.

If there are 100 families who tithe like that, the income would be \$500k. And they're probably about to burn any mortgage, buy new land, build something new or start a new mission. Or maybe they're hiring a couple more clergy, a secretary, etc. How many 100-family parishes have half a million dollars to use every year?

Even if half the families in a parish start tithing or even if that same half started giving just 5%, the parish would probably never have any more money problems ever.

6. Tithing Changes a Parish Culture

Related to #5, I sometimes hear that, if only the membership knew all the money problems in their parish, they would be inspired to give a little bit more. But usually the people who say that, knowing full well the financial situation of their parish, have not themselves increased their pledge. Giving information and insight to the unmotivated usually doesn't accomplish much.

But what if we started thinking about parish life in a whole new way?

What if we stopped talking and worrying about paying for things and started thinking about why each of us needs to become generous, serious givers? We have to put the horse before the cart: We don't develop a culture of generosity by complaining about money problems. We develop a culture of generosity, and our money problems go away.

A tithing parish sees itself as a group of people ministering to one another, not as a group of people who are paying for something or expect to get something. And that's the kind of parish that's truly Christian, because they have love for each other (John 13:35).

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 10:

THE ROYAL MINISTRY OF CHRIST

In the Creed, we confess our belief in Christ as King with these words: "And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; of His **Kingdom** there shall be no end." The catechumen as well, as he approaches baptism, is questioned about his faith. He, of necessity, must acknowledge that he believes in Christ as "King and as God."

At the very Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary, that to the Son whom she was to bring forth "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Lk. 1:32, 33).

When Christ was born, the wise men came to Jerusalem from the east to worship Him: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" (Mt. 2:2) When they found Him they offered Him gifts, one of which, gold, was in recognition of His kingship. (Note also God's promise to David at the time of the birth of Solomon in II Kings [II Sam.] 7:13, 16 and also in Psalm 131[132]:11-14. On the day of Pentecost, Peter relates the promise announced by Gabriel to the Lord's promise to David. See Acts 2:30.)

The Servant Who Reigns

The contradiction between the royal title and the humble lot of Him "that had no place to lay His head" is only too obvious. In fact, the Lord specifically declared His ministry to be one of service and obedience. (Mt. 20:28; Lk. 22:25-27) He repeatedly rejected the attempts to proclaim Him King in a worldly sense. He reproached His disciples when they asked for the first places in His Kingdom after Him, for they thought that He would go up to Jerusalem to take the throne. (Mt. 20:20-28; Mk. 10:35-40)

Then again, when Christ perceived that the multitude "would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone." (Jn. 6:15)

On the other hand, on being questioned by Pilate about the accusation against Him, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus answered affirmatively, "Thou sayest that I am a king." (Jn. 18:37; Mk. 15:2; Mt. 27:11; Lk. 23:3) Yet He had already told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight ... but now my kingdom is not from hence." (Jn. 18:36) (The "now" of the foregoing statement is very important, as we shall see later.)

Pilate then, for some reason that he himself did not understand, refused to change the name-plate that he had written for the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Even when the Jews who read it objected, he replied, "What I have written I have written." (Jn. 19:19-22)

The only act or exterior manifestation of Christ's kingship or royal ministry during His earthly life was His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He even prepares, or better, commands His royal entry. He sends two disciples to a neighboring village to bring Him an ass's colt so that He may enter the city on it. (Mt. 21:1-6)

Here the Lord directly applies the prophecy of Zechariah concerning the entry of the King-Messiah to Himself: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (9:9; see also, Is. 52).

As in other cases, the disciples did not understand these things at the first, "but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him." (Jn. 12:16)

The people received Him as a king: "Hosanna; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the Kingdom of our Father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest." (Mk. 11: 9,10) "Hosanna to the Son of David ..." (Mt. 21:9) "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest." (Lk. 19: 38) (We note here a harmony with the song of the angels at the birth of Christ in the city of David.) The "blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" is the direct application to Christ of the prophecy of the messianic Psalm 117/118: 26.

Jesus accepted this acclaim as king: the spreading of cloaks under His feet, the waving of palms and branches, and the cries of all, even the children. All of this was necessary, for the King had truly come into His own city. But the chief priests and the scribes were indignant and asked Him: "hearest thou what these say?" And Jesus responded by recalling Psalm 8:2 : "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." (Mt. 21: 15,16) He testified to the fact that this praise had to be: "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." (Lk. 19: 40)

But the course of Jerusalem was already set. The Lord wept over the city even at this moment of triumph, saying to it, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace." (Lk. 19: 41-44)

The day after entering the city, Christ went into the Temple. There He exercised His authority and purified it by driving the money-changers out. (Mt. 21: 12, 13)

This royal glory was only of short duration at this time. The week of the Passion begins immediately. Just as before, when He entered into His priestly ministry, His glory revealed on Mt. Tabor was a momentary break-through. It was still necessary for Him to carry the earthly ministry, with the obedience that was the center of it, to the ultimate, to the death on the cross. His testimony to His being both the Son of Man and the Son of God would have been incomplete if He had not allowed certain ones to see His eternal glory in the Transfiguration, and had He not manifested His royalty or kingship in the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

The Miracles of Christ

The only acts of our Lord during His earthly life in which He is seen specifically to accept any acclaim as King were His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and His answer to Pilate. On the other hand, it must always be remembered that Jesus Christ was the God-Man. Even during the time of His humiliation and before His glorification, He exercised that power that belonged to Him as Lord and Ruler, as King.

Many of these things were in preparation for the establishment of His Kingdom in the Church. He taught the absolute, eternal truth and gave a new commandment. (Jn. 13:34) Those who heard Him in the synagogue "were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one that had authority ..." (Mk. 1:22) He declared that He would build His Church (Mt. 16:18), and for this society He provided its basic form of worship, the Eucharist: "this do in remembrance of me." (Lk. 22:19)

Another act of Jesus which was a sign of His power was his selection of the Apostles, who were to be the hierarchy of His Church. To them He would transmit spiritual authority and power, including that of binding and loosing. He promised this to them in the name of Peter after He announced the foundation of the Church (Mt. 16:19), and fulfilled His promise after the resurrection (Jn. 20:23).

In one sense, the miracles that Jesus did during the time of His humiliation belong to His prophetic ministry. The work of the prophet in the history of God's people was to proclaim the will of God, but the proof of their calling was often their miracles.

On the other hand, the miracles of Christ, even if they do belong to the prophetic period and role, can certainly not be separated from His exercise of His lordship and sovereignty, which had always belonged to Him. It is for this reason that some theologians have tended to associate the miracles more with His royal ministry. Yet it matters little whether we classify them as belonging to one or the other ministry. The point is that it was the divine power that healed, overcame the laws of nature, and even raised people from the dead.

The Lord Himself pointed specifically to His miracles, His works, as proof of His power and His divinity. For example, when a man sick of the palsy was brought to Him, He seeing their faith, said to Him: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." And then, knowing that "certain of the

scribes" were doubting and accusing Him of blasphemy, He said: "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed ..." (Mt. 9: 2-6)

Even more pointedly, Jesus offers His works as proof of who He was and of who had sent Him. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works." (Jn. 10: 37, 38) Further He declared: "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me." (Jn. 5: 36) "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." (Jn. 14: 11; see also 15: 24) Both the Apostles Peter and Paul (Acts 2:22, 23 and Hb. 2:3, 4) offer the miracles, signs and wonders as proof that the power of God was working in Jesus Christ.

Jesus demonstrated His power over all of nature when He changed water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), when He walked on the sea (Mt. 14:26), and when, with a word, He calmed a storm. This latter miracle made His disciples ask, "What manner of man is this, for that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" (Mt. 8:23-27; Lk. 8:25)

Christ healed every kind of sickness and disease. (Mt. 9:20-26; 14:35, 36) He gave sight to the blind (Mk. 10:46-52), hearing to the deaf and speech to the mute (Mt. 9:32-35; 12:22; Lk. 11:14), and wholeness to the lepers (Mt. 8:1-4). And finally, with a few loaves of bread and fishes, He miraculously fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, on one day and more than four thousand on another. (Mt. 14:15 ff. and 15:32 ff.)

Overruling Death and Hell

That Jesus had dominion over the powers of Hell and over demons is clear from the many cases in which He commanded evil spirits to come out of men. (Mk. 1:25; 5:8; 9:25; Lk. 8:32, 33)

The demons themselves recognized Him, as is evident from the incident in the country of the Gergesenes. On seeing Him approach, they cried out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Mt. 8:28-34; see also Mk. 3:11; 5:7)

He had communicated to His disciples the power of the destruction of the works of Satan in the human race even before His glorification and the

sending of the Holy Spirit. For example, when the seventy disciples, on returning from their preaching mission, told Him with joy: "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name," He told them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Hereby He gave testimony of His eternal existence. (Lk. 10:17,18)

This sovereign power of our Lord over the spirits of evil during His earthly life, the apostle Peter attests to in the presence of the newly converted Gentiles: "Ye know [that] which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." (Acts 10:37, 38)

Most remarkable, of course, is Jesus' demonstration of His power over death. He raised the son of the of Nain by touching his bier and saying: "Young widow man, I say unto thee, Arise." (Lk. 7:14) He brought to life the daughter of back Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, by a simple touch and this word: "Maid, arise." (Lk. 8:54) Then, just before His own death and resurrection, He raised His friend Lazarus, who had been dead four days, saying in a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth." (Jn. 11:43) Even this important incident, in which we see Jesus' real human compassion, for "Jesus wept," He also addressed the Father in the presence of the people precisely in order that they might believe and He had sent Him: "I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." (v. 42)

So, again, in the days of His humiliation, as He went about fulfilling His ministry as Prophet and as High Priest, and worked in the power of the Holy Spirit as the God-Man, Jesus' miracles demonstrated both that He was sent from God, and that He was Lord and Sovereign: King of the universe and the Vanquisher of death.

The Descent to Hell

The Church believes that after His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus Christ descended to hell to proclaim salvation to those who were held there and to rescue the just of the Old Testament and others who had not been able to know Him in their earthly life.

While the most commonly used Creed, the Nicene, makes no reference to the descent to hell, another ancient creed, that of the Apostles, contains this doctrinal statement: "He descended into Hell." Although this creed is not used in the Orthodox Church, its doctrines are certainly not questioned.

There is sufficient evidence in the writings of the Apostles, that is, the New Testament, to support our belief in this doctrine. To be sure, the Fathers of the Church of almost every century testify to its general acceptance. The Fifth Ecumenical Council defines the doctrine in an indirect way, in the anathema (or condemnation) it places on anyone who denies "that the Word of God, being incarnate in a flesh animated by a rational and spiritual soul, descended to hell and then ascended to heaven." (*Anathema ix, against Origen*)

St. Peter, in his discourse to the Jews (Acts 2; 27-31) quotes the words of the Psalmist David: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 15/16:10) Peter declares that David was foretelling the resurrection of Christ.

Later, in his First Epistle, Peter expresses the idea even more clearly when he says: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison." (3: 18,19) In other words, while He was dead in the body, Christ descended alive in the spirit to the prison of the spirits in order to proclaim to them the salvation He had preached on earth.

St. Paul also refers to the same thing when he asks: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" (Eph. 4: 9, 10) Compare also Romans 10:6, 7: "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep [or, the abyss]? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)."

From among the writings of the Fathers of the Church, we shall cite just a few of the many references to our Lord's descent to hell.

§ In the Second Century:

"The Lord descended to the depths of the earth, announcing also His coming and the remission of sins to all those who believed on Him, that is, to all

those who had awaited Him, to the same one who foretold His coming and had fulfilled His ordinances, the just, the prophets and the patriarchs." (St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 12, no. 1)

"He remained three days in the dwelling-place of the dead, and He descended to them in order to free them from there and to save them." (Ibid., V,3, no. 1,2)

§ In the Third Century:

"The Lord descended to hell only to proclaim the Gospel." (St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 6; cf. 11, 10)

"After having revealed the truth to men, according to the will of God, He submitted to death in order to destroy and conquer hell." (Lactantius, *Divine Institutions*, IV, chap. 12)

§ In the Fourth Century:

"He was crucified, buried; He descended into hell in His divinity and His (human) soul, and He took captivity captive." (St. Epiphanius, *Haeres Herodian*, xx)

"David predicted clearly in Psalm 48 (/49):15, the descent into hell of the Lord Jesus, who freed with the other souls that of the Prophet that it might not remain in hell." (St. Basil the Great, *Homily on Psalm 48:15*)

"He was buried, but He arose; He descended into hell, but He rescued the souls from there." (St. Gregory the Theologian, *Third Theological Oration*)

"Imagine that God, having left heaven and His kingly throne, descended to the earth, even to hell, arming Himself for the struggle." (St. John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Homily ii, n. 1)

And to refute Apollinarius, who denied the existence of the human soul in Christ, St. Athanasius asked him:

"But, how could Jesus Christ descend to hell, when His body was in the tomb, and if, in His divinity, He is present everywhere?" (*Against Apollinarius*, I, n. 13, 14; I, 17) St. Athanasius took for granted that this descent to hell was generally recognized among Christians.

The witness of the Church can be summarized by the Paschal Troparion: "In the grave with the body and in hell with the soul, as God, while in paradise with the thief and upon the throne with the Father and the Spirit, wast thou, O Christ, filling all things, thyself uncircumscribed." In this hymn, we

see that in the descent into hell, the humanity and the divinity of Christ are not separated. It is the God-Man who descended to proclaim salvation to the captives and to conquer hell and its hold over man.

Christ's Mission in Hell

The foregoing has demonstrated that the Church as always believed in and accepted as dogma the descent of Christ into hell. This leads then to the question of the purpose of His stay in the place of the dead.

1. First, St. Paul answers the question when he says: "When He ascended up on high, He **led captivity captive** and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." (Eph. 4:8-10)

The Fathers of the Church explain St. Paul's answer thus: "Hell was led captive by the descent which the Lord made there; it has been annulled, mocked, killed, overturned, struck." (St. John Chrysostom, *Paschal Sermon*)

"He did away with the sting of death, He destroyed the somber doors of hell most vile, He gave freedom to the souls." (St. Gregory the Theologian, *Hymn to Christ*)

"He came for the salvation of the souls that were in hell waiting for His coming from all eternity; and having descended, He took down the brazen gates, broke the iron bolts, and led to freedom those who had previously been enchained in hell." (Eusebius, *Evangelical Demonstration*, bk. x, *On the Words of Psalm XVI*)

2. As we have already seen, the Lord's mission was to free those who believed in Him before His coming into the world, those who had foreseen and prophesied concerning Him, and those who had lived according to God's law.

"He was really placed in a stone sepulchre, as a man; but because of Him the stone was rent from fright; He descended into the subterranean places in order to set the just free. Because, would you imagine that those living on earth at the time of Christ, most of whom were unrighteous, would be able to enjoy His grace, while those who came after Adam would not receive their freedom? Isaiah had prophesied so many things about Him. Would you think that the King, on descending, would not give

freedom to His herald? There too were David, Samuel and all the Prophets, including John ..." (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, IV, n. 11; XIV, n. 19)

3. In the descent into hell, Christ, truly dead in His body, but alive in His human soul, which was still in inseparable union with His Divine Nature, completed His saving work. He not only had proclaimed salvation to the living, but He did not forget the righteous dead. He came and finished His universal proclamation.

The God-Man followed the destiny of all men after Adam, and went to the resting place of all His precursors, the prophets. In this His prophetic ministry continues. He brought to them the consequences of His saving sacrifice; in this, His priestly ministry is seen. Then, in the splendor of His glory, He conquered hell and the dominion of death; in this, He is king. Thus, did Christ free those who awaited Him and took away the sting of death and its finality for all mankind. Hereby, He gave man the possibility of living with Him forever in His Kingdom.

The Resurrection

Although our Lord Jesus Christ had previously revealed His power over death by restoring to life several people who had died, His victory over death was accomplished by His resurrection from the dead on the third day.

The Word of God explains this victory as a victory for all men. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." (I Cor. 15:20-23)

Those who believe in Christ and live the life that is in Him, the core of which is participation in His holy mysteries, become partakers of Him and will live with Him forever. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." (Hb. 3:14) "Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you ..." (Jn. 6:27)

The Lord Himself taught: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were

dead, yet shall he live." (Jn. 11:25) "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (Jn. 6:51) "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (Jn. 6:56) The Church has always understood these sayings of the Lord to refer specifically to the way in which He provided for man to eat His flesh and to drink His blood: the Eucharist.

Baptism is the other way in which we are directly made partakers of Christ, of His victory over death in the Resurrection. St. Paul teaches: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27) "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life ... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him." (Rm. 6:3, 4, 8, 9)

Because of our union with Christ, we are already raised with Him, being dead to the old life. "If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are glad, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:1-3)

The Resurrection as Christ's victory over death is consistently taught by the Fathers of the Church. For example, St. Athanasius writes: "The Lord had as the particular purpose of His dispensation the manifestation of the resurrection of His body. He wished thus to demonstrate to all the marvel of His victory over death, and to convince them that by Him corruption is destroyed and incorruption given to men." (*The Incarnation of the Word of God*, n. 22) As well, St. Cyril of Jerusalem says: "He is risen, that dead man, who is **free among the dead** (Psalm 87/88:5), He is the very Liberator of the dead. He whom they crown atrociously, in His great long-suffering, with a crown of thorns, arose crowned with the diadem of victory over death." (*Catechetical Lectures*, XIV, n. 1)

The resurrection of Christ is not to be understood figuratively, but quite literally. It was

predicted by David the Prophet: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Psalm 15/16:10) This prophecy was applied by Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, to Christ's resurrection. (Acts 2:29-31) The Lord Himself declared that the stay of Jonah in the belly of a great fish was a symbol of His burial and resurrection. (Mt. 12:39-40; 16:4) Then He simply declared many times to His disciples that He would be killed and that He would be raised from the dead on the third day. (Mt. 16:21; 17:9; 26:32; Jn. 2:19; 10:17, 18)

The Apostles, who were eye-witnesses, testify to the reality of the Resurrection. According to their own testimony. Christ appeared to them for forty days afterward. He spoke with them and explained the Scriptures to them. He revealed the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to them. He ate and drank with them and permitted them to touch Him. (Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24; Jn. 20, 21)

Then again, the writings of the Fathers of the Church in every generation are full of detailed teachings concerning the literal, physical resurrection of Christ. Among them, the following may be consulted: St. Clement of Rome, *To the Corinthians*, 1, n. 24; St. Ignatius, *To the Smyrneans*, n. 1, 2, 3; St. Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, ix; St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1,10; St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, IV, n. 12; and especially St. John Chrysostom, in his 90th homily, *On Matthew*.

The reality of the resurrection has been denied by many from the earliest days. Since it was the proof of the truth of all that Christ taught about Himself, the Jews who rejected His messiahship would certainly refuse to recognize it. They explained the empty tomb as a trick on the part of the Christians, claiming that Jesus' body had been stolen from the grave. (See Chrysostom's Homily 90, *On Matthew*; cf. Mt. 28:11-15)

Later in the Church's history, there were others who taught that the Saviour did not have a real body at all, but that He only appeared to have one, like a phantom. These Docetists would explain His appearance to the disciples after the resurrection as that of a ghost.

In our own times, the denial of the Resurrection is very widespread among "Christian" modernists. These usually disavow altogether the divinity of Christ, at least in the sense that it has always been

accepted by the historic Church. Many of them claim, for example, that the idea of the physical resurrection was a distortion of the enthusiasm of the disciples. (They refer to that group of Christians as the "Easter community.") They simply "realized" that their Master had "transcended" death in His life and works, and in this sense only had "triumphed" over it.

The recent English heretic, John A.T. Robinson, in his famous book *Honest to God*, sums up the contemporary secularist attitude toward the Lord's rising from the dead. He teaches that the physical resurrection was part of the mythologizing tendency of the early Christians. He would have contemporary Christians recover the enthusiasm of that first apostolic generation but not "the myth into which they had translated it." For him and others of his school, Pentecost was a sort of "group realization" of the transcendence of their Master's teachings, when all of a sudden it hit them.

Yet it is quite simple to refute Robinson, and those like him, from the clear evidence in Scripture that the apostles were anything but enthusiastic following the Resurrection. They had returned to their nets, even after several resurrection appearances. (Jn. 21:4 ff.)

Nor can Pentecost be explained away as a group realization. Indeed the miraculous speaking with tongues was marveled at by those who were not of the apostolic "group". (Acts 2:1-13)

Had the Resurrection merely been the product of such a mythologizing tendency of early Christians, reason would lead one to believe that they would not have chosen to document such obvious counter-indications of their "myth".

The Ascension

Holy Scripture contains abundant evidence of the final event in the earthly life of the Saviour, the Ascension. It was foretold in the Old Testament: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men..." (Psalm 67/68:18). St. Paul -specifically refers this prophecy to Christ's ascension, and explains the second part of the verse as an allusion to His descent into "the lower parts of the earth," to free those held in captivity. (Eph. 4:8-10)

The Lord Himself told His disciples before the Passion that He would return to the Father, and that

this return would prepare the way for their ascension. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (Jn. 14:2, 3) And further, He says: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more ..." (v. 19) "Now I go my way to Him that sent me ..." (16:5) "I leave the world, and go to the Father." (16:28) Finally, in the high priestly prayer, He says to the Father: "I come to thee." (17:11, 13)

In two of the Gospels, Mark and Luke, and in the Books of Acts, there are narrations of the event itself. "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." (Mk. 16:19) "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." (Lk.24:51) "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." (Acts1:9)

In Matthew, while the ascension itself is not mentioned, it is clearly implied, both by the atmosphere of a last conversation and the promise to be with the disciples until the end of the world. (28:20) In John, while the Lord had made the same promise not to leave the disciples "comfortless" (lit. "orphans") (14:18), He only makes a reference to His coming again. Yet this indicates His leaving the world. (21:22)

In Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, we find this: "Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand ..." (Acts 2:33, 34)

Neither is there any lack of reference to the event and its significance in the Epistles. For example, in Ephesians, Paul, speaking of the power of God, says: "...the working of His mighty power, which wrought in Christ, when he raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places." (1:19, 20)

In Hebrews, the Apostle makes a point of the fact that it is as High Priest and Intercessor for us that Christ has entered into heaven. "After He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, [He] sat down on the right hand of God." (10:12) "[He is entered] into

heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (9:24)

The Fathers of the Church make many references to the Ascension, and testify to the Church's belief in every century in the literal departure in glory from the world, as recorded in Mark and Luke. For example, St. Cyril of Jerusalem says: "But when Jesus had finished His course of patient endurance, and had redeemed mankind from their sins, He ascended again into the heavens, a cloud receiving Him up: and as He went up Angels were beside Him, and Apostles were beholding ... He has ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives on the East. For having gone down hence into Hades, and come up again to us, He ascended again from us into heaven, His Father addressing Him, and saying, Sit thou on My right hand, until I make thine enemies Thy footstool, Psalm 109 (/110): 1." (*Catechetical Lectures, IV, 13,14*)

St. Gregory the Theologian makes a point of the fact that Christ was true man in His Ascension. (*Oratio xli, On Pentecost*)

It would be worthwhile to quote from other Fathers. They, too, relate the event itself and its significance quite consistently. Yet, the liturgical texts and the scriptural lessons prescribed for the Feast reveal perhaps with greater clarity the place the Ascension has in the Church's understanding of the work of Christ.

In the second Old Testament reading at Vespers, we find: "Behold the Lord hath made it to be heard in the ends of the earth, tell the daughter of Zion: Behold thy Saviour cometh: behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him ... Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra ... I, that speak justice, and am a defender to save. Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the winepress? ... in His love, and in His mercy He redeemed them [of the house of Israel]; and He carried them, and lifted them up ..." (Is. 62:10-12; 63:1-3, 7-9 [LXX])

Here we see prophesied the Saviour's return to the Father after having accomplished His work of redemption, the crucifixion with the shedding of His blood, and His preparing in the Ascension the entry of all into the Kingdom of heaven.

Christ, the Son, who is eternally with the Father, enters into heaven taking His glorified human nature with Him. "The angels wonder as they see a

man more exalted than they. The Father receiveth into His bosom Him who is eternally with Him..." (*First Sticheron on Lord, I have called, at Vespers*)

"From the Fatherly bosom thou wast inseparable, O sweet Jesus, and on earth thou didst behave like a man. Thou hast ascended in glory from the Mount of Olives; and by thy pity thou didst raise our fallen nature and seat it with the Father ..." (*Glory ... Now ... on Lord, I have called, at Vespers*)

The Saviour ascended in glory from the Mount of Olives to fill all things with His glory and to send the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. "Thou didst ascend in glory from the Mount of Olives, O Christ God, at thy disciples' side, and didst sit down at the right hand of the Father, O thou who dost fill all with thy Divinity, sending to them thy Holy Spirit, the Illuminator, Strengthened, and Sanctifier of our souls." (*Third Sticheron, of the Aposticha, Vespers*)

The human nature that the Lord took to heaven was glorified or deified, pointing to the deification of those who will be saved in Christ. "The eternal Word before all the ages, who took a human nature and deified it in a mystical way, today doth rise ascending ..." (*Second Kathisma, Matins*)

In the Ascension, our Lord Jesus Christ reconciled what had been separated by man's sin, our human bodies with the celestial. "... Having united things on earth with those in heaven, thou didst ascend ..." (*Kontakion of the Feast*) "O Christ, thou didst take upon thy shoulders the nature that had gone astray and didst present it to God the Father ..." (*Troparion in the Seventh Ode, Matins*) "Our nature, fallen of old, has been elevated above the angels, and it is seated upon the divine Throne, in a way that passeth all understanding." (*Troparion in the Eighth Ode, Matins*)

The Ascension completes the work of the Son inaugurated by His incarnation: having taken upon Himself our fallen human nature, "[He] took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ... He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:7-9)

Thus, it is our nature that is taken with Christ in the Ascension. This is the glorification of Christ, who was humiliated at the time of the Passion, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things

in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (vss. 10, 11) And consequently, this is the glorification of our own nature, which He came to lift up and save from corruption and death.

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!