

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

*"Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Mark 1:2-3*

June & July 2017

VISION:

Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:

The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Father Stavros' Message Lessons Learned from My Surgery And Recovery

As most of you know, I had an operation on May 2 to correct several problems in my nose and my sinuses. I'm writing this on May 10, as I'm still recuperating at home. It has been eight days since the surgery, and for someone who rarely takes a day off, it has been different to be laying around the house, not able to do very much between the pain and nausea and the need to just be still and heal. Needless to say, I've had a lot of time to think, to process and to pray. When one takes time to do these things, it's pretty amazing, some of the thoughts that come to mind. For this month's message I want to share some of the spiritual things I've thought about in the past week.

First and foremost, I want to say thank you to everyone for your prayers. There were lots of prayers before, during and after my surgery. The Sunday before the surgery, a parishioner came into church, and specifically asked to say a prayer for me. The day before the surgery, two other parishioners came and offered the same. What great gifts! I heard that fifteen people stopped by the church at various times on May 2, the day of the surgery, to offer prayers. I'm very appreciative. There is a great benefit to praying not only for one another but with one another present. I will talk a little bit more on this below.

I want to thank the Sunday School children for the bag of thoughtful and funny cards I received. And I want to thank everyone for the texts, emails and calls. I'm thankful to Charlie and Monica for keeping everything running smoothly while I was gone, and to Fr. John Lazarek who filled in in my absence.

Now to the lessons I've learned (along with some action items for you to consider in your own life) . . .

Hymns and verses of scripture help one relax - I love the

hymns of our church. Not only do they supplicate the Lord and teach us important lessons, their words and phrases can bring relaxation in times of stress. The hymn "*Soma Christou*" is sung during the Paschal season. It says "*Receive Ye the Body of Christ, and partake ye of it; He is an immortal fountain. Alleluia.*" Words don't do justice to how powerful this hymn is when it is sung by our choir. I listened to this hymn many times before the surgery and as I made my way to the hospital and during the painful first few days home, this hymn played over and over in my head. And it always brought a calm to me. There are several verses of scripture that I use as "mantras" in my life and one of them is Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" I also said this phrase over and over again at the hospital and at home. I could almost "get lost" (forget where I was) in this hymn and verse. When you are under duress, a go to hymn and Bible verse will bring you comfort.

Action Item: Start compiling a list of hymns and Bible verses and put them aside for your times of distress.

I finally understood in a way I never have before why we pray for people—The Image of the stadium—As some of you know, my biggest phobia is IV needles. I had several bad experiences with this in childhood and the angst of this has carried over into adulthood. For many people this is not a big deal but for me it is. I asked my doctor to prescribe a sedative they placed the IV start so I wouldn't have to experience this, and as usual, there were complications over whether they were going to give it to me or not. So, as I laid on the hospital bed, not the confident person you see at church but rather feeling very shaky and nervous, I asked God to bring a calming thought into my mind, and I closed my eyes and waited for the thought to come. Here is what God

brought to my mind:

I saw the dusty, dirt track at my old high school, and someone was telling me to run laps until they decided that I had run enough. I never liked running laps and I wondered, what kind of thought this was and why was God bringing THIS thought to my mind at this particular time. Then I heard one voice in the stadium saying “keep running, you can do it.” And I thought “well, thank God I’m not alone, even though I’m still the only one doing the running.” Then I heard many voices, shouting encouragement and the running became easier. Then in my mind and thoughts I was transported from that dusty track to Raymond James Stadium and there were 100,000 people shouting encouragement to me. I didn’t feel the pain of the track or the effort in the running, even though I was still the only one running. It felt like I was being lifted up by the encouragement of everyone and what felt like drudgery felt almost euphoric. And in THIS moment, I had a profound thought about why we pray for other people.

I was still the only one on the hospital bed. No amount of prayers could change that. But knowing that I had received prayers (and well wishes) from several hundred people who contacted me before my surgery made me know I wasn’t alone. Add to their voices, the voices of the saints and the angels and it was like a stadium filled with people rooting for me.

We’ve all felt alone, like the lonely runner on the track, like the drudgery of the challenge will never end. Even one voice of encouragement can make a difference. Many people think that this is the role of the priest, to be that voice, and most certainly it is. However, it is not only the priest who is offering prayer. All of us can do that. The fact that several hundred “non-priests” said to me “I’m praying for you,” was really inspiring. To tell someone, “I’m praying for you” means really “I’m going to God, and I’m going to Him for YOU.” Imagine what it would feel like if a few hundred people said to you, “I’m going to God for you.” It wouldn’t take away your challenge, but it would make a difference in how you faced your challenge. And I’m not just saying to give a good word to someone—that is important. But to tell someone “I’m going to God in prayer for you” is really one of the nicest gifts one can receive and the nicest gift that someone can give to another person. It’s a gift from which we can all benefit. It is a gift which we can all offer. Thank you again for your prayers.

Add to these voices of prayer from us, the voices of the saints and angels telling us “I’m going to God for you,” and it can take an experience that is miserable and turn it into something that can actually be euphoric.

This is why we are supposed to pray for one another, to go to Christ for one another. There are several hundred families who call this church their spiritual home. And each person, at some point or other, is going to have a challenge. Some people are very private about their challenges, and that is each person’s choice. Some people, like me, choose to ask others for prayer. So whether you are being asked or you are offering, this idea of praying for one another is something we will all have an opportunity to experience, probably many times in life. Are you willing to be a consistent voice in the arena? Again there are some who think that the priest is the only voice necessary, or that’s the priest’s job and not the job of everyone, or it’s the priest’s voice that is heard by God. Certainly the priest should be a voice of prayer and encouragement. But a priest is still one person and one voice. And how great is it when many voices join in prayer, going to God on behalf of someone else.

Action Item: If you are not in the habit of praying for others, start today. Make a list of the people you want to remember in prayer and start praying for them. As it is appropriate, tell the people on

the list who they are, and that they can count on your prayers. That will boost not only the morale and spirit of the people on your list, it will boost your relationship with them. It will make it harder for a relationship with them to go off track.

We are never alone—God is with us. God is always with us. He is in us and around us. In Psalm 23, another “go to” piece of scripture, we read “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow death, I will fear no evil, for YOU are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.*” God makes sure that we are never alone. Again, that doesn’t change the fact that others are not experiencing the sufferings and challenges that are uniquely ours. And it doesn’t mean there won’t be times when it feels like God is far away. However, if God is in each of us, we each have the opportunity to bring God’s love to others. When we pray for and encourage others, then we bring them closer to God and bring God closer to them.

Action Item: Make praying for others and encouraging others part of your daily life.

How you act at your job can make a big difference—I’m going to tell you about my two nurses, Christine (her real name) and Sabrina (not her real name). As I said before, I have a phobia of IV needles. My doctor ordered a sedative, which is not the usual protocol, just as my phobia is unusual. As anyone who has been in a hospital knows, the experience isn’t all that pleasant. As you give up your clothes for theirs, and put away all your belongings, it’s a little unnerving.

I was met upon my arrival by a nurse named Christine. She took my blood pressure and said “well, this is a tick above normal, but that’s normal, most people in here are nervous.” I said to her, “Christine, do you mind if we just talk for a minute, I’m super nervous and before we get too far here, perhaps we could just talk.” So before hopping on the bed, we sat in chairs like two friends and I told her about my IV fear. She was so calming that I almost let her start it without the prescribed sedative that was very late in arriving. That’s how calming and trustworthy this stranger was quickly becoming.

Enter nurse Sabrina, who maybe was having a bad day, I don’t know. She was totally the opposite. She was like “let’s hurry this along, just pop that thing in, What’s the big deal! Are we going to have to give you gas like a little kid?” Overriding my feelings of being talked down to was hearing the offer of “gas” to go to sleep and then get the IV. That solved my problem! Nurse Sabrina then continued to insist I was taking an unnecessary risk and made me feel even worse about my predicament.

Nurse Christine said “I don’t normally go up to the operating room but I’ll go up there with you and start the IV as soon as you slip out of consciousness.” As these two nurses were wheeling me up to the OR, I was more relaxed, knowing that my peculiar issue could be dealt with in a way that wasn’t going to stress me out. I tried to be a little jovial, in fact, especially with Sabrina. I said “I bet you ladies can’t guess what I do for a living.” Sabrina answered with a sarcastic “what do you work in a needle factory or something?” I told them that I was actually a priest who frequently is in the hospital visiting parishioners. But that I struggled when I had to be in the hospital. Christine said to me “You know, I’m a Christian. In fact, Christ is not only part of my life but the first six letters of my name.”

As they were about to send me off to unconsciousness, Christine said to me, “You won’t mind if I pray as you slip out,” and I said “of course not.” As I breathed in the gas and drifted off to sleep, the last word I heard was from Nurse Christine, “Jesus.” When I woke up, Nurse Christine was right there, calming, reassuring.

I'm not a nurse but I imagine nursing is a stressful job. Maybe Nurse Sabrina was having a bad day. Maybe she didn't get enough sleep, maybe her boss just yelled at her. I don't know. And my situation wasn't an emergency. If it was, I'd be smart enough, I hope, not to be debating or discussing the fine points of how to start an IV. But in the situation I was in, there was time, this wasn't an emergency, and one nurse's kindness made all the difference in keeping me calm and confident. When I get better, I plan to go to the hospital to thank Christine again, and also ask for her boss' name and the name of the head of the hospital so I can write to them about how great this nurse is.

My point in sharing this is that all of us will have the opportunity to be like Nurse Christine. We will all have the opportunity to offer compassion to someone who needs it. And we will all have the opportunity to be like me—We will all have the need of compassion and the hope that someone will offer it. Every person has the opportunity at many points to offer compassion. In just about every job, no matter how unimportant you might think it is, in the big picture of things, there is an opportunity at some point to offer compassion to someone—to a co-worker, a client, a patron, someone, maybe even someone who you don't like or someone who doesn't deserve it. Compassion can make all the difference to someone. It did for me last week. And it's important that we offer compassion, because ultimately it's the compassion of the Lord that will be our key to entering His Kingdom. If we expect His mercy on us, we should be offering it more freely to one another.

Action Item: Think of specific ways that you can show compassion to others in your work.

Be thankful for small things, like breath—After the surgery, my nose was packed and was unusable for breathing. I could only breathe through my mouth. Taking a drink of water was an ordeal as it not only hurt to swallow with my nose plugged but I had the sensation of drowning, not a good feeling. There were moments that were really painful. And in those moments, I wasn't thinking how much I need a vacation, or how much money I have saved for retirement, or what college Nicholas will go to, or why is the bush in front of my house dying. I kept thinking how wonderful it would be to just be able to take a breath, or take a drink of water without difficulty. Grandiose dreams gave way to the desire for the most basic thing, to breathe. The day that the packing came out, when I took my first full breath in my nose and felt the cool air fill my head, I felt almost euphoric. I was so thankful just to breathe. Many times we are so obsessed with grandiose things that we forget to be grateful for the simple things. We take for granted the ability to get up each day, or to take a breath of air. We take them for granted, until we no longer have them. I know that this recent experience will make me more grateful for simple things, like breathing.

Action item: Be grateful for small things. And thank God in your prayers for His many blessings, even the smallest of them, like breathing today.

I have a greater respect for those who are sick—No one likes to be sick. When we get sick, we think it's "the end of the world." Which, thankfully, most of the time, it isn't. This is the first time in a long time that sickness has caused me to miss two weeks of work. There were some definite moments of not only physical struggle but mental struggle as well. I had moments where I thought "How much more of this can I take?" And yet, I was told fairly accurately by the doctor what to expect, that it would be painful but that it would be temporary. As I lay in bed thinking one night, I began thinking about all the people who are "really sick," people whose pain lasts more than a week, people who are not sure about how it's going to turn out, or people who know that it isn't going to turn out well. What happened to me was a

"nothing" compared to what other people go through. We should continually pray for those who are having serious and long-term illnesses, offering prayer and encouragement, empathy and help. Lots of people came to my mind, during these hours when I had nothing to do but pray. I hope now that I can be active again, that I will continually take time to remember and to pray for them. I certainly intend to.

Action Item: In your daily prayers, remember by name those who are sick. Also, make a point, at least once a month, to call or write to someone who is sick, just to offer encouragement.

It's okay to rest—I like working. I like moving around every day. I don't like sitting idle, I get restless. But I learned that it is okay to rest. It is okay to not send out any emails for a week. The world survived just fine without me in it for a few days. None of us are irreplaceable. Another priest celebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. John on May 7. One priest replaced another, God was still glorified. Rest is actually a commandment in the Bible. God tells us we are supposed to rest. Which might mean spending time with family, or on a hobby, or maybe doing nothing at all. Our society glorifies multi-tasking and tends to look down on non-tasking. Non-tasking for a week was actually a nice relief. It helped to rest my mind to gear up for the work that is ahead. I encourage you to make rest part of your life on a weekly basis, to schedule if needed, some down time, to watch a movie, read a book, develop a hobby or just to sit and be still.

Action Item: Schedule some time off each week.

Submitting to the expertise of others is critical to success—No matter how much we know, no one knows everything. In fact none of us knows everything about even one thing. Yet, most of us struggle with the concept of obedience and submission to the expertise of someone else. Many times, we tell professional people what we think rather than listening to their professional advice. God has blessed certain people with certain special talents, who have developed their knowledge and become experts in their field. My surgeon has fairly exhaustive knowledge about ears, noses, and throats. I do not. So, when I went for surgery, I "submitted" to his knowledge and his directives on how to be most successful at what we were trying to accomplish. I have listened and "obeyed" what he has said. Thus, I have had success thus far. Do I like doing everything he's asked me to do? NO. Have I thought about "cheating" and not doing what I'm supposed to do? YES. Am I going to have a successful outcome if I cheat and do it my own way? NO. So, I'm sticking to his way, even the difficult parts. This is another critical thing for our way of thinking. Christ said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. He has shown us the way. The church reinforces the way to Christ. And yet how many of us go through life taking our own way, rather than taking His? How many of us are selective in which teachings of the church we honor? How many times do we ask for spiritual advice that we later don't follow? How many of us still resist the idea of working with a priest to improve our spiritual health? Submitting to a doctor is the only way to recover from this surgery and find my way back to restored health. Submitting to Christ is the only way to find our way to paradise.

Action Item: Give some thought to the concept of submitting to Christ's will and how does that look in your life. Seek out a priest at least once a year for confession and spiritual direction.

What good is anything without health? No, you can't get far in life without health. Watching what we eat, how much we drink (and that's not just alcohol, but how much water we intake), exercising, resting, and managing stress in an appropriate way. These are things that are important and necessary to have a long and healthy and productive life. Going in the hospital is no fun at all.

I hope I won't be back in a hospital for a long time to come. There are certain things in life we have no control over. Having the particular sinus issues I have is something I've dealt with from birth—they just finally found a way to fix it. But most dimensions of good health are things we absolutely have control over. Heart disease and diabetes, and many forms of cancer are affected by how we choose to live. Yes, some instances are congenital, but most are environmental. Faith (spiritual health) is the highest priority. Physical health comes next.

Action Item: Think of ways to improve your physical health—better diet, cut down on certain bad foods, exercise at least a couple of times a week.

I missed one Sunday of church, which is rare. Yes, I will miss a Sunday once a year or so when I'm on vacation, and I will be away from St. John on a few Sundays but I will go to church at camp, or with family in California. This was the first time I've missed a Sunday in Tampa while physically being in Tampa. I decided to watch the live stream of the service. After all, what else was I going to do on a Sunday morning? I've dedicated just about every Sunday morning of my life to worshipping and I'm not about to stop now. And I learned a few things from that experience as well:

Livestream is a good substitute if you can't go to church.

On any given Sunday, there are some people who can't come to church for legitimate reasons—home with sick child, home sick, traveling and no church near, inclement weather, etc. On these occasions, looking in on our live stream is a way to stay involved in the liturgical life of the church. About thirty people were watching the live stream the Sunday I was home watching. The sound quality is pretty good and the picture is clear. And for those who wish to watch a service after it has happened, such as looking back at Holy Week, our services are archived on our website as well.

Action Item: Check out our livestream, just so you can see what it is, and if you ever miss a service please join us via the livestream.

If you aren't participating in the service, it really doesn't grab your attention. Watching the Divine Liturgy from the comfort of my couch was just that, watching it. I stood up when the Gospel was read, but otherwise, I was reclining. I didn't sing, or do my cross much, I didn't bow my head, or receive Holy Communion. I didn't really do anything. I just watched. I enjoyed the choir for sure. But I found my mind drifting and the service going by slower than it does on a normal Sunday even though in reality it was going faster. It made me glad that I participate in worship each Sunday by being the celebrant. And I encourage you to "participate" in the service by singing, bowing, reciting the Creed, all the things we do in worship. If you are just watching, this service doesn't really grab your attention, which is probably a reason why many people don't come, or come late, or skip. You don't skip or come late to things you are a participant in.

Action Item: Participate in the Divine Liturgy each time you attend. Come on time, sing with the choir, become engaged in the words of the service.

The church is the people. At home on this one Sunday, I heard the Divine Liturgy that I love so much. I heard the choir sing the beautiful hymns I enjoy so much. And yet, the most important ingredient of worship was missing. No, it wasn't because my house isn't covered in icons. The artwork wasn't missing. It's because I was sitting alone and watching the service. The church, the Body of Christ, is the people. Without people, our church is just a museum. Without people, the church has no life. And separated from the people on one Sunday, I saw the church but I was-

n't part of it. Part of the reason we worship is to be with people, who are striving for Christ. On the day my faith is weak, you pick me up. And on the day that yours is, I hopefully pick you up. When we "stand and attend," we stand as one body. When we lift up our hearts, we lift them up as one. When we commune together, diverse people from diverse families with diverse life experiences become as one. The church is the people.

Action Item: Make worship a mainstay on your weekly calendar. Get a church "account-a-buddy," someone who will encourage you to go when you don't want to, and someone you can encourage to go. Keep each other accountable, encourage each other to attend every week.

Going to church is a blessing. I didn't get that blessing one Sunday and it made me sad to not go. Worship is how I choose to start every week of my life. I may not always want to go, I may not always be focused when I go, but worship is how I enjoy starting my week every week. As the saying goes, "you don't know what you've got til it's gone," well I really missed worshipping when I was not allowed to worship. Just like how I appreciate breathing now more, having had the experience of not being able to breath right, I hope I will appreciate worship even more, having had the experience of not being able to worship. I center my week around worship and Holy Communion and this week, I didn't get to do either. I can't wait to go to church this Sunday so that I can do both!

Action Item: Plan to go to church this Sunday!

I love being part of this church community—seeing it through the live stream was nice, but sad. I wanted to be there with everyone. As I watched the live stream, I could see familiar faces of friends and parishioners going up for Holy Communion, or receiving antithoron, singing in the choir, and serving in the altar. And it made me realize just how much I enjoy serving this community of St. John the Baptist. I know that I'll miss a few weeks this summer for summer camp and for vacation, but outside of that, I really enjoy being here. I really enjoy offering the Divine Liturgy each Sunday. And I really enjoy you, the people for whom and with whom the Divine Liturgy is being offered. And I hope and pray that not only will God bless me to serve here for a long time to come, but that He will bless each of you with long life and good health so that we can share Him, in worship, and in fellowship, for many years to come.

Action Item: Please say a prayer for our community, and everyone in it, that we may continue to worship and grow together, in health and in joy, in the years to come.

Thank you again for your prayers and encouragement. Please continue offering both, as I need both not only in times of sickness, but at all times. God bless you!

With love in Christ,
+Fr. Stavros

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 850 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more that 2 years! Over half of our parish receives it daily, as well as many people outside of our parish. Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask to add you.

Liturgical Schedule for June & July



Saturday, June 3

Saturday of the Souls

Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Memorial Service at the Conclusion of the Divine Liturgy

We Live-Stream every service!
www.greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com

Sunday, June 4

Holy Pentecost

Orthros 8:15 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:30 a.m. Kneeling Vespers 11:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew/St. Mark

Ushers: Brett Mourer, John Alexander, Amin Hanhan

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Donna Trakas, Elaine Halkias; Ambassador: Donna Hambos;

Caller: Maria Karounas; Get Acquainted: Mike Xenick, Maria Xenick

Coffee Hour: Food Pantry/Community Outreach

Sunday, June 11

All Saints

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke/St. John

Ushers: David Voykin, Ed Gerecke, Pete Trakas

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Skip Higdon; Ambassador: Debbie Kavouklis; Caller: Vickie Peckham

Coffee Hour: TBD

Sunday, June 18

2nd Sunday of Matthew - Father's Day

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Doxology 9:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.

Choir is going to sing the Liturgy of Peace arrangement of the Divine Liturgy

Altar Boys: Any of the GOYAns may serve

Ushers: Tammy Christou, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Julie Palios, Jenny Paloumpis; Ambassador: Sandra Pappas; Caller: Megan Rindone

Coffee Hour: Junior Olympics

Friday, June 23

Feast of Sts. Peter & Paul - Evening Liturgy

Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, June 25

3rd Sunday of Matthew

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew/St. Mark

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, John Tsibris, Ron Myer

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Bessie Palios, Michael Palios; Ambassador: Megan Rindone; Caller: Katherine Sakkis

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Wednesday, June 28

Synaxis of the Holy Apostles - Evening Liturgy

Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 2

4th Sunday of Matthew - Fr. George Ioannou, Celebrant

Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke/St. John

Ushers: John Alexander, John Christ, George Trimikliniotis

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Genie Carter, Cindy Xenick; Caller: Helen Cauthorn

Coffee Hour: No Coffee Hour

Sunday, July 9 **5th Sunday of Matthew - Fr. George Ioannou, Celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew/St. Mark

Ushers: Nick Kavouklis, Marcus Calpakis, Peter Theophanous

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Kalliope Chagaris, Carole Fotopoulos; Caller: Elaine Halkias

Coffee Hour: The AHEPA Family

Sunday, July 16 **Sunday of the Holy Fathers - Fr. Stavros, Celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke/St. John

Ushers: Florin Patrasciou, Jim Armstrong, Tammy Christou

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Donna Hambos, Skip Higdon; Caller: Maria Karounas

Coffee Hour: The Paras Family

Sunday, July 23 **7th Sunday of Matthew - Fr. George Ioannou, Celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Matthew/St. Mark

Ushers: Ron Myer, George Mitseas, Chris Kavouklis

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Maria Koutroumanis, Edie Kavouklis; Caller: Julie Palios

Coffee Hour: Young at Heart

Sunday, July 30 **8th Sunday of Matthew - Fr. George Ioannou, Celebrant**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Altar Boys: Captains and St. Luke/St. John

Ushers: Ed Gerecke, Tammy Christou, Pete Trakis

Welcome Ministry: Greeters: Vickie Peckham; Caller: Sandra Pappas

Coffee Hour: Philoptochos

Thank you to Everyone!

To all the parishioners of St. John the Baptist

On behalf of the Decorating Committee and the Altar Angels, we would like to personally thank all the ladies and everyone who assisted with decorating the Icons and Ephitaphio and cleaning the church throughout the entire Lenten Season and Pascha. It was a beautiful and wonderful Pascha Celebration and we are grateful for all your continued support. May God Bless you all.

Interested in serving as an altar boy? Any of our boys who will enter 4th grade in the fall, or who are older and are not serving presently, are welcome to serve in the altar beginning in August. If you are interested in having your son added to an altar team, please contact Fr. Stavros by June 30. New teams will take effect on Sunday, August 13.

**IMPORTANT
NOTICE**

Father has scheduled two teams for each Sunday, knowing that there will be people absent each Sunday because of vacation. Please do not serve unless it is your turn, even if you know someone is not serving.

Liturgical Notes for June & July

Saturday, June 3 - Saturday of the Souls

There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 3. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please bring Kolyva (boiled wheat) along with a list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided).

Sunday, June 4 - Pentecost

This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!!. A special Vespers Service will be held after Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (June 4), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feastday. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.”

There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. However, there is a fast for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which lasts from the Monday after all Saints Day (June 12 this year) - June 28. So there is a 16-day fast before the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. When Pascha falls earlier, this fast period is longer.

Sunday, June 11 - Sunday of All Saints

The period of the Pentecostarion is now complete with the commemoration of “All Saints.”

Choir to sing “Liturgy of Peace” on Sunday, June 18-

The choir will sing the liturgical arrangement “Liturgy of Peace” as the responses on Sunday, June 18. Since this arrangement of the Divine Liturgy is a little longer than our usual liturgy responses, we will begin 9:45 a.m. The Doxology will begin at 9:30 a.m.

Friday, June 23 - Nativity of St. John the Baptist (evening Liturgy)

This marks the feastday of the Nativity (birth) of St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner of the Lord and patron saint of our parish. The feastday is actually June 24, but we will celebrate Liturgy on Friday, June 23 at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros at 5:00 p.m.)

Wednesday, June 28 - Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (evening Liturgy)

The Paramounts of the Apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul, have their feastday together on June 29. Sts. Peter and Paul are not only two of our greatest saints but they are two of the greatest sinners. St. Peter denied the Lord three times and St. Paul was persecuting Christians in the early church. They show us that through repentance, anyone can become a saint. We will commemorate this feastday with an evening Liturgy on Wednesday, June 28 at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros at 5:00 p.m.)

Don't Take a Vacation from God this summer

Services will be held each Sunday and on many weekdays throughout June and July. On a few Sundays, we will have visiting priests. So, please keep worship as part of your weekly schedule. If you are going to be out of town, we encourage you to visit an Orthodox parish in whatever town you are visiting.

St. John the Baptist to Participate in the Metropolis of Atlanta's St. Stephen's Summer Camp

A large contingent of campers and counselors will be taking part in St. Stephen's Summer Camp this summer. Fr. Stavros will be serving as the director for sessions 2 and 3. Several other counselors will be going from our parish, and a large contingent of GOYAns will be attending as well. One Sunday after the campers return, they will give presentations on their experience in church.

Fr. Stavros to be out of town for parts of June and July

Fr. Stavros will be taking vacation time as follows this summer: June 7-10; (Father will celebrate Liturgy on June 11); July 17-August 2. Fr. Stavros will also be at the Metropolis of Atlanta's St. Stephen's Summer Camp from June 29 - July 15. Fr. George Ioannou will celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, July 2, 9, 23 and 30. Father Stavros will celebrate all other Sundays of June and July.

**If you have a pastoral emergency while Father is out of town, please contact the church office.
Father will not be answering his cell phone or email while on vacation or at summer camp.**

Sermons on YouTube Channel Each Sunday

Father's sermons each Sunday are available on our YouTube channel. Just go to YouTube and type in “St John GOC Tampa” and you'll find them. If you miss a sermon or wish to hear a sermon again, you'll find it there!



The Importance of a Life Verse from the B.I.B.L.E.

By Charlie Hambos

We, at St. John the Baptist, have been talking a lot about the Bible. It is indeed the Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth (B.I.B.L.E.) Pretty catchy, right? Sounds like something we should pay attention to. Actually the word, Bible, comes from Greek, of course. The singular is *biblio*, meaning “book” and the plural is *biblia*, meaning “books.” The word, Bible, comes from *biblio* because it is THE BOOK. The one and only book we every need. The Bible, in fact, holds the Guinness World Record, for the best-selling book of all time with over 5 billion copies sold and distributed. Not only that, according to Wycliffe, one of the world’s leading Bible translating organizations, the complete Bible, both Old and New Testaments has been translated into 636 languages. The New Testament has been translated into 1,442 languages. Just portions of the Bible have been translated into 1,145 languages. So that means, 3,223 languages in our very small world have some form of the scripture in it.

The word Bible also comes from *biblia* because the book itself is a combination of many books, which took 1,100 years to write down, and almost another 1,000 to be listed out in the books, which make up the Canon of the Scripture we have today. The Bible is the “Word of God.” Jesus is also the “Word of God” made flesh. In many Protestant circles, the preferred translation is the King James Version, which is the first full translation of the Bible into English. In my personal opinion, the Protestants also believe that God wrote the KJV and it came from heaven to earth in 1620 A.D. and anything that happened before that was simply null and void. Not true, it was indeed the Church that helped put what we now know as the Bible together. According to Fr. Thomas Hopko, “It [The Bible] was produced in the Church, by and for the Church, under divine inspiration as an essential part of the total reality of God’s covenant relationship with His People.” Also our beliefs about the scriptures come from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 which says, “*All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*” So, again, a pretty big deal.

The Orthodox Christians, the Catholics and the Protestants have different books in their Canon of the Scripture. The Orthodox have 39 (+10), so 49, in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The Protestant have 39 and 27 and the Roman Catholic have 46 and 27 respectively. Ultimately, the Canon of the Scripture in the Orthodox Church isn't necessarily set but what we have today was ratified through the Ecumenical Councils of the early church.

Now, in the Orthodox Church we have what we call Tradition with a capital T and tradition with a lowercase t. Tradition with a capital T consists of all the beliefs and practices of the church handed down from the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils consisting of the Sacramental Life of the church, icons, the Divine Liturgy, monasticism and much much more. The traditions of the church with a lowercase t are some local customs within jurisdictions of ethnic Orthodoxy and “yiayiaologies.” Basically, we have Scripture and Tradition and these are the “building blocks” of the Orthodox Christian faith. Protestant churches on the other hand only use scripture, also known as *sola scriptura*.

Everything they believe is based on scripture only. So how do we handle these two identities at the same time. Borrowing an analogy from the Rev. Dr. Eugen Pentiu, Professor of the Old Testament and Semitic languages at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, we handle them as if life was an exam. The Tradition is like the Cliff Notes of the Bible. The Bible is the textbook. We can study the Cliff Notes and get away without reading the textbook and pass the exam but in order to get the full grasp of our life, we need to actually read the textbook. As mentioned earlier, the B.I.B.L.E. is the Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. If you don’t have one, again borrowing from Fr. Eugen Pentiu, speaking to a classroom of mostly male students, “Take your wife to a hotel and steal one.” Now, we can take a moment and thank Gideon International for supplying almost every hotel room with a Bible. So go out there and get one. Open it and read it.

Now for Part 2, choosing a life verse. Why choose a life verse? I don’t really know. It’s something I grew up learning to do at a Non-denominational Bible-believing Christian School. It’s definitely something not seen in most Orthodox Christian circles. There are literally thousands upon thousands of verses. Our life circumstances may have the need for many. And surely there is a verse of scripture for every season of life. There is something, however, about having one in particular that serves as a foundation for our lives. Mine, for example is Isaiah 40:30,31 which says, “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” This is from the KJV version because when I chose it this was my translation of choice.

Let’s dig into it a little bit. The Prophet Isaiah is a treasure chest of amazing things. He was an incredible prophet responsible for some of the most famous prophecies of the coming Messiah. From a Christian perspective, it reads almost like the 5th Gospel, however it was written way before the coming of Christ. It is indeed complicated because it is a prophecy and it is in the Old Testament. Chapter 40 where the verses comes from is found in the second part of Isaiah which consists of chapters 40-55 and is often entitled, “The Book of the Consolation of Israel” because the previous chapters prophesied the frightening things that would happen to the Israelites if they didn’t stop and listen to God. The particular verses of my life verse are found in a section of the chapter, which describes the majesty of God and how it compares to the weakness of human nature. In fact the three verses before 30 and 31 say this, “*Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*” (Isaiah 40:27-29) By the way, it is always helpful to look a few verses ahead and a few verses after of particular scriptures to help give us a clearer understanding of the context. Basically, at this point the chosen people of God, were exiles in Babylon and questioned whether or not God had forgotten them in their exile because where

they were was supposedly “hidden” from Him. This is a normal human response, as we also, sometimes think that God has left us in the midst of our sufferings. However, a quick reminder, that God is the everlasting God, the Lord and the Creator of the ends of the earth, quickly dispels any notion that God has forgotten them. He doesn’t faint and does not grow weary. He is the Creator and the Lord of all.

Nothing happens without Him knowing. We can not understand His ways for they are beyond our understanding. He is the source of power and strength to those who are faint and weary. So, what must we do in order to get power and strength if we are faint and weary? We have to wait. Booooooooooooo! I don’t want to wait. I want it now. Too bad, the Prophet Isaiah says, even the youth grow tired and weary. The youth aren’t supposed to grow tired and weary, they are young, but even the young tumble and fall. However, in their despair and in their fumbling around, in their situation, whether it be in the Babylonian exile or the stupidity of life for various reasons, they do get weary and lose strength and stumble and fall. But those who “wait” like it says in the KJV or in the New Jerusalem Bible, but those that “hope” in the Lord. If you don’t know Hebrew or Greek, it is always helpful to use multiple translations to glean a different meaning and understanding. “Wait” and “Hope” are equally moving. Hope is all we got. If we ain’t got hope we ain’t got nothin. For the Chosen People, they have Hope in the Messiah but they had to wait for Him. For us, we have Hope in the Resurrection of Christ. It should and does effect everything we do. If we wait and if we hope, we will not grow wings like a penguin but will grow wings like and eagle,

one of the most powerful and prolific birds known to mankind. We will run and not grow weary and we will walk and not get tired. I can’t tell you how many times this verse has saved my life. This verse is in the process of saving my life. Every once in a while, I forget about it and then I remember it and I am comforted.

How do you choose a life verse? Just do it. Start digging. Use Biblegateway.com and just type in a word or words that are important to you and see what comes up. Then investigate it. Look a few verses ahead and a few verses after. Figure out what the purpose of the chapter is or the purpose of the book. Live your life according to it. We don’t have to have just one. The more the better but have at least one really great one. Let me know if you need help finding one.



Do you Like our Facebook page?
 Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist. You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA
 William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
 Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
 Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
 Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
 Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
 Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
 Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
 Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
 Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH

Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, FL
 Bessie Bliziotes - Palm Cost, FL
 Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
 Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
 William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
 Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
 Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
 Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
 Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA

Friends of St. John the Baptist - Some of you who receive *The Messenger* do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish by being a “Friend of St. John the Baptist.” Your contribution as a “Friend” will help offset the cost of mailing *The Messenger*, among other things. Being a “friend” does not make one a steward of St. John the Baptist or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish.

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

I wish to become a Friend of St. John the Baptist. I am enclosing a contribution in the amount of:

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church 2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.

Community News

Parish Registry

Baptism - Emmerson Alexandria Hampton, daughter of Wade Hampton and Sasha Artizbushev, was baptized on Sunday, April 30. Godparent was Nicole Patouhas. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism - Zachary Meynard Balntas, son of Emmanuel and Meion Balntas, was baptized on Sunday, May 7. Godparents were Bill Balntas and Marian Santos. Na Sas Zisi!

Trisagion - John Stratis passed away April 14. Trisagion Service was held on April 25. May his memory be eternal!

Funeral - Peter Lambrou passed away on April 19. Funeral services were held on April 26. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to John Mitchell and family on the passing away of John's mother, Lucile, on April 24. Funeral services were held at Holy Trinity in Clearwater on April 26-27.

Wedding - Michael Larino and Amanda Makrides were married on Saturday, May 13. Electra Makrides was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

Get Acquainted Sunday, June 4 - No Coffee Hour Sunday, July 2



In an effort to get to know one another better, we are going to continue our "Get Acquainted Sundays" one Sunday of each month. We will have nametags and markers in the entry way of the Kourmolis Center and will ask that each person put one on during coffee hour and introduce yourself to at least one person that you do not know. This will serve to help us increase our fellowship and sense of community.



Community Outreach - Saturday, June 17 and July 15

St. John the Baptist's Community Outreach will be serving breakfast to the Homeless at the First Presbyterian Church in Downtown Tampa from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The church is located at 412 Zack Street. The entrance is on Polk Street. Grab a cup of coffee and come help us!

We love to see new and old faces!



GOYA

The GOYA meeting will be on Sunday, June 4, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. We will be preparing for the Junior Olympics. Dinner, as always, will be provided. We invite all students who are finishing 6th grade, entering 7th grade this fall, to join GOYA and to join us for both the June 4 meeting and participate in the Junior Olympics.

The GOYA Junior Olympics are Friday, June 16 - Sunday, June 18. Make sure you sign up with Maria Koutroumanis 813-245-3854 or Kara Kataras 863-669-6739 if you are going to attend by June 5.

Junior Olympics - Volunteers Needed!



St. John the Baptist will be hosting our annual Sunshine State Junior Olympics on June 16-18. This event brings GOYAns (teenagers) from all over Florida to our parish for a weekend of athletics and spirituality. In order for the event to be a success, we need many other volunteers to assist him in many capacities, including working at various athletic venues, cooking and serving at the church, and some administrative jobs, such as entering data as to who won various contests while the event is going on. This event is a chance to not only showcase our community and to do something meaningful for our young people, it is also a chance for us to work together on something and get to know one another better. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Dean Koutroumanis (dkoutrou@verizon.net) or Maria Koutroumanis (mrk1997@verizon.net) 813-245-3854.

Young Adults Dinner

Our young adult ministry group has a monthly dinner/discussion night at the church. We have planned to meet Sunday, June 11, from 5:00 - 7:30 p.m. Please bring \$10 to cover the cost of dinner.

Successful Mother's Retreat

On Saturday, May 13, a Mother's Retreat was held at our parish. Led by Anastasia Stonestreet and Mary Ann Konstas, a dozen moms came together for a morning of fellowship, learning and worship. We will be working to build on this in the near future.

Save the Date - Dad's Retreat on August 26

With the success of the recent Mother's Retreat, we are going to have a Dad's Retreat on Saturday, August 26, from 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Save the date, more information to follow.

Dear Parishioners,

We are all familiar with the Diakonia Retreat Center (DRC) in Salem, South Carolina. Many of us have gone there for summer camp or a Philoptochos Retreat or other events. His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios has led the effort to build up this Retreat Center so that it will be something that will be a place of Spiritual renewal for all the faithful of our Metropolis for generations to come.

At present, a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary is being built on the DRC grounds. In an effort to both finish the project and involve all the faithful in it, His Eminence has created a "Roof Tile Campaign." The goal is two-fold. First, to collect the names of all the faithful (both living and deceased) so that they may be placed in the Altar Table of the Chapel when it is consecrated and also to be remembered in prayer throughout the years in the many divine services that will be held there. Second, each family is asked to offer \$30 towards the final steps in the construction process, including the building of the roof.

You recently received a phone call from His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios and a member of our community regarding a concluding campaign for the completion of the Panagia Chapel. I wanted to write to encourage you all to submit the names of your loved ones, living and departed for inclusion in the Altar Table of the Panagia Chapel.

In the event that any of you feel that you cannot contribute the \$30 sponsorship, please let me know so that we can make proper arrangements for your names to still be included, as His Eminence has offered to sponsor any families who cannot afford this contribution.

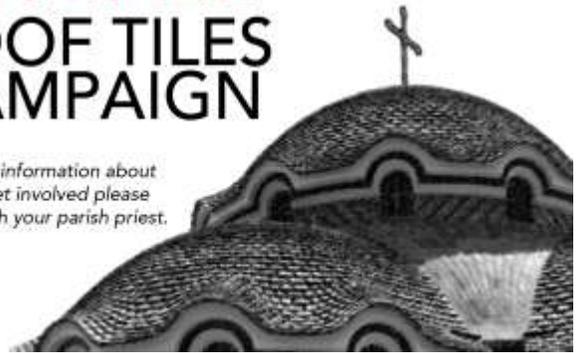
Please make checks payable to our parish and write "Roof Tiles" in the memo. The due date for this is Sunday, June 11. We will have a table in the hall each Sunday in order to collect forms and contributions. We will be submitting one check in mid-June to the Metropolis.

I hope and pray that I can count on all the members of our parish community to participate. His Eminence has given us several blessings: not only to become active participants in this Chapel, but also the opportunity to ensure that our loved ones—whether they are still with us, or if they have passed on to the Lord will be remembered forever by the future generations who visit the Diakonia Retreat Center for both fellowship and worship. Thank you for your consideration and support of this worthy project.

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis

building
THE DIAKONIA RETREAT CENTER
**PANAGIA
CHAPEL**
**ROOF TILES
CAMPAIGN**

For more information about
how to get involved please
speak with your parish priest.

A decorative background for the luncheon announcement. It features a central white oval with a blue border, surrounded by a vibrant, colorful pattern of cherubs (putti) and floral motifs in shades of blue, green, and gold. The overall style is reminiscent of a stained-glass window or a traditional tapestry.

Philoptochos
End of the Year Luncheon
Sunday, June 25 at 1:00 p.m.
The Columbia Restaurant
Ybor City
\$28 per person
RSPV by Thursday, June 22
to Lisa Alsina at 813-728-1094.

Class of 2017



Magdalene Kavouklis (top left) graduated Cum Laude from Florida State University. She received a dual degree in Sociology and Political Science.

Gregory James Koutroumanis (top right) graduated from Jesuit High School and will be attending Flor-



Alexandra Gerecke graduated Magna Cum Laude from The University of Tampa with a degree in Graphic Design.



Christina Gerecke graduated Magna Cum Laude from Stetson University with a degree in Business Systems and Analytics.



Elizabeth Kavouklis (left) graduated with Honors from Plant High School. She is deciding between The University of Tampa and University of South Florida - St. Petersburg.



Nicholas Patides (right) graduated from University of South Florida - St. Petersburg in December 2016 with a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Nicholas is currently working in Orlando.



Andreas Paloumpis (left) graduated from Ripon College in Wisconsin with a degree in Politics, Government and History.





Alyssa Milonas (left) graduated with Honors from University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from the Warrington College of Business. She will continue her education at UF in the Master of Health Administration Program. Go Gators!

Larissa Krinos (below right) graduated from the International Baccalaureate program at Robinson High School. She will be attending the University of Florida where she will major in Civil Engineering and will be a member of the Honors Program.



Alex Peckham (left) graduated from the University of Florida with a Law Degree.



Chace Sibley (below) graduated from Robinson's International Baccalaureate (IB) program and headed to University of Florida to study pre-med with an interest in forensic pathology.



George Hambos (above left) graduated from Grace Christian School as the Valedictorian of his class. He will be attending Florida Southern College to major in Music Business.

Congratulations

Graduates!



~Sunday School News~

Our last day of Sunday School was on Sunday, May 21 and we would like to thank everyone for a successful Sunday School Year and Graduation Ceremony. Debbie and Tom Nicklow hosted our end of the year party and everyone had such a fabulous time. We can't thank them enough for opening up their home to us.

Congratulations to our all of our students and especially our High School Graduates for a amazing Sunday School year. At the end of the year ceremony each student was given a gift and a certificate from the Sunday School and our graduates received a Holy Week Book.

The following students had **PERFECT ATTENDANCE** for the **ENTIRE YEAR** of Sunday School and were acknowledged at our Graduation Ceremony.

+++Congratulations to Santino Bavaro, Gianni Bavaro, Niko Bavaro, Lola Bavaro, Antonio Bavaro, Emily Nicklow, Maria Nicklow, Gennaro Scarfogliero, Ariana Choundas-Thatcher, Andrew Choundas-Thatcher, Yanni Trimikliniotis, George Xenick, Elizabeth Xenick, and Artemis Xenick.

FATHER STAVROS and CHARLIE HAMBOS are such an inspiration to all of us and we appreciate everything that they do for the Sunday School. We are very thankful for their leadership, guidance, and teachings throughout this school year. We would like to thank all of our parents for bringing their children to Sunday School and to their children who are always eager to learn more about their faith.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the **SUNDAY SCHOOL STAFF** for making this Sunday School year a success.

THEY ARE:

Director of Sunday School: **Vickie Peckham**

Director of Music/Special Programs: **Maria Xenick**

Music Assistant: **Pam Irwin**

Pre-K (3 and 4 years old): **Alexis Scarfogliero** – Teacher and **Denise Panos** - Assistant

Kindergarten: - Debbie Nicklow - Teacher and **Donna Trakas** - Assistant

Grade 1: **Melissa Krinos** - Teacher and **Andrea Jernigan** - Assistant

Grade 2: **Oliviana Catrone** - Teacher and **Georgia Kane** - Assistant

Grade 3: **Stamie Garcia** and **Amy Kafantaris** - Co-Teachers

Grade 4: **Debbie Ferekides**

Grade 5: **Vickie Peckham**

Middle School: **Marina Choundas** and **Heidi Borgeas** - Co-Teachers

High School: **Peggy Bradshaw** and **Isidoros Passalaris** – Co-Teachers

We are blessed to have most of our teachers returning next year, although Stamie Garcia and Andrea Jernigan will not be returning. We can't thank them enough for all that they have done for our Sunday School Program this past year.

Our last Youth Sunday of the year took place on Sunday, May 14. Our children have joined the choir in singing our liturgical hymns throughout the year, on a monthly basis, under the leadership of Maria Xenick. Melissa Krinos also conducted lessons on the meaning and making of Prospora with each classroom this year. We would like to thank both of them their valuable service and all the high school students who read the Epistle throughout the year. Christos Nenos read the Epistle on Sunday, May 14. These Youth Sundays have been a blessing and a wonderful opportunity for our children.

We would like to wish everyone a joyful summer vacation and we hope to see everyone in church during these next few months. We will start back in August following the public school calendar and we are already planning for next year. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call 813-758-3102.

Dear families,

This fall we will begin our second round of youth protection background checks. Everyone who went through the Youth Protection Program in 2014 and 2015 is up for renewal this September 2017. Currently, the Youth Protection Certification process only applies to individuals who are directly involved with our children, or who lead organizations that include individuals under the age of 18-years-old. Parish Council members, ministry leaders who handle money, and SJGOC staff members are also required to undergo background checks. If you were certified in 2016 or 2017, you are **not** up for renewal.

The YPP process includes a Level 3 - 5 background check, an application, a statement of faith, and review of a training video. Currently, we are aligning our policies and procedures with the requirements of the Metropolis of Atlanta. That means, there may be changes to the process or system as summer progresses. Please check our church bulletin regularly for updates. We will post any new information as well as dates for renewals as we go through our planning process.

Thank you again for understanding and for supporting our commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for the children who attend St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church.

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis & Catherine S. Mitseas

Sacrament Presentation

For the first time in many years the Sunday School presented a Sacrament Presentation and what a wonderful job they did! This presentation was written, directed, and narrated by our Middle School students and performed by our students in Kindergarten through 5th Grade: Kindergarten (Holy Communion), 1st Grade (Ordination), 2nd Grade (Baptism, Christmation), 3rd Grade (Confession), 4th Grade (Holy Unction), and 5th Grade (Marriage). A special thank you to our middle school teachers, Heidi Borgeas and Marina Choundas, to all the Middle School students, and to our actors in Kindergarten through 5th Grade, for making this presentation possible.

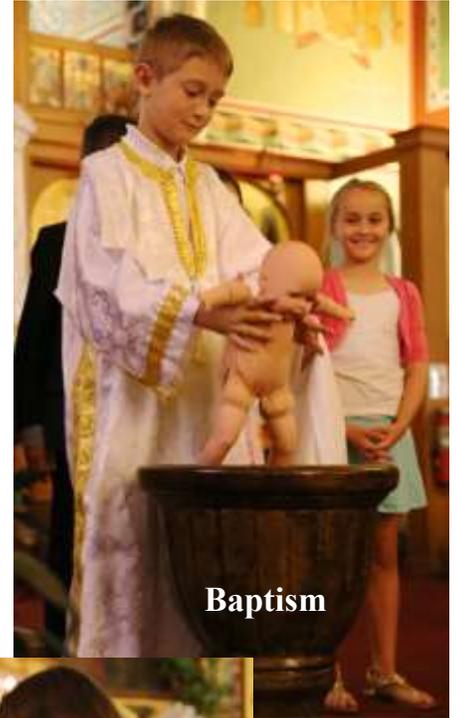
Photos by Karina Findlay



Marriage



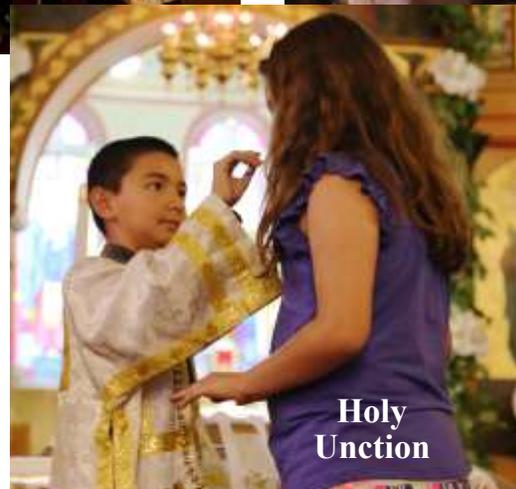
Ordination



Baptism



Holy Communion



Holy Unction



Confession

Pictures
Go to Flickr.com and search "St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church" or go to www.flickr.com/photos/stjohngoctampa



Christmation

~ Stewardship Update ~

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God' - Hebrews 13:16

We thank the loyal Stewards of St. John the Baptist. Your pledge is a sign of your growing commitment to Christ to share fully your gifts. And this comes with the understanding that your treasure is needed to sustain and grow our beloved church.

As we go about our lives, may we always remember why we give to our church and others. First, to show our thankfulness to God knowing everything we have is a gift from Him....our family, our friends, our abilities, our material wealth, our salvation – All of it is from God. We can't out give God. You will never give enough so that God owes you something. That is what grace is all about. Grace is the center of life and giving. We don't give so that God will love us. We give because God loves us. Our giving is a response to the fact that God has given us everything. Our giving is a way of saying 'Thank-you' to the one who has given himself to us.

Secondly, giving helps us not only grow in our faith but it feels really good! In the Old Testament there was an offering called the first fruits. When the harvest of the new year started people were called to take the first part of their crop, the first fruits, and offer it to God. To give the first fruits of your crops was an act of faith, faith that God would provide. The same principle can be found in the idea of giving God our best, not our leftovers. It takes incredible faith to give generously. But when we give generously and sacrificially, we will grow in our faith, as we learn to trust in God.

May we all continue to live a life filled with Gods Grace and give back, today and everyday, with Thankfulness and Faith!

Little of This & That...

A list of Pledged Stewards was printed in the May Messenger. We will print a list again in October and as a reminder you must be a 'Member in Good Standing' to participate and vote at Parish Assembly meetings or run for Parish Council in the fall.

We are grateful to the Stewards of St. John The Baptist and encourage over 87 Families that pledged last year but not this year to become Stewards once again. Members of our welcome committee recently reached out to many of these families encouraging their stewardship. We thank our callers: Genie Carter, Ewana Forde, Victoria Melton, Vickie Peckham, Christine Worley, Maria Xenick & Maria Zabetakis. We also encourage you to encourage one another to become a Steward of St. John. The work of Christ truly depends on all of us and your pledge is a sign of a growing commitment to Christ.

Mid-year Stewardship Statements will be mailed near the end of June providing a recap of your individual/family pledge and dollars received year to date.

Our Online Pledge Forms are easy to complete. Hard Copy forms are also available in the Church Narthex or Bookstore. Stewardship Donations and General Donations may also be made online via PayPal as a one time or recurring commitment or setup with auto deductions from your bank account.

Please let us hear from you today if you haven't submitted your pledge form.

Visit <http://greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com/2017-stewardship/> to complete your complete your Stewardship Pledge Form and make your gift today.

For any questions, please speak directly with Fr. Stavros, Sandra Pappas or Pete Trakas-Stewardship Co-Chairs.
We are here for YOU!

~ A Little Comparison ~	2017*	2016*
Pledged Year to Date	\$386,186	\$418,806
Received Year to Date	\$203,576	\$128,703
Average Pledge	\$1,374	\$1,357
Median Pledge	\$750	\$700
# of Individual/Families Pledged	281	309

*YTD as of 5/8/17 & 5/12/16

Please consider including St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church in your estate plans.

Whether you would like to put your donation to work today or benefit our church after your lifetime, you can find a charitable plan that lets you provide for your family and at the same time supports St. John the Baptist. After you've considered how much you'd like to leave each of your heirs, would you consider leaving what might be left over in your estate to St. John the Baptist? Take care of yourself and your family, plan for your future, do everything you want to do in your lifetime – and then consider leaving what is left (or the residue) to our church. Whatever you do, please be sure to consult your financial and legal advisors and let your family members know of your intentions.

Become a founding member of the St. John Legacy Society. For more information about this new dimension to stewardship, please contact Fr. Stavros at 813-876-8830 ext. 103, or email at frstav@gmail.com or contact Debbie Gavalas at 813-505-8901 to learn how you can have an impact on our church.

Oratorical Festival Speeches

In *The Messenger* for May, we printed all of the Oratorical Festival Speeches from the Junior Division.
In the June/July issue, we will now print all of the Senior Division Speeches.

Senior Division

The gap between the rich and the poor in the United States and worldwide is arguably wider than it has ever been. How should we as Orthodox Christians address such terrible financial inequality?

Maybe once a week or once every other week I see a panhandler standing at the side of the road by a stoplight, holding up a sign that claims hard times, begging for a divine miracle. I have given money, I've looked away, but no matter the outcome I always avoid eye contact. I avoid that feeling of guilt which surges through me as I am only willing or able to give a dollar if anything at all.

Panhandlers used to be much more frequent before laws were installed to ward them away. The streets were competitive as human beings fought over who could own a certain street corner. Keeping them out of the public eye did not solve the problem. The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) ⁴² *For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,* ⁴³ *I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.* In America, or in my area of America at least, we went a step further than turning away and offering nothing, we forbade them from even attempting to receive aid from those willing to give a little. We cast them away from our idealistic society and forced them to live in the shadows away from our guilty averted eyes.

In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Rich Man turned his back on the bleeding Lazarus in favor of hoarding his own wealth, similar to how modern society turns their backs on the thousands suffering at the gates. When the Rich Man died, he found himself suffering a tremendous deal, and he begged for pity ²⁵ *“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.’”* We may not be the ones passing the laws against the poor, but ignoring those in need can be just as bad.

Wealth may seem like a gift, and there is a gift-like quality to never having to worry about anything or need for anything. But the wealthy people are not only gifted with their fortune, they have been gifted with the enormous responsibility of using that wealth wisely. Some people have more money than they could ever reasonably spend, and as Orthodox Christians we need to know when to give rather than hoard.

While wealth may allow us to give more to the church, wealth exists as a very relative concept. In the biblical story of the Widow's Offering, the rich members of society donated their gold coins and small amounts of their tremendous wealth, and the widow offered a tremendous amount of her small wealth. Despite the comparative size, Jesus saw her gift as more because of the sacrifice which the gift entailed. Our everyday offerings to God don't have to put us on the streets, but frivolously giving is not a meaningful gift and hardly displays your faith. The rich and the poor may seem to be on different spectrums of

existence but in reality we will be judged aside from how much wealth we manage to accumulate.

Those who choose to hoard will ultimately drown. When a man approached Jesus asking how to receive salvation in Mark 10:17-29, Jesus told the man to give his enormous fortune to those who needed it, and that man turned away. *“25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”* On a day to day basis in America, millions of people are ignored in favor of building new stadiums or hotels or businesses that turn a profit. People who are blinded by greed can seldom access the resources available through the costless deeds like helping others. This brings us back to the concept of wealth being a responsibility. This man who turned from Jesus could have chosen to turning towards helping the masses but he chose his money instead. Money is just paper, or maybe even just electronic numbers and ultimately valueless. The impact we leave on others is where the true value lies.

Throughout my entire high school career, I have volunteered for organizations like Metropolitan Ministries and the Boys and Girls Club. I helped parents find gifts for their children at the Metropolitan holiday tent once a year, listening to their stories and trying to find something that would make their child happy. I saw children who had been neglected in the public school system and helped them make sense of words which they should have learned years ago when I volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club. I find that giving an hour every week at an impoverished Boys and Girls Club alleviates the guilt that I feel when I give a dollar at the street corner.

Helping others is the Christian way, but giving a dollar on the street corner can only help so much. The number of the impoverished would go up exponentially without the financial support of those willing to give, but giving our time or talents can make a similar if not greater difference. I would love to be able to reach a stoplight and see no one begging beside it. Not because the laws have finally succeeded in driving them away, but because we have teamed together as Christians, and as human beings to make it so they no longer have the need to do so.

Larissa Krinos is the daughter of Dimitri & Melissa Krinos and in the 12th grade.

Psalms are an integral part of Matins, Vespers, and many other Church services. Talk about a Psalm that impacts or influences your life.

Recently on the 5th of January, I prepared myself spiritually to dive and retrieve the cross at the Epiphany Celebration in Tarpon Springs. You see, as I prepared myself it wasn't the importance and magnitude of the celebration that I prayed upon, but the fear that I would emerge from the waters of the Bayou and see that another young man had recovered the cross, and instead of being happy for him, feel jealousy because I had not retrieved the cross. Feel anger because I had not been chosen by God to recover the cross. It was something that I had discussed with the fellow divers from my church and my parents.

But no matter how much I thought about it, I doubted my own ability to overcome temptation and feel joy for the victor.

When January 6th came, the nervousness was still present in my mind and in my heart. During the Liturgy service, during the march to the bayou, and as I waited for the cross to be thrown the thoughts dwelled in my mind. How could I, a Christian partaking in one of the greatest spiritual experiences that I will ever have, leave the event feeling jealousy and anger? What kind of Christian would I be? I wished that in the moments before the cross was thrown that I could have more than the few minutes then, to pray. That God would look down upon me and whisper in my ear that I wouldn't feel these things. But he didn't come and whisper in my ear, and the cross was thrown anyways. I did not retrieve the cross and as I stood there in the bayou, I anticipated the feeling of jealousy. Patiently I waited and it never came. Instead, in its place was joy. Pure joy. I looked around in the water and at the faces of all the young men that I had dived with, and they didn't look angry or jealous. I could tell that in the place of those emotions was the much more powerful one that I felt, happiness.

Looking back upon my experience I always wished that I could have received an answer from God. A confirmation that I would not feel jealousy, but instead gladness. I realized that instead of waiting for an answer that I should have been looking for one. My answer comes from the book of psalms. In Psalm chapter 51 verses 10-12 David writes "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*" I have never read a bible verse that felt so accurate. That gave an answer to my question so easily. It speaks of the heart and forgiveness, but then continues to bring up joy, the joy that I know I felt in the Bayou waters. That I know all of the divers felt.

It isn't coincidental that this verse pertains so well to my circumstance. Psalm 51 is read daily during the Orthros, the 3rd hour, the Compline, and even weekly during the Divine Liturgy as the Priest censes before the great entrance. The necessity of the verse is because it contains what every Christian, every person needs. Forgiveness and the redemption of the spirit. Because every Christian requires it on a daily basis, we read Psalm 51 frequently as a constant reminder that, yes we are at fault, but God has the mercy and forgiveness that allows us to have a clean heart full of joy.

I believe that these verses had such an impact on my life because I realized that it wasn't only useful during my moment in the Bayou, but as I go through life. I know that I do not live each and every moment without sin, but the beauty of Psalm 51 and of our orthodox faith is that we already know this. We read these verses often because we have the knowledge of our own sins. When we read verses of redemption like Psalm 51 we can overcome the sinful thoughts of our minds and deeds of our hands, and instead be filled with joy because Christ the Lord grants each of us forgiveness.

*Savvas Ferekides is the son
Of Chris & Debbie Ferekides and is in the 11th grade.*

Although many people diet for health or vanity, the discipline of fasting is found in many religious traditions. What is the difference between dieting and fasting, and why is it important? By Sophia Krinos

Dieting and fasting, both common practices, can be indistin-

guishable to some as they both require similar motivation in order to earn self-discipline.

Fasting, or abstinence from varying food or drink for spiritual reasons, has existed since the beginning ages of religion, in some form or another. Dieting for vanity or health reasons is excessively popular in the present age, as self-appearance seems to be the main focus of improvement. As both of these require restricted eating in some fashion, the lines between the dieting and fasting practice can be blurred for many.

Two years ago, when I was around the age of fourteen, I decided to restrain from eating meat for lent. This ended up turning into a complete life alteration for me, as I continued far after lent along this lifestyle of vegetarianism, despite much dissension from my family, and my many friends who believed I would not be receiving the proper nutrients, or that I was doing it for weight loss and not the right purpose. While it was respectable and purely religious for me to cut meat out of my diet for fasting, the second it was for anything else it seemed societally unacceptable. This truly opened my eyes to the societal atmosphere around any unnatural changes to a teenagers- or even a woman's diet as being blatantly rude. Contrary to this, fasting has an upheld reputation of being a personal choice that seemingly exhibits self-control for anyone.

Because of my experience, I believe that while fasting is seen as more spiritually beneficial, the disciplinary factors that play into dieting can achieve the same result as that achieved from fasting. As stated in Corinthians 7:5, "*Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*" Through the self-discipline required in order to abstain from foods you avoid in a diet, you may gain the same sense of self-control one not eating breakfast early in the morning before church may, which can help you avoid other temptations later in life, such as alcohol or drugs. Further explanation of the mindset that fasting can create through disciplinary action is shown in 2 Corinthians 4: 16, "*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*" The pretense of suffering can prevent many from attempting to fast, yet they are in turn being deprived of the satisfaction of practicing self-control in order to become inwardly renewed.

The most obvious difference between dieting and fasting is the goal you are trying to achieve. In the case of dieting, you are outwardly abstaining from food in order to achieve something for yourself, whether it be physically or mentally. Many look to exercise and healthy living as a means for release and relaxation, as it makes them feel better and more comfortable in themselves. On the contrary, fasting is done for one reason, to please and become closer with God. As stated in Matthew 6: 17-18, "*But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*" Fasting, from a Christians perspective, is possessing a hunger for Christ so great that you are too spiritually focused to care when you are to receive your next meal. Fasting achieves a sense of satisfaction greater than that of any meal could bring, as conveyed in John 6:35, "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst*".

By the stereotypical means of dieting by counting calories pre-

cisely and avoiding any indulgences to achieve your ideal point of health, you are achieving self-satisfaction and content through restriction that, retrospectively will leave you anything but content. Contrary to this emptiness achieved by dieting, fasting produces a form of fullness as a cause of restriction. A true Christian knows that one fasts not to avoid food and starve, but to cancel out hunger for food for hunger for God. By avoiding your meal, you allow yourself more time and energy for contemplation of God's word, which will leave you more full than anything you could eat would. This is a common misconception, especially for younger people or beginning fasters, those of whom do not see the true purpose behind it and can often turn to it as an excuse to diet or become vainer.

The distinction between dieting or fasting is in whom you are fasting for; to increase your own self-worth, or to provide sacrifice for God. I would like to conclude this speech with a quote from Matthew 5: 5-6, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

Sophia Krinos is the daughter of Dimitri & Melissa Krinos and in the 10th grade.

The Lord commanded us not to create idols (Exodus 20:4), yet people continue to do so. Discuss the kinds of idols people make or worship today and the response that an Orthodox Christian should have when confronted by them.

Growing up as an Orthodox Christian has benefited me in such a way that the basic traditions and customs of the Church were instilled into my mind at a young age. However, it takes much more than habit and memory to comprehend even the simplest Christian ideals. As I have aged in this modern society, I have been faced with, and even succumbed to temptations in my everyday life, some of which are unintentional.

As a high school student, I'm constantly listing and relisting my priorities in order to keep myself on top of my responsibilities. "Sports, school, friends," I'll say to myself. "No, school, sports, family," I say again. "No, wait. Family, school, sports," right? That's always my final decision. Under each of those three categories are so many different topics. I concern and busy myself with my grades, test scores, college applications, school gossip, practices, and clubs. The list never ends. It had gotten to the point where I considered myself *obsessed* because I was putting everything above the Church, above my faith, and above God.

The Bible tells us in Exodus 20:4, "*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*"

"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything..." What does that mean? In ancient times, that may have been statues or objects. In modern society I see that in blind ambition. I see that in the lust for popularity. I see that in idolizing celebrities. I see that in the way our cell phones are treated; are *loved*. I loved my phone so much that I was checking my texts, Instagram, and Facebook moments before sleep every night. I'd shut it off, and quickly make the sign of the cross out of habit, and then fall asleep. Out of habit.

I make the sign of the cross over my body out of habit, but I check my social media out of desire.

I was talking to my best friend one night about Church and praying...and I said to her, "I prayed for about 20 minutes today. It felt so good."

Then she paused for a moment and said to me, "Shouldn't we be doing that every day?"

That hit me. Because I'm sure I have at least 20 minutes of spare time in my day, when I'm not doing that; when I'm not praying. When I'm not even thinking about it.

I realized that I was giving into the temptations of creating that image and idolizing everything that I shouldn't. Reverend George Mastrantonis said, "The Lord our God demands not a part of our lives, but that the wholeness of our lives be dedicated without hesitation or reservation." Coming to church and singing hymns doesn't mean anything when your thoughts and deeds don't match the words you sing. The words lose meaning and we start singing out of habit and by memory again. (Two things that can't make you comprehend or believe the most basic ideals of Christianity). Making the sign of the cross doesn't mean anything if I am not aware of what it is I am doing. We must go about our faith wholeheartedly, because He does nothing for us half heartedly.

Every Sunday, during the Divine Liturgy, the priest quietly says, "Look down from heaven, O Master, upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have not bowed before flesh and blood, but before You, the awesome God."

We remember the people that are disciplined enough and faithful enough to worship and prioritize themselves with one God. I, as a Christian, *We as Christians*, must strive to be exactly like that. The awesomeness of God, of the Holy Trinity, is far more advanced than any human concept or invention. And He's beyond worthy of our time.

I'm lucky enough, in a way, to have gotten so lost because now I can see the numerous errors in my ways. I am creating new habits such as limiting the time I spend on my phone and avoiding negative content online and in the media. By doing such things, my conscience has begun to put an emphasis on what my heart desires-- on what really matters. So I pray in depth, I where the cross around my neck as a reminder, and I sing the hymns to worship Christ. I know the words I'm singing and I believe in them. I am constantly trying to remind myself of these things as I grow in my faith.

When faced with these specific temptations of idolization, I try to avoid them by sticking to my original method; listing my priorities. Only now, It starts with the Lord, and everything after involves Him.

My list isn't out of memory or habit either. It's out of desire, it's out of love, and it's out of faith.

Anna Thomas is the daughter of John & Stephanie Thomas and is in the 11th Grade.

Psalms are an integral part of matins, vespers, and many other Church services. Talk about a psalm that impacts or influences your life.

When one is inspired, he has the ability to gather up credible information and knowledge in order to obtain a profundity for whichever path he chooses. He is able to access the expediency of his mind, and interdependently communicate with those around him. Inspiration is powerful. Inspiration is truth. Inspiration is the motivating factor that keeps us focused and determined to reach our full potential of what we thrive to achieve, here, in our earthly lives. The book of Psalms has, is, and always will be a prominent and noted 150 chapters of the Old

Testament for one reason, and one reason only. Inspiration. The same inspiration, which still continues to transpire through each of us to this day.

Throughout attending my non-denominational private school since kindergarten, my school had made sure that we were well associated with certain sections of Scripture, engraining them into our minds, in hopes of their students maintaining a steady mindset throughout the rest of their lives. One of these sections of Scripture included Psalms, chapter 23. I can remember reciting the entire chapter each morning in the 2nd grade before pledges, slowly memorizing each section, till it was completely memorized. Even as a young elementary student, the verses inspired me in a unique way, giving somewhat of a “security” as a platform, from which everything was to be built upon it. The Psalm starts off as follows: *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul;”* David starts off the chapter by reminding us that God is our shepherd, who protects us from all trial and tribulation that we come upon while in this world. He then goes on and clarifies that even near the *“valley of the shadow of death”*, the Lord will protect and guide us away from the darkness, and toward his everlasting light. Midway through the Psalm, an illusion is made to a prepared table in the presence of our enemies. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over”*. This portion of the chapter is rather remarkable, and essential in order to understand the basis for this Psalm’s meaning. We are anointed to become Holy ones with God. The definition of the word anoint, means to consecrate or make sacred in a ceremony usually pertaining to oil. If we are anointed, God will continue to overflow us with blessings, which will inspire us to continually live for Christ. As the chapter comes to a close, we are given a certain fulfillment, a sort of clarity, a reminder to us to use that same inspiration to help others along the same path as the rest of us. Life. *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”*.

Although experiencing these verses of the Psalms as a young elementary student, the context of the passage has always stood out to me in a personal way. Even as a senior in high school, this portion of the Psalms has given me the will to inspire others by being and living in the image and likeness of God, which should be all our goals and inspirations as Orthodox Christians. As each of us travel along our Christian journeys, we will grow, and bear fruits, while being inspired by the groundwork He has put forth in front of us, if we choose to accept it. It is up to us, as followers of Christ, to continuously act on our inspirations, so that we may inspire others to follow in the same direction, the same path, the same light.

George Hambos is the son of George & Donna Hambos and is in the 12th grade.

The gap between the rich and the poor in the United States and worldwide is arguably wider than it has ever been. How should we as Orthodox Christians address such terrible financial inequality?

Finding the balance between gratitude and greed. This is one of life’s most prominent and integral inquiries. Gratitude, originating from the Latin word “gratus” meaning pleasing or thankful, is defined as the quality of being thankful or the readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. Greed, originating from the Old Germanic word “gratac”, is defined as an in-

tense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power or food. Comprehending the association between these two attributes have the ability to both have resurgence or a deprivation for your state of mind. Achieving the fulfillment and knowledge of these two, can alter the direction and course to your path to Christ.

Sometimes, the destitute feel the need to donate more than the wealthy do. Why does this stand to be true? Why are the rich and the poor on the same scale if the wealthier are able to donate more to the Church and to the people in need? In the Widow’s Offering (Luke 21: 1-4), the poor widow set down two copper coins. Those coins were what she lived off and she put them into the temple treasury, when others- who were able to give a lot more than she did- did not feel the need to donate more. That is one of the many examples of the destitute feeling the need to donate more than the wealthier do. That is possibly due to the fact that they appreciate and understand what donating means. It is easier to put yourself in someone’s shoes when your situation is closer to theirs. It is harder for a wealthy man, who has never been through tough financial situations, to understand how much his donation can possibly mean to someone compared to one who has come close or has been in that situation.

It is not the value of money that is important but what we can give and offer instead of money that is equally important. I like to volunteer with Metropolitan Ministries, to feed the homeless. There, I see different types of attitudes between these people. Some are very grateful for the food we provide them with and are very happy and others do not seem to appreciate it as much. Although in poverty, I can see that some of the homeless are greedy, as they do not show any signs of appreciation. While on the brighter side, others are very grateful and they appreciate our help while thanking God for the food and for our help. In The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46), the Son of God is said to come in all His glory and separate the sheep from the goats- the thankful and the greedy. It describes how the Sheep, who were not blinded by greed and helped Him will receive rewards and a kingdom prepared for them, while the goats who were greedy and unthankful do not get any luxuries.

Another great example was the life of St. Basil the Great. He came from a wealthy family but had a very selfless heart. He baked cakes and put in gold coins as a gift for the destitute, trying to help them in an anonymous way. St. Basil the Great used his wealth wisely as he was not blinded by greed, having responsibility in the way he distributed his money. He viewed everyone equally, knowing that some can help more than others but that we all deserved the same.

As Orthodox Christians, we should help those in need through volunteering, donating and coming together as a community to pray for those in need. As the gap between the rich and the poor in the United States and worldwide becomes wider it is one of our responsibilities to help in every way we can, not showing any greed but only gratitude for our lifestyle and privileges that God provides us with.

Stephanie Owens is the daughter of Mary Florou-Owens and is in the 12th grade.

Building the Deep Bonds of Spiritual Friendship

By Tony Rossi

The definition of “friendship” has taken some hits in recent years. After all, we live in a world where social media allows us to “friend” or “unfriend” someone with the click of our computer or smartphone. But that’s precisely why face-to-face and heart-to-heart friendship is needed more than ever. These are the times that call for spiritual friendships, the kinds of bonds that reach to a place deep within our souls, far beyond shared interests, book clubs, and shopping dates.

Spiritual friendship is not an invention of our modern times. In fact, we can trace it back into the Old Testament. “A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he who finds one finds a treasure,” we read in Sirach 6:14. We’re not talking about just any good friend here; we’re talking about a friend whose hunger for spiritual connection, whose journey toward God mirrors our own.

Aelred of Rivealux, a Cistercian monk who lived in the 12th century, wrote the original book on spiritual friendship. His collection of letters was meant to help readers discover the beauty of this kind of soul-to-soul relationship. Five centuries later, St. Francis de Sales took up the mantle and wrote extensively about spiritual friendship in his classic “Introduction to the Devout Life.”

“If the bond of your mutual liking be charity, devotion, and Christian perfection, God knows how very precious a friendship it is! Precious because it comes from God, because it tends to God, because God is the link that binds you, because it will last forever in Him,” wrote St. Francis.

But spiritual friendship is not some remnant of a bygone era. It is alive and well among faithful friends who want to be companions on the spiritual journey through highs and lows, good times and bad, from here to eternity.

Sacred Communication

“Nothing is more sacred than a letter or conversation in which one human being opens his or her heart to another.” – “Compassionate Fire: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Catherine de Hueck Doherty”

In their book “Love & Salt: A Spiritual Friendship Shared in Letters,” authors Amy Andrews and Jessica Mesman Griffith allow us to enter into their relationship. The pair began writing letters to each other in 2005 as a way to “seek and struggle together.”

“We wrote to preserve and make sense of our daily lives; we wrote to confess and console, to rant and grieve. But more than anything else, we wrote because it was the only way we knew how to pray,” they explain in the prelude to their book.

In their personal and sometimes painful letters, we see in black and white the power of spiritual friendship to lift us up and push us forward even when we think we can’t move a spiritual muscle.

For instance, following the death of her baby, Andrews received support from her husband, family and church community. Yet it was her friendship with Griffith that provided the greatest consolation because of their spiritual bond. She explained on *Christopher Closeup*, “Seeing Jess beside me, weeping when I was weeping—that’s the incarnational nature of our

faith. I was seeing God suffering through her, and that absolutely lightened my burden. It didn’t make it go away, but it redeemed it.”

So you see, spiritual friendship isn’t about a connection between two already-perfect friends. It’s often about two people slogging through life and serving as both anchor and buoy to each other, inching closer to “perfection” together.

“Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you! For wherever you go, I will go.” – Ruth 1:16

True Soul Mates

Jesus told His disciples, “I no longer call you servants...I have called you friends.” (John 15:15) We can see some of Jesus’ own spiritual friends gathered around him in the stories of the Gospel: Mary, Martha and Lazarus; Mary Magdalene; Peter; and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus gives us an example to follow, a reminder that we are not meant to walk this path alone.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are called to relationship and community, and this community is made up of friends who share our faith and our longing for God. In “Walking Together: Discovering the Catholic Tradition of Spiritual Friendship,” author Mary DeTurris Poust talks about the ways friends can lead each other to “great things” through their spiritually intimate understanding of each other.

“They can coax each other along the spiritual path, nudge each other to face a spiritual challenge that may seem daunting, and shore each other up when one or the other is struggling or maybe even veering off course,” Poust writes. “Spiritual friendship in short, starts with God, grows in God, and ultimately finds fulfillment in God.”

So often the seeds for these types of friendships are right in front of us, just waiting to be nurtured. Once we become aware of the possibility of spiritual friendship, we can begin to seek out and invest in relationships that have the potential to help us grow as friends, as people, as spiritual seekers. Perhaps a co-worker or neighbor will stand out as someone who shares not only our sense of humor but our love of prayer or the saints or daily Mass. It is in these seemingly everyday friendships that we often discover the “treasure” we read about in Scripture.

Pat Gohn, author of “Blessed, Beautiful, and Bodacious: Celebrating the Gift of Catholic Womanhood,” talks about the importance of “spiritual motherhood,” those relationships where a woman—whether biological mother or not—nurtures the spiritual life of another. This is just one of the many incarnations of spiritual friendship available to us today.

Gohn says, “As the parent of a child, we freely pour our love and energy into their growth, even though a child is often not capable of a reciprocal giving back. A spiritual mother willingly gives of herself, and lets her love be planted in another person’s life, investing without expectation of a return, yet leaving the results to God, because God is the source of all our goodness in the first place.”

That same spirit is very much at the heart of spiritual friendship—loving without expecting anything in return, offering without strings attached. And it’s something that flies in the

face of what our society tells us. In a world where there's "no free lunch," spiritual friendship is counter-cultural. It says, yes, you can give and receive this love, this bond, this communion without fear of indebtedness or guilt.

Growing Together in Faith

Perhaps one of the most beautiful things about spiritual friendship is that rather than isolating the friends, this kind of relationship moves ever outward, encompassing others. We can see this reality in the lives of saintly spiritual friends over the centuries. St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi allowed their friendship to inspire their religious vocations and their ministry, as did so many others whose stories have changed the face of our Church and our world.

St. Teresa of Avila's friendship with St. John of the Cross allowed each of them to develop their full spiritual potential — John in his vocation to the new Carmelite order and Teresa as a mystic. St. Jane de Chantal's friendship with St. Francis de Sales inspired her to found the Visitation Sisters. Dorothy Day's spiritual friendship and bond with Peter Maurin resulted in the Catholic Worker Movement.

Interestingly enough, if we look at those friendships, we notice something else unusual about them, at least according to our society's norms: a deep friendship between a man and a woman without the promise of — or interest in — a physical relationship or marriage. Spiritual friendship is a deeply intimate relationship graced by chastity and an "agape" kind of love.

The Practical Side

If you've got a spiritual friend in your life or someone who has the potential to become a spiritual friend, you can nurture that relationship through some simple and regular practices. Perhaps you can go on a pilgrimage together, even if it's "only" to a local church or shrine. Maybe you can send each other daily emails with inspiring quotes. You don't even need to communicate directly to nurture your bond. Try praying for each other at the same time every day. It's a powerful way to allow prayer to infuse your relationship from afar.

Even technology — the same technology that has seemingly watered down friendship of late — can be used to assist spiritual

friends. Regular contact on Facebook or Skype can actually allow you to share stories, photos, prayer intentions, or screen-to-screen conversations that may provide inspiration and support. Just be sure your spiritual friendships don't remain solely in the virtual world. They require those heart-to-heart moments of communication that encourage spiritual friends to stand side-by-side looking out at the same ultimate goal: union with God.

"The greatest gift my friendship can give to you is the gift of your belovedness." — Henri Nowen, "Life of the Beloved"

Meditation on Spiritual Friendship

We are not meant to be solitary figures
Walking a lonely path toward heaven.
We are meant for God and for each other.

We are one body with many parts,
sharing our gifts and growing in faith.

Today we pray for the grace
To recognize the friends in our midst,
to open our eyes, our hearts, our minds
to the possibility of what God has planned.

We long for a community of friends
to journey with us, and we know now
that through trust and abandonment,
we will be given exactly what we need.
— Mary DeTurris Poust, "Walking Together"



Notice of Spring Parish Assembly June 4, 2017



Come hear about YOUR Church at our Parish Assembly to include a 'State of the Community,' financial update and update on the Strategic Planning underway, immediately following the Divine Liturgy in the Kourmolis Center. Please note our Divine Services will start at 9:30 a.m. on this day. Your voice is needed and all members in good standing* are invited to attend, sign in, and participate, since a quorum is required at this meeting. *If a quorum is not present, we will call a second meeting on Monday, June 5 at 7:00 p.m., at which time a quorum will not be required.*

*According to the Parish By-laws, Article I, Section 5, "All members in good standing shall have the right to participate and vote at meetings of the membership and elections," (Subsection A) and "any person who has not submitted a properly completed pledge form shall not have the right to vote until such qualified person has submitted a properly completed pledge form and paid the amount of the pledge owed at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of a meeting of membership or election." If you have any questions regarding your membership status please call the church office.

~June & July 2017~

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
O - Orthros DL- Divine Liturgy KV - Kneeling Vespers ** - fasting Day				1 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.	2 **	3 Saturday of the Souls O: 9:00 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m.
4 Pentecost O: 8:15 a.m. DL: 9:30 a.m. KV 11:00 a.m. Parish Assembly.	5 No Fasting this week Holy Trinity DL: 10:00 a.m. in Clearwater	6	7	8 Adult Greek School 6:00 p.m.- 8:30 p.m.	9	10
11 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. YAL 5:00 p.m.	12 ** Holy Apostles Fast Begins	13 **	14 **	15 **	16 ** Junior Olympics	17** Junior Olympics Community Outreach
18 ** O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m.	19 **	20 **	21 **	22 **	23 ** Nativity of St. John O: 5:00 p.m. DL: 6:00 p.m.	24 **
25 ** O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Luncheon	26 **	27 **	28 ** Sts. Peter and Paul O: 5:00 p.m. DL: 6:00 p.m.	29 Fr. Stavros Out of Office until 8/2	30 **	1
2 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Fr. George Ioannou, Guest Celebrant No Coffee Hour	3 Office Closed	4 Independence Day Office Closed	5**	6	7**	8
9 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Fr. George Ioannou, Guest Celebrant	10	11	12**	13	14**	15 Community Outreach
16 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Fr. Stavros, Celebrant AHEPA Family Meetings	17	18	19**	20	21**	22
23 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Fr. George Ioannou, Guest Celebrant	24	25	26**	27	28**	29
30 O: 8:45 a.m. DL: 10:00 a.m. Fr. George Ioannou, Guest Celebrant	31	1** Beginning of Dormition Fast	2**	3**	4** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	5**

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
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Carole Fotopoulos 813-982-0947
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Gus Paras, President 813-254-6980

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Perry Katsamakis 516-403-3118
Jimmy Konstas 813-220-7352

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Bookstore
Bill Manikas 813-960-3679

Chanter
Nick Andreadakis 813-516-6081

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Artie Palios, Director 813-831-1294
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach
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H XAPA ΜΑΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
Parea, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
Anna Maria Bavaro 732-239-9085
Panigyri, Vanessa Aviles 813-221-2194

Daughters of Penelope
Chris Frazier, President 813-661-2290

Finance Committee
Gary Ward 813-846-3898

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Anetta Alexander 813-758-2689

Gasparilla Parking
John Kokkas 727-992-4615

GOYA
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Kara Katzaras 863-669-6739

Hope/Joy
Debbie Nicklow 813-690-0671

Junior Olympics
Dean Koutroumanis 813-624-4620

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Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862
Lindsey Skourellos 813-503-7845

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Oratorical Festival
Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

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Lisa Alsina 813-728-1094

Small Group Bible Study
East, Donna Hambos 813-843-8412
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The Messenger of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is published on a monthly basis. Publication is the first of each month. Deadline for notices and announcements for The Messenger is the 10th of each month. You may send announcements to the church office through email.

“May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” From the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.