

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*

February 2022

VISION:

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

MISSION:

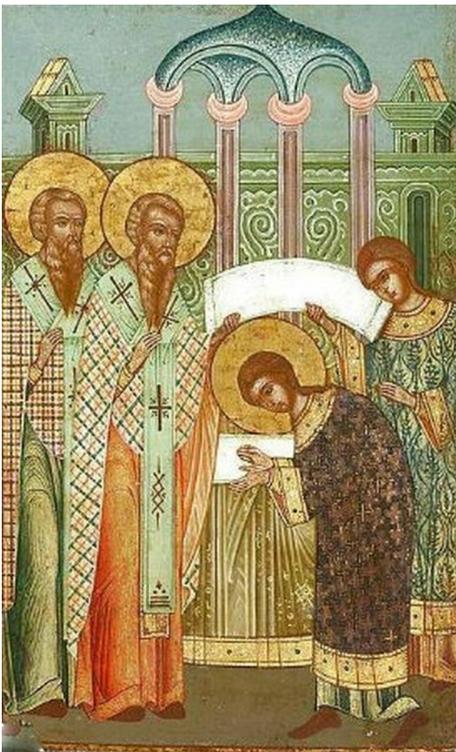
The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

The Sacrament of Ordination



Jesus chose twelve men to be His Disciples. For three years, they followed Him around, learned His message and understood why it needed to be spread throughout the world. After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Disciples and said to them "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them "Receive the

Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:21-23) This was the first "ordination," in that Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit unto the Disciples, in this case by breathing on them. In Matthew 28: 19-20,

Jesus commissioned these disciples to be Apostles, by commanding them "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The Apostles then went into all the cities of the world and established churches. Peter went to Rome. James stayed in Jerusalem. Thomas went to India. Andrew went to Asia Minor (Turkey today). This is why the Patron Saint of our Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople is St. Andrew, because he founded the church there. Now, when the church was founded, communities were small. They met in homes. It was easy for an Apostle to lead the entire church in one city. The Apostles, head of a church in each city, were the precursors to what we now call bishops. A bishop is the ecclesiastical head of a geographic area, like a city or a country.

As the churches grew, they became unmanageable for one Apostle. We know from Acts 6, that the work of the early church was two-fold, preaching the word of God and the daily distribution, feeding the poor and the widows.

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Acts 6: 1-6 reads:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve table. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. Be we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philp and Prochoros, and Nicanor, and Timon and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

(again it's amazing how much of our history is easily seen just from reading the Bible). This passage shows us that the early church was concerned only with preaching the word of God and feeding the hungry. There wasn't a cultural dimension or a social dimension or an athletic dimension. It was just worship and philanthropy. This was too much work for the Apostles, so they asked for assistance. Notice that the Apostles did not choose the ones who would assist them. They told the people to pick out from among you those that would be appointed to this duty. These seven men they chose became the first deacons, or helpers, to the Apostles, who were the first bishops. The Apostles (bishops) laid their hands on them, and this happened in public. It was not a private thing.

As the church expanded, and more communities were established in cities, (think a major city with several church communities) it became too much work for one Apostle to lead multiple church communities. Thus, the office of "presbyter" was created, to lead the community in place of the bishop. In other words, the bishop was still bishop of the city (or territory) and had oversight of all the parishes in that area (or diocese). The presbyter would lead the day-to-day affairs of the individual church community. The bishop would visit occasionally, and be kept apprised of the community's progress. When the bishop would be present, he would lead the worship.

And thus we have the three offices of the "holy priesthood"—the bishop (episkopos), the presbyter or priest (presviteros) and the deacon (diakonos). Some facts about the priesthood.



1. One must be ordained deacon first, then priest, then from the unmarried priests, the bishops are chosen.
2. Each position has ranks within the position. There is a title deacon, as well as archdeacon. For the priests, there is the presbyter, the confessor (pneumatikos), the economos (who served as the "quartermaster" so to speak, watching over the church's property), and the protopresbyter (who was the leader of a large church community). Amongst the bishops, there are bishop, Metropolitan, Archbishop, and Patriarch. All, however, are bishops. Every bishop also has a diocese, such as Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta, of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. It's not just a bishop at large. The bishops are from the ranks of the unmarried clergy.
3. If a person is going to be married, they have to be married before they are ordained deacon.
4. There are minor orders of clergy, including the subdeacon, the reader and the altar server (our altar boys were tonsured and prayed over by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios when he was here in January).
5. When the bishop is present, he is the main celebrant. Because the diaconate was created before the presbyterate (priests), when the deacon serves with the bishop, he actually stands closer to the bishop than the priests.
6. The deacon cannot celebrate a sacrament alone. He is able to distribute Holy Communion and Holy Unction. But he cannot consecrate the Holy Gifts or do a liturgy alone.
7. The priest can conduct all the sacraments. However, he cannot create Chrism. Only the Patriarch (or head of an autocephalous/self-governing church) can do that. The priest also cannot ordain anyone into the priesthood.
8. The sacrament of ordination can only be done by a bishop. When a bishop is ordained, it requires three bishops in order to ordain a bishop.

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9. The sacrament of ordination for the Bishop, Presbyter (priest) and deacon is nearly identical for each rank. The prayers are nearly identical, they just use the proper position—deacon, priest, bishop. Where the ordinations take place is different. However, an ordination always takes place in the context of a Divine Liturgy.

10. The ordination of a deacon takes place after the consecration of the Gifts, shortly before the Lord's Prayer. That is because the job of the deacon is to help distribute Holy Communion, not to consecrate the Gifts.

11. The ordination of a priest takes place after the Great Entrance but before the Consecration of the Gifts. That is because the role of the priest is to consecrate the Gifts.

12. The ordination of a bishop takes place right before the Scripture readings, because the primary role of the bishop is to teach.

13. One has to be a deacon for at least a day, then a priest for at least a day and then can become a bishop.

14. Once a person is ordained, they serve at the direction of the bishop. So, a deacon will remain a deacon as long as he is needed as a deacon, which is usually not long. Most deacons are a deacon for a day, or a week or a month. Some deacons are permanent deacons, though that is rare. And some deacons will remain a deacon for a long period of time and serve a bishop as his deacon. (This is why I was a deacon for a year, I served as the deacon to Metropolitan Methodios of Boston in 1997-1998). Because priests are what is most needed in the church, the time as a deacon for most people is very short. They are ordained to the priesthood usually very quickly.

15. An ordination always takes place publicly. There are no private ordinations. This is because at an ordination of a clergyman, the congregation says "Axios" (worthy). If they feel the candidate is unworthy, they say "Anaxios," and then the person cannot be ordained.



Charlie Hambos is scheduled to be ordained as a deacon on Sunday, February 6 at St. John in Tampa. His ordination to the priesthood will take place in late March in Orlando. There is a common custom to ordain someone as a deacon in the parish they came from, and a priest in the parish where they will be serving which is why these two locations were chosen. Charlie will be a deacon for a month or so. During that time, Charlie will participate in the Divine Liturgy and be able to offer Holy Communion but won't be able to serve alone or be the main celebrant of the Divine Liturgy. After he is ordained a priest, he will be able to serve alone and be the main celebrant at the Divine Liturgy (and other services).



On February 6, His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at St. John and ordain Charlie to the Holy Diaconate. **The ordination will take place during the Divine Liturgy.** At the conclusion of the Orthros, at the end of the Great Doxology, Charlie will be led from the altar to the Bishop's throne and be presented to the Bishop who will "ordain" him to the office of subdeacon, which is the highest rank that a layperson can have. A subdeacon is considered a minor order of the clergy. Charlie will be vested in a white robe, and will hold a pitcher of water and a bowl in his hands. The Bishop will pray over him. He will wash the Bishop's hands. The Bishop will dry his hands on a towel and the towel will be placed over the head of Charlie. Charlie will then be escorted before the icon of Christ, where he will stand and pray. At the time of the Great Entrance, Charlie will again wash the hands of the Bishop and will walk last in the Great Entrance. After the Great Entrance, he will stand before the icon of the Virgin Mary.

The ordination will begin right after the blessing "And the mercies of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, be with you all." This is shortly before the Lord's Prayer.



The ordination of the deacon takes place at this point, since the primary role of a deacon is to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. At the time of the ordination, the candidate will again be presented before the Metropolitan. A letter, called the "Symartyria" will be read. This is a

letter from the Spiritual Father of the candidate, stating his worthiness for ordination. Since I am Charlie's Spiritual Father, I will read this letter. Charlie will then address the Bishop as to why he wishes to be ordained. I remember when I was getting ordained, my spiritual father told me to address the Bishop as if I was addressing God Himself, stating to God why I want to be ordained and why I think I have been called to serve as a clergyman. The Bishop will then offer words of exhortation and advice to Charlie.

After this, Charlie will be escorted by two priests through the Royal Doors of the Holy Altar for the very first time. (only the clergy enter through this door) He will be escorted around the altar table three times as the same three hymns from the wedding service (when the couple goes around the table) are chanted. This is because in the ordination service, the person being ordained is marrying the church. (The three hymns from the wedding, affectionately known as "Isaia Horeve" are done, but in a different order. At the wedding the themes of the hymns are joy-sacrifice-glory to God. At the ordination, the more somber hymn of sacrifice goes first. So it is sacrifice-glory to God-joy.) After this "dance" around the altar table, Charlie will kneel before the Holy Altar, and the Bishop will ordain him as a deacon. In those few moments, he will leave the rank of laity and become a clergyman. (I can say from personal experience, this moment was among the most powerful in my life. I felt like I got hit by a bus or something, like an out of body experience. It is hard to explain). After the ordination prayers,

now Deacon Charlie will stand in front of the congregation. The white robe will be removed, and he will be vested with the vestments of the deacon. The Bishop will proclaim "Axios"—"Worthy" and all the people will shout and then sing "Axios." And just like that our beloved Charlie will be a clergyman in the Orthodox Church, and he will take his place in the Divine Liturgy, offering the petitions before the Lord's Prayer and doing the rest of the deacon parts for the remainder of the Divine Liturgy.

If you want to witness all the steps of the ordination service, it is important that you are in church 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, February 6.

On Monday, February 7, Deacon Charlie and I will celebrate our first liturgy together at St. John. And I hope many of you can attend.

February 6 and this ordination will be one of the highlights in the history of our community. We have sent other young men to the seminary before Charlie. We've had ordinations in our community before (we had one four years ago). But this will be the first time in the history of our community that one of our own will be ordained. We've watched Charlie grow up here. We watched him leave us to go to the Seminary. We watched him return four years later. We watched him grow for seven years as our pastoral assistant. We cried when he left us last August. We rejoiced in his marriage this past November. And we will be here to say "Axios" to him as he enters into the Holy Orders of the Orthodox Church on February 6.

Every person who becomes a priest must first be a deacon. And everyone who is ordained must first perceive a calling to the ministry and decide to answer it. Charlie has had this calling for many years. The journey to this day began many years ago. We had our first conversation about the priesthood shortly after I arrived and I know Charlie had it in his heart long before then that this was his calling. I could not be more pleased to see Charlie taking this step, presenting himself to God and entering into the ranks of the Holy Priesthood. In anticipation of this special day in his life, I say "Axios", "Worthy!"

With love in the Lord,
+Fr. Stavros

Pastoral notes from Fr. Stavros

There are several pastoral issues that occur each month. Out of a desire to keep a good sense of order and serve you better, periodically I'll make some "pastoral notes."



Fr. John Stefero has been working for our parish for over a year on a part-time basis. For over a year, Fr. John Stefero has been working for our church on a part-time basis. Not only does he celebrate the Divine Services of the church, he holds a Bible study on Monday nights and is the spiritual advisor to our Young At Heart Group. He also is available for confession, counseling hospital visits and house blessings. Because our church numbers over 400 families, there are times when Fr. John will be handling pastoral work including sacraments. His cell phone number is 678-637-4425. If you'd like to meet with Fr. John, please reach out to him directly. His email is also jwstefero50@hotmail.com. We are so happy that he is serving with us. Along with Fr. Stratton Dorozenski, who has also served our parish on Sundays and feast-days for two years, it is a joy to be blessed with additional clergy to serve with us.

Please Schedule all sacraments and memorial services through the office. In order to serve you more efficiently, please schedule all sacraments and memorial services through the office. Please do NOT send sacrament or memorial requests directly to Fr. Stavros. Alex and Vasili will be the initial intake on the sacraments, going over the guidelines, filling out paperwork, etc. They will check with Fr. Stavros on available dates and Father will have the final say on dates. Then in the case of weddings, Fr. Stavros will meet with the couple for pre-marital counseling. Memorial services should also be scheduled through the office. The office staff knows which Sundays memorial are not allowed on. All other Sundays are open. The only exception to the scheduling of services is in regards to funerals. Please contact Fr. Stavros directly regarding scheduling of funerals. Thank you for your help in working more efficiently.

Liturgy Before a Funeral? A Divine Liturgy can be celebrated on any day of the year outside of the weekdays

of Great Lent. There are certain days that are dubbed "liturgical days," meaning a day that a liturgy is traditionally celebrated, such as St. Athanasios (January 18) or the Presentation of Christ (February 2). If a funeral is scheduled on a liturgical day, we generally offer the family the option of having the body of the deceased brought to the church for the Divine Liturgy. If you wish to have a liturgy celebrated on the day of a funeral, so that your family can receive Holy Communion and so that the body of your loved one can lie in repose in the church, all you have to do is ask and we are very happy to accommodate. This is not a requirement (except for a funeral for a clergyman), but is an option for those who want it.

Can someone go to confession or Holy Communion on their period? Yes, I still get asked this question. And the answer is YES!!!! Most women will be on their period for half of their life. If you add up the number of time a woman goes through a menstrual cycle in her life, it's close to 500. If each one of those "periods" lasts a week, that's 500 weeks, or ten years of being "on your period." If the church didn't allow people to receive Communion or confession on their period, that would mean that each woman, over the course of her life, is excommunicated for 10 years. No matter how deeply she believes, no matter how much she prays, no matter how much she wants to repent, and no matter how much she desires to receive Christ. God is a God of mercy and compassion. He has the capacity to forgive countless and grievous sins. Surely He has the capacity to forgive and offer Himself through the Eucharist to a woman who is experiencing something that is a natural (and not sinful) part of life. A woman's menstrual cycle used to not allow women to leave the house for fear of disease or infection. This is no longer the case. We don't ask. You don't need to tell. And you don't need to feel excluded from Communion, Confession or anything else related to the faith or the Christian life.

Some Very Important Wedding Guidelines: No Wedding Date without wedding eligibility. There are some requirements in order to be married in the Orthodox Church. One of those requirements is that one person of the couple be Orthodox and the other, if not Orthodox, must have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity. Another requirement if a person was married in the Orthodox church and subsequently divorced, they must obtain an ecclesiastical divorce before being remarried. There have been instances in the past, where a couple has set a wedding date and they are ineligible to marry, based on one of these requirements. Either they have not received an ecclesiastical divorce, or one of the parties is not baptized.

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When we schedule a wedding and these requirements haven't been made, and the person getting married drags their feet in either getting the ecclesiastical divorce (a process that is not difficult, but usually takes 3 months) or in getting baptized, this creates a difficult situation for all involved, especially the priest. In the case of divorce, it causes the priest to have to push through a process that takes time. In the case of baptism, it becomes like a "shot-gun" baptism, where the priest is essentially forced to baptize someone who doesn't come to church, or catechism, or doesn't express any interest in faith, just so that a box can be checked, so that a requirement can be fulfilled. With this in mind, effective immediately, no wedding date will be set without both requirements being fulfilled. If you have been married in the church and are subsequently divorced, you will be required to complete the ecclesiastical divorce process before a wedding date will be set. If you are marrying someone who is not Christian, who has not been baptized in any church, no wedding date will be set until a baptism certificate is obtained from another church, or sufficient catechism has occurred and the baptism has taken place in the Orthodox Church.



Some other notes regarding weddings:

1. The couple getting married must schedule their own wedding. Not their parents. If you are old enough to get married, you are old enough to call the church and schedule it.
2. There is a \$300 damage deposit that will be held for all weddings going forward. Recent weddings have left the church a mess, causing us to stay for hours and clean it.
3. No wedding will be put in ink on the schedule until at least one party of the couple has come in to meet with Fr. Stavros to discuss wedding guidelines. This is so that the couple is aware of the requirements and expectations to get married in the Orthodox Church, for example, that a wedding license is required to get married.
4. On that note, no wedding license = no church wed-

ding. This happened recently unfortunately. It is both a state and federal law that a couple must get a wedding license in order to get married. In Florida, the wedding license is good for 60 days. It can be procured from any clerk of the court in any county in Florida for a wedding that will take place in Florida. The officiant (the priest) must be in possession of the wedding license in order to perform a wedding.

5. We have put down some guidelines regarding bridesmaids dresses. The wedding takes place in a church, not a nightclub. We have asked that shoulders be covered, i.e. no strapless dresses, for bridesmaids. A shawl or throw can be worn in the church and ditched for the wedding reception. However, in the church, we ask that some proper decorum be followed. *Because this has been an issue at several weddings in 2021, going forward, we are going to require the bridesmaids dresses to be approved by Fr. Stavros. This is not a measure I wanted to take, but unfortunately, what we've been seeing in the church is inappropriate regarding bridesmaids dresses. A picture of someone wearing the dress will be sufficient. Should this continue to be a problem, we will look into buying something appropriate that can be placed over dresses that are inappropriate for church.*

When to leave with a baby. Someone asked me the question recently, because they want to be in church with their baby, but also want to be respectful when the baby is fussy. We WANT all of our children of all ages to be in church to worship. We understand that babies get fussy and cry, that's what they do. We also understand that when a baby is screaming, it can become disruptive. Here are a few suggestions: If a baby is fussy for a minute or so, no worries, try to soothe the baby. If that doesn't work, try walking around a little bit. If that doesn't work, try stepping out for a few minutes. And some days, the baby is going to win. Every parent has gone through that, and you will end up outside of church for much of the service. And if that happens occasionally, that's okay. It won't be like that forever. For those who are nervous about coming with a baby, consider coming for part of the liturgy. Holy Communion is usually right around 11:00 a.m. Start by coming at 10:40, then back up to 10:30, 10:20, etc., until you can start off at 10:00 a.m. As a reminder, we have a nursery that is open on Sundays, and it also has the livestream feed from the church. The livestream is also working in the hall every Sunday as well. Keep bringing your babies. We want them in church. As with everything in child-rearing, some days will be good, and some will be challenging.



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Stewards of God's Grace Stewards of our Families

Our word for our parish for 2022 is "stewards". Every month this year, Fr. Stavros will write a short article on one aspect of this word, to keep it at the forefront of our minds as we journey through 2022.

*As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.
1 Peter 4:10*



God ordained the idea of a family in Genesis 2, when He took a bone from the side of man and fashioned it into a woman. He brought the woman to the man and the man was pleased. Up until this point, despite the fact that God had created man and given him dominion over all creation, man was not happy because he did not have anyone like him to share life with. Before the fall, man and woman lived in a perfect union not only with God, but with one another.

As a result of the fall, everything is more difficult. We live in a broken world. We still have the God-given blessing of marriage and family and children, but we live out these blessings with a sense of our own brokenness. Our own brokenness does not prohibit us from feeling joy or love or other good things. It just prohibits us from feeling them at all times. Inevitably we will fall and fail in certain aspects of everything we do, including with our families. No family is perfect. The idea of the family, however, is a perfect idea, created by God.

We are stewards of our families, in the sense that we take care of them temporarily. A good marriage will last 50 or 60 or 70 years but at some point, one partner will pass away. There will no longer be an earthly marriage. The marriage is a temporary blessing, it is a blessing, it is temporary. This is why spouses should see each other as stewards, caretakers of one another. When they fall, they should get up again. When they get off track, they should work to get back on track. When they can't get on track on their own, they should go to someone outside of their marriage, together, like a priest or a counselor to help heal wounds, understand failings and be able to move forward, again as stewards. I saw a graphic in a marriage book one time that described married couple as going from soul mates, to roommates to cell mates. This is sad, though it describes the state of many marriages. Again, if this is your marriage, please reach out and get some help, so that you can get back to

being the good steward that you intended to be when you got married.

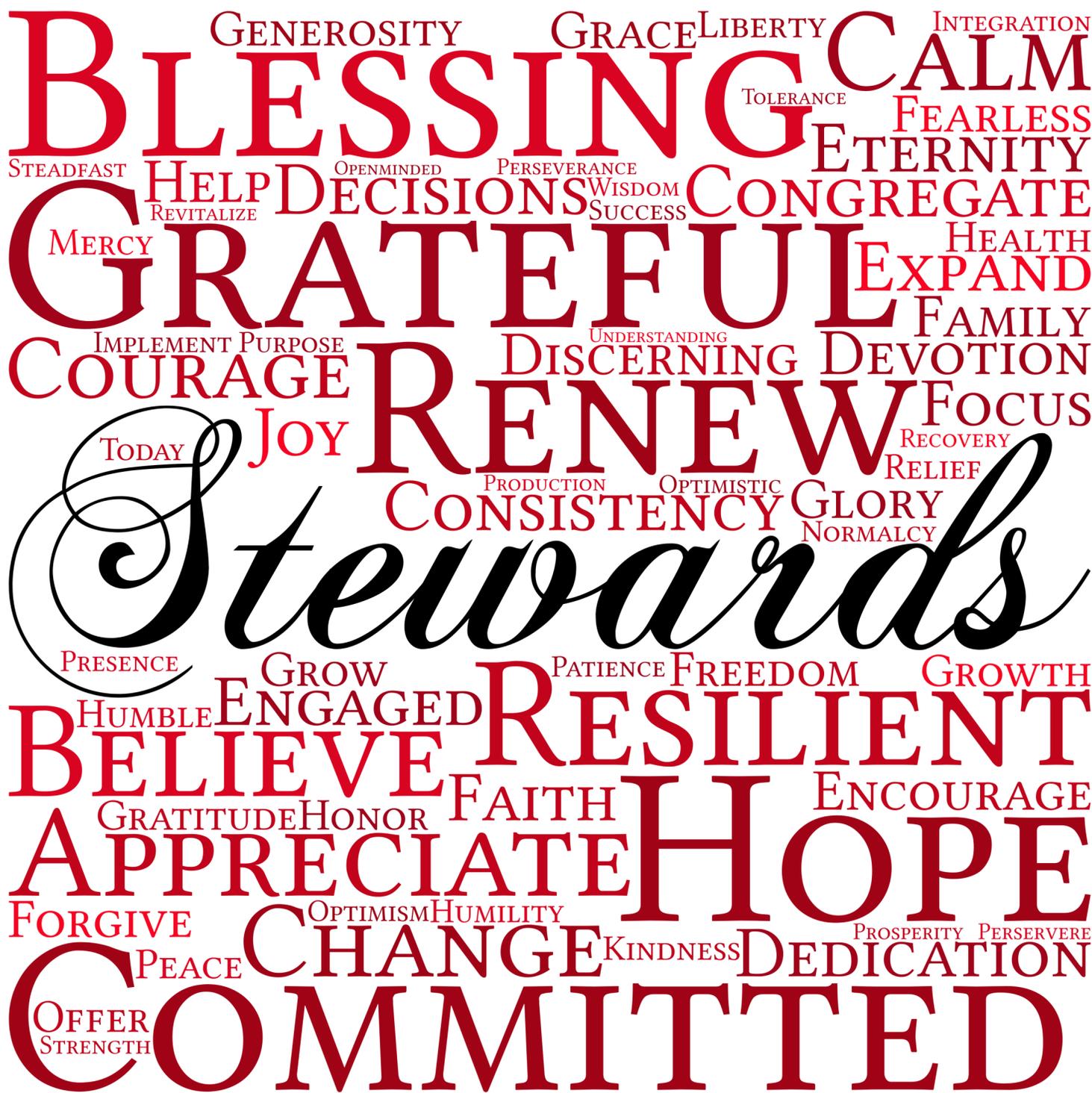
Children are part of our families, a beautiful by-product of a married union. (The purpose of marriage is not to have children, but rather it is mutual salvation. Each partner is supposed to encourage and help with the salvation of the other.) Children are a blessing, not a requirement. Once a decision has been made to have children, parents become stewards, caretakers of those children. They literally take care of them, as they are dependent on the parents for food, shelter, safety and guidance. In some sense a parent's job is never over. We will be parents of our children until we are no longer on this earth. However, the role of parent changes from caregiver, to teacher, to director, and in their adult years, to consultant, advisor and friend. We have to see ourselves as stewards of our children. They are ours to take care of and to nurture. The most important gift you can give your children is the same give you give your spouse, encouragement towards salvation.

As time goes on, we see more and more instances where children are called upon to take care of their parents. We end up being stewards to them in almost the same way that they were stewards to us. Siblings, sometimes out of necessity, are called upon to be stewards and caretakers of one another.

There is no perfect steward, just as there is no perfect person. There is no identical marriage, or situation—each one of these is also unique. Using our verse for this year, as each of us has received a family—parents, for some a spouse, for some children—employ this gift for one another, in other words, take good care of the gift God has given you. Be a good steward of God's varied grace. Some of us have parents who live around the corner, and for others of us, they are around the world. Each of us is supposed to take care of our parents in the best way we can. And of course that will vary based on where they live, how healthy they are, etc. Same thing with our children. Some of us have children at home, others have children who are away from home. Some have one child while others have five. Some have dependent children and some have seen their children get married and have children of their own. Regardless of your children and your status as a parent, remember that we are always going to be caretakers of our children as long as we are on this earth. Therefore, it is important to employ your gifts as well as your time to take care of your child or children. The same can be said for our spouses. Some are happily married. Others are struggling. Some are good stewards and some can stand some improvement.

Here's the thing to keep in mind. We are stewards of today, and whatever opportunities today brings. We can't be stewards of yesterday and there is no guarantee we will live to be stewards of tomorrow. So, however you are doing with the stewardship of your family, give your best effort to them today. On this given day, the best might be a kind word or a middle-of-the-day text because you have to work late. But on the weekend, when there are no work obligations, we can do much better. All we can do is our best. So give your best to employ your gifts for the benefit of your family, as a good steward of whoever God has blessed you with that you call family. And you'll be well on your way to being a good steward of your family.

+Fr. Stavros



Our word for our parish for 2022 is “Stewards”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year. Use wordle document that Maria sent and make a new page, like we had yesterday, with the word, the word and the verse of the year. I’ll write an article each month to go along with our word and verse.

Verse of the Year—I Peter 4:10

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.

Thou Shalt Put Away Thine Own Shopping Cart

By Alex Limberatos



“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ (Matthew 25:23)

What if I told you that leaving your cart out in the parking lot (not in the cart corral) is a sin?

Stay with me for a moment. As offensive or off-putting as this might already be, I assure you, there’s an important component of our faith that needs to be addressed here that is meant to be edifying.

Let’s talk about sin. Sin—amartia in Greek—literally means missing the mark, a term that has its roots in archery. This implies that our lives have an aim, that there’s a target to shoot for. Christ talks about sin and “the mark”, as does St. John the Baptist. Unfortunately, we sometimes gloss over this word because it can be a rather uncomfortable and judgmental concept. That being said, we can’t pretend like God doesn’t place some kind of expectation on us, that there isn’t an ideal for each of us to strive for. We can discuss what that aim looks like uniquely to each of us, but my appeal to you today is that as far or high as that aim might seem to be, I personally believe our church invites us to participate in small reachable targets daily instead of only daunting over a long target that’ll take a lifetime.

Here’s our small daily target: our shopping cart. Our aim is at least the cart corral. Missing that mark (ignoring it or otherwise) is amartia. Fortunate for you and me, it’s a relatively



easy target and will give us spiritual exercise—not to mention physical exercise—to practice putting away our shopping cart.

Seems simple, right? So why do we neglect it? Why do we move our cart somewhere other than its target? Why do we sin with our shopping carts? The following are perhaps the most common answers we come up with.

- It’s not going to do anything
- It’s someone else’s job to put them away
- I’m ____, therefore I can’t put it away

Each excuse stems from our own personal lenses as to how we see the world, how we see the shopping cart. We usually don’t look at the parking lot, the store, the shopping cart, or our fellow shopper as something or someone we are responsible for. It’s a convenience until it isn’t; it’s a help until we have to put it back. We see the cart corral as a suggestion more than a target, and we take advantage of the medians, the neighboring parking spots, whatever nearby place we can leave our shopping cart as our compromised target. But like our life there is actually a target, and it takes not only a little effort to push the thing to its target but intentionality to find and recognize that target. If it’s so easy for us to ignore and disregard the purpose of our carts, I wonder then if it’s a similar challenge to ignore or disregard the purpose of our lives.

With any sin, it can be helpful to understand the line of reasoning that can get us into trouble. So let’s parse this out for a moment and understand why we fall short of the cart corral.

The Cart’s Not Going To Harm Anyone/Anything

False.

In 2009, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) staff analyzed injuries to children younger than age 5 year associated with shopping carts. What you’ll find in this study is a category for injuries by “collision” which mostly had to do with, “the shopping cart running into/over the child or the child running into the shopping cart.” Between 2008 and 2012, there were an estimate of 4,200 injuries related to this category that includes shopping carts left in the parking lot. While that category does admittedly include other instances unrelated to shopping cart abandonment, we can’t dismiss the potential harm that rogue shopping carts present to children and adult shoppers.



<https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/ShoppingCartInjuriesToChildren2008to2012.pdf>

Continued...

While this next paragraph is anecdotal, it's coming from a source you can trust: yours truly. During seminary, I seasonally worked at a grocery store as a Customer Service Representative (where I gained most my stellar experience in Pastoral Care); I worked up to this position as a lowly and humble utility clerk where my youth served me well to chase after shopping carts in the parking lot. Hearing the complaints of customers unable to park during peak hours because a shopping cart had taken up an entire spot and first-hand seeing shopping carts nestle their noses into other people's automobiles was a nigh-daily occurrence. On particularly windy days, I'd see rogue carts flying faster than the parking lot speed limit, and on blizzardy days, I'd march out into windchills of 30 below to retrieve carts lodged into snow banks like a land of forgotten Christmas toys.

Abandoned shopping carts can and do inflict damage upon property and to our fellow man. Though it all seems harmless, and because it is largely out of sight, we tend to have blindfolds as to the result of such a seemingly innocuous oversight as leaving our cart roam free.

Such are our sins.

Though we don't always see it, though it's hard to imagine, our sins DO affect our world and those around us—even if they don't seem to have a direct or immediate impact. This is what we call a fallen world; mankind's sinning affects man, nature, all the above. Our personal sinning is like leaving a shopping cart free-range, creating a ticking time bomb for another poor soul to fall prey to injury by the fallenness that we participate in.

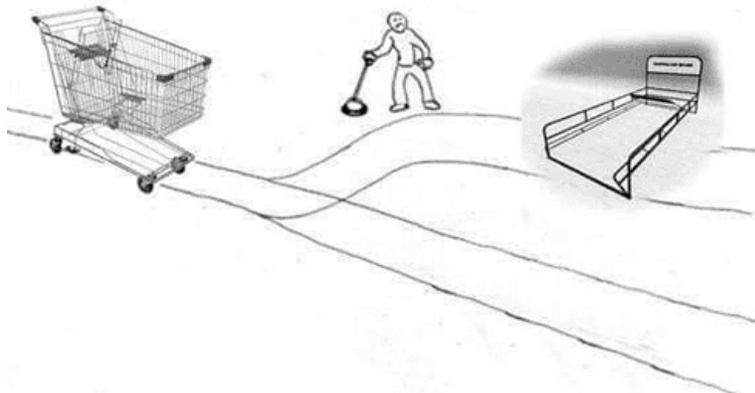
The solution? Put away your cart in the corral. For your sins? Put them away in confession and exercise your faith daily.



Rare photo captured in the wild: A shopping cart prowling about a Walmart parking lot in search of its natural prey: an unsuspecting car door!

There is no dire emergency.

Do you accept your duty to return the cart even though you gain nothing?



It's Someone Else's Job To Put Them Away

The utility clerk and store's staff are responsible for putting away your shopping cart from your parking space or median, am I right?

That's just as true as assuming only the clergy, monastics, and church workers are responsible for prayer, fasting, and helping those in need. It is true that the store staff is tasked with bringing in carts from the cart corral as well as the littered carts that mar the parking lot. However, littering our parking lots under the assumption that someone else will tend to the litter is synonymous to throwing a wrapper on the floor knowing a janitor will get it without looking for a garbage can ourselves.

This leads into the topic of rights and responsibilities. We all go to a grocery store feeling we are entitled to a cart for ease of shopping. But with that right comes a responsibility for the cart that we easily forget. When the right and corresponding responsibility seem to become an inconvenience, it then merely becomes someone else's responsibility. We then assign to the store staff the responsibility for that which we are borrowing from them without thinking about the social contract of taking a shopping cart.

Such is true in so many facets of our life.

Our parking lots stay clean and orderly when we cooperate with the store staff and do our part with our carts. Our streets and neighborhoods remain pristine when you and I regularly put our trash out where it belongs for pickup. Our church and world can be freed of the rubbish of sin and vice when we do our part in establishing this cleanliness and orderliness rather than leaving it all to church leadership. Yes, our clergy, our ministry heads, our monastics are working hard towards spiritual public safety & health, but their work is optimized when we cooperate in synergy, putting our spiritual carts in the corral so their time isn't spent on chasing down a stampeding cart out in the wilderness.

Continued...



Not a suggestion. A solemn commandment.
A sacred responsibility for mankind.

Personal prayer and the divine services are for everyone to worship in. The fast is something we are all to participate in. Almsgiving and volunteering is an expectation on us all. The ways in which each of us follows our own prayer rule, fast, and gives of our own time and treas-

ure will vary based on our particular circumstances. In the church we call this mercy or dispensation, *oikonomia*. The cart corral is the *oikonomia*.

Some of us park closer to the corral so we can reach it easier. Some of us will have to walk our cart a little further. Some of us go straight for the store with our carts when we're finished. Each of our walks will look different, but it's important that we each participate in the walk that we are called to do rather than leave that walk and work for "the professionals".

I'm _____, Therefore I Can't Put It Away

It's a catchall excuse that acknowledges the first two excuses are insufficient. We know the potential damage and nuisance of rogue carts, we acknowledge our responsibility to tend to our own shopping cart, and yet we give one last reason for falling short of hitting the mark.

It might be because we're late. It might be because we're tired and had a long day. It might be because we are overwhelmed by our screaming child. Fill in the blank.

Still, are any of these excuses sufficient should an abandoned cart injure or destroy? Does this rationale remove from us the burden of us picking up a cart in the first place?

I think of these excuses in various parables of the Kingdom of God that Christ tells us. In the parable of the Last Judgement, those on the left hand, the goats, give the excuse of not seeing the Lord hungry or thirsty. In the parable of the banquet, the initial guests say they can't attend due to a recent purchase and a recent marriage. In the parable of the talents, the third servant explains he was afraid of his Lord and so buried the talent instead of doing anything with it.

We worship a God of mercy who looks forward to our daily repentance. That being said, He doesn't seem to respond well to us when we shirk our responsibilities with excuses. So what excuse really holds weight when we neglect the invitation to receive the Eucharist, to using our talents, to loving our neighbor, to picking up our Cross?

Again, the shopping cart is one small thing we can work on to say, "I won't give myself a reason to not put it away". In that kind of small stewardship, I believe we'll have sufficient practice in becoming better stewards with more precious and heavenly responsibilities.

In Conclusion

The shopping cart is emblematic of the thing we are responsible for, a kind of cross we tend to forget and leave at the wayside. The shopping cart is our fasting, our prayer rule, our church attendance, our words, our reading of and observance to Scripture, among so many other things that Christ calls us to work on and pay attention to. It is a simple thing that merely requires us to call to mind where the target is, what is the thing that God is expecting us to aim for.

Our word this year is Steward. I began this message with a quote from the parable of the talents, where the Lord praises two stewards by recognizing that they have been "faithful in a little." What we are discussing here is being faithful in something so little as your shopping cart. The shopping cart is not ours, it is the store's, and there is an expectation—whether we recognize it or not—as to where we leave it. The same goes for our lives, our families, our neighbors, our treasure; none of it is ours...it's within our grasp for a short time as a steward or as a "shopper" in God's grocery store...and each of us is expected to give an account of where we leave each of those!

Just think of our world, our churches, even our souls, as a giant parking lot, full of shopping carts that simply need to be returned. Again, the cart corral tells us that this is an endeavor we don't need to take on all by ourselves, but that we can have help along the way, for others to meet us half-way there in this important work. Still, it's going to take some effort, from you and from me. We all need to spot the cart corrals that we don't see or that we simply ignore in order to clean up this spiritually littered universe we cohabitate. It will literally take one cart at a time for us to get to this perfect world, and it starts with each of our carts.

Rest assured, just as easy as it is to return one's shopping cart after a long trip to the grocery store, so too is our walk of faith as simple as looking for what Christ has chosen for each of us as our target and to walk that cart of responsibility to its destination.

So let us pick up our shopping cart and make straight our parking lots that we may be faithful in much greater things than these.

This message was inspired by the good work of Matt Walsh & Agent Sebastian, who are continually bringing awareness and accountability to the issue of our littered parking lots.



Agent Sebastian of Cart Narcs, the unsung hero of our times.

Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks: The Bible Project

By Fr. Stavros

Most of us don't spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don't spend any time. Each week since January 2019, we provide in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin, a verse or two. I choose verses that are meaningful to me, or well known or ones that have meaning in contemporary times. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. If you want a challenge, do the following:

- Memorize the verse of the week.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire chapter of the book that the verse comes from.
- For a greater challenge, read the entire book where the verse comes from.

Another challenge to consider is to keep a journal, read it, memorize it and contemplate the verse each week. Allow the Holy Spirit to move your mind and your thoughts and then write down those thoughts and keep them in a journal. If you do one reflection on Scripture each week, you will have the best book that could be. A book written by you, for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, who will guide your thoughts as you read the Scriptures.

Below are verses for the month of December. There is one verse for each week. I have written a few comments below each verse to get your mind going. Don't let my thoughts be your interpretation. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

February 6-12

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

I Corinthians 13:2

For the month of February, our verses will be centered around the word "Love." So the first verse we look at is I Corinthians 13:2, and the idea that if we have prophetic powers (i.e. if we have great power), if we understand all mysteries and all knowledge (i.e. great intelligence) and even if we have all faith, so much faith that we can move mountains, if we have all these things, but we don't have love, we are nothing. We can't have faith without love, because the most basic expression of faith is love for others. And God is love, so if we have no love, how can we love God? We can have lots of power, but if that power is not based on love, that power is control, dictatorship, or it is yielded in fear. Power without love eventually is tyranny. And if we have all knowledge, but we don't have love, the knowledge isn't really worth much. Imagine if we go to God with an impressive resume of accomplishments, but we never learned how to love, those accomplishments won't really do us any good at His awesome judgment seat. As we learn, as we acquire knowledge and power, as we rack up accomplishments, and even as we grow in faith, we have to lead with love.

In honor of Valentine's Day in February, all of our verses have to do with "love."

February 13-19

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children.

Psalms 103:17

No one is perfect. To one degree or another, we are all broken. On a given day, we may feel more put together or more broken, but we live in a state of brokenness. This is manifested chiefly by sin, so at some point every day, when we sin, we are again expressing our brokenness. The beautiful words of Psalm 103:17 remind us that God's love is steadfast, it is from everlasting to everlasting. God understands our brokenness and still loves us despite it. No matter who we are or

what we've done, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

February 20-26

Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 12:10

Imagine if we had a contest to see who could outdo each other in showing honor to other people. Imagine if we worked to outdo each other in acting like brothers. Love is certainly not a contest where there are winners and losers, or even competition. But imagine if we tried to love others more than they loved us. If instead of waiting to be loved in order to show love, we showed love first, and we loved more than we were loved. Imagine the day when someone wronged you, even someone close like a spouse, a child, a parent or a good friend and we decided to love them anyway, even in our annoyance. Imagine if we "fought" about who would open the door for someone else, or who could get in the most compliments, or who could give the most encouragement. Love, again, is not a contest, but we should have a consciousness about love, and it should be leading with love, not just reciprocating love we've already been shown.



February 27-March 5

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Matthew 5:43-44

These verses are in line with our verse from last week, about outdoing one another with love. These verses go so far as to tell us we are to love our enemies. It seems natural to love our neighbors (or those who love us) while hating our enemies. Jesus tells us not to take this "natural course". Because, in fact, the course isn't natural. The ability to love is innate. The desire to hate is learned. So Christ tells us to return to our "natural state" and love without condition, to love those who love us and to love those who hate us. Interestingly, during the Divine Liturgy, right before the Great Entrance, the priest bows to the congregation and says "for those who love us and those who hate us, may God forgive us." He doesn't pray for forgiveness only for those whom he loves or who love him. He prays for all to have forgiveness, those we love and those we don't. For how can we come to Communion with hate toward anyone in our hearts? We are supposed to love all, whether they deserve it or not. This is the ideal. Of course we will fall short of the ideal. But the ideal can't be love some people some of the time. Christ sets the ideal as loving all the people all of the time. Because He died for all people, even those who didn't love Him, even the ones that were killing Him. He died for them too.

Liturgical Schedule for February

Wednesday, February 2 **Presentation of Christ in the Temple**

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

Sunday, February 6 **St. Photios**

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

His Grace Bishop Sevastianos of Zela Officiating

Ordination of Charlie Hambos to the Diaconate

Monday, February 7 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Charlie Hambos first liturgy as a Deacon

Thursday, February 10 **St. Haralambos**

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

Sunday, February 13 **First Sunday of Triodion—Publican and Pharisee**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, February 20 **Second Sunday of Triodion—Prodigal Son**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, February 23 Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, February 26 **First Saturday of Souls—To be held at Garden of Memories Memorial Park**

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

Sunday, February 27 **Third Sunday of Triodion—The Last Judgment**

Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



PLEASE COMMEMORATE THE NAMES OF MY DEPARTED FAMILY

MEMBERS IN THE SATURDAY OF THE SOULS MEMORIAL SERVICES - February 26, March 5, March 12

In Memory of

****You only need to write the first name of each person. Please mail to the church office by Friday, February 25.**

You may also email the names to office@stjohntpa.org

Liturgical Notes for February 2022

Wednesday, February 2 - The Presentation of Our Lord into the Temple

The Presentation of Christ is a major feastday of the church and commemorates the day, 40 days after the Nativity, when Christ was brought to the temple when He was 40 days old. According to the Law of Moses, every male child was brought to the temple on its 40th day, together with a sacrifice of pigeons or turtle doves by the parents, and the child was “consecrated Holy to the Lord.” Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple on His 40th day, because it was the law to do so. In the temple was a priest named Simeon, who was an older man, who had been promised by God that he would not die until he saw the Christ. When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he knew in his heart that this was the Lord’s Messiah. He took the child in his arms and prayed “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32) This prayer is recited over every child in the Orthodox Church when they are brought to church for the first time when they are 40 days old. That’s where this beautiful tradition comes from.

Sunday, February 6 – St. Photios the Great - Saint Photios was the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople from 858-867 and from 877-886. He is regarded as the most powerful and influential church leader subsequent to St. John Chrysostom. He led a renaissance in the spread of Christianity, helped quell a schism, and was instrumental in missionary work. St. Photios is the patron saint of the shrine in St. Augustine.

Thursday, February 10 - St. Haralambos - St. Haralambos was a Saint of the first century and lived in Greece. He was a priest who was martyred. Our parish has a special connection to St. Haralambos since his relics were interred in our altar table when the church was consecrated in 1986.

Wednesday, February 23 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For February, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday Evening, February 23, from 6:00--7:00 p.m.

What We Celebrate on the Sundays of Triodion and Lent

Pascha will be celebrated this year on Sunday, April 24. Holy Week will begin with the Saturday of Lazarus on Saturday, April 16. Forty Days prior to that is the start of Great Lent, which is Monday, March 7. And for four Sundays prior to that the Church has the period of the Triodion, or preparation for Great Lent, which will begin on Sunday, February 13.

Sunday, February 13 - Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee - The focus this Sunday is on the Gospel of Luke 18:10-14, in which two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, an externally decent and righteous man of religion, and the other was a publican, a sinful tax-collector who was cheating the people. Though the Pharisee was genuinely righteous under the Law, he boasted before God and was condemned. The publican, although he was truly sinful, begged for mercy, received it, and was justified by God. There is NO fasting this week, in preparation for our great journey.)

Sunday, February 20 - Sunday of the Prodigal Son - On this Sunday in the preparation for Great Lent, Orthodox Christians are to read Christ’s parable about God’s loving forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). They are to see themselves as being in a foreign country far from the Father’s house and to make the movement of return to God, where we truly belong. The parable gives assurance that the Father will receive them with joy and gladness in their journey through Great Lent, their journey home.

Saturday of the Souls – Saturdays, February 26, March 5, and March 12

It is a Tradition in the Orthodox Church to offer prayers for the souls of all of our loved ones who have departed this life, in the hope of the Resurrection to Eternal Life. There are four Saturdays of the year that are dedicated specifically to this purpose. There are three Saturdays at the beginning of Lent and the Saturday before Pentecost. Everyone is encouraged to submit the names of their loved ones to be commemorated at the services (see enclosed form). Everyone is encouraged to attend one of these services (and bring Kolyva) if you are able, as a way of honoring the people in your family who have passed away, once a year. *An insightful article on why we offer memorial services is part of this issue of [The Messenger](#).*

First Saturday of Souls Divine Liturgy on February 26 to be held at Garden of Memories-After a one year hiatus we will again hold Divine Liturgy for Saturday of Souls at Garden of Memories Memorial Park at 4207 E. Lake Avenue in East Tampa. We will celebrate Divine Liturgy in the Chapel of the Funeral Home (different location than the past). Orthros will begin at 9:00 a.m. followed by Divine Liturgy at 10:00 a.m., with a memorial service at the end of the Liturgy. After Liturgy is concluded, Father Stavros will visit the graves of the relatives of all attendees of the Liturgy. This is the ninth year that we will be doing this liturgy at the Garden of Memories. Please come and join us praying for the souls of our loved ones, as we also pray for strengthening and inspiration for ourselves.

Sunday, February 27 – Judgment Sunday (Meatfare)

Judgment Sunday is also called - Meatfare Sunday because it is the last Sunday, according to the fasting canons, that the faithful eat meat before Easter. During the following week, we do not fast on Wednesday and Friday (except for meat, of course). On this Sunday, we call to mind something that has not even happened yet: the Second Coming of Christ. Our Lord has promised us that He will come again, “to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end” (from the Nicene Creed). We call to mind the “criteria” of our entrance into Paradise, as our Lord said in today’s Gospel: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

The Prodigal Son

By Fr. Stavros



Most of us are familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15: 11-32) A man has two sons. The younger of the two asked his father for his share of his inheritance, which his father grants. He then goes to a faraway country where he squanders all of it. He is alone and hungry. Recognizing his dire situation, he is now subsisting on the slop that pigs eat, he comes to himself and decides to go back home and beg his father's forgiveness. His father welcomes him back with open arms and throws a party in his honor. The older son is angry that the father receives the prodigal son back with joy and forgiveness. He tells his father that he has never disobeyed him and that he can't/won't rejoice in the return of his brother.

The key moment in the Gospel lesson is a critical decision made by the younger son as he sits in the slop of the pigs. He has two choices: I am okay here. I am eating slop but I'm eating. Or "I can do better than this."

Before we discuss the younger son, let's discuss the older son. He basically said to his father, "I never do anything wrong. I resent my younger brother now that he has come back." The problem with the older son is not his loyalty to the father. That was exemplary. One problem with the older son is that he does not rejoice in the repentance of his younger brother. He does not truly love his brother, because as St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 13, love rejoices not in the wrong, but in the right. And when the younger brother came home, love dictated that the older brother rejoice in the right, at least offer his brother a path back. But the more significant problem with the older son is that he is not truthful—"I never do anything wrong" is not a truthful statement for any person. Unfortunately, there is no room in most places in life to be truthful about doing something wrong. We risk being looked down on, or fired, or cancelled. We haven't created places where it's safe and expected to be honest. We've created parameters where it's expected we'll be perfect and that's simply a standard no one can meet. Somehow, we feel pres-

sured to be the older brother, living an untruth about being perfect, while at the same time getting angry at those who around us who are not perfect.

So, now we go back to the younger son. He's in a mess of his own making. He was the one who demanded the inheritance. He was the one who wasted it. He is now the one who is hungry and alone. The Gospel said no one gave him anything. So now he has two choices—I'm okay here. Or I can do better. There is no compelling push either way. There is no search party, or urgent email saying come home. Just a lonely young man and his thoughts. The key moment is when those thoughts turn to his loving father. He remembers his home. He remembers the food, the warmth. He remembers that in his home, even the servants are treated well by his father. And he decides that he'd rather be a servant of his father than eating the food of the pigs. The Gospel tells us that he comes to himself. He figures out on his own what he needs to do. He makes a plan to throw himself at his father's mercy. He doesn't expect to be treated as a son. He is content to become a servant.

The father sees the son coming home. Here is another critical moment in the story. He runs to his son, and embraces and kisses him. He doesn't wait for the son to come to him. He doesn't greet him with an angry scowl. He doesn't say "you've got some explaining to do." He certainly doesn't condemn him, "why did you come back?" He embraces his son. And when the son starts to plead with his father to be treated as a servant, the father will have none of it. He restores him immediately—he asks for the best shoes, the best robe, the best ring and the best food be given to the son. He is so filled with joy because his son has come back.



Continued...

There are two applications for this story in 2022. The first applies every year when we read this passage two weeks before the start of Great Lent. Great Lent begins March 7. It is supposed to be a time for us to place ourselves in the shoes of the Prodigal Son, as he sat among the pigs. It is a time to choose either “I am okay” or “I can do better.” The choice to do better is the choice to go back to the Father, God, in repentance. The choice to do better is the plan to spend Lent growing in faith, so that when Pascha comes, we’ll feel as though we are at the party at the father’s house, rather than still sitting with the pigs. The way back to father requires us to do two things. It requires us to be humble, like the tax collector last week, and admit to ourselves “I can do better.” And it requires the journey of the Prodigal Son, which we call repentance. Repentance is when we change direction, when we stop sitting in pig slop and start the journey home, to the father.

The beautiful thing about the Parable is that the reaction of the Father is the same reaction that God has for us when we come back to Him. I think of this often when a person comes to the sacrament of confession. As they walk in the door, I’m not thinking “I wonder what they have done”. Rather I’m rejoicing, “they’ve come back.” This is how God sees us. He sees us as the Father saw his wayward son. He is ready to throw the party. He is ready to give us the best shoes, the best ring, the best robe, the best. All we have to do is come home. All we have to do is make the decision “I can do better.” The upcoming journey of Great Lent, with its services, with a journal we are putting together, is designed to help us renew, return, and rejoice. Now is the time to start thinking about what we are doing to renew and return to, so that at Pascha we can rejoice. Will it be an improved prayer life? Will it be an overall greater sense of kindness towards others? Will it be strengthening a relationship, or repairing one that has been ruined? Will it be greater control of our thoughts, or our mouths? There is no one who has no area for improvement.

The second application for this story in 2022 has to do with the state of our world. Many of us are tired. We are tired of the pandemic. We are tired of the endless news cycle. We are tired of the restrictions. We are tired of the politics. We are tired of all of it. May I make a humble suggestion as we begin this period of the Great Lent. Let us stop looking at the whole world for a little while. Let us stop watching the news and let us get out of the debate. Let’s get off social media and stop trying to keep up with the Joneses. Our society looks like its sitting in the pig slop and doesn’t seem to have any sense of urgency to get out. So let’s look at that decision “I can do better in two ways.” First, as individuals. As the saying goes, the only person we can control is ourselves. So, let’s each make the decision “I can do better.” And for the next two weeks before we begin Great Lent, let’s each of us think about how “I can do better.” Second, let’s look at this as a church community. We can do better. We can do better

for ourselves. And we can do better witnessing our faith towards others. We can do better. We are going to be spending time this Lent getting back to our core values—love, worship, community, learning, service. We can do better as a community, collectively, at all of these things. We can do better as a society. But we cannot control the society. We can control ourselves, and we can control our community. And we can make a statement, as individuals and as a community, that we can do better. We can do better when we realize that our loving God, our loving Father, wants us to come home. He eagerly waits to welcome us. All we have to do is get to a place where we can humbly say “I can do better”, and get out of the slop, and starting walking home.

There are people who are reading this message who haven’t been to church in a while. Either they are watching on line, or they’ve started going to another church, or they’ve stopped going to church altogether. Some have been worshipping at home for the past two years, out of understandable fear of catching Covid. Many are not watching anymore. The fatigue of the pandemic, perhaps the frustration at the restrictions, has caused them to change the channel. We all know people who are not here in person OR on line, and its time to encourage them, that it’s time to come home. That we can do better.

The goal of this Lent is to make our way home, to come to the individual and then collective decision, “I can do better,” “we can do better.”

When the Prodigal Son made his decision, he didn’t exactly know what was going to happen. That’s where his faith came in. He didn’t know if the father would embrace him or reject him, whether he would restore him or punish him. But he had faith that whatever was going to happen was going to be better than what he was living. And this is what faith is. Faith is the decision to get up and start walking even though we don’t know exactly where we are going or what’s going to happen when we get there. Faith is the decision to follow with the humility that says “Where I am is not good” and the repentance that says “I can do better.”

As you decide how you’ll mark Great Lent this year, evaluate these two statements. I’m okay here. Or “I can do better.” If you decide “I’m okay here”, this Lenten journey probably won’t have much to offer you. But come anyway. Come enough and you might decide “I can do better” in some aspect of your spiritual life. If you decide “I can do better,” make the decision to start walking, and choose the path or paths you’ll take to make the journey home. The icon of the Prodigal Son does not show a wayward son but a father embracing the son who has returned home. In the same way, God the Father waits to embrace us.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Celebration of Theophany and our Feastday of St. John

The first week of each year brings the celebration of Theophany and St. John to the calendar. On Thursday, January 6, we had 3 young men from our parish dive for the cross—James Kavouklis, Spiros Grapsas and Demetri Passalaris.

On the evening of January 6, His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios presided over our Great Vespers for the Feast Day of St. John, assisted by Fr. Stavros, Fr. Athanasios Haros (Tarpon Springs), Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis (Tarpon Springs), Fr. John Bociu (Sarasota) and Fr. John Stefero. At the end of the service, His Eminence tonsured nine of our altar boys—Nicholas Akrotirianakis, Yanni Trimikliniotis, George Xenick, Nicholas Magos, James Magos, Genaro Scarfogliero, John Palios, Alex Findlay, PJ Zelatis, Andrew Thatcher, and Karter Lenardos. A big thank you to the Philoptochos Society for sponsoring the reception following Great Vespers.

On Friday, January 7, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America presided over the Divine Liturgy, assisted by Fr. James Rousakis (Palm Harbor), Fr. Stavros, Fr. John Stefero, Fr. Athanasios Haros, Fr. Theofanis Katsiklis and Fr. Sampson Kasapakis (St. Petersburg), as well as Archdeacon Dionysios Papiris and Deacon Michael Giavris. Special thanks to the Hambos family, who cooked for the feastday luncheon, and to the parish council who helped serve. Also thank you to our choir who sang so beautifully on January 7. A big thank you to everyone who attended and made our feastday truly special!

What is Tonsuring Altar Boys? In the early centuries of the church, there was more of a fullness to the clergy of the church. Communities were large and had multiple priests and deacons serving. These clergymen did their ministries on a full time basis. There were others who worked for the church, some even on a full time basis and many on a part-time basis, but did this work for the entirety of their lives. There were subdeacons, chanters, readers and altar servers. These were considered “minor orders of the clergy.” They were not ordained for life, like the clergy, but they entered into the service of the church intending to do this for life. There were not altar boys who served from age 9-18, but rather men who would enter into the altar in their teens or 20s and serve for the rest of their lives. Also, there would not be 40-50 altar boys as we have at St. John. There might be 4-5 who would serve. So, for someone to enter into the service of the church was a big deal, and this was not done merely with the ascent of the priest, but with a blessing from the Bishop. Our altar boys will not serve for the entirety of their lives in the altar—they will graduate, go to college, and leave the service of the altar at some point. They also begin serving at age 9 at St. John, with the blessing of the priest. His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios (together with all the hierarchs in America) like to continue this tradition of blessing those who serve in the altar, by offering the formal blessing from the Bishop, which is called tonsuring, when young men are in high school. This service includes a prayer over the young men and a tonsuring (a cutting of their hair representing the sacrifice of self for service to the church). This is what His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios did when he came here on January 6 and tonsured our altar boys.

Parish Council News

The Parish Council officers for 2022 will be as follows: President-John Zelatis, Vice-President-Euripides (Rip) Panos, Secretary-Marilyn Sandborn, Treasurer-Gary Ward. George Chagaris is leaving the Parish Council after serving for seven years (one additional year was added because of the pandemic). Jimmy Konstas is also leaving the Parish Council after serving for several years. We thank George and Jimmy for their service. As a reminder, there was no Parish Council Elections held in 2020. Everyone on the Parish Council has been granted an extra year added to their current term, and also an extra year of eligibility as per term limits. Those who are on the Parish Council right now would be permitted to serve a total of seven years, rather than the six-year term limit, as per the decision of our Metropolitan in regards to the pandemic and Parish Council Elections.

Meeting of Ministry Heads, Tuesday, February 8 - On Tuesday, February 8, there will be a meeting of ministry heads in person from 6:30-8:30 in the Kourmolis Center. Each ministry head is requested to attend and other members of each ministry are invited to attend. If the ministry head cannot attend, please ask someone else in your ministry to attend, so that all ministries are represented.

GOYA—Our GOYA meeting for February will be Sunday, February 20 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Men’s Group-Our men’s group will meet on Sunday, February 27 at 5:00 p.m. We meet once a month, go to a restaurant for fellowship and discussion. We finish by 7:30 p.m. All men of our parish are welcome to join. New people are welcome, and bring your non-Orthodox friends, they are welcome also.

Women’s Bible Study meets on Tuesdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. with both in-person and zoom options. Fr. Stavros leads this group. In February, our meetings will be Tuesdays, February 1, February 8 February 15 and February 22. We are studying St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians.

Women’s Bible Study Retreat-Our women’s Bible study group will be holding a women’s retreat on Monday, February 28, at the home of Vickie Peckham. This all day retreat will include women from our Bible study who don’t live in Tampa. So please save the date and we look forward to meeting some people we’ve seen over zoom and who have become an integral part of our Bible study family. Details to follow.

Monday Night Bible Study - Will continue meeting at 6:30 pm Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively, and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday

Continued...

lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. In February, Monday night Bible study will take place on Mondays, February 7, 14, 21 and 28. Looking forward to your participation!

GriefShare meets every Thursday In-Person at 6:30 p.m. It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. If you've lost a spouse, child, family member, or friends you've probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel. This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions. "Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you're shivering." GriefShare groups meet weekly to help you face these challenges and move toward rebuilding your life. Each GriefShare session has three distinct elements: Video seminar with experts, support group discussion with focus and personal study and reflection. We will meet from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Thursdays, starting January 21, for 13 weeks, ending on Thursday, April 22. For February, GriefShare will meet February 3, 10 17 and 24. For more information please contact Donna Hambos at 813-843-8412 or dhambos@msn.com. Books for the program will be provided. Donation for the book suggested but not required. Open to all family and friends. Griefshare remains open enrollment with support towards healing and hope. You can begin at any time.

Vasilopita Sunday—We resumed our annual Vasilopita Sunday on January 9, after a one year hiatus because of the pandemic. We recognized all of our ministries and raised money for St. Basil's Academy. There were three recipients of coins from our three vasilopites. They were Elizabeth Xenick, representing GOYA, Catherine Mitseas, representing Youth Protection and Engie Halkias, representing Altar Angels. Thank you for Jeanie Nenos who organized everything and to the who brought Vasilopites to share with the community at coffee hour. We raised over \$1,300 for St. Basil's Academy in New York.

GO RED SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13 - February is healthy heart month. We celebrate Valentine's Day. We get our hearts ready for Great Lent. And we recognize the need to live healthier lives. As a show of support for our hearts and an opportunity to do something together, everyone is asked to wear RED on Sunday, February 13, for Valentine's Day and for healthy hearts. We did this last year and it was great. See you in red on February 13.

OCMC Super Bowl Luncheon Sponsored by Philoptochos - On Sunday, February 13, Philoptochos will host the annual Super Bowl Chili Dog luncheon to benefit Orthodox Christian Mission Center. O.C.M.C's. mission is to make disciples of all nations by bringing people to Christ and His Church. We hope you will join us in the Koulouris Center and help support the Mission Center.

Philoptochos Selling Spanakopita & Tyropita-Philoptocos still has limited amount of Spanakopita and Tyropita for Sale. Please see a board member or contact Lisa Alsina at 813 728-1094.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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.

Live Streaming

All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.

To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: stjohntpa.org,
2. Scroll the mouse over the "Multimedia" tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy,"
4. Then click on the link where it says, "Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>. All of the services are available to watch at anytime.



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

Parish Registry

Baptism-Luke Joseph Depasquale, son of Ryan and Catherine Depasquale, was baptized on Sunday, December 19. Nadia Farah was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism-Gabrielle Maria Morros Dimitriuevich, daughter of Steven Jones and Alina Morros Dimitriuevich, was baptized on Sunday, December 19. Christine Scourtes was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Wedding-Nicholas George Patides and Melinda Hong Carmichael were married on Saturday, January 1. Demetri Klimis and George Klimis were the Koumbaroi. Congratulations!

Wedding- Maria Tsambarlis & Randolph Carter were married on Saturday, January 15. Jamie Odorisio was the Koumbara. Congratulations!

Wedding- Maryann Ciorogar & Trevor Wahler were married on Saturday, January 8. Alex Limberatos was the Koumbaro. Congratulations!

Christmas Candlelight Service - December 20



Christmas Eve Service - December 24



Vespers for St. John - January 6



Vasilopita Sunday - January 9



February 2022 Sunday School Update

January was a very busy month for the Sunday School. Our topics for January were the Epiphany/ St. John the Baptist, the Vasilopita/St. Basil, The Fruits of the Holy Spirit, Making Moral Choices, and The Saints of the Orthodox Church (The three Hierarchs).

On Sunday, January 9th, the Sunday School had their own Vasilopita Celebration. Each student and teacher received a piece of this sweet bread. CONGRATULATIONS to Alex Limberatos, our Pastoral Assistant, for finding this lucky coin. He teaches our High School boys and we wish him a year of many blessings.



We would truly like to thank Melissa Krinos for making this Vasilopita for our Sunday School year after year. It was delicious and appreciated by all of us.

On Saturday, January 15th, the Sunday School Teachers participated in a retreat with Fr. Stavros. The Sunday School teachers are truly blessed to have Fr. Stavros and Alex as our spiritual leaders of our Sunday School. THANK YOU Fr. Stavros and Alex for dedicating so much of your busy schedule to our Sunday School.

We also had our YOUTH SUNDAY on Jan. 23rd. The children sang beautifully under the direction of Maria Xenick and our student Epistle Reader did a fine job. Our children are truly great stewards of St. John's. On Sunday, January 30th, our 1st through 4th Graders made Prospora under the guidance of Melissa Krinos. The students learned how to make it, what each part of the seal represents, and why it is such an important part of our service.

February Calendar:

Sunday, February 6th: Topic: Presentation of Christ / Salvation
(Story of Zacchaeus)

Youth Sunday-(7th-12th Grade Music at 11:40 a.m.)

Sunday, February 13th: Topic: Publican & Pharisee
Prospora: 7th and 8th Graders

Sunday, February 20th: Topic: Prodigal Son

Sunday, February 27th: Topic: Last Judgement



"Souper Bowl of Caring"
 Which team will raise the most donations for the
 children of
 Hope Children's Home

Sunday, Feb 13th is not only the BIG game we cheer for our favorite football team, it is also "SOUPER BOWL OF CARING" Sunday a nation-wide, youth-led initiative to TACKLY hunger! Pick your favorite team and join our HOPE & Hoy Youth ministry collect donations to benefit Hope Children's Home- a Christian home that takes orphaned children and is entirely supported by churches, private individuals, clubs and organizations.

Our Sunday School children will be near the side doors on Sunday, Feb 13th holding pots to collect your cash donation or food item. Pick your favorite team's pot to donate to! The BIG winner: Hope Children's Home

Youth Protection Program Reminder:

At this time, many of our Youth Workers' background checks are coming up for renewal, which is done every two years. On or about your two-year mark, Praesidium will automatically send an email to you from backgroundcheck@praesidiuminc.com when a new background check is needed. Please be on the lookout for these emails, as the link for a background check expires after two weeks. Also, the Youth Protection Program administrator will notify you via email when it's time to renew your online training by completing the 2-part/2-quiz Youth Safety module and the 1-part/1-quiz Youth Worker Regulations module.



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855.

St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$309,802	\$237,754	\$381,345
Received Year to Date	\$66,410	\$68,160	\$80,112
Average Pledge	\$1,833	\$1,662	\$1,815
Median Pledge	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	169	143	215
*YTD as of 1/20/22, 1/20/21, 1/13/20			

Our Food Pantry is very active helping people near and far in the Tampa Community.

Here are some special requests we have:

- Pasta
- Spaghetti Sauce
- Tomato sauce/chopped tomatoes etc.
- All kinds of white flour
- Canned Tuna
- Canned Chicken
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Body Wash
- Gluten Free Foods and Flours
- Cereal
- Whole wheat rice and pasta
- Men's and Women's razors and shaving cream (travel size)
- Toothbrushes
- **Gift cards in any amount for Publix, Walmart or Save-a-lot**



All food items offered are accepted. Thank you for supporting those who need it the most. Please contact our new volunteer, Sheila Vukmer, for any questions (412-719-1005).

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

I had rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (I Cor. 14:19)

St. John the Baptist's Twelve Disciples Project continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" for all members of the St. John's congregation.

You too may join us in this endeavor that, not only broadens your community awareness with others in our congregation, but also sharpens each of our personal prayer disciplines.

In his book, *My Life in Christ*, St. John of Konstadt said "Let us measure the worth of our prayer by a human measure, by comparing it to our interactions with other people. How do we interact with other people? Sometimes we express our requests, praises, and gratitude coldly, apathetically, out of a sense of dry duty, or simply out of politeness. Sometimes our actions are equally cold. However at other times we do all this with warmth, enthusiastically, with love (sometimes feigned, sometimes sincere)."

"We must always sing our praises, gratitude, and requests to God with the whole heart; every work must be done before Him with the whole heart."

My Life in Christ, Volume 1, page 18, St. John of Konstadt

Are you interested? Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

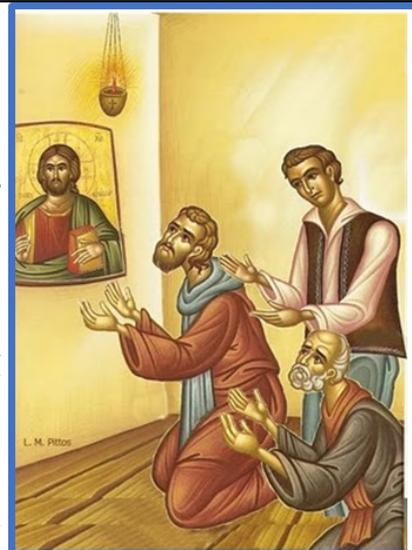
If you'd like to participate (to enjoy the presence of God as you develop your prayer rule) and receive the prayer along with at least one page of names to pray for, please contact Mathew Balasis, 727-345-4855

(mathewbalasis@verizon.net).

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

The Jesus Prayer

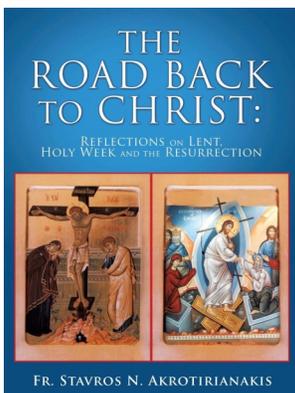


Prayer List: Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our Souls and Bodies, visit and heal your servants: Christopher; Christopher; Elaine Daniels; Mary & Peter Nenos; Tony Ekonomou; Keith Lynn & Patrick Carroll; Daniel Hoss, Ourania Tziotis, Irina, Marina, Yuri, and Christophoros; Ashley Snyder; Evangelos & Caroline Critkas; Constantinos & Kalotina Klimis; Christine Alex, June, Lillian Thomas; Scotty; Desi Serriera; Ashley Kladakis; Dora Kallas, Kathy & Andrew Bouzinekis; Anastasia; Virginia Georgiou, Ron Myer, Toulia Tsaros, Fr. Pat Legato, Nellie Pringle, Yolanda Webb, Angela Bougas, Tony Ekonomou, Ron, Jason Vickers, Rex Garrison, Tina Chakonas, Ann Demas, Christina Noel Kouzes Houck, Evangeline Xeroteris, Ashley Henderson, Natalie Henderson, Chris, Debbie, James, Avery, Lily, Jacob, Jesse, Ann, Rosario, Antonia Caffentzis, Alissa, John, Angela, Joey, Christine Scourtes, Steven, Matthew & Family, Phyllis, John Zelatis, Reagan, Peter Zaharis, Alexandra Ferrarolis, Leon & Despina Botham, Cindy Xenick, Mary Ellen Evdemon, Marie Sofia Panagopoulos, Maria Hursey, Chris Vamvakias, John Myer, Mike Trimis, Robert and Alice Stoccardo, John Alexander, Michael Romero, George Hambos, Dean Kondilis and Family, Bill and Nancy Manikas, Patricia Costello, Anastasia Smyrnakis, Ekaterina & Anna Shushaalykova, Dora Koudouna, Debbie Phelps, Mary Voykin, David Voykin, Denise Badrane, Don Payne, and all victims of war, terrorism, crime, natural disaster, and all of whom we are unaware.

St. John's Bookstore



By special order, family icons are now available in our bookstore. As pictured, the 11 x 14" icon portrays The Theotokos with icons of the patron saints of your children, grandchildren, etc. The icon shown here portrays the Panagyia with icons of the patron saints of children Nicholas, Nectarios, Demetrios, Catherine and George. Please see Presvytera Denise for more information and to order. Allow a minimum of 8 weeks for delivery. (It's not too early to consider this for a beautiful and unique Mother's Day gift.) See a sample icon in our bookstore.



The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection is now on sale! It is a series of daily reflections to be read from the beginning of Triodion (this year that is February 13) through All Saints Day (this year that is June 19). Pick up your copy today so you can begin reading it on February 13. This book costs \$18.99 and all monies taken in at the bookstore go to the church.

The Prayer Team will celebrate its 7th Anniversary On February 20!

For six years, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection. It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the subject of “The Heart of Encouragement” and on Saturday - Sunday, Father is writing on the Scriptures of each Sunday.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,360 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! 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 Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the “forward to a friend” option. Also, make sure prayer-team365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

Father Stavros has authored **FIVE** books that are available both in the bookstore and on-line. They are entitled:

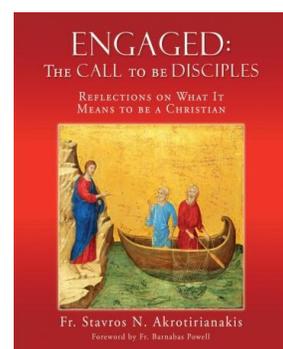
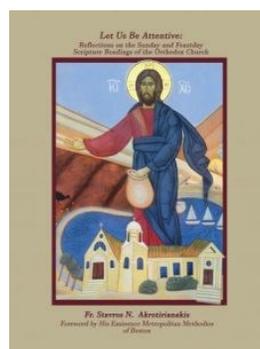
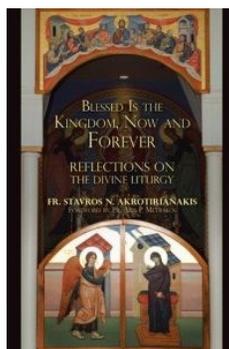
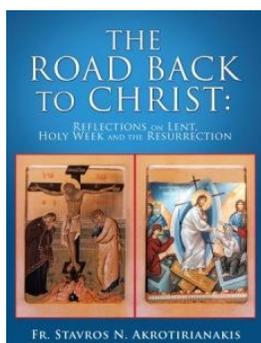
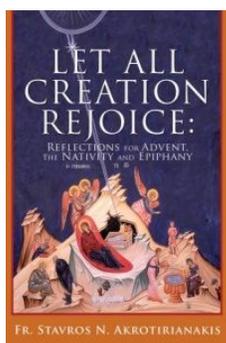
Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy

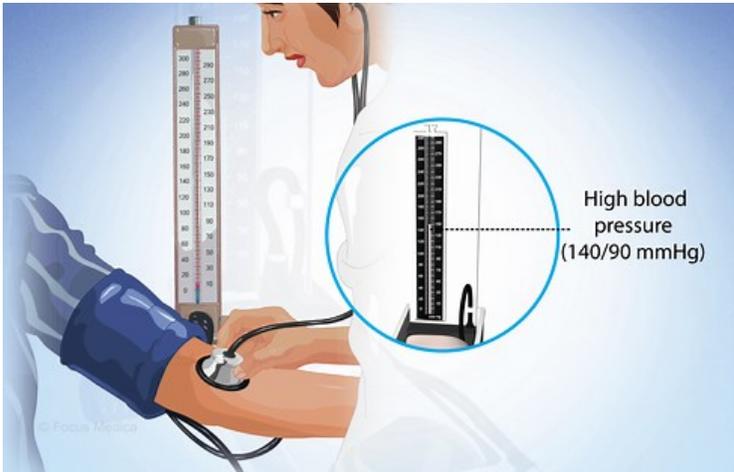
Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church

ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian



Blood Pressure

A PSA from St. John's Nursing Ministry



DO YOU KNOW YOUR NUMBERS?

February is Heart Health Month. If you're planning on making improvements to your heart health start now and celebrate those wins during heart health month. Your nursing Ministry team will be checking blood pressure every Sunday after the liturgy, so take advantage of this wonderful service and start your healthy heart adventure. This health article will focus on blood pressure and the importance of maintaining a healthy blood pressure to draw attention to the importance of good cardiovascular health.

What is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure is the physical force exerted by the blood as it pushes against the walls of the arteries. Blood pressure readings are written in two numbers separated by a line. The top number represents the systolic blood pressure, and the bottom number represents the diastolic pressure. The systolic blood pressure is the pressure in the arteries as the heart contracts pushing the blood forward. The diastolic pressure is the pressure in the arteries as the heart relaxes.

Normal Blood Pressure

Normal pressure Normal blood pressure is below 120/80. Systolic pressure indicates the strength of the pressure in your heart during heartbeat. So, if you find your systolic pressure too high, chances are that you have hypertension.

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

- The American Academy of Cardiology defines blood pressure ranges as follows:
Blood pressure between 120/80 and 129/80 is elevated blood pressure, and a blood pressure of 130/80 or above is considered high.

Symptoms of High blood pressure:

High blood pressure is referred to as the “silent killer” because most people with high blood pressure have no signs or symptoms, even if blood pressure readings reach dangerously high levels.

A few people with high blood pressure may have headaches, shortness of breath or nosebleeds, but these signs and symptoms aren't specific and usually don't occur until high blood pressure has reached a severe or life-threatening stage.

Left **untreated, hypertension** can result in permanent damage

to the small blood vessels of your body, which can damage organs such as the heart, brain, and kidneys, leading to heart attacks, stroke, and kidney failure.

Most common symptoms if symptoms occur with hypertension:

- headache
- blurred vision
- dizziness
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- heart attack

Factors that increase one's risk for high blood pressure:

- Smoking
- High Cholesterol (which clogs the arteries)
- Overweight or obesity
- Lack of physical activity
- Too much salt consumption
- Too much alcohol consumption (more than 1 to 2 drinks per day)
- Stress
- Older age
- Genetics
- Chronic kidney disease
- Adrenal and thyroid disorders
- Sleep apnea

Simple lifestyle changes that can help lower blood pressure:

- Losing weight if overweight or obese
- Eating a healthy, low-salt diet
- Exercise regularly
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Stop smoking

YOUR Nursing Ministry will be doing **FREE** blood pressure screening after liturgy every Sunday for the month of February.

Stop by and get your blood pressure checked for **FREE** and Know your **numbers!**



Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share that, beginning May 1st, we will be offering a Parish Assistance Program, PAP, with BayCare Behavioral Health. The PAP program will provide our parishioners access to free and confidential counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors.

Parishioners can contact BayCare to request up to three free and confidential counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional. The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times.

Through BayCare Behavioral Health, parishes enrolled in this program allow access to services for their parishioners who are suffering from emotional turmoil that results from the challenges of everyday life which span a lifetime. The BayCare network of providers understand the importance of compassionate care and are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve.

You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: <https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-health-services>

Help is available for life issues including:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Family discord
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse issues
- Behavioral issues



BayCare
Behavioral Health

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
Demet & Eleni Anagnostiadis - Bethesda, MD
Nicholas & Doris Andreadakis - Lititz, PA
Andy Apostolopoulos—Asheville, NC
George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL
Nicholas Anton - Dunedin, FL
Gaby & Alicia Atik - Treasure Island, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC
Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Christopher & Jaime Brewer - Tampa, FL
Pete & Carol Caldwell - Ringgold, GA
William Camarinos - Alexandria, VA
William & Kanella Jane Chapman - Ellenton, FL
Nicholas & Sondra Chronis - Mt. Pleasant, SC
Emmanuel Chrysakis - Palm Harbor, FL
Victor & Cynthia Cucuz - Tampa, FL
Fr Stratton & Pres. Denise Dorozenski - Sterling Heights, MI
Eric & Artemis Mellen - Longwood, FL
Peter George - Tampa, FL
Ron & Maria Gregory - St. Petersburg, FL
Charlie & Eleftheria Hambos - Orlando, FL
Gabriel Hurst - Largo, FL
Michael Ibrahim - E. Brunswick, NJ

Judith Jogerst
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demetrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH
John & Cathie Koch - New Port Richey, FL
Tommy Kolouris - Tampa, FL
Sharon Kush - Tallahassee, FL
Evangelos & Helen Liras - Tampa, FL
Fr Michael & Pres Virginia Massouh - Seminole, FL
Kathleen Spanos Mendez - Ponte Verda, FL
Charles Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Deanna Palmer - Greenville, SC
Theodora Pappas Poletis - Nottingham, MD
Luke & Arianna Quinn - Arlington, MA
Nadine Raheb
Pericles & Fotini Stamatiades - Asheville, NC
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI
Lillian Thomas - Dyer, IN
Wesley & Melisa Thompson - Clearwater, FL
Christopher & Georgette Tsavoussis - Dunedin, FL
William Yotis - La Grange, IL

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.**

Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real. Any questions? Please contact the office.

Opt-in on *The Messenger* - In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, we will be mailing *The Messenger* **ONLY** to those who ask. If you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail, you certainly may. We just ask that you indicate on your stewardship form, or let the office know, that you wish to receive *The Messenger* by mail. We will no longer be mailing *The Messenger* unless you ask us to.

**Have questions?
Just need to talk?
Worried? Sad? Happy?
We are here for you!**



Fr. Stavros
<813-394-1038



Fr. John
678-637-4425 >



Vasili
414-254-5134>



Alex
<262-370-0586

Matthew 25 Temporarily On Hiatus

Our Community Outreach Ministry, Matthew 25, is temporarily on hiatus until further notice. Matthew 25 is waiting for approval to change its base of operations and hopefully will resume in springtime 2022. We appreciate your patience and will disseminate details once this ministry reorganizes and relocates.

Happy Birthday!

Nina L'Hommedieu - Feb 1
Walter L'Hommedieu - Feb 1
Nicholas Reddie - Feb 1
Paraskevas Serbanos - Feb 1
Sophia Crassas - Feb 2
Natalie Guzman - Feb 2
Peter Hanhan - Feb 3
Max Malatin - Feb 3
Sameer Al Diffalha - Feb 4
Taylor Parker - Feb 4
Andrew Findlay - Feb 5
Louis Mantzanas - Feb 5
Pheobe Sengsouvana - Feb 5
John Nenos - Feb 7
Tommy Reace - Feb 7
Alexandria Colado - Feb 9
Leo Lenardos - Feb 9
Ekaterini Sheridan - Feb 9

Nicole Voisey - Feb 10
Christina Cardy - Feb 11
Sam Lenardos - Feb 11
Kelsey Stein - Feb 11
Marianna Giallourakis - Feb 12
Sophia Ioannidis - Feb 12
Katerina Kataras - Feb 12
William Sotiropoulos - Feb 12
Thomas Phillips - Feb 13
Michael Ibrahim - Feb 14
Wren Robinson - Feb 15
Lambros Papaeconomou - Feb 18
Charles Katsaros - Feb 19
Constance Santos - Feb 20
Emory Brewer - Feb 21
Stephanie Florou - Feb 21
Joseph Hambos - Feb 21
Mila Depasquale - Feb 22

Alex Halikoytakis - Feb 22
George Panson - Feb 22
Mila Saliba - Feb 22
Jazmyn Singh - Feb 22
Anna Galin - Feb 23
Chris Maltezos - Feb 23
Andrew Mellon-Lynn - Feb 23
Stylios Sheridan - Feb 23
Alexandra Frantsvog - Feb 24
Margarita Kyros - Feb 24
Melanie Letobarone - Feb 24
Christian Cole - Feb 25
Mia Lenardos - Feb 25
Penelope Markowski - Feb 25
Lisa Gialamas - Feb 26
Katie Spirides - Feb 26
Kaitlin Zelatis - Feb 26

St John Greek Orthodox Church's Young-At-Heart Ministry

We welcome people of all ages to join us as a member or as a friend of YAH.

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

- Our meetings are held once a month from 11:30 to 1 p.m., usually at the Koumolis Hall. From time to time we may go on fieldtrips or have lunch at a restaurant in place of meetings at the hall.

BIRTHDAYS:

- In January, we wished birthday to Kathy Bouzinakis.

Core Values: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, & Service

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound during the pandemic as part of our Church's fulfillment of the core values of love and community. We contacted by

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Feb
Phoned	40	20	32	38	37	15	14	16
				88				
Left Messages	3	1	6	9	2	8	7	7
Visited	3	1	7	1	3	2	2	9
Sent Cards	2	4	2	0	6	2	1	3
Left Text Messages	3	1	4	2	8	2	3	3

For more information,
 contact
 Bill Manikas
 wmanikas@gmail.com / 813-716-8185
 Dora Morgan
 813-613-3738

PASSED ACTIVITIES

- The December meeting was a Lenten pot-luck luncheon and holiday gift exchange at the St John Koumolis Center. Elections were held and Bill Manikas was chosen to be president and Dora Morgan was re-elected as recording secretary.
- The January meeting was held at the Carrabba's Italian Restaurant. The president passed out a list of potential fieldtrips that we may go on. These potential fieldtrips are in a radius of two hours from Tampa.

Bible Trivia - Answers On Next Page

1. What is the common name given to the first four books of the New Testament?
2. Who wrote most of the books in the New Testament?
3. Who wrote the Acts of the Apostles?
4. Which book comes last in the New Testament?
5. What does the word "gospel" mean?
6. Who was the king of Judea at the time of Jesus' birth?
7. Which Gospel records the fewest miracles performed by Jesus?
8. In what water was Jesus baptized?
9. What miracle did Jesus perform at the wedding in Cana?
10. Who was the tax collector that climbed up a tree so he could see Jesus?
11. Which two Old Testament characters appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration?
12. How did Jesus reveal the one who would betray Him?
13. Where was Jesus crucified?
14. For how many days did Jesus appear to His disciples after His resurrection?
15. Who went with Paul in his first missionary journey?
16. Paul and Silas were imprisoned during the second missionary journey, but in what city did this happen?
17. During Paul's third missionary journey, how long did he minister in the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus?
18. On what island was Paul shipwrecked as he made his way to Rome?
19. How many church of Asia Minor were there?
20. On what island was John when he was given the vision of Revelation?
21. In the New Jerusalem described in Revelation, what are the twelve gates made from?
22. Where was Jesus born?
23. Why did Joseph take Mary and Baby Jesus to Egypt?
24. Where did Jesus grow up after returning from Egypt?
25. What was Jesus' first miracle?
26. As Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat, a big storm arose. Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and the storm disappeared. What was Jesus doing when the storm arose?
27. Jesus miraculously broke just a few loaves of bread and fishes and fed 5,000 men, along with women and children. How many loaves and fishes did He start with?
28. How did Judas identify Jesus as the one to be arrested?
29. On Good Friday, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate for trial. Why did Pontius Pilate condemn Jesus to death?
30. What language was most of the New Testament originally written in?
31. What is the last book of the New Testament?
32. In which Gospel did Jesus say and quote: "Everything is possible for one who believes?"
33. What is John the Baptizer's father's name?
34. Who wrote Acts of the Apostles?
35. What is the first book of the New Testament?
36. What was the name of the first Christian who was stoned to death?
37. For how many days and nights did Jesus fast?
38. Which wood has been used by Noah to build the ark?

Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

1. Memorial Services **MUST** be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

February 1
BRIDGET, FILIKITA, TRYFON

February 2
IPAPANTI

February 3
ASIMAKIS, ASIMINA, SIMEON, STAMATIA, STAMATIS

February 4
IASIMOS, ISIDOROS

February 5
AGATHI,

February 6
PHOTIS

February 7
PARTHENIS

February 8
ZAHARIAS

February 9
MARKELOS, NIKIFOROS, PAGRATIOS

February 10
HARALAMBIA, HARALAMBOS, HARIKLIA, HARI-LAOS

February 11
AVGI, THEODORE, VLASSIS

February 12
MELETIOS, PLOTINOS

February 13
PRISCILLA

February 14
CHLOE, VALENTINI

February 15
EFSEVIOS

February 16
PAMFILLIE, PAMFILLOS, SELEFKOS

February 17
THEODOROS,
February 18
AGAPITOS, LEON

February 19
FILOTHEI

February 22
ANTHOUSA, THALASSIOS

February 23
POLYCHRONIS, POLYKARPOS

February 25
RIGINOS, TARASIOS, TARSI

February 26
ANATOLI, PHOTINI, PORFIRIOS, SEBASTIANOS

February 27
ASKLIPIOS, NISIOS

February 28
KYRA, MARIANNA, CASIANOS

Bible Trivia - Answers!

1. The Gospels
2. Paul
3. Luke
4. Revelation
5. Good news
6. Herod the Great
7. Matthew
8. River Jordan
9. Turning water into wine
10. Zacchaeus
11. Elijah and Moses
12. Dipped a piece of bread and passed it to him
13. Golgotha
14. Forty
15. Barnabas
16. Philippi
17. Two years
18. Malta
19. Seven
20. Patmos
21. Pearl
22. Bethlehem
23. To escape from King Herod, who wanted to kill Jesus
24. Nazareth
25. Turning water into wine
26. Sleeping
27. Five loaves and two fish
28. He kissed Jesus
29. The chief priests had persuaded the crowd to demand his execution
30. Greek
31. Revelation
32. Mark
33. Zacharias
34. Luke
35. Matthew
36. Stephen
37. Forty
38. Gopher

On the Serious Side

The people we surround ourselves with either raise or lower our standards. They either help us to become the best version of ourselves or encourage us to become lesser versions of ourselves. We become like our friends. No man becomes great on his own. No woman becomes great on her own. The people around them help to make them great. We all need people in our lives who raise our standards, remind us of our essential purpose, and challenge us to become the best version of ourselves.

God's Voice—calms, comforts, convicts, encourages, enlightens, leads, reassures, stills
Satan's Voice—obsesses, worries, condemns, discourages, confuses, pushes, frightens, rushes

It's hard to hear God's voice when you've already decided what you want Him to say.

If you see a married couple still in love through the years, you may think how lucky they are. But in marital relations, there's no such thing as luck. They made many compromises, they overlooked each other's faults. They forgave many mistakes and endured many problems. They spent years learning to understand one another. Love has never been a matter of luck. It's mutual giving, compromise, shared dreams, care, respect, mercy and patience.

The Church is a hospital, and not a courtroom, for souls, She does not condemn on behalf of sins, but grants remission of sins. ~St. John Chrysostom

To the world you may be one person. But to one person, you may be the world. ~Dr. Seuss

The Meaning of "Kyrie Eleison" "Lord, have mercy."

Keep this in mind when you respond "Lord, have mercy" during our services.

The word "mercy" in English is the translation of the Greek word "eleos." This word has the same ultimate root as the old Greek word for oil, or more precisely, olive oil; which was poured onto wounds and gently massaged in, thus soothing, comforting, and making the injured part whole again. The Hebrew word which is also translated as "eleos" and mercy is "hesed," which means steadfast love. The Greek words for "Lord have mercy" are "Kyrie Eleison" meaning, "Lord soothe me, comfort me, take away my pain, show me Your steadfast love." Thus mercy does not refer so much to justice or acquittal but to the infinite loving-kindness of God and His compassion for His suffering children.

~by Fr. Anthony Coniaris

On the Lighter Side

A new supermarket opened near my house. It has an automatic water mister to keep the produce fresh. Just before it goes on, you hear the sound of distant thunder and the smell of fresh rain.
When you approach the milk cases, you hear cows mooing and experience the scent of fresh hay.
When you approach the egg case, you hear hens cluck and cackle, and the air is filled with the pleasing aroma of bacon and eggs frying.
The veggie department features the smell of fresh buttered corn.
I don't buy toilet paper there any more.



Be careful where you shop online. We ordered a german shepherd and now this guy lives with us.

A huge stack of toilet rolls fell on me in the supermarket. I'm ok though, just soft tissue damage.



The guy at the furniture store told me the sofa would seat 5 people without any problems.
Then it occurred to me, I don't think I know 5 people without any problems.



On Death and Memorial Services

By Fr. Paul Kaplanis

WHAT IS THE ORTHODOX CHURCH?

The Orthodox Church is the Church founded by Jesus Christ and described throughout the New Testament. (St. Paul's letter's, Book of Acts, etc). All other Christian Churches and sects can be traced back historically to it. The word Orthodox literally means "correct teaching" or "correct worship," being derived from two Greek words: orthos, "correct," and doxa, "glorification", "teaching" or "worship." In the early Church as the encroachments of false teaching and division multiplied, threatening to obscure the identity and purity of the Church, the term "Orthodox" quite logically came to be applied to it. The Orthodox Church carefully guards the truth against all error and schism, both to protect its flock and to glorify Christ, whose Body the Church is.



Ministry at the End of Life

The Dignity of Mankind

As Orthodox Christians we view the creation of the world from a Biblical perspective. In His goodness, God created the material universe; "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Then "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27); the "Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

For us, mankind is meant for paradise, and paradise is eternal life in God. St. Isaac of Syria who lived in the 7th Century, gives us an insight into this anthropology. God indwells in man as a temple, The person of Christ is the fullest realization of this indwelling. Man in turn was created with the potential of admitting the fullness of the Divinity and endless existence. This concludes that, "Every human person is provided with five 'incomparably great gifts': life, sense perception, reason, free will, and authority."

Illness and death, then, are foreign to the original purpose for which God created us. God never ceased to love that

which He created. With the gift of Free Will, there is responsibility and so every day we have the opportunity to make choices.

When we are gravely ill, however, the ability to make decisions for ourselves becomes difficult, if not impossible and our family members, (if we have them), are put into a very emotional and challenging position.

The Mind of Christ, the Mind of the Church Life a Gift From God

We consider life to be a gift from God. It would be correct for me to say that the gift of life, even a single breath given to man, whom He created in His image and called to be like Him, is a grace beyond measure.

Christian Values: Following God's Will and Passing into Eternal Life

When it comes to the transition between life, death to this life and transition to eternal life, humanly we can pray the same anguishing prayer of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." On the other hand we are firm in our conviction that death is a joyous transition to another life, a blessed life partaking of the Divine Nature (cf. 2Pt. 1:4) for all eternity.

This combination of human sorrow in our human nature felt as such a sense of loss is joined with spiritual joy a sense of hope and trust in the Almighty Father.

Reflections on God's Mercy

For the Orthodox Christian who is about to pass into eternal life and for their family as well, the phrase, "There is no man who lives and does not sin" is very well known. So for someone who is coming to the end of their life, preparation through repentance and confession of sin, anointing with the Holy Unction and partaking of the Divine Mysteries is an essential preparation. Orthodox Christians may receive Sacraments only from an Orthodox Priest. Prayers may be offered by a chaplain, but contacting the local priests should take place as soon as possible. It is very important that the patient has the opportunity to speak with their Orthodox priest. Ideally, it is important that the priest sees the terminally ill person early on so that he can communicate, answer questions and administer the Sacraments while the person is still conscious and/or not heavily drugged. In Orthodoxy, the most important blessing and Sacrament that can be given while the person is aware is the Holy Eucharist. In this particular case when a patient is in

Continued...

Hospice, the end of the person's life usually is approaching quickly. There is another important prayer that the priest offers at this point, when there is no virtually no chance of recovery. It is called the prayer of the separation of the body and the soul. I have said this prayer a lot over the years and on many occasions when a person is laboring and struggling to let go. I cannot say that the prayer guarantees that the person will pass on soon, but I have witnessed a peaceful end to prolonged suffering. Permit me to share a small excerpt from the prayer, "We pray to You, therefore, God in the Trinity, to bring about, in repose, the parting of the soul of your servant, (name), from his body. Yes, Master, Lord our God, hear me your sinful and unworthy servant at this hour and loosen your servant, (name), from this unbearable suffering and bitter illness by which he/she is afflicted, and give him/her, rest with the spirits of the righteous."

Targets of Intervention

The persons in need of intervention are the child of God coming to the end of life and his/her, family, close friends and caretakers. The issues of concern of both groups could overlap but are likely to be different as well. The main focus of the dying person may be issues such as the loss of personhood, and value. They also may be suffering great discomfort including pain, loss of dignity, concern about loss of control, loss of meaning in life, being a burden to family and friends and the indignity of dependency on others (Back, Wallace, Starks, & Pearlman, 1996; Canetto & Hollenshead, 1999). The dying person may also be burdened by grieving over the effect of their death to their survivors especially if they are responsible for the welfare of others.

In my experience, visiting parishioners who are ill for many years, I have always admired all those who work in the medical field. As we know the Physician typically wants to preserve hope in a physical cure. Physicians, nurses and those offering care and counsel, may have difficulty telling patients and family when a cure is not possible. Some may have difficulty discussing basic patient choices such as home treatment, hospice and comfort care. In the past, Medical education had not included palliative or comfort care and compassionate care near the end of life. Physicians and caregivers believed that they must do everything to prolong life regardless of the pain and suffering involved and fear that offering comfort care may suggest they have given up or failed. Today I am pretty sure that has changed.

(I had a doctor's wife in my previous parish who always joked that her husband had a 100% failure rate, meaning

that eventually all his patients died). For the Orthodox priest, discussing issues of Orthodox Christian teaching and the ethics of end of life care is critical in such situations.

For Orthodox patient the inclusion of

the parish priest is essential when discussing end of life decisions. The priest is there to listen to the guidance of the physicians and to assist them as they offer options to the patient and family. The priest is to offer comfort and help remove the potential for guilt that accompanies end of life decisions. The priest should always try to reinforce the physician's recommendations and discuss options with the family to keep their loved one comfortable.

From the Church's viewpoint, the prayers said almost to the very end ask for healing. They prayers continue a hopeful tone until such time through medical realities and discernment that the prayers for a peaceful end to the person's life are read. I always explain to the family members that the time as arrived to pray these prayers.

There is a time when medically the person is kept comfortable, but other means of life support and medical applications are no long practical or necessary. We would say that it time for the person to rest and to be able to go from not from life to death, but from death to eternal life. I had an interesting experience not too long ago at Duke Hospital. A dear parishioner had breast cancer. She was in her 70's and had treatments for several years, but finally her body could not longer fight the disease. I knew her and her family very well and they were very active in the church. Before her condition worsened and she was put on a ventilator, she had an order to be resuscitated in her living will. Her daughter and only child was the medical power of attorney. The palliative care doctor happened to be Greek Orthodox, but not active in the church. The first day I went to visit after she had been in the emergency room, as soon as the doctor saw me I could feel the tension. He thought I was going to counter all the advice and guidance that he was offering. He was convinced that I would turn things into a religion vs. medical battle. I was very quiet and cordial and I read my prayers and listened to him and the daughter. The next day, as I was coming down the hall, I heard the doctor say, when saw me coming toward the room, "speaking of the devil".



I ignored what I heard and I simply continued to listen and be supportive. Then he asked for my help in talking with the daughter and the patient to convince them to eliminate the resuscitation order. He told me how she was so fragile and how painful it would be to try and do something that really wasn't going to make things better. After a few more days, the doctor and I became good friends and he even got interested in his Church and spiritual life again.

Psycho-Spiritual Assessment

The impact of death on the family should also be looked into from the viewpoint of the dying person as well as the family and friends left behind. It is very important for the Orthodox Christian psychologist and priest to have a sense of the level of spiritual development of both the person coming to the end of their lives and their family. Ministering to active and non-active Orthodox Christians requires a careful and sensitive approach.

Death and loss is an existential confrontation with who we are and our meaning in life. For the committed Orthodox Christian, Christ is the meaning of life: God's Love, Mercy and Will, and the grace we receive to respond with hope and trust, is the foundation life's meaning. Some marginal Christians however, will not have construed the meaning of life in Divine terms. Assessment of the spiritual level of all and careful guidance by committed caregivers to help those construct a view of death and grieving issues is necessary.

The Paradox of a Good God Permitting Evil



One major spiritual issue that is common to many end of life situations is the paradox of the love and mercy of God and the unfairness of the end of life process (Morelli, 2006a). It is just this issue however

which confound both Christians and non Christians alike.

The age old question: How can a good God permit such an unexplainable death? Such calamities are perceived as evils by those who ask.

This question did not escape our holy spiritual father St. Peter of Damaskos, who wrote:

I was also astonished how God, who is good beyond all goodness and full of compassion, permits all the many and various trials and afflictions of the world. Some He allows as sufferings conducive to repentance. These include hunger, thirst, grief, privation of life's needs, abstinence from pleasure, the wasting of the body through

asceticism...anguish, fear of death...the dismay, the oppression, the throttling of the soul in this world and in the next.

And then there are all the dangers facing one in this world: shipwrecks, illnesses of every kind, lightning, thunder, hail, earthquake, famine, tidal waves, untimely deaths-all the painful things that God allows to happen to us against our will." The saint lists also the sins of mankind among calamities: "wars, the tyranny of the passions; the derelictions, dislocations and vicissitudes of life; the anger, slander and all the afflictions that we of our own will bring upon ourselves and one another against God's will. (Philokalia III p. 75-76).

In the Orthodox funeral service, one of the hymns written by St. John of Damascus in the 8th century says: "I called to mind the Prophet, as he cried: I am earth and ashes; and I looked again into the graves and beheld the bones laid bare, and I said: Who then is the king or the warrior, the rich man or the needy, the upright or the sinner?" Or, in the words of a popular contemporary song: "Is that all there is?"

But St. John of Damascus' prayer does not end there. Because of Christ we have divine eternal meaning. The last line of that hymn is, "Yet, O Lord, give rest unto Thy servant with the righteous." Later in the funeral service we pray, "May Christ give you rest in the land of the living, and open unto you the gates of Paradise and make you a citizen of His kingdom."

So the meaning of illness and death for Orthodox Christians is eternal life. In counseling those dying and their families I try to emphasize, life is a gift from God and a great mystery. "Even a single breath is His gift." I also point out that we see the 'little picture', with dimmed and partial understanding: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1Cor 13: 12-13).

Individualizing Intervention: Psych-Spiritual Stage Assessment

As in all psychological and pastoral interventions, it is important to let the patient describe the death and dying process in their own terms. I have outlined above a rather complete Orthodox theology of death and end of life care based on the meaning of our lives as Christ and His Church has taught us. However, great clinical sensitivity and spiritual discernment is needed to put this into practice with the individual. Preaching is definitely not appropriate.

Continued...

After the dying person or grieving family member tells their "life story" as they are confronting the end of life, the meaning of life as known to us as Orthodox Christians can be kindly and wisely inserted in an empathic loving conversational manner.

Orthodox Christians in the beginning of their spiritual life may need more help in appreciating the mystery of God and the good that we cannot now perceive: "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21: 5). Those more advanced can more easily grasp this because trust in God and abandonment to His Providence and Will has become enlivened in their hearts.

The challenge of the Christian: Lack of Human Understanding but Complete Trust in Christ

God does all for love and even though some events are beyond our understanding, we can nevertheless know that some events have a greater, higher, and divine purpose even when we don't see what they might be.

The Ultimate Healing in Union with Christ: Victory



The Christian view however, sees an eternal dimension to all illness, death and ultimate healing by the possibility of being united with Christ in paradise. The suffering of

Christ on the cross, for example, has eternal ramifications in that the power of sin and death was destroyed when Christ destroyed death by being resurrected from the dead.

What should be done when the patient dies?

Usually the family of the deceased contacts their local Orthodox Priest, but if this is not possible, then we would ask for Hospice to contact us. When possible, the priest will come and say a memorial prayer and minister to the family members. The Service that is prayed is called the Trisagion, which means thrice blessed and it includes the reciting of the Lord's Prayer.

WHY DO WE PRAY FOR THE DEAD?

In the Orthodox Church Praying for the dead is an expression of love. When you love someone you want to remember them. Our Church encourages us and gives us the means to pray for our departed because we love them. Communication is important in this life, but it becomes even more important when physical communication is no longer possible.

Just as we pray for the deceased, so we believe they who

are now closer to God, continue to pray for us, remember us and love us. Whether on earth or in heaven, the Church is a single family, one Body in Christ.

These Orthodox teachings have received verification even from medical researchers. There has been a great interest in medical science to study those people who were considered to be dead for a certain period of time. In modern society we read about people who have experienced the departure of their souls, from their bodies. Advances in medical technology has enabled the resuscitation and reviving of the body and the soul returning after a brief separation.

The one question that we all want to have an answer to is one medical science cannot answer. Religion enters the seen as the only qualified source to answer the questions dealing with eternal life and salvation. In fact, the main purpose of religion is to preoccupy itself with such questions. Every religion before Christ, during Christ's earthly life and since, has had some moral message, but Christ is the only One who died and came back from the dead. It is because of this that we can answer many of the questions that frighten us about death and eternal life. Once we believe in the words of the Easter hymn that "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and bestowing life to the in the tombs", then we have the foundation of faith for understanding several things about life and the after-life.

The Orthodox Church has a full and very precise teaching on the questions of the make-up of man, the nature of the soul, the relationship between the body and the soul, the nature of death, Paradise and Hell, and the general destiny of man. The sources for these teachings are the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Fathers and Teachers of the Church, most notably in the writings from the monastic community, the lives of the saints, and in the Church's Hymnography and Iconography.

What this reminds us is that when we believe in the power of prayer, we must believe that anything we ask for is possible, otherwise why ask? St. James tells us in his epistle lesson, chapter 5 verse 16, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

When we remember our departed loved ones in prayer we must have strong faith and allow God to work through and in us through the Holy Spirit. We should never think we have any special control over God or that we can make contractual agreements with Him, (i.e. if I do this God you will do this for me). What we can do is have trust and faith in God's mercy. Prayer not only benefits those we love, they benefit us also!

“When It’s Safe” in Church Means Never

by Fr. Geoffrey Korz



Kindly set aside the idea that you will return to the holy services “when it’s safe”. That day will never come.

At every liturgy in the Orthodox Church, just before the singing of the Nicene Creed, the priest or the deacon intones the words, “The doors! The doors!” This call dates back to the earliest times, when the doors of the church had to be barred shut, to prevent outsiders (in those days, Roman soldiers) from entering the church, witnessing those who confessed the faith, seizing them, and killing them.

entering the church, witnessing those who confessed the faith, seizing them, and killing them.

Being a Christian was not safe.

Centuries later, under the Muslim Turks, Crypto-Christians – those who lived publicly as Muslims, but secretly as Orthodox Christians – attended Liturgy in secret churches, often hidden beneath secret doors in the floors of their own homes, or in unknown caves. In rural villages, Orthodox priests sometimes posed as Muslim imams just to maintain their cover. If such a village of Crypto-Christians was discovered, everyone – from the old people down to the infants – was put to the sword.

Being a Christian was not safe.

Centuries later, under Communist regimes, faithful Christians would meet secretly in grey concrete apartment blocks, where priests would baptize the little ones who had been brought by their grandmothers, without the knowledge of the parents – a legitimate excuse for the parents to give to the atheist authorities if the family was ever caught. In the most severe Communist regimes, a handful of faithful would gather outside a city or town for a clandestine nighttime Liturgy, served by a priest brought in from far away to avoid the prying eyes of local authorities. In all these cases, the faithful knew that if they were found out, the punishment would be a swift execution, or worse – a slow and painful death in a concentration camp.

Being a Christian was not safe.

In the last few months, faithful around the world have experienced the closure of our churches, the prohibition of the public celebration of Holy Week, and the effective ban by bishops and civil authorities in different places on the reception of Holy Communion. In most places, churches have now reopened (at least in part).

Yet formal studies and informal observations show that about one-third of those who regularly attended holy services at the start of this year have now become accustomed to staying home on Sundays and feast days, and have not returned to church.

Perhaps good habits have been broken. Perhaps laziness has set in. Perhaps the lure of Sunday breakfast in bed has proven seductive. Yet what has covered all the human laziness and brokenness behind the spiritual falling away is a single self-deception. These are the words, “I will return to church when it is safe again.”

Curiously, one does not hear the same phrase repeated in relation to the liquor store – i.e. I will return to the liquor store when it is safe again. Nor does one hear it applied to the purchase of groceries: grocery stores seem somehow protected from all sicknesses, and remained so throughout the recent worldwide crisis.

Neither does one hear this phrase when it comes to the workplace – i.e. I will refrain from making an income, because the risk to my health is too high. I will return to work when it is safe again. No, it seems only churches suffer from the unique level of danger – just as they did throughout the earlier part of this year, making them more risky than public transport and dollar stores combined.

The truth is, in the current climate of madness, many Orthodox Christians have not only shifted from realistic medical precaution to social hysteria, they have also found social hysteria to be a most convenient cloak for avoiding anything inconvenient or difficult.

Have to visit a relative? Not until it’s safe again. Have to finish some difficult job? Not until it’s safe again. And how about going back to church every Sunday morning...?

Brethren, attending the holy services of the Orthodox Church – Sundays or feast days – has never been safer than it is today. The truth is, however, it has never been safe to be a Christian.

In the catacombs around Rome rest the remains of more martyrs for Christ than live in my home city – over half a million martyrs. Being a Christian and going to church was always a risk for them – and so it will be for every generation of Christian, unto ages of ages.

So please, kindly set aside the idea that you will return to the holy services “when it’s safe”. That day will never come.

You will either make up your mind to live as a Christian and return to church, or you won’t.

The Muskox Response to Covid-19

by Fr. Michael Gillis



tience or the bearing of the burden of others—that is, to bear the burden that the other often is. If human beings easily agreed with one another, Jesus wouldn't have to tell us to go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, or love our enemies.

Fear and anger, however, seem to trump common sense and faith in God. Fear and anger open in us a floodgate of animal passions making it seem appropriate to demonize (or de-humanize) those we disagree with. Fear and anger release our inner muskox ready to trample those who are less clear thinking than we are, less concerned for liberty or the common good than we are, less eager to create a just and safe society than we are—or at least that's how it appears to us. And we don't have time to listen, truly listen, to one another. Fear and anger create urgency so that we don't have time to listen, we don't have time to care, we don't have time to be Christians.

We all have acquaintances, friends and family with whom we disagree, about our response to COVID-19, or about a thousand other very difficult and very important matters. Will these disagreements trump our faith? Will we love and be kind and generous and patient when it is most difficult to be so? Or will fear and anger (and maybe a bit of self-righteousness) open the floodgate of the inner muskox?

Fr. Michael Gillis serves as the parish priest of Holy Nativity Orthodox Church in Langley, British Columbia, Canada.

Last night I watched an episode of Dr. Oakley, Yukon Vet on Disney Plus. It was about Dr. Oakley treating an muskox. The episode is called, "One Angry Muskox." In order to treat this animal, they had to tranquilize it, but before they could tranquilize it, they had to separate it from the herd. And the reason they had to separate it is what I want to talk about. They had to separate it from the herd to tranquilize it because if the (male) muskox were to fall down, the other muskox would take advantage of the opportunity to attack it, injuring or killing it.

My first reflection on hearing this was, "How terrible these animals are!" However, on further reflection, I saw that these muskox are only mimicking human behaviour—or worse yet, human beings are only mimicking the worst aspects of animal behaviour.

I think the reason this idea hit me so profoundly is that in the past three days I have had no less than five pastoral conversations with people deeply troubled by the rending of friendships and family relationships due to differing opinions about how best to respond to COVID-19.

It seems in so many situations we have forgotten to be Christians. We have forgotten that good, well intentioned people may not always see eye to eye (such as the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the New Testament). We have forgotten that our Kingdom is not of this world, but is a Kingdom of righteousness and peace in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). We have forgotten that mercy triumphs over justice (James 2: 13).

We all want a just and safe society, and if human beings could easily agree on what that looked like, there would be no need for mercy, no need for pa-



Marvelous In Our Eyes

by Fr. Barnabas Powell

I always wonder at those who constantly insist “You can’t judge me.” I don’t need to judge you. We always judge ourselves. Our words, our actions, and our thoughts all contain all that is needed to “judge” rightly the true state of our souls. It is also why the Last Judgement and our constant Orthodox prayer “For a Christian end to our lives, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord” all reveal that even the Lord will only reveal, not condemn us.

But why do we get so defensive when we feel we are being “judged?” It has everything to do with being exposed for who we really are, and that is quite uncomfortable.



Look at our Lesson today in Matthew 21:33-42:

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

Jesus tells stories in the Gospels to teach us deep and profound truths. And this story is no exception. He relates to His hearers in a way that leaves them with more work to do after He speaks. So many layers of meaning! So much wisdom! And so much challenge. If we truly have eyes to see; it really is marvelous!

First, God is the Lord. You see, our lives are chaotic until we discover Whose we are; not just who we are. That’s why there is such a distinction between people who live their lives as if there is no God and those who live their lives as if there IS a God. If all of this is random and meaningless, then why bother with self-sacrifice and caring? But if there is a “householder,” well, that makes a difference. A big difference. Especially if that Householder wishes you to know Him! And He does!

Next, We are Tenants. I’ve rented houses before as both landlord and as a renter, and I can tell you it matters a great deal how you care for Someone else’s property. In fact, how you care for Someone else’s property says a great deal about you, yourself. If there is a God, and if that God wishes to be known, then even my very body is “rented property!” I am a tenant in the Lord’s Vineyard and how I care for this rented place reveals who I really am. This is why judgment is NEVER an attack but a revelation!

Next, We are Servants. There are those whom the Landlord has chosen to go into His Vineyard and “reap” what is truly His! How we treat those servants; how we embrace those servants, also reveal who we are. When we mistreat God’s servants, we reveal our disbelief in the Landlord. We assume this life is ours and ours alone. We prove to be functional atheists.

Finally, We have received the Son. God loves His vineyard, His creation. And He will not hesitate giving everything, even His very Son, to make His vineyard what He intends it to be!

Today, no wonder the Church has us say “This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” God’s judgments are His Light revealing who we really are. By the way, just because something is marvelous doesn’t mean it is always pleasant. Being confronted with who I really am is always an invitation to repentance and wonder at the inexhaustible mercy of God! That’s why we must be Orthodox on Purpose!

P.S. O Lord, You are beautiful. Your mercy is past finding out. Your grace is immeasurable. And, in the face of such love and mercy, I still struggle to bring my honest confession to You because I am ashamed. Forgive my lack of trust in Your love for me, and show me Your boundless mercy. Amen.

Fr. Barnabas Powell is the parish priest at Sts. Raphael, Nicholas, and Irene Greek Orthodox Church in Cumming, Georgia. He is also host of Faith Encouraged Live on Ancient Faith Radio and author of the Faith Encouraged podcast.



February 2022							Mar 2022 ▶
◀ Jan 2022	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
** Fast Day			1 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. PC Planning Meeting	2** Presentation of Christ Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	3 Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	4**	5 Young at Heart
6 St. Photios Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Ordination of Charlie Hambos to the Diaconate	7 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m. Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	8 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Meeting of Ministry Heads 6:30 p.m.	9**	10 St. Haralambos Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m. Griefshare 6:30 p.m.	11**	12 GOYA Clearwater Event	
13 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. OCMC Superbowl Luncheon— Philoptochos Souper Bowl of Caring	14 Bible Study 6:30 p.m. NO FASTING THIS WEEK	15 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. PC Meeting	16	17 Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	18	19	
20 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	21 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	22 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	23** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	24 Griefshare 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	25**	26 1st Saturday of Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	
27 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Member- ship Day Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	28 Women's Bible Study Retreat Bible Study 6:30 p.m.						

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

2418 W. Swann Avenue

Tampa, FL 33609-4712

Office: (813) 876-8830 Fax: (813) 443-4899

office@stjohntpa.org

www.stjohntpa.org

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. **Sundays:** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

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

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis

813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell)
fstav@gmail.com

Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
813-876-8830 (Office)

Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero
813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell)

Pastoral Assistants

Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586 (Cell)
alex@stjohntpa.org
Vasili Panagopoulos 414-254-5134
vasili@stjohntpa.org

Parish Council

John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271
Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972
Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-855-8678
Gary Ward, Treasurer 813-846-3898
Jim Armstrong 954-295-6665
Joanne Dalakis 781-888-3329
Amin Hanhan 813-846-2957
Nick Katzaras 863-581-2430
Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Office Staff

Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper
debbie@stjohntpa.org fax:813-443-4899

Adopt a College Student

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Adult Greek School

Magda Myer 813-523-5771

AHEPA

Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319

Altar Angels

Engie Halkias 813-932-5859
Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134

Altar Boys

Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Bookstore

Presbytera Denise Stefero 678-464-4833

Bible Study

Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425

Buildings & Grounds

Euripides Panos 813-352-3972

Chantor

Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

Choir

Pauline Spencer, Director 813-390-1782
Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782

Community Outreach

Greg Melton 813-967-2074

Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children

Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534

Dance Groups

H XAPA MAΣ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668
Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Marquet Edquid 813-422-8963
ΠΑΡΕΑ, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, Alexandra De Maio 813-340-9668

Daughters of Penelope

Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

Festival

Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

Finance Committee

Gary Ward 813-846-3898

Food Pantry

Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

GriefShare

Donna Hambos 813-843-8412

Gasparilla Parking

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

GOYA

Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346
goya@stjohntpa.org

Hope/Joy

George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813

Junior Olympics

Dwight Forde 727-685-9028

MOMS

Mary Ann Konstas 813-215-9862

Men's Fellowship

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Parish Nursing Ministry

Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026

Oratorical Festival

Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374

Photography Ministry

Karina Findlay 813-476-9632

Philoptochos

Melissa Krinos 813-716-9975

Stewardship

Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920
George Mitseas 813-748-1220

Sunday School

Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102

Usher

Pete Trakas 813-505-2193

Website / Social Media / APP

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Welcoming Ministry

Maria Xenick 813-765-3587

Women's Bible Study

Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038

Young Adult/OCF

Alex Limberatos 262-370-0586

Young at Heart

Bill Manikas 813-716-8185
Dora Morgan 813-613-3738

Youth Protection

Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855

12 Disciples

Mathew Balasis 727-421-7376

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.

“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.