

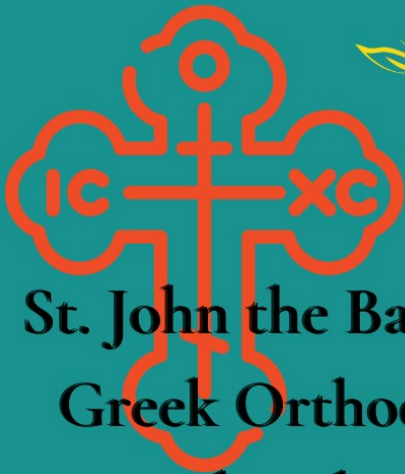
THE MESSENGER

October 2023 Edition

St. Demetrios



October 26



**St. John the Baptist
Greek Orthodox
Church**

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)

**Fr. Stratton Dorozenski
(Retired Priest In Residence)**

Fr. John Stefero (Retired Priest In Residence)

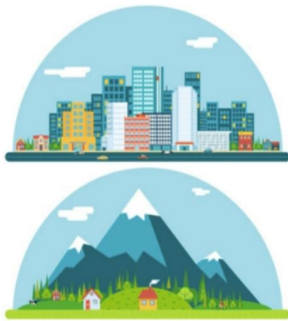
Fr. Stavros' Message

A Very Important Comment—We have a wonderful opportunity to spread the Orthodox Christian Faith in our own community—Nearly every Sunday, we have new people who are coming to our church. Some are visiting from other places and just passing through. But MANY are new to Tampa and have moved to the area. On Labor Day weekend, we had at least seven new families attend the Divine Liturgy. Some are Orthodox and some are not—these are searching for something. When we think of spreading the faith, we often think of needing to go out and do it. We have a wonderful opportunity to share our faith right in our own community, with people who are coming in the door looking for something. We don't even have to find them. They have found us. What can YOU DO? Be welcoming! Welcome new people, make sure they have someone to talk to, invite them for coffee hour and sit with them, introduce them to your children, encourage them to come to a youth program (Sunday school, GOYA, whatever is age appropriate). I meet people when they come for Antithoron, but I can't get to the coffee hour very quickly. This is something that YOU (everyone of us) can do—conscientiously welcome our new people!

The Best of Both Worlds—

What Might That Look Like

'The best of both worlds'



As many of you know, I visited Greece during the month of August. This was the first time in my life that I have ever been to Greece. My father was born on the island

of Crete, in the city of Chania. I didn't get to go to Crete on this trip, but perhaps I will go in the future. Even though I was only in Greece for a week, staying in Athens for most of the time, the experience brought a lot of things to mind, seeing how the Orthodox Church works in an Orthodox country. (And to be fair, I only experience one Orthodox country. The church in Greece is probably different from the church in Romania, Albania, Russia, Ukraine, and other Orthodox countries. I also only saw the church in the city, not in small villages or on small islands. However, half of the population of Greece lives in the Athens Metropolitan area, so I experienced the church as many Greeks in Greece experience it.) As with anything, I saw things that I liked and things that I disliked, as it relates to the church. I could say the same thing about the Orthodox Church in the United States—there are definitely things to like and dislike. Was one place better than the other? I'm not sure that's a fair question. The churches in both countries are just different. I will say that going to Greece helped me understand a little more the point of view of those who came from there, as it relates to the church. And as I reflect on the experience, one thing I realize is that if we took the best of what Greece offered, and the best of what our church in Tampa offers, we would really have the best of both worlds. Let me explain.

Positives in Greece

There are churches everywhere. There are huge churches and small chapels. In Piraeus, the port city of Athens, there were two very large churches on the same block.

I had a chance to visit the Parthenon and view Athens from above and in my line of sight I could see dozens of churches. That was really awesome.

It is common to see people making the sign of the Cross. While we might feel a little self-conscious making the sign of the cross in public, they do it all the time over in Greece. While on a boat to the Island of Aegina, to venerate the relics of St. Nektarios, each time we would pass by a church, from the boat, people would make the sign of the cross.

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I saw people make the sign of the cross before eating, granted some people did it fast and sloppy, but there was some recognition of God.

There was a small chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas, right at the dock on the island of Aegina. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of travelers. When I disembarked from the ferry, I saw the little chapel, but from the outside, there was no indication of the saint it was dedicated to. I went inside, lit a candle, and looked at the icon screen, second icon to the left of the altar door, to see who the chapel was dedicated to. It was St. Nicholas. How appropriate, I thought, that someone had the foresight to build the chapel, right there. So that people who are traveling could ask for the intercessions of St. Nicholas before traveling, or use the occasion of arriving safely as an occasion to offer a prayer of thanks. Many of the tourists on the ferry went into the small church.

Because the church is a national church, the churches and priests are supported by people's taxes. There isn't the need for festivals and fundraisers. Also, there are virtually no church "complexes." There is no hall, no offices, no classrooms, no programs, no Sunday school—the churches, even the Cathedral of Athens and all Greece, just stand alone. They are just churches. And priests, by and large, are just priests. They do not have the expectation to run programs. This is both a positive and a negative, which I will discuss below.

Many churches are open during the day. People can walk in to any church and pray. Obviously, many people going into the churches were tourists, so I didn't see much praying going on, but it was nice that churches were open.



My Experience in Two Churches

I had the opportunity to serve in two churches. The first was the Cathedral of Athens and all Greece, where I had been invited to participate in a wedding. The church was in the center of Athens. It was only 3 blocks from the Parliament building. It was in the center of a tourist area, filled with restaurants, shops and tons of people. This is the church where the last king of Greece had his funeral recently. This is where the Archbishop serves on all the big feastdays. The church was built in 1845, and dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, on whose feastday Greek Independence was declared in 1821. It's one of the oldest "modern" churches—meaning it doesn't go centuries back as some other smaller churches do. When it was built, it was one of the largest churches in Greece. Now there are many that are larger.



In the church are the relics of St. Gregory V, the Patriarch of Constantinople who was hanged in 1821. Most of his body is preserved in Athens in a sarcophagus inside the Cathedral. On the other side of the church, are the relics of St. Philothei, patron saint of Athens. There are also chains that were worn by St. Paul nearly 2,000 years ago. It was really amazing to see those. Downstairs they have a museum with vestments and other things that were used by Archbishops centuries ago. As you'd expect, the Cathedral is served by multiple clergy, has an army of chanters, even at a wedding, and has an amazing sound system. The Divine Liturgy is televised across the world each Sunday. What they didn't have, I was told by one of the priests, is a lot of sacraments—only a handful of weddings and baptisms are done each year. They don't really have a stable congregation, which means they don't really have a sense of community. The church was BEAUTIFUL but what makes a church are the people in the church. This grand church was really empty when it came to that. And I wondered how do they offer services with any level of solemnity when there are thousands of tourists, restaurants and live music right outside the door.

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Next to my hotel, which was in a suburb of Athens called Vouliagmeni, there was a small chapel next to my hotel. Ironically, Vouliagmeni is supposed to be the “Beverly Hills” suburb of Athens, yet this chapel couldn’t have been more humble. The church was not even twice the size of my office, there was an even small building next to it which contained a little bookstore. There was a small courtyard in front of the church where there were some tables and benches. The church only held about 25 people total. There were no side aisles. When I went to see what time services were, the entire complex was locked and there was no posting of any service times. Outside of services the place is not open. There was Liturgy on Saturday, I could tell because the bells rang in a certain pattern (that we used to use at the Seminary) to let people know that there was a church service that morning. I was meeting someone for breakfast in the hotel at 9:00 a.m. So I went into the church for a little while before breakfast. Services begin in all churches at 7:30 a.m. with Orthros, Liturgy is around 8:45 a.m. and it’s all done by 10:30 a.m. I was dressed in a polo shirt and slacks, with no indication that I was a priest. I sat in the very last seat in the back and chanted along quietly with the chanters. For a VERY small church, they had five chanter—four women and one man—and they were very good. The woman who stood at the candle stand kind of looked at me rudely, like I shouldn’t be singing with the chanters, so I stopped. There were no altar boys, but women brought up small candles for the Gospel, a gentleman walked into the altar to carry the censer for the Great Entrance, no one had to tell them what to do, they just did it. Which I thought was amazing. I left the service at 9:00 a.m. and returned later around 10:30 a.m. Everything was over. I actually introduced myself to the priest, and asked if I could attend church the next day, I showed him the official paper we have to carry in a foreign country to let people know that we are priests. He said to come at 7:30 a.m.

The next morning, I went to serve, and he insisted that I take the role of the celebrant, which is very rare.



Most priests don’t step over for people they know, let alone people they don’t, and here was I, an American, being offered the front of the altar.

We served the Divine Liturgy 100% in Greek, as expected, save for two lines he asked me to do in English “so that we can hear what that sounds like.” The priest didn’t speak a word of English, and thankfully I could communicate pretty well with him in Greek. He asked if I would give the sermon, and I politely declined. My command of Greek in the services is excellent, but to give a formal sermon, not so much. Thankfully, there was another priest who was with me for the wedding and he didn’t serve but gave the sermon. (At the wedding, I offered a few words in English after the service, and then the dean of the Cathedral offered some words in Greek which he asked me to translate in English, which I was thankfully able to do, though I’m sure I made a lot of mistakes.) What was really interesting about the service was that the church was filled to capacity, 25 people, and there were another 50 sitting outside, listening to the service on a speaker they had outside. No air conditioning in the church and it was hot, not much room to move, no altar boys, a few little children, mostly women, hardly any men, but overall a good experience. When the priest, Fr. Alexios, introduced me after the service, the woman at the candle stand came up and apologized for being rude the day before, she didn’t know I was a priest. Someone else came up and gave me a prayer rope, because they wanted to show hospitality. I’m not sure if I got this treatment because I am a priest or if they do this for all visitors. Anyway, it was a neat experience for sure, to serve a Divine Liturgy and a wedding in Greece, something I never thought I’d do. Even when I left for the trip, I wasn’t planning on serving at the Divine Liturgy, and never did I think I would be asked to preside over it.

One thing that always inspires me about our church is that we can feel comfortable anywhere in the world in an Orthodox service. I celebrated a wedding with five other priests, three of whom I had never served with or met before the day of the wedding. The service was smooth, in fact, people asked if we had practiced. The fact is that we hadn’t. The wedding service is the same everywhere in the world.



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We divided the tasks and the prayers/petitions and everyone knew the rubrics because they are the same everywhere. Same thing with the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. I served with someone I had never met (I don't even know his last name now) who didn't speak a word of English, in a church filled with people I didn't know. Yet I felt comfortable serving, offering Holy Communion, and all the things I do when I serve in Tampa. One of the best things about Orthodoxy is that it is virtually the same (with a few different practices that are unique to each Orthodox country) the whole world over.

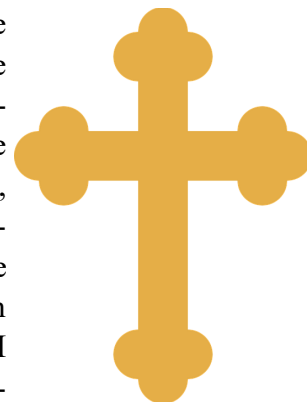
“Negatives”

While I did enjoy my trip very much, while in Greece (the food was amazing, especially the tomatoes and the octopus, and the water was beautiful), I had the opportunity to really see how the church works, or doesn't at the case may be, over there and I have a lot of thoughts on things that I didn't really like.

No church complexes. The first thing that struck me about the churches in Greece was that there is just the church, not a complex. There are no parking lots (not only in churches but in the whole country), so you have a church with little land around it. There is no place to gather for socializing or learning or even serving. There is no office, no place to meet a priest. There is no bulletin to take, no bulletin board announcing services. Churches and priests just “do their thing” and I guess people just know, or maybe they don't. I love that our churches in America have complexes. There is a large space at 2418 Swann Avenue set aside for our community. There is a church in which to worship, a hall in which to socialize, classrooms in which to learn, and an office where one can come and meet with the priest. I'm not sure how the churches run—there are no parish councils, or Sunday school teachers, no ministries really.

No sense of belonging to a community. Because there are no ministries, people aren't really (or can't be) invested in the life of a particular church. It seems like many people are transient, they can go to a different church each Sunday, or not at all. Ironically, the small chapel felt like it had some sense of community, like the same people went there each Sunday. But there was no coffee hour, not much hanging around after church, and nothing done there except services.

Many people hold a negative impression of the church and priests. I'm a people person and I like talking to people. Having ridden in numerous taxis and ubers during my trip, I had a chance to talk to many drivers about their experience of the church. And most had a negative view of the church. Some said they never go to church, or believe in God. When I asked some basic information about churches we were passing, they had no knowledge of them. Some admitted to going only on Christmas and Pascha and Panayias. Some said they had children that were baptized but that's the only time they ever went to church. One driver whose wife was expecting said “I guess we will go for a baptism.” Many see the church as a corrupt organization. In a country where many are poor and struggling to survive, they don't see the church as offering much of anything. To the contrary, it just sucks money from people, so they say. Of course, I see the other side of this, if a person never goes to church and all of a sudden just appears



and wants something, you'd expect that they would offer something. The flip side of this is that everyone pays for the church with their taxes, so they should be getting what they want when they want it. As for the priests, they didn't have much respect there either. The priests, they say, just come in for services, want to be catered to, don't really work hard. I saw their point. I saw many priests walking the streets in their robes, easily recognizable as priests. There were usually two of them walking together. And while it seemed neat that a priest could walk the streets like that (I'd get a lot of strange, even negative, looks if I walked around the streets of Tampa in a black robe), I never saw anyone actually interacting with a priest. I even heard that people fear the priests. That made me sad. Priests are by and large not seen as pastors, most do not offer confession, many have no education either. I was told that the Chancellor of the Archdiocese produces a sermon that all the priest in the Archdiocese district are supposed to read each Sunday. So people don't even get a personal message from their priest.

No sense of mission. There didn't seem to be any sense of mission, purpose, or urgency. The church is kind of just “there.”

Continued...

And in today's fast-paced (and getting faster all the time) world, the church in Greece really just seems to be on the sidelines.

I think sometimes of the reasons I became a priest. Serving the services was the initial draw, and they have that in Greece, way more services than we have in America. However, the thing that sustains my priesthood, that gives it depth and meaning, is the relationships I have with people. And I don't see the priests having that in Greece. I think I would be very unfulfilled serving as a priest in Greece.

Good Things from Greece that We Should Adapt

We shouldn't be afraid to express our Orthodoxy. When is the last time you made the sign of the cross in a restaurant? Or at a prayer offered outside of our church? We shouldn't be afraid to express who we are.

We should have a greater sense of the Liturgical calendar. We know we have Sunday services, but many of us are ignorant about the saints' days, and the various feasts and fasts of the church year. If we are little more cognizant of the liturgical calendar, maybe we will come to



some of the services that are not on Sundays.

Our church is open every day, Monday through Friday, if you

ever want to just stop by and spend some time in the church. Most people come to church only for worship. Hardly anyone ever stops by for private devotion. Unlike Greece, where there is nothing going on in the church when there are no services, Fr. John and I keep a pretty robust schedule of confessions. So, if you want to "stop by" the church, it is best to call first, to make sure it is empty.

Having a church complex as opposed to just a church brings the temptation to come for other things that we have at the "complex." There are people who come for

various things that we offer on our church property who never actually worship in the church. We can't forget that first and foremost we are a church, a place of worship.

Some Other Observations from My Trip

Like many experiences in life, the experience of Greece was a "mixed bag". Again, I was only in a big city, actually bigger than Tampa, so other than my experience on Aegina for a day, I was in surroundings that mirrored the experience of living in a big city like the one we live in.

There was a refreshing sense of hospitality. That's partly in the nature of the people. I think as a culture we are very hospitable, we like people. And tourism is the number one industry in Greece, so that's another reason to show hospitality.

As you would find in any major city, there was places of beauty and places of filth. There were happy people and there were miserable people. There were people who were kind and people who were rude. (ALL the drivers drive like maniacs and they don't respect people in crosswalks). There were people who liked their jobs and people who saw me as a dollar sign. There was a sense of modernity combined with a sense of history. In the shadow of the Parthenon is the Plaka, which is like a big street fair with food and shops. And there was a sense of holiness combined with a sense of commercialism. At the monastery of St. Nektarios, fifty feet away from his relics was a gift shop.

The food was really fresh. It didn't feel processed, like everything we buy here.

I majored in history in college, so I have an appreciation for history. To see the Parthenon that was built several centuries before Christ was mind-blowing. To stand on the Areopagus, where St. Paul preached two thousand years ago to the Athenians was also very moving. To venerate the chains that once wrapped around the wrists of St. Paul was a blessing. In the monastery where St. Nektarios lived and is buried, they have preserved his room, his bed, and many of his meager belongings.

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To be able to pray in the place where he prayed, to see his personal space and things, makes his story come alive. It's more than an account on the pages of a book. It makes me want to go back to see other historic sites both in Greece and in the Holy Land. It helps to put more context to the history I've read. But is the history really understood? Do the people who live in the shadow of this history really appreciate it?



What I Bring Back to My Ministry in Tampa

In addition to some great memories, I bring back a sense of inspiration, comfort and purpose. First, inspiration. I was inspired to see Orthodoxy in a country that has had Christianity and Orthodoxy since the very beginning. Orthodoxy is less than 200 years old in our country. Our country is only 250 years old. It was inspiring to see churches build without modern building techniques that are probably build more solidly than our modern churches. It was beautiful to see churches covered with icons from the floor to the ceiling.

Second, I am comforted that our churches, I believe, are ahead of the churches in Greece. It is not a competition of course. But there has always been a sense that we are not as "good" as the churches in the old country. And this experience has taught me that we are probably better. Because we have a better sense of church community, and a better shot at our people being engaged in the ministries of the church, that our church actually can have ministries that serve others. I think our communities give our people a better opportunity to feel a sense of belonging. And for sure our communities make it easier for someone from the outside to come in an inquire, learn and join. I didn't see anything about catechism classes in Greece for people looking to convert.

And I wondered several times, if someone came searching for God, for faith and for truth, who would actually welcome them, teach them and guide them?

And finally a sense of purpose. I saw many churches in Greece. I love looking at churches. Obviously I love praying in them. Other than being something nice to look at, and for tourists to look at, it didn't feel like any church was making a difference in its community, because the church itself was more like a museum than a community. If we are not careful, our church could resemble this. Society is becoming more and more indifferent to God. But society has also never had a greater need for God and for truth than it does now in a world that eschews God and skirts truth. And this provides an opportunity and a responsibility to bring God and truth to as many people as we can.

When we think about the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-19, that we are to baptize all nations, and Christ's admonition in Luke 19:10 to seek and to save the lost, it made me wonder how it can possibly happen in the church in Greece, the way the church is set up. And it also made me wonder how we are doing with this here in America. Because, as I have said many times, and will continue to say, our churches are not just places of relaxation or beautiful buildings to be celebrated and photographed, they are supposed to be communities that spread the Gospel and serve those in need. And this is the work that we must continue to understand and to do.

I'm thankful that I got to see the Orthodox Church in Greece. And I'm thankful that I serve the church in America. If we could take the best of both of these worlds, and put them to work in our church in Tampa, oh the things we could do in His name!





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Message from Fr. John Stefero —on Forgiveness

Several people have requested that Fr. John's sermon from Sunday, August 20, be reprinted in the Messenger. It is a sermon on forgiveness.

11th Sunday of Matthew (Matthew 18:23-35)

Quite often, one of the most challenging things for us to do as Christians, is to forgive someone who has hurt us or a family member. The question posed to us is "when we have been wronged, what response should we give?"

A survey was conducted a while back of 200 married adults regarding forgiveness. The researchers wondered how one's ability to forgive others would af-



fect their marital satisfaction as well as their personal well-being. The results of the research suggested that there was a strong relationship between marital satisfaction and forgiveness. In fact, it appears that as much as one third of marriage satisfaction is related to forgiveness.

Not only does the ability to forgive impact the marriage relationship, the ability to forgive was also significantly related to personal emotional well-being. As one's ability to forgive went up, individuals reported fewer symptoms of depression, fewer symptoms of anxiety, and fewer symptoms of fatigue. These results suggest that both secular and faith-based counselors should emphasize the importance of forgiveness.



Karl Memminger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!

It is important to note that in the Lord's Prayer, we pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, give us this day our daily bread, and lead us not into temptation." None of these requests has a condition or stipulation attached to it. However, when we pray for forgiveness, we pray "Forgive our trespasses," and this is immediately followed by the stipulation, "AS we forgive those who trespass against us." In other words, if we request and expect God to forgive us, we must first forgive others!

To forgive is ἀφίημι in Greek, which means to send away, to release, to remit, to liberate completely, or today we would say "to let go." In the two verses preceding today's Gospel lesson, Peter asks Jesus a question: "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to 7 times?" In Old Testament times, many rabbis suggested that three was the maximum number of times a man must forgive the same offense. This was falsely based on the Book of Amos which speaks of Israel being punished for three transgressions.

Peter seemingly had doubled this number and even added to it, and doubtless felt that his question showed how spiritual he truly was. He was probably shocked at Christ's answer which was "Not up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven!" in other words, one should not keep track of such things, but forgive indefinitely!



Jesus then goes on to tell the parable of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

Continued...

One servant owed a debt of a myriad of talents (from the Greek μυριάων) which was 10,000 talents, equivalent to billions of dollars in today's money.

But the servant fell down in humble obedience and begged the king to be patient with him, promising to repay everything. The man's tearful grief touched the heart of the king who had heartfelt love for him and forgave him the debt.

Then, this same servant who was forgiven his large debt, went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him only a hundred denarii, a mere 3 months of wages for the working man. He laid hands on him and took him by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe" and then threw him in prison until he paid the debt. The king heard of this and was filled with anger at such heartlessness. He revoked his earlier remission of debt and instead he delivered the heartless servant over to the torturers who ran the pagan prisons of those days.



Forgiveness, according to Jesus in the parable, should be in direct proportion to the amount forgiven. Thus, the first servant had been forgiven all of his debt, and in turn, he should have forgiven all that was owed to him!

Three important points need to be made about forgiveness. First, forgiveness is not the same as excusing. We do not excuse what was done when we forgive someone. It is almost the opposite. We need to forgive them because we have not excused them. If we can excuse something it does not need forgiveness. There is no blame, no one was responsible, it was an accident. Much of what passes as forgiveness is actually excusing the behavior or attitude of another person. We should never excuse intentional hurts. To excuse intentional hurt from another person is not helping them or helping our relationship with them. We should not excuse them; but rather

cancel the debt and forgive them.

Second, Forgiveness is not the same as accepting people. We accept people for what they are. They are people made in the image of God. They are people God values highly. So, we accept people for who they are, but we forgive them for what they do. But we should not accept intentional wrongs that are done to us.

Hurt doesn't require acceptance; hurt requires forgiveness.

Third, forgiveness is not the same as tolerance. We can forgive another person for anything, but there are a lot of things we should not tolerate.

For example, a person who is in an abusive relationship can eventually forgive the abuser, but that person should not tolerate the abuse. They may seek counseling, move out, etc. But they should not tolerate the abuse.

While we would agree that it's important to forgive, we'd have to agree with the Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, who said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, UNTIL, we ourselves have to forgive someone." Some of life's hurts are so deep and painful that to forgive the people who caused them seems impossible. Yet Jesus says that we cannot experience His forgiveness if we have an unforgiving spirit.

A good example of this is the true-life story of Corrie ten Boom, a famous Dutch survivor of a Nazi concentration camp during WWII. In the war, Corrie and her sister Betsie were arrested for concealing Jews and were sent to a German concentration camp. Betsie died a slow and terrible death from the cruel treatment.



**Learn to accept
people for
WHO THEY ARE,
not who you want
them to be!**

Continued...

Then, in 1947, Corrie spoke about God's forgiveness to a church in Munich. Afterward, a man sought her out. She recognized him as one of the guards who had mistreated her and Betsie. Now, he was sitting in the church in Munich listening to her talk on forgiveness.



When Corrie finished speaking, the man walked to her and extended his hand in greeting and said, “Fraulein, isn’t it wonderful that Jesus has washed away our sins?” He told her that he had become a Christian. Corrie struggled with her feelings. She tried to extend her hand, but it would not move. She knew she was in trouble and quickly said a short prayer, “Dear Jesus, I cannot forgive this man, You forgive him through me.”

Instantly her hand was freed. She extended it to the man, and she began to feel an overwhelming sense of forgiveness and peace.

Sometimes we have been hurt so deeply that we have trouble forgiving. It is then that we need to draw on God’s strength. We need to let Him heal the hurt and invite Him into our heart to forgive through us, where we feel we cannot. Further, we should place the person on our prayer list since it is not possible to hate someone we are truly praying for.

A wise elder of the desert fathers said that “the inability to forgive is the most destructive passion of all! The unforgiving person is poisoned by his hatred. When praying he feels no peace. All his Christian labors are in vain!” What a powerful statement!



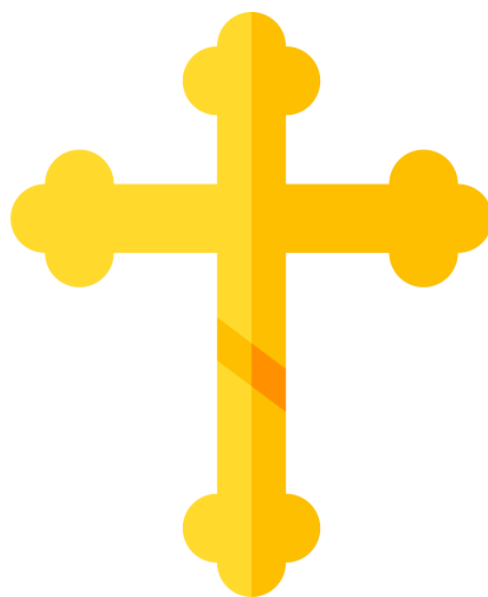
An unforgiving spirit is the Devil’s playground. If somebody hurts us, either deliberately or unintentionally, and we do not forgive them, then the potential is for us to develop bitterness, which hardens the heart. We can become sour and irritable and even develop a martyr complex and begin to pity ourselves.

When this happens, we are not hurting the person who hurt us but are only hurting ourselves. Bitterness in the heart makes us treat others the way Satan treats them, when we should treat others the way God has treated us.

St. John of Kronstadt concludes: The forgiveness or unforgiveness of our sins, and hence also our salvation or destruction, depend on we ourselves. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation.”

One author said: “We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive. To which we pray to God: ‘Forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.’

Amen.



3 Lessons I Share When Someone Comes To Confession

by Fr. Christian Siskos

As an Orthodox Priest, I am privy to the intimate details of a person's heart. **Lesson #2 - Your Sin Is Like A Cancer**

Over the past year, it has been sobering to listen to the pain and anxiety that everyone goes through. The betrayals and the disappointments. The grief and the bitterness.

Their sins remind me of my sins. They remind me of my own need for confession.

And when I hear confessions I will share these 3 lessons that I have learned over the years.

And I think you will find them valuable as well.

Lesson #1 - Your Trauma Is Not Unique

If you've suffered trauma, there's a lie you are tempted to tell yourself, "No one has ever suffered like me."

□ When you accept this lie, your trauma becomes a wall that separates you from other people. You feel alone. And this breeds self-loathing and despair. You define your life by this one event. And feeling lonely confirms the lie you tell yourself.

Trauma grows in loneliness but is healed in community.

Your trauma is not unique. You are not the first person to go through this pain. When you accept this you can begin the journey towards healing. You look for others who have suffered in the same or similar ways. Find a support group and immerse yourself in community. There you will find healing.

Confessing your pain is the first step towards entering into community.

Think of your sin like a spiritual cancer.

Cancer can wreck havoc in your body for years before it is detected. You usually go in because of unrelated symptoms and then find a much deeper root cause. If it remains untreated it can lead to death. The best ways to catch cancer is by doing a yearly check-up with a doctor and by being self-attentive to any symptoms that may come up.

If caught, cancer treatments vary depending on the type of cancer. Some treatments are uncomfortable while other treatments deteriorate your body.

This is exactly what sin is like.

Sin is the cancer of the soul.

Sin remains undetected at first. It slowly spreads to other spiritual organs; the heart, the eyes, or the mind. Sin taints everything it touches. And as it continues to grow symptoms will develop overtime.

If sin taints your eyes, you begin to watch more filthy images.

If sin taints your heart, you begin to see everything as evil and corrupted.

If sin taints your mind, you begin to cultivate insidious thoughts.

The priest is like a doctor and confession like your yearly check-up. You begin to treat your sin like cancer. Being self-attentive, you make an account of the various symptoms (small sins) that have accumulated since your last check-up.

Continued...

The doctor (the priest) then prescribes various treatments (the ascetical practices of the Church) depending on the type of cancer (passion).

When you understand sin as a cancer, you begin to actively live a healthy spiritual life that keeps spiritual cancer at bay.

Lesson #3 - You Are Lacking Healthy Shame

You and I (and society) need more healthy shame.

Healthy shame is like the signpost on the fence that reads “Beware of dog.” This type of shame is a limit imposed on the soul. It signals to you, “You probably shouldn’t be doing this because others are watching and there are consequences.” You likely experienced this shame as a child. It stopped you from doing some stupid stuff.

I see healthy shame lacking in confessions.

Next time you go to confession, notice how you speak about your sins. There are some sins that you feel ashamed about. These sins you often beat around the bush. You make excuses or justifications. You are ashamed to say the sin simply for what it is.

Other much worse sins you gloss over without a second thought. As though it were no big deal. I sense no shame in those sins.

Healthy shame orders your life properly.

Normally you feel bold when committing a sin and then shame when you go to confess it. But really, it should be the other way around. You should feel shame when committing a sin and bold when you confess it.

This is healthy shame at work.

This is how we grow spiritually.

The goal is “to make us ashamed where we ought to be but aren’t; to make us free of shame where we are ashamed but shouldn’t be; to make us exactly as ashamed as we ought to be, no more and no less, in all areas.” (Quote from *The Ethics of Beauty* by Dr. Timothy Patitsas)

Learn to cultivate healthy shame in your life.

Integrating these lessons in your own life takes time.

I have learned that integrating these lessons in my own life has resolved a lot of my internal anguish. There is no longer this rush to solve every problem. It stops being less about me and more about Christ.

For God is working in the areas where I find myself lacking.

Fr. Christian Siskos serves as the Assistant Priest at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Charlotte, NC.



INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY?
PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FOUR WEEK COURSE

Orthodoxy 101

BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER & OFFERED BY
FR. STAVROS N. AKROTIRIANAKIS, PARISH PRIEST

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND ORTHODOXY 101?

· INTERFAITH COUPLES. THIS WILL HELP THE NON-ORTHODOX PERSON UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR CHURCH.

· ANYONE WHO IS CONSIDERING JOINING OUR CHURCH. GOING FORWARD, THIS CLASS WILL BE A REQUIREMENT FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO JOIN OUR ORTHODOX FAITH.

· NEW CONVERTS TO ORTHODOXY. FOR THOSE WHO RECENTLY JOINED OUR CHURCH AND WHO WANT TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT MORE.

· ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE BASICS OF OUR FAITH, OR WHO WANTS A REFRESHER

WHEN WILL THE CLASSES BE HELD?

· MONDAY, OCTOBER 2
THE DIVINE LITURGY –
A “TEACHING” LITURGY

· MONDAY, OCTOBER 9
ORTHODOX TRADITIONS –
FASTING, ICONS, PRAYER
AND LIVING AN
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
LIFE

WHAT FORMAT CAN I EXPECT?

A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITH PRESENTATIONS, INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS,
AND LOTS OF TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

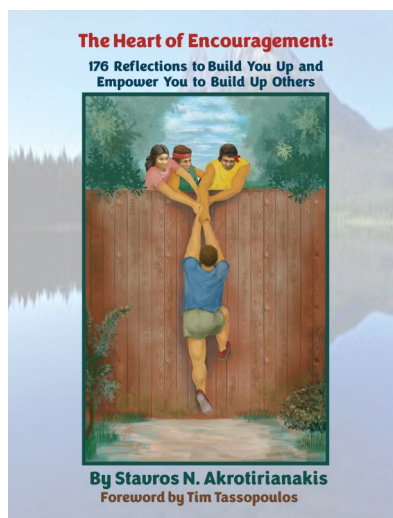
CLASSES WILL BE HELD FROM 6:30-8:30 P.M. IN THE CHURCH SANCTUARY.

Please sign up with Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com, so he has enough materials for everyone.
There is no charge for this class.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH · 2418 W. SWANN AVENUE · TAMPA, FL · 33609

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

By Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis



One of God's greatest blessings on my life is the ability to write. I love writing. For the most part it comes easy to me. By God's grace, I have written a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team" since February 2015. This has resulted in the publication of seven books, the latest of which is "The Heart of Encouragement." Each month this year, I'm going to in-

clude one reflection from the 176 reflections of this book, as a way to share a small sampling of the contents with you in the hopes that you will buy this book. This is not about pushing a product. It's about sharing a message, a message we all need to hear. We all need more encouragement. Please read this reflection below, and if you like it, please consider purchasing the book for yourself or for someone else. It can be purchased from our bookstore or from Amazon/Barnes and Noble. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world. This book is my attempt to reach this parish and far beyond it with the hope that by God's grace, this book will help change the world even a little bit for the better.

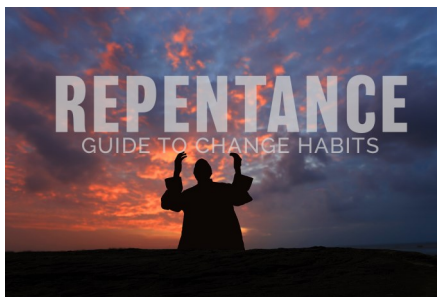
+Fr. Stavros

Breaking the Cycle—I Will Not Do That Today

Bear fruit that befits repentance.

Matthew 3:8

This reflection will focus on two words, repentance and habits. Repentance is a change of orientation so that one is pointed more toward God. Repentance is the antidote to sin. Sin is missing the mark and falling away from God. Repentance is when we correct our course so that we are pointed at God. Our life on



earth involves a continual struggle to create habits that point us in the direction of God while avoiding habits that take us away from Him. Because we all have the inclination to sin, we have to also develop an inclination to repent.

In the battle of sin versus repentance, our daily habits will play a role in which wins. For example, a daily habit of prayer is important in fighting the battle against sin and toward repentance. Prayer, at the moment we are doing it, orients us toward God. We can't be sinning and praying at the same time. Sin happens at the moments when we are not praying. Theoretically, the more we pray, the less we sin. And the less we pray, the more open we are to sinning. Because in the moment of prayer, we are not capable of gossiping or harming our neighbor, and the majority of sins involve failing to love our neighbor.

All of us have bad habits. Habits are things we do on a regular basis, some even without thinking. Other habits are known to us—maybe we have a habit of drinking too much, gossiping or swearing, looking at pornography, judging, looking at others with envy, overeating, being too negative—the list is endless. And if we are honest, we all do at least a few things habitually wrong.



How does one break a bad habit? How does one stop a negative cycle? I've read that it takes thirty days to create a new habit. So, whether that means eating better or exercising or whatever we are trying to do better, if we do it for thirty days, it has a good chance of becoming a good habit.

To the person who is addicted to a bad habit, thirty days may seem like a very long time. At Alcoholics Anonymous, a support group that helps people stop drinking, the focus is on today. AA doesn't ask or expect an alcoholic to never drink again for the entirety of his or her life. That is too long of a period of time to wrap one's head around. So the focus is on not drinking today.

Continued...

This is why alcoholics go to meetings daily, to make a pledge to not drink today, and then they come back tomorrow to make the same pledge for a new day.

What does any of this have to do with encouragement? Our bad habits discourage us. They cause us to feel down about ourselves, our lives, our relationships, and our relationship with Christ. If you feel down and discouraged because of a bad habit you have, break the cycle of bad behavior by making a pledge to not do the behavior today. Much of what we will discuss in these reflections is to focus on today's challenges and not look at the big picture, which can be daunting.

As you begin each day, make a pledge to avoid a bad habit today. If you get through today, make the same pledge tomorrow. At the same time, make a pledge to work on a good habit today. If you make a step in the right direction, make the same pledge tomorrow. There is no waiting period when it comes to repentance. If you are not in the habit of praying, there isn't a period of probation or punishment until you can pray again; just pray today. If you have some bad habit, stop it today. (As a caveat, there are certain addictions that require professional help—a person with a drug or alcohol addiction will need professional help. Other kinds of addictions are a matter of willpower, such as controlling what we eat or what we say. The addictions that are overcome through willpower should be addressed through prayer. Prayer is a great tool in overcoming bad habits. So is being accountable to someone else).

If you aren't the best at praying or are addicted to some habitual sin, do not despair. Break the cycle of bad behavior and start a cycle of good behavior with a pledge to do the right thing today.

Lord, thank You for the gift of this day and the opportunities it will bring. Help me to avoid temptations (list at least one temptation you will strive to avoid today), and help me to bear fruit that befits repentance and shows love to You and others (list at least one good thing that you will commit to doing today). Give me the strength to avoid temptation and the heart that seeks to do good. Amen.

Encouragement Challenge: As you begin today, affirm something good that you will commit to doing today and make a commitment to avoid a temptation you struggle with today. Bear fruits that befits repentance by avoiding situations that cause you to sin.



Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The 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 that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free 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. 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-healthservices> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

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

This service is completely confidential between parishioner and a BayCare Christian Therapist

St. John Greek Orthodox Church's Young at Heart Minstry



The YAH will gather at the Hudson Dinner Theater for a luncheon followed by a Christmas show. **December 16th. is the best date to go.** Lunch will be served at noon and the show begins at 1:30 p.m. You are welcome to join us. Some members may need a ride. Let me know if you need a ride and/or if you can take someone in your car. The theater is located at 16128 U.S. 19, Hudson, Fla.

If we have at least 12 persons attending we get a group discount rate--\$64 per person. This the lowest rate. That fee includes lunch, show, dessert, gratuity and a non-alcoholic drink.

The sooner we make reservations, we get good tables and sit as a group. To ensure those tables we need to make payment by **October 11th.** Checks have to be made out to me and I send one single check to the Hudson Dinner Theater

You have two weeks prior to the show to cancel if necessary and be reimbursed.

On September 16th. several members met at the Village Inn for breakfast. The October meeting will be a potluck luncheon at the Kourmolis Center. Lunch will be served at noon.

Bill Manikas



"Starting Greek dance practice for Y Hara Mas dancers (K- 2nd grades) on Sunday's after church in the hall by the stage. Any questions (Alexandra DeMaio 813-340 -9668) Cookies for all the dancers!

St.John's
Dance
Groups



Greek dance practices for Y Hara Mas (3rd-6th grades) will be held on Sundays from 12:15 to 12:45pm in the Kourmolis Center (during coffee hour). Practices will continue until our Greek Festival in November. Costume fittings will take place on Sunday, October 15, after dance practice. Please contact Maraquet Edquid (813-422-8963) with any questions.



Sunday School News



We are so glad to have the 2023-2024 Sunday School year off to a great start. Thank you to all the teachers, parents, and children who are committed to our program.

All class pictures were taken in September and the new photos should be up on our Sunday School bulletin board by the time you read this article. Thank you to Karina Findlay and her mom for taking these class photos.

We are very excited about our Weekly Topics that each classroom will include into their program. The topics for the month of SEPTEMBER were PRAYER, THE SIGN OF THE CROSS, and THE CREED.

Our HALL of FAITH program will continue again this year! We have a number of students who have been added to our Hall of Faith for the Lord's Prayer. They are:



- Zoe Katzaras
- Delilah Clements
- Constantine Georgiou
- Margarita Kyrus
- Alexandra Stroud
- Daphne Kane
- Irene Delashaw
- Athena Katzaras
- George Ciampolillo
- Xander Halikoytakis
- Alex Zaharis
- Senna Smith
- Niko Nakos



This program is to encourage our children to memorize and understand The Lord's Prayer and The Creed. Our Pre-K through 4th Graders will be focusing on The Lord's Prayer and our 5th graders through High School will focus on The Creed. Look for our HALL of FAITH poster on our Sunday School bulletin board. Will your child's name be on it?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, suggestions, or comments regarding St. John's Sunday School Program. Parents: If you do not receive our weekly e-mails about our Sunday School Program, please contact Vickie Peckham at 813-758-3102 or e-mail her at vickiepeckham@gmail.com

OCTOBER CALENDAR:

- Sun. October 1st: Topic: Reading the Bible
- Sun. October 8th: Topic: The Ten Commandments
- Sun. October 15th: Topic: Making Moral Choices
- Sun. October 22nd: Topic:
The Light of Christ-Making Faith Personal-YOUTH SUNDAY
- Sun. October 29nd: Topic: St. Cosmas and St. Damian



Sunday School Pictures

smile!



This is the inside of the 5th Grader's church.

Our 5th Graders created a foldable church with the Lord's Prayer inside of it.



The 5th graders learned about the Holy Trinity. They started with 3 candles representing God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit



Our Pre-K4 years old class is working on a project.

Our 1st Graders working on their Cross Projects .




Our 5th Graders discussed that we can pray to The Holy Trinity.



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.



**St. John is
responsible to have 6
volunteers sign up
each month.**

Sign Up



*Have a heart, lend a hand,
and make a difference.*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH 2023

OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINING MONTHS OF 2023 IS
AS FOLLOWS:

SATURDAY OCTOBER 21,
NOVEMBER 18, DECEMBER 16.

TIME: 8:00 AM - 10 AM

PLACE: TAMPA HOPE
3704 E. 3RD AVENUE
TAMPA, FL. 33605



Sign up via SIGNUP GENIUS

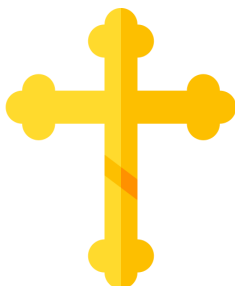
Liturgical Schedule for October

Sunday, October 1	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, October 2	Evening Teaching Liturgy for Orthodoxy 101 St. Dionysios the Areopagite 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Sunday, October 8	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, October 15	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, October 18	St. Luke the Apostle and Evangelist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 22	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, October 23	Evening Liturgy of St. James Orthros 5:15 p.m. Divine Liturgy of St. James 6:00 p.m.
Thursday, October 26	St. Demetrios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, October 28	Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary/OXI Day Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, October 29	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, November 1	Holy Unmercenaries Sts. Cosmas and Damian Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Friday, November 3	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, November 4	Orthros 8:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:00 a.m.
Sunday, November 5	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, November 8	Archangels Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.
Thursday, November 9	St. Nektarios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

St. Luke the Apostle and Evangelist



Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary/
OXI Day



St. Nektarios

Liturgical Notes for October

Monday, October 2- Teaching Divine Liturgy - St. Dionysios the Areopagite

St. Dionysios converted to Christianity after hearing St. Paul preach in Athens, becoming one of the first Athenians to convert. He later became the first bishop of Athens, who was later martyred for his faith. AS part of the Orthodoxy 101 class, we will have a teaching Divine Liturgy on Monday, October 2, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated on the solea of the church, and there will be periodic pauses in the service for people to ask questions and for Father Stavros to offer explanations.

Sunday, October 15 - Special Prayer for Medical Personnel

St. Luke, Apostle, Evangelist and also Physician, has his feastday celebrated on October 18. In conjunction with this, as he is the patron saint of doctors, we are going to offer a prayer for everyone in the medical field on Sunday, October 15, at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. All doctors, nurses, dentists, researchers, students, and anyone connected to the medical field is encouraged to attend.



Tuesday, October 18 - Feast of St. Luke

St. Luke was one of the Four Evangelists, along with Sts. Matthew, Mark and John. He was an artist, writer, and doctor, and is probably one of the most intelligent of all the saints in the history of our church.

Wednesday, October 18 – 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.

Monday, October 23 - Liturgy of St. James - Evening Liturgy

The Orthodox Church celebrates four different Divine Liturgies throughout the liturgical year. The most prominent is the Divine Liturgy written by St. John Chrysostom, which is celebrated almost every Sunday and on most feast days. The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is celebrated 10 times a year—on the eve of Christmas, the eve of Epiphany, on the five Sundays of Lent, Holy Thursday morning, Holy Saturday morning, and on the feast of St. Basil, which is January 1. The Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated on Wednesday and Fridays of Great Lent and the mornings of Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, and Holy Wednesday. The Divine Liturgy of St. James is celebrated only once a year, on his feastday, which is October 23. The Divine Liturgy of St. James is the oldest of the Divine Liturgies and is also the longest. It was written around 70 A.D. making it the oldest Eucharistic service in the entire Christian world. Among the interesting things about this service is that by the end of the first century, the structure of the Liturgy we celebrate today was already loosely in place. The Divine Liturgy begins not in the altar, but in the Narthex of the church, as was the custom of the early church. The priest and faithful enter the church together from the narthex, and the next part of the service is conducted on the solea, with the priest facing the people. The priestly prayers, while very long in the liturgy, reveal a beauty and completeness which would later be shortened by St. Basil and even more by St. John Chrysostom. The most unique part of this service comes at the reception of Holy Communion. This the only Divine Liturgy that has become the custom for the faithful to receive Holy Communion in separate elements, in similar fashion with how the clergy commune. The communicants first receive the Holy Body of Christ in their hands and consume it, and then drink from the Holy Chalice. This is a special beautiful tradition which will be continued at St. John the Baptist, and it is encouraged that all who attend this service fast beforehand and prepare to receive Holy Communion at this Divine Liturgy.

Continued...

Thursday, October 26 - Feast of St. Demetrios

St. Demetrios was born into a wealthy and distinguished Christian family in the Greek City of Thessaloniki in the late 3rd century. Demetrios was noted for his wisdom, and was a good speaker and polished orator. St. Demetrios was also a distinguished soldier. Thessaloniki was known for popular gladiatorial games which attracted the local pagans. Travelling with the Emperor Galerius after a military victory, Demetrios stopped in Thessaloniki, where many pagans, who were jealous of his successful life, denounced him as a Christian before the emperor, who ordered Demetrios be put in prison. A man named Nestor befriended Demetrios in prison. The Emperor went to the arena to see his favorite gladiator, Lyaos and offered a reward to whomever could defeat him. Nestor accepted the challenge, and through the prayers of St. Demetrios, defeated the giant. When Nestor refused to kill Lyaos, because he had been helped by the "God of Demetrios," the Emperor ordered that both be killed. This occurred in the year 306. We commemorate St. Demetrios on October 26 and St. Nestor on October 27. We will celebrate Divine Liturgy for St. Demetrios on Wednesday, October 26, at 10:00 a.m.



Saturday, October 28 – Feast of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary (Oxi Day)



(Mostly) GREEK Liturgy October 1 has been celebrated for many centuries as the feastday of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary. October 28, 1940, is observed in Greece as Oxi Day, the day the Greeks said "no" to the Axis powers who were trying to invade Greece. Since 1940, the church of Greece moved the feast of the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary (Agia Skepi) to October 28, to coincide with Oxi Day. In other jurisdictions, it is still celebrated on October 1. Because many of us have our roots in Greece, celebrating the Holy Protection of the Virgin Mary on October is something that has great meaning. In trying to serve the many and diverse needs of our parish, we get requests periodically to do more Greek in the services. Our use of Greek in worship reflects a congregation that by and large does not speak Greek. Making an effort to accommodate these requests, occasionally a weekday Divine Liturgy will be scheduled that will be celebrated mostly in Greek. October 28 will be one of these. Based on the turnout, we can schedule more in the months to come.

Wednesday, November 1 – Feast of Sts. Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenary Healers

Sts. Cosmas and Damian are the Patron Saints of the Philoptochos, as they went from place to place healing people and not taking any money for their services. Sts. Cosmas and Damian (called the Agii Anargyri) are also saints we pray to for intercession when we are sick, and are also patron saints of doctors (in addition to St. Luke).-



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 4,053 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 Vasili at Vasili@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Vasili 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 prayerteam365@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 NINE books that are available both in the bookstore and online. 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

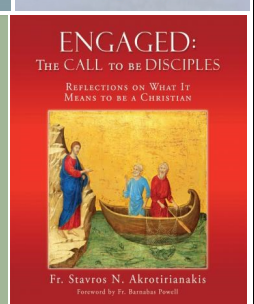
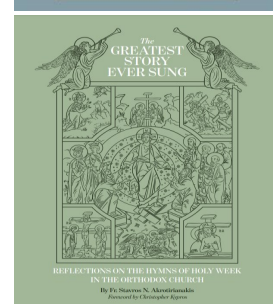
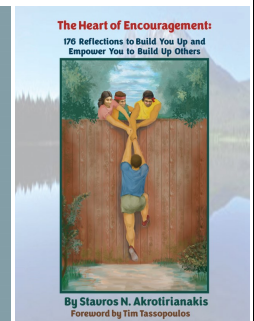
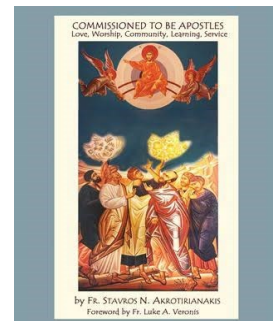
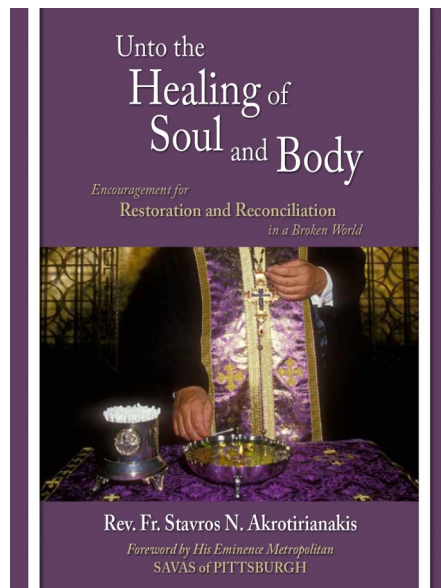
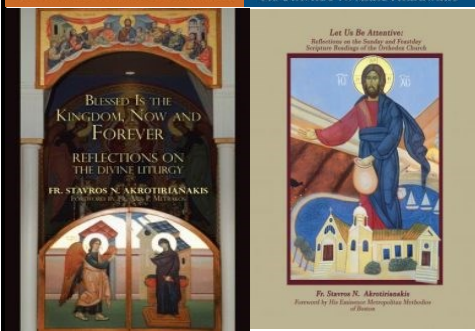
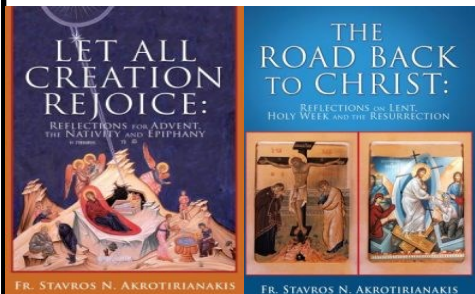
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church

NEW: Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World





PAREA DANCE GROUP (7th-12th graders)

We will have practice every Sunday after that unless there is a GOYA meeting that day (October 1, 15, 22 and 29). We are also planning to have a couple of Saturday practices given the limited time we have before the



festival. Please email Marina Choundas at mchoundas@outlook.com if your child will be dancing in the Parea dance group this year and provide your child's name, age, grade and your (the parent/guardian's) email and cell number. Thank you!

Policy for Letters of Recommendation

Every year, Father Stavros gets many requests for letters of recommendation for students to get into college or for scholarships. Here are some guidelines to assist those who will be making these requests.

The person for whom the letter is being written needs to contact Father Stavros, not their parents. Please give Father at least two weeks' notice to write a letter. Please send your information to Father in an email at frstav@gmail.com.

1. Your current school, year of study, major, and career objective
2. The name of the scholarship, who it is to be addressed to, and whether the letter is to be mailed, or given to the student in a sealed envelope.
3. The kind of scholarship that you are applying for - is it for sports, or writing, or business, etc.
4. The due date of the letter
5. Some information about yourself that will be helpful in writing the letter - i.e. if the letter is for leadership, please send leadership activities.

YOUTH PROTECTION PROGRAM REMINDER:

It's that time again . . . time to register with the Youth Protection Program! Our child and youth ministries will be starting up soon and the ministry heads will need your assistance with meetings and events. Would you like to help out? Great! But first you must register with the new Youth Protection Program, get screened, and do a training module before you can help your favorite child/youth ministry. To get started, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!



Stewardship

Thank You for Your Gifts of Stewardship

We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and offer a Heartfelt Thank You to everyone. Our Total Pledges and Offerings have reached \$533,627 through August 31st, and \$395,281 has been collected. We now have 320 Loyal stewards for 2023.

We lovingly remind you to make your 2023 Stewardship commitment Today! If your name is missing from this list, please do not wait. It would be a blessing to surpass last year's total of 363 families. Your giving supports the many ministry offerings we all enjoy and participate in.

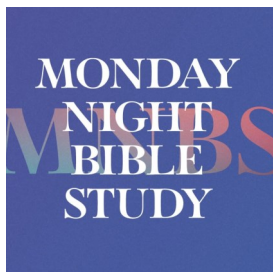
It is a joy seeing our church filled every Sunday. So many new faces. Sunday School in full swing, and the festival is just around the corner. It is an exciting time to participate in everything our church has to offer. It is our hope that everyone chooses to provide gifts Stewardship in support of St. John's mission and goals.

Forms are available in the church office, Narthex or online at stjohntpa.org. Please remember to make your Stewardship commitment for 2022.



St. John the Baptist Community News

Orthodoxy 101-Two sessions left-Orthodoxy 101 has two sessions left in October. Monday, October 2 we will have a teaching Divine Liturgy from 6:30-8:30 p.m. This is open to anyone in our community, you don't have to be part of the Orthodoxy 101 class. Fr. Stavros will celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the solea, pausing frequently for questions and answers. On Monday, October 9, we will have the concluding session of Orthodoxy 101, on Scripture and Tradition, Theology versus Yiayialogy. The class will be again from 6:30-8:30 p.m.



Monday night Bible study with Fr. John

Will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most 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 lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For October, the dates are: Tuesday, October 3; Monday, October 16; and Tuesday, October 24.

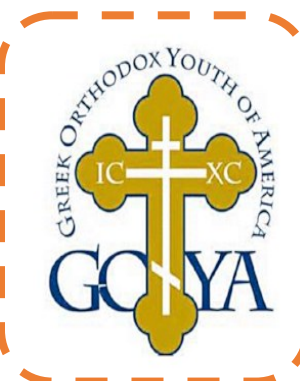
Women's Bible Study-

Our Tuesday morning women's Bible Study began in September. We meet on most Tuesdays from 10:00-11:30 a.m. either in person or on zoom. For October, the dates are Tuesday, October 3; Tuesday, October 10; Tuesday, October 17; Tuesday, October 24 and Tuesday, October 31.



Dance Practices will be starting again in preparation for our Greek Festival

Alexandra DeMaio will lead our youngest dancers, H Hara Mas (3 year old through sixth grade), who will practice after Liturgy on Sundays beginning September 18. There will be a group for very young, and then a 4-6th grade group under H Hara Mas, which will be directed by Maraquet Edquid. Marina Choundas will lead our Pareia Dancers—this is our GOYA age group. Practice schedule to be determined. The Adult group is called Panigyri Dancers and they are led by Alexandra DeMaio and will practice on Wednesday evenings.



GOYA-There are two of GOYA events in October.

GOYA Meeting-

Our regular GOYA meeting will be on Sunday, October 8, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be provided.

Senior Lockin-There will be a lock-in for our 10th-12th grade GOYAns on Saturday, October 21, beginning at 5:00 p.m. If you are interested in attending, please RSVP by Tuesday, October 17.

Continued...

Men's Group-



Our men's group will meet on Sunday, October 15, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Any men of our community are welcome to join us for dinner, discussion. We meet at 5:00 p.m., walk to a local restaurant and get some food, then bring it back to the hall where we eat and have a discussion. Our topic for October will be—How we can serve God in our jobs. Please mark down our dates for men's group for this academic year—Sunday, October 15; Sunday, November 26; Sunday, December 17; Sunday, January 21; Sunday, March 3; and Sunday, April 14.

Save the Date—Men's Retreat—Saturday, February 10—Men's Retreat for Orthodox Men of the Tampa Bay Area.

Young Adult Dinner/Discussion-

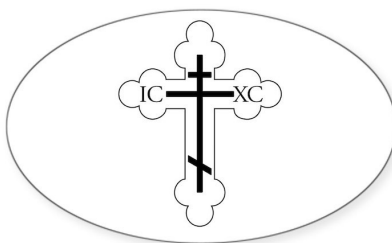
Thursday, October 12—Our young adult group meets once a month for dinner/discussion (and other times for fellowship and service). The meeting for October will be on Thursday, October 12, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. All young adults, ages 18-40, are invited to participate. We will be having a monthly discussion based on some set topics. The Topic for October is Service—how we can best serve in the church and in the world. Group Members use What's App for communication. Please contact Aris Rogers to be added to our what's app for young adults at 813-309-5525.

Get Together for College Students who are going to college in the Tampa Bay Area

October 15 after Liturgy—We had 15 college students at our lunch in September. We will have our second monthly lunch after church on Sunday, October 15 for all college students. Join us in the library for a free lunch and discussion.



Fr. Stavros will be out of town October 4-7. He has been asked to again present at Holy Cross Seminary in Boston, as part of a program called "Be Attentive" which is designed to help people discern if they have a priestly calling. For pastoral emergencies, please contact Fr. John.



FIFTY- TWO VERSES IN FIFTY- TWO WEEKS



THE BIBLE PROJECT
BY FR. STAVROS

May God bring good things into your life everyday.



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 October. 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. If you have any favorite verse you'd like me to comment on, please forward it to frstav@gmail.com.

October 1-7

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord!

Psalms 150:6

This verse of Psalm 150:6 is chanted in almost every Orthros service. It is a reminder that all creation is supposed to praise the Lord. Everything that has breath. Some translations actually say "let every breath praise the Lord." That can mean that everything with breath should praise the Lord, but even more poignantly, that every breath from every breathing thing ideally praises the Lord. What would life look like if every one of our breaths praised the Lord. Imagine if every words praised the Lord. Imagine when we sit quietly with our thoughts, when we are breathing silently, if even the thoughts were thoughts that praised the Lord. This does not mean we can't ever have another thought besides the Lord. Rather, if we divide our lives into two pieces—things that show praise for the Lord and things that sin against the Lord. If we put everything into those two categories. The goal then would be to have everything we do be in the category that praises the Lord. Even leisure and laughter can praise the Lord, when these things are done in a wholesome way. This is the ultimate goal, which is why this is the last verse of the last Psalm. The Psalms are prayers that capture every emotion as it relates to the Lord and the spiritual life. It is fitting, then, that the last verse of the Psalms captures this ultimate goal, that everything that breathes should praise the Lord, and ideally every breath should praise Him as well.

Continued...

October 8-14

***Never flag in zeal, be glow in the Spirit, serve the Lord.
Romans 12:11***

It is amazing how much can be said with few words. There are only twelve words in this verse from Romans 12:11, yet they give such powerful guidance. To “never flag in zeal,” pertains to our enthusiasm for Christ, for the Church, for Scripture, for service, for obedience to the commandments. These opportunities should excite us, inspire us, and focus us. Imagine if we were glowing with the Spirit. We’ve all seen glow bracelets that are used at dances. In the darkness of the dance floor, you can see arms aglow with the glow bracelets. Imagine if people could see the glow of the Holy Spirit in us, if in a dark world, like on a dark dance floor, we were illumined by the power of the Spirit and in turn illumined others as well. Serve the Lord. We are either serving ourselves or we are serving the Lord. When we serve others, we are serving the Lord. Thus, it is a question of whom do we serve? Ourselves or Him? We need to be consistent in our zeal, our enthusiasm for the Lord; we need to be glowing in a way that illumines others and brings others to the light, and we need to consistently serve the Lord. This is another example of how clinging to even one verse of Scripture as a guide can change our lives and center them on Christ and serving others.

October 15-21

***Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation,
be constant in prayer.
Romans 12:12***

The next verse of Romans is also twelve words, with three additional solid pieces of advice. The “hope” of Christians is salvation. It is not riches, fame, fortune, even security. The things that the world goes after are not necessarily the things that the Christians are supposed to be after. Even in the midst of suffering, i.e. material suffering (like when a hurricane destroys a home), or medical suffering, or any other kind of suffering (loss of a job, divorce, legal problems, etc.), we are supposed to rejoice in our hope, which is salvation in Christ. Tribulation is part of every life. Some we bring on ourselves, some is brought on us by other people and some comes as a result of living in a fallen world. We are supposed to be patient in the tribulations that come our way, because we have the hope of Christ that will not fail. The way we hone our patience is through prayer. When we are constant in prayer, it will be easier to be patient in tribulation, and when we are patient in tribulation, it will be easier to keep our eyes and our hearts and souls on the hope of Christ that we are supposed to always rejoice in.

October 22-28

***And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, He went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And He said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!”
And the fig tree withered at once.
Matthew 21:19***

The end of October brings fall colors to many parts of our country (not so much to Florida, where it is generally green all year round). The leaves change color and eventually fall. This is a sign of the changing season. It is expected that this is part of the yearly cycle—leaves fall, things go dormant in winter, then they awaken in the spring. Jesus saw a fig tree during a season when it should have been producing fruit and all He found on it was leaves. Jesus cursed the fig tree, saying that it would never bear fruit. The fig tree withered. The lesson is that we are each like the fig tree. We have leaves, we are capable of producing fruit—witnessing for Christ, sharing Him with others. When we don’t bear fruit, when we don’t produce fruit, we stand to end up as the fig tree, cursed and withering. Jesus blesses us abundantly, and freely. Yet, His gifts are to be met with a sense of responsibility from each of us, a responsibility to bear fruit—our own repentance, our own witness, and our own evangelism.

October 29-November 4

***Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed,
or hidden that will not be known.
Luke 12:2***

I asked my Spiritual Father how this verse reconciles with the prayer at the end of the Sacrament of Confession which says “Have no further anxiety about the things you have confessed; depart in peace.” This verse from Luke 12:2 seems to induce fear that our sins will be revealed before God. The simple answer I received from my Spiritual Father is that if something is revealed in confession, it is no longer covered up or hidden. It has been said not only in front of God but in front of another person. The secrets of our secret heart are then not secret, since they have been shared. I don’t know about all priests, but I know in my experience, I don’t remember the things I hear in confession. I pray to forget them, and this prayer is answered by God. The grace of the Holy Spirit that washes over someone to forgive their sins washes over me to wipe out my memory of the conversation. This verse from Luke 12:2 is a warning, that the things we keep hidden, the sins we don’t repent of, we will have to answer for these things before God. Nothing will be hidden from him. The good news is that as Orthodox Christians, we have a way to release the hidden and secret things, so we can answer for them in this life and not at the awesome judgment seat of Christ.

FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

The St. John Food Pantry helps support our existing Ministry Food Drives along with Metropolitan Ministries, Feeding Tampa Bay, Bridge Prep and others in need!

Every little bit helps! One donation at a time YOU can help us help OTHERS to tackle hunger in our community! It's as easy as 1,2,3 ...

- 1) Look for our dedicated drop off location in the entrance area of the Church Hall.
- 2) Mark your calendars for the First Sunday of Each Month as our primary collection day (but donations are welcome anytime).
- 3) When you attend a Ministry Meeting bring a food item from the list below.

Lastly, we accept grocery store gift cards in the church office.

Thank you for your support and thinking of the St. John Food Pantry one item at a time! If you have any questions or know of someone in need (we can create meals in a bag to go) please contact Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747

Requested Food Pantry Items

- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Canned beans (all varieties)
- Canned Meat (including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- Cans of soup
- Cereal
- Instant mashed potatoes
- Jell-O/Pudding
- Macaroni & cheese
- Oatmeal
- Pasta
- Peanut Butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- Ramen noodles
- Rice
- Spaghetti sauce
- Dry goods
- Paper towels
- Toilet paper



Parish Assembly Meeting – October 22

On October 22, we will have our fall Parish Assembly Meeting. There are two things that we will do that are critical to our parish for the coming year. The first is to pass a budget. For most of the items on the budget, there is not much to discuss. We are not going to debate whether to pay the electric bill or the sewer bill. These are fixed costs to our church regardless of how many people attend here or how much we spend or save. There are a couple of areas of the budget where there is something to discuss. These include personnel and charitable giving. The kind of budget that we pass says a lot about the kind of parish we want to have. And our financial support of our parish through stewardship says a lot about how important spreading the message of Christ is to us individually. While the budget will reflect a certain amount for stewardship, we don't offer stewardship in order to achieve some goal—rather we offer stewardship in a prayerful and personal way which reflects our love for Christ.

Parish Council Elections

There was no Parish Council Election in the fall of 2020. This was because of the pandemic. The Metropolis of Atlanta said that everyone serving on the Parish Council would have one year added to their term. This means that everyone on the Parish Council at present is either in the added year to their original term, or will have one year added. Everyone on the Parish Council is able to serve three consecutive terms, which for those who are currently serving may amount to 7 years, since one of those terms is a three-year term.

Even though it is October, it will be time to start thinking about Parish Council Elections. On October 22, we will hold our fall Parish Assembly and open up nominations for the Parish Council. This year, there are six (6) positions coming up for election for a two-year term. According to the Parish By-laws, nominations for the Parish Council will be closed following the Parish Assembly Meeting on Sunday, October 22. If you wish to be nominated for the Parish Council, please plan to attend the meeting on Sunday, October 22 and have someone nominate you, or send a letter to Fr. Stavros prior to the commencement of the meeting, stating your wish to be nominated for the Parish Council and he will read it at the meeting and have someone nominate you. Parish Council Elections will be held on Sunday, December 10, following the Divine Liturgy. A mailing to all eligible voters will occur following the close of the nominations period which will have the names of the candidates, a picture of each candidate and a statement by each candidate.

In preparation for nominations and elections, please keep in mind the following:

Regarding eligibility to be a candidate for the Parish Council: Uniform Parish Regulations (UPR) Article 18, Section 1:

PARISHIONERS

Section 1: Every person who is baptized and chrismated according to the rites of the Orthodox Church is a parishioner. The religious, moral and social duties of a parishioner are to apply the tenets of the Orthodox Faith to his/her life and to: adhere to and live according to the tenets of the Orthodox faith; faithfully attend the Divine Liturgy and other worship services; participate regularly in the holy sacraments; respect all ecclesiastical authority and all governing bodies of the Church; be obedient in matters of the Faith, practice and ecclesiastical order; contribute towards the progress of the Church's sacred mission; and be an effective witness and example of the Orthodox Faith and Traditions to all people.

A parishioner in good standing practices all the religious and moral duties as described in this Section 1. At a minimum, a parishioner in good standing must: be eighteen years of age or over; be current in his or her stewardship and other financial obligations to the Parish, abide by all the regulations herein stated and the Parish Bylaws; and cooperate in every way towards the welfare and well being of the Parish. (Stewardship is recommended to be ten percent (10%) of one's annual income as stated in Holy Scripture to help meet the financial obligations of the Parish, the Metropolis and the Archdiocese.)

2. Regarding Election of Parish Council: UPR Article 25, Section Two

Section 2: A candidate for the Parish Council must be a parishioner in good standing of the Parish for at least one (1) year immediately preceding the date of the election and must live his or her life in accordance with the Faith and canons of the Church. The Priest determines whether the Parishioners are in canonical and financial good standing as specified in Article 18, Sections 1 through 3.

Section 3: Candidates for election to the Parish Council shall be nominated in accordance with the provisions of the Parish Bylaws.

All candidates shall attend a seminar conducted by the Priest prior to the election at which the Priest shall discuss and explain to the candidates the Uniform Parish Regulations, and the significance of the affirmation of office.

At the discretion of the respective Hierarchy, such seminar may be held locally or regionally, provided that candidates are given appropriate advance notice and more than one reasonable opportunity to attend the seminar in a location within close proximity to the applicable Parish.

In the event that an otherwise eligible candidate(s) cannot attend the scheduled seminar(s) for justifiable cause, the Priest shall meet privately with such individual(s) to provide the seminar.

At the conclusion of the seminar all candidates must sign a statement acknowledging that they understand the Regulations and will abide by them and the affirmation of office. If a candidate for the Parish Council does not attend a seminar and sign the statement, his/her name shall be deleted from the list of candidates.

~ Each candidate is expected to be active in the sacramental life of the church. This is covered in Article 18, section one, above. This includes the sacrament of confession. If a candidate has not been to confession in the past year, they are not eligible to run for the Parish Council. In the event your spiritual father is serving another parish, he

can send a one-line email to Fr. Stavros indicating your participation in this sacrament in the past year.

~All candidates for the Parish Council will be subject to a background check. Any background check that reveals a felony conviction will make a candidate ineligible to serve for ten years. Any background check revealing a conviction for financial misconduct—embezzlement, fraud, etc., will make a candidate permanently ineligible to serve on the Parish Council.

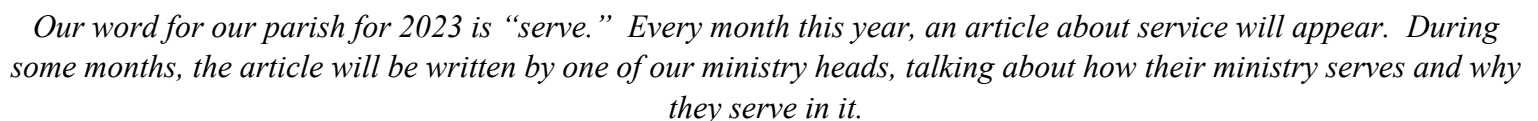
~Each candidate is asked to write a half a page on why they want to run for the Parish Council and to supply a recent photograph that is able to be photocopied well. The statement and photo need to be to the church office no later than November 15.

Thank you for your interest in being a Parish Council candidate. If you have any questions on any of the above, please feel free to contact me at any time.

+FR. STAVROS

Parish Council Nominations

At the conclusion of the Parish Assembly Meeting in October, we will again nominate people for the Parish Council for 2024. This is a critical decision each year, as it affects how our church will function in 2024 and beyond. Year after year, people decide to run for the Parish Council. Some are qualified and some are not. Some come in to speak with me about running, even asking a blessing to run. And many do not come into speak with me, they certainly don't seek any kind of blessing to run. As I have mentioned in previous writings and sermons, getting a blessing from the bishop in a Liturgy when multiple priests are serving creates a good sense of order, which in turn, leads to a good sense of Christ. Running without any input or blessing from the priest can create disorder and disharmony in the Parish Council and in the parish. I'm asking then, if you are thinking about running for the Parish Council, please make an appointment and come see me before October 22, and let's talk about it.



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 - Lynchburg, VA
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

Constantine Kallenekos - Tampa, FL
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL
Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Demitrius & 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
Sharon Colonis- Vero Beach, FL

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.**

Nursing Ministry- October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

October is Breast Cancer Awareness month. Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer among women. Approximately one in eight women in the United States will get breast cancer during their lifetime, and each year, more than 40,000 women die from breast cancer.



Signs and Symptoms of Breast Cancer

Different people have different symptoms of breast cancer, while some do not have any signs or symptoms at all. It is important to know how your breasts normally look and feel to be able to recognize any changes that may occur. While knowing what to look for is important, regular mammograms and clinical breast exams are crucial, as these tests can help detect breast cancer before symptoms show.

Signs of breast cancer may include:

- Lump in the breast or underarm (armpit)
- Swelling or thickening of all or part of the breast
- Dimpling or skin irritation of breast skin
- Redness, scaliness or thickening of the nipple or breast skin
- Nipple discharge (other than breast milk)
- Any change in the size or shape of the breast
- Pain in any area of the breast

Get Screened

A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray picture of the breast. Early detection of breast cancer can improve a woman's chance of survival and mammograms are the best tool to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Women

should ask their healthcare provider if and when a mammogram is right for them.

How Can I Lower My Risk?

There are many factors that can influence your breast cancer risk such as family history and getting older. There is no sure way to prevent breast cancer, but lifestyle changes can help lower your risk of breast cancer such as:

- Keep a healthy weight and exercise regularly.
- Choose not to drink alcohol, or drink alcohol in moderation.
- If you are taking hormone replacement therapy or birth control pills, ask your doctor about the risks.
- Breastfeed your children, if possible.
- If you have a family history of breast cancer, be sure to talk to your doctor about ways to lower your risk. Learn more about breast cancer, its symptoms, risk factors, mammograms, diagnosis, and treatment for breast cancer.
- Quit smoking. There are many reasons to avoid smoking, and decreasing the risk for breast cancer is one of them

Thanks to research advances and improved methods of early detection, most women will have an excellent prognosis when diagnosed with breast cancer. The most important thing in the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer is early detection.

This Year, The Philoptochos is teaming up with the Nursing Ministry to walk in the **"Making Strides of Tampa" Breast Cancer Walk** on Saturday October 28th at Raymond James Stadium. For more Info please Text Georgia Kane at (813) 598-8520.



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.

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



Fr. John
678-637-4425 >

Fr. Stavros
<813-394-1038



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.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

PLEASE TEXT THE WORD

"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS,
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September 17, 2023

Exaltation

Of the Holy Cross

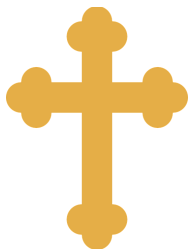
September 17, 2023



Large TRAY
MADE BY
Kathy, Jeanie,
Presbytera Lisa
and Kalliope.



Tray made by
Kathy Kaburis
and Kalliope
Chagaris



Philoptochos Retreat on September 16, 2023



WHO'S AFRAID OF HALLOWEEN?

By Fr. Mark Sietsema

I have a confession to make. And it's a bad one

When I was a kid ... I used to get dressed up for Halloween! And it was not always something innocent either, like an astronaut or a cowboy. Once I was even a ghost! Worse yet, I would go door-to-door with my brothers and say "Trick or treat!" Idolatrous! Occultic! Satanic! Over time, of course, this demon-glorifying activity caught up with me. Look at me now. I dress in black almost every day ...

Of course, you see the problem here. If not, you will very soon start reading about it in the paper again. Many people of churchy persuasions object strenuously to the observance of Halloween. Every year we read letters to the editor that run as follows:

"Halloween is the worship of the devil! Halloween comes from heathen roots! Trick or Treat comes from an ancient pagan custom: the Druids would go from house to house seeking a virgin to sacrifice! If you complied and handed over your family's virgin, they left outside your door a jack-o-lantern with a candle inside ... fueled by human fat! If you did not comply, a terrible trick would be played on you! The Catholic Church perpetuated the pagan legends with its Feast of All Saints. If you let your kids celebrate Halloween, you expose them to the possibility of demonic possession!"

Well, good Orthodox Christian, what should our Church make of this controversy? Is Halloween something we Christians should shun like the Black Mass? Don't the facts about Halloween's origins prove that it is an abomination?

No. First of all, none of these "facts" are true. It's all fiction. We know almost nothing about the culture and practices of the ancient Druids, except what little the Romans had to say. (Mind you, these are the same Romans who also used to say that Christians hold secret orgies where they sacrifice babies and eat them—so let's be careful about how much credence we give them.) The Romans invaded Britain in 43 B.C. There they found a number of



Celtic tribes, which the Roman legions subjugated with relative ease.

Now, you need to know that the Romans were not what you would call "culturally curious." They had little interest in the ways of the conquered Britons.

Generally, when there is an interaction between the conqueror and the subject, the conqueror picks up and uses the local names for rivers, hills, and the like. For instance, our state is full of names from the native languages of the Indians: Michigan, Mackinac, Saginaw, Escanaba, Kalamazoo, and Washtenaw. However, we find almost no use of the Celtic place names by the Romans. The Romans did not come to Britain for kaffeeklatsch, but for plundering and pillaging. Under the Roman sword, the Celtic place names perished with the Celts, as did any certain knowledge of Celtic or Druidic customs (like what kind of fat they used in their candles).

But what if the stories about pagan Halloween were true? Does that prevent us from making a fun day out of the Thirty-First of October? Or do pagan origins damn a thing forever?

WHAT
DO YOU
THINK



I would hope that as Orthodox Christians we would know better than to say that. We borrowed an awful lot of useful things from ancient pagan cultures. Our musical system of eight tones? From the pagan Greeks. (Next time you hear a dismissal hymn in the Third Tone, picture a phalanx of Lacedaemonian warriors marching into an attack: they liked Third Tone for their battle hymns.)

And our iconography is an obvious adaptation of Egyptian funerary art: the portraits painted on Egyptian coffins look just like the faces in our icons. Christmas, we all know, is a retooling of the Roman celebration of the winter solstice, the Feast of Sol Invictus (the Invincible Sun-god). And many, many Christian churches were built atop pagan shrines and holy places, the most famous example being the conversion of the Parthenon (a temple built in honor of

Continued...

Athena the Virgin Warrior) to a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Even Protestants with their Puritan impulses and their “just the Bible” mentality have to contend with borrowings from pagan sources in the Scriptures. For example, chapters 22-24 of the Book of Proverbs are almost certainly a translation of the older Egyptian advice guide The Instruction of Amen-em-Opet. And elsewhere in the Bible different titles given to God such as El Elyon “God Most High” and “the one who rides on the clouds like a chariot” (Psalm 104:3) are originally epithets for the pagan storm god Baal.



What’s my point? You can’t judge a custom by its origins. What counts is one’s intention in the here and now. And let’s be honest: modern Halloween for you and me—and even the Wiccans down the street—has nothing to do with virgin sacrifice or black magic. It’s about having fun in a costume and eating things your dentist wouldn’t approve of.

“Well!” the anti-Halloween crowd would reply, “Halloween teaches kids that they can get something for nothing!!” But is that so bad? To my ears, that sounds awfully close to the Christian idea of grace!

“Yes, yes, but we shouldn’t teach our kids that it’s OK to threaten someone with vandalism if they don’t fork over something you want!” Well, let’s look at this from another perspective. Maybe Halloween holds a nice little life lesson: you give a little to get a little. The Book of Proverbs speaks often of the power of gifts. If we all practiced the spirit of Halloween—being prepared always to give small kindnesses to those around us—what a wonderful world we would have.

Again, let’s be honest: no one was ever possessed by the devil because he or she dressed up for Halloween or passed out licorice, or read a Harry Potter book. Our modern lives have way too many other avenues for the temptation to enter, and these things are the real cause of our spiritual problems: pride, gluttony, hatred, materialism, and ignorance.

This may be the only pro-Halloween article by a clergyman you read this year. Actually, this piece isn’t so much pro-Halloween as it is anti-superstition and anti-paranoia. American Christianity is too much titillated by thoughts of demons, based on a mythology of evil that has more to do with pagan folklore than the sober statements of Scripture. Such superstition gives all Christians a bad name.

That’s why I’m not afraid of Halloween, and I see no problem with Orthodox Christians having fun at costume parties. After all, why would anyone want to learn more about Jesus Christ and his message, if being a Christian means forever being a spoilsport and a killjoy? If you believe in one God, if you trust Him, then accept his protection and don’t live in fear of demonic bogeymen. The real battle with the devil is fought in the heart, not in front of the Harry Potter bookstore.

Some people drink too much on New Year’s Eve. Should that stop you and me from enjoying a glass of champagne? Some people eat too much at Thanksgiving. Should that stop us from having our turkey with all the trimmings? Some people spend too much at Christmas. Should that stop us from exchanging gifts?

Some people go overboard on the spooky side of Halloween. It’s not too hard to avoid that for your family. Skip the horror movies. Don’t revel in gore. Don’t profane death. Don’t indulge in occult practices ... But don’t be paranoid or superstitious either!

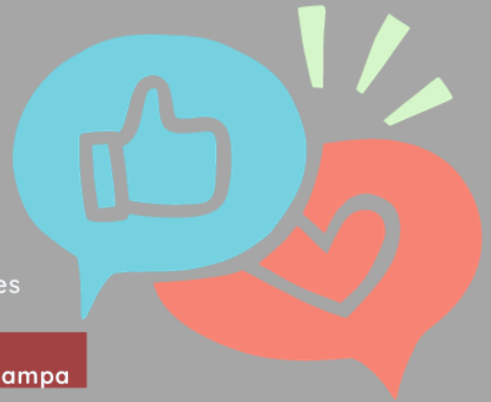
And have a Happy Halloween!

Fr. Mark Sietsema is the Proistamenos of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Lansing, MI

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St. John's Bookstore

Our bookstore has an entire section of titles geared toward the many issues young married couples and families face. Check out the following books along with many others in our bookstore this month.

Under the Laurel Tree – Grieving Infertility with Saints

Joachim and Anna

Children of My Heart – Finding Christ Through Adoption

Fertile Ground – A Pilgrimage through Pregnancy

Of Such is the Kingdom –

A Practical Theology of Disability

Parenting Toward the Kingdom –

Orthodox Christian Principles of Child Rearing

Preserve Them O Lord – A Guide for developing marital unity for Orthodox Couples



Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk – October 28

Join the ladies of Philoptochos, our Nursing Ministry, and the American Cancer Society in a celebration of courage and hope as we take strides in a movement uniting communities to end breast cancer on:

Saturday, October 28th – Raymond James Stadium – 7:30am

For three decades, these 3 to 5 mile non-competitive walks have grown into the nation's largest and most impactful breast cancer movement providing a supportive community for courageous breast cancer survivors, caregivers, and families alike.

Under the direction of Chairpersons Georgia Kane and

Vivian Samuel, we will be enlisting volunteers of all ages to form teams, raise funds, and participate in the walk.

Look for more information in our Sunday bulletins to find out how you can be a part of this exciting event!

October 2023						Nov 2023 ►
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Dance Practice	2 Orthodoxy 101 Teaching Liturgy 6:30 p.m.	3 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	4 ** Choir Practice Fr. Stavros out of town October 4-7	5 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	6 ** Office closes at 12:00 p.m. Scotch Guard Carpet.	7 Children's Greek School Young at Heart
8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Dance Practice GOYA 5:00 p.m.	9 Orthodoxy 101 6:30 p.m.	10 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Parish Council 6:30 p.m.	11 ** Choir Practice	12 Young adult discussion 6:30 p.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	13 **	14 Children's Greek School
15 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Prayer for Medical Personnel College group Dance Practice Philoptochos Meeting Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	16 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	17 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	18 ** St. Luke Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Choir Practice Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	19 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	20 **	21 Community Outreach Children's Greek School
22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Youth Sunday Parish Assembly Fall Festival 4:30 p.m.	23 St. James Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	24 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	25 ** Choir Practice	26 St. Demetrios Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00- 8:30 p.m.	27 JOY Tweens movie night 6:30 p.m.	28 Holy Protection of Virgin Mary Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Children's Greek School; Making strides with breast cancer walk (Philoptochos)
29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Founder's Day	30 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	31 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	**Fast Days			

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As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight -- " Mark 2:3