



First Things First:

MAKING TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST A SIX-WEEK LENTEN STUDY

Join us Wednesday evenings during Great Lent



March 1 First Things First: *Worship*

Dinner Sponsored by the Sunday School

March 8 First Things First: *Community*

Dinner Sponsored by the Choir

March 15 First Things First: *Love*

Dinner Sponsored by the AHEPA/Daughters

March 22 First Things First: *Learning*

Dinner Sponsored by the Young at Heart and Welcome Ministry

March 29 First Things First: *Service*

Dinner Sponsored by the Philoptochos

April 5 First Things First: *Priorities*

Dinner Sponsored by the Young Adults and Bible Studies

EACH WEDNESDAY EVENING SCHEDULE:

6:00 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

7:15 pm Lenten Dinner provided by one of our ministries

7:45 pm Presentation by Father Stavros

8:05 pm Small group discussion

8:30 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer



GREAT LENT 2023
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
TAMPA, FL



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Matthew 6:33



PART TWO: *Community*

BIBLICAL KOINONIA

- The Greek word *Koinonia* means communion, fellowship, community. Community is essential to our relationship with God and with one another. This is firmly established throughout the Bible.
- Community existed before everything else in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a mystery - co-eternal, of one essence, undivided. **Genesis 1:1 -3**
- When man was created, God knew the value of living in community and said, "*it is not good for man to be alone.*" **Genesis 2:18**
- The Old Testament is filled with communities of people - friends, couples, families, tribes, kingdoms. **Psalm 133:1**
- In the New Testament, Jesus' earthly ministry was lived out in community. His family, the 12 disciples, the inner circle of three, a broad group of friends, and women were all integral in His life. Though He often desired time to be alone in prayer, this should not be mistaken for being lonely. **Mark 1:35**
- The early Church, as described in the book of Acts, was based on community. Nobody found their faith alone or apart from each other and nobody was expected to. **Acts 2:46-47**

COMMUNITY IN TODAY'S WORLD

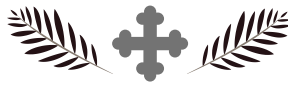
- Community for the Orthodox Christian is found in three principal places:
 - Inner circle. This includes immediate family, extended family, close friends.
 - The Greater community. This includes our neighborhoods, towns, places of work. Each person has been entrusted a talent to help the greater community. Some are teachers, some healers, etc. **Ephesians 4:11-12**
 - The Church. The Greek word *Ekklisia*, refers to the body of Christ. **1 Corinthians 12:27-30** Christ didn't mean building a church edifice, He wanted to build a community of believers. **Matthew 16:18**
- All three types of community flourish when there is trust, respect, vulnerability, mutuality.
- Some of the greatest benefits of belonging to a community include accountability, encouragement, honor. **Proverbs 27:17**

"ONE ANOTHER"

- Our faith journey requires us to be in a community and compels us to have the mutual concern for the salvation of all its members. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10**
- In the New Testament alone, the words "one another" appear over 100 times. The writers often exhort us to encourage, love, help, serve, greet one another. **Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:10**
- To reinforce this in our worship, as part of the Divine Liturgy, we hear "one another" seven times:
 - "*Let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.*"
 - "*Let us love one another so that with one mind we may confess.*"
- The entire Divine Liturgy is offered as a communal act. It is written in the plural, inviting us to worship with others around us and in fellowship with the saints and angels. **Hebrews 10:24-25**
- The ultimate expression of community is Holy Communion, *Thia Koinonia*, which is literally translated "Divine Fellowship." **Matthew 18:20**

A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY - MARK 2:1-12

- This is the Gospel reading of the upcoming second Sunday of Lent.
- In the story, there are four friends who are bold, desperate, creative, concerned, faithful, hopeful, all for their friend, the paralyzed man, who is helpless and stuck, yet trusting and vulnerable.
- The paralyzed man had to first be brought to Christ, was then forgiven of his sins, and was ultimately healed.
- This miracle not only benefited the paralytic, it also inspired his friends and those who witnessed it.



SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

GENESIS 1:1-3	<i>1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.</i>
GENESIS 2:18	<i>Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."</i>
PSALM 133:1	<i>Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!</i>
MARK 1:35	<i>And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed.</i>
ACTS 2:46-47	<i>46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.</i>
EPHESIANS 4:11-12	<i>11 And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,</i>
1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-30	<i>27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?</i>
MATTHEW 16:18	<i>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.</i>
PROVERBS 27:17	<i>Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.</i>
ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10	<i>9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up.</i>
GALATIANS 6:2	<i>Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.</i>
ROMANS 12:10	<i>love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor</i>
HEBREWS 10:24-25	<i>24 and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.</i>
MATTHEW 18:20	<i>For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.</i>
MARK 2:3-5	<i>And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and He was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this Man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." 12 And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"</i>



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PART TWO: *Community*

1. As we see so often in Scripture, we were made to live in community. How can the concept of biblical "Koininia," (or fellowship and community) help us to cope with the pervasive problem of loneliness in today's world?
2. Some of the greatest benefits of belonging to a community include accountability, encouragement, honor. How is this true for you? What other benefits can you think of?
3. Consider the statement "one another" used so often in Scripture. How can we best love/serve/encourage one another in our families, our communities, our church?
4. In this Sunday's Gospel lesson, a paralytic is carried to Christ by a "community" of four friends. Have you ever helped carry someone to Christ? Who has helped carry you to Christ?