

THE MESSENGER

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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

June 2020

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

The Messenger goes to the printer on the 15th of each month for the following month. The calendar of events may or may not be reflective of what we will do in the month of June.

As of this writing, it appears that the church will be opening for worship in small groups (number still to be determined) on Sunday, May 31. Additional instructions will be sent electronically.

Sign-up genius will be required in order to sign up for a service. Additional Divine Liturgies and other services will be scheduled for the month of June. Please stay tuned to our website and to constant contact emails for the latest schedule of services and events.

A SPECIAL MINI COME-BACK MESSENGER WILL BE FORTHCOMING VIA EMAIL PROBABLY BEFORE YOU GET THIS ISSUE. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU READ IT.

It will be imperative once we return that whatever guidelines are given to our parishioners be followed by all, whether that means only coming to a service you've signed up to attend (if we do it by sign-up genius or some other method), maintaining social distancing, or not congregating once the service is over. The latest information will be on our website and through constant contact.

In the past, we've done a combined Messenger for June and July. Because it is impossible to schedule two months in advance, we will have a small Messenger in June and another small issue in July.

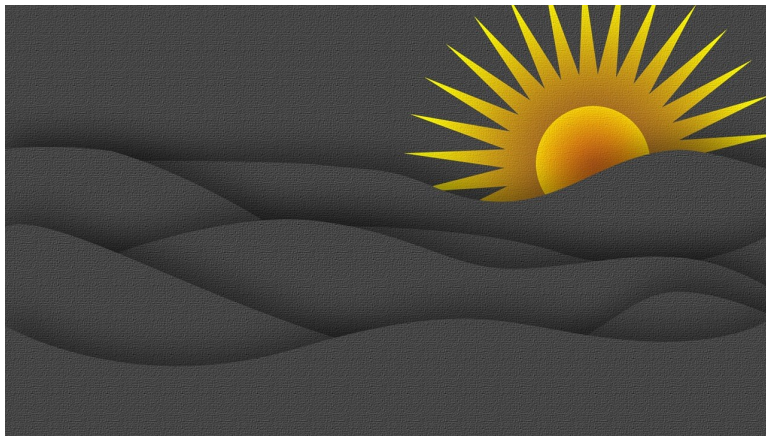
Thank you for your patience in filtering through all of our constant contacts. It is really the most effective way to communicate news and comments during this time.

Father Stavros' Message

Many Thoughts Pass Through My Mind These Days

During most months of the year, I write on a particular theme for the month. Usually the June/July Messenger is a combined issue and covers the time I spend at summer camp and on vacation. The theme is generally something like getting recharged over the summer. Summer camp is cancelled and vacation is on hold for the time being. Many of us have cancelled summer plans. The usual opportunities for rest and recharging are not going to happen.

Another theme for this month could be building up the church, because we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost which commemorates the establishment of the church, as well as the Feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul and the Holy Apostles, which both call us to spreading the Word of God. Right now, it seems that we are more in the maintenance mode than the growth mode, at least until we are out of this crisis. Having said that, the amount of "traffic" to our live-stream services is certainly more than we would have had if we were face-to-face so perhaps our church is growing more than we think right now.



This month's message is going to be a compilation of several thoughts I have had in my mind during this time of quarantine, where we are doing services in a different way than we have ever done them.

God is an Optimist

Do you think that God sees the glass half empty (pessimist) or half full (optimist)? This is an interesting question. If a glass contains 50% of its capacity, there are really only one of two ways to see it—it's either half empty or its half full. Each of us has a way that we lean in looking at such a glass. There are some people who are so optimistic we can't stand them. They think everything is good. I've confess I've looked at people like this and thought "what color is the sky in your world?" I'm not sure anyone can be optimistic all the time. There are some people who think everything is bad. I'm reminded of a cartoon Nicholas used to watch when he was a toddler called "Caillou." It was about a shy, awkward kid named Caillou, whose mother was the consummate pessimist. Every time Caillou would go outside to play, she'd say something like "well, I hope you don't get hit by a car and get killed." She never said, "Have a good time." There are some people like this in the world. They can see anything and think something negative is going to happen. We even have a nickname for people like this, "debbie-downer." Of course, there are some people who say they are realists, not optimists or pessimists. And there are some people who are generally optimists but have pessimism for certain parts of life, like politics. My point is that we all have tendencies that put us on one side or the other of the optimism/pessimism fence.

I believe that God is an optimist. I believe that God sees the good in people. I believe that God sees the potential in people because He created us with potential to do something. Forgiveness is the ability to overlook a past failing while giving someone a chance at a future good—that is optimism. Our inability to forgive comes from being stuck on a past event while not giving someone a chance at future good—that is pessimism. God is a forgiving God. Which means He can overlook past failings and see future good in us. That makes God an optimist. If God is an optimist, then we should also be optimists. If God sees the glass half-full for us, then we should see it as half-full for others.

How can we optimistic in this time of the coronavirus, where life has been disrupted, the economy has been negatively affected (which eventually will hurt our personal economy if it hasn't already), when anxiety is heightened, where things we hold dear like graduation, summer camp and vacation have been cancelled and other collateral damage? The answer is simple. Wake up each day looking for what good can come out

of it. Psalm 118:24 says "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." It doesn't say, "let's see how the day goes before we decide if we will rejoice." On a recent weekend day, there was nothing to do—all the homework was done, all the housework was done and everything was closed. So we stayed inside, played games and watched movies. Would going to the beach and having a meal at a restaurant been better? Maybe. But if we fixated on what we couldn't do, we would have lost the opportunity to do what we did, and we had fun doing that.

Wake up every day and embrace the possibilities the day holds. There is always the possibility to help someone or encourage someone, no matter what kind of day we are having, no matter what kind of weather we are having, and regardless of whether we are out and about or quarantined at home. This is what optimism is—rejoicing in the day, embracing the possibilities it holds and looking for opportunities to be positive, encouraging and helpful.

God is an optimist. We should be as well.

Something Good Came Out of Home Worship

Two weeks after Pascha, Charlie put together a slide show of all the pictures of Holy Week home worship that were submitted to the office. The most impressive thing about the video was the pictures of Good Friday worship, and how many families build a kouvouklion, the tomb of Christ, in their houses. Since most craft stores were not open, people used whatever they had on hand at home, which showed great creativity. But in making these with their children, teaching occurred. No way does a family make one of these with their children without telling them what they are making and why. Our Sunday school program is great at St. John. But 45 minutes of Sunday school a week can't be all the religious education our children receive. The primary place of learning is in the home and in many homes, this is forgotten. How pleasant to see parents teaching their children about the death and burial of Christ. Even more beautiful was to see fathers carrying the tomb around their homes on Good Friday evening. Men have long shirked their role as the spiritual leader of the household. Most people believe (correctly) that however the mother is with religion, that is how the children will be. How beautiful to see fathers taking on a spiritual leadership role in the house.

No, home worship isn't better than worship in church, where we gather all together and receive Christ together in the Eucharist. But something good came out of home worship (there, my optimism) and I hope that families will remember this in the years to come. I hope there will be a pause each year during Holy Week so that families can make a tomb of Christ. This is a great example of what we call "the home church." The first church is that of the home because the home is where we live every day. This is why we put up icons and have a prayer corner at home. This is why we should have prayer and family worship in the home. Not because they will ever take the place of worship in the church. But because we don't go to church every day and prayer and worship should be part of everyday life.

Great job with the home worship!

Connections Are What Build Relationships—With God and with Each Other

Relationships are about connections. When something positive happens between two people, the relationship is strengthened. When something negative happens, the relationship is weak-

ened. We all are familiar with the phrase “hanging on by a thread.” When there is just one thread holding two things together, their relationship is tenuous. When there are a hundred threads holding two things together, we don’t need to use the phrase “hanging on by a thread,” because if the thread breaks, there are still ninety-nine threads holding the things together. And when many threads hold two things together, we don’t have to worry if a thread or two break.

Marriage is about making connections. It’s not about being perfect or not making mistakes. It is about making connections. When two people get married, the Lord makes a divine connection between them, and between them and Him. The couple who gets married pledges to never sever the connection that God has made. (obviously in our human condition, some marriages break down) And from that day forward, they are supposed to work at making connections. If a marriage starts to break down so that there are few threads holding it together, rather than lamenting or blaming why a marriage finds itself in this state, the couple would be better suited to make some connections in earnest. These could include seeing a counselor for some direction in how to build a connection. It could be something even more simple, such as a walk in the park together, holding hands, sitting together on the couch, sharing a meal, or even giving a compliment. Anything that builds a connection strengthens the relationship.

The same can be said with our children. When we yell at our children, or scold them, or tell them we are disappointed, we may see some correction to behavior but we won’t see connection with them. Because negativity severs connection. Yes, it is our job as parents to correct, but it is also our job to connect. So make sure that there is connection, and not just correction. (As an aside, as I’m typing this, a random thought comes to mind. Our prison system is called the “department of corrections.” A person is sent to the department of corrections to ostensibly correct behavior that is incorrect, in other words for rehabilitation. When a person spends years unconnected and is not taught how to make good connections with others, then there is a high probability that they will re-offend, because connections are more important than corrections. We can’t run our relationships in marriage or with our children as if we are the department of corrections, but as the department of connections.)

Friendships are built on connections. Common interests, spending time together, these cause connections to be built which create and strengthen relationships. If we want stronger friendships, make connections. In a time when we are not going out with friends, thankfully we have other means to make connections—phone calls, emails, texts as an example. If we stay totally isolated and don’t connect with anyone, relationships we had pre-covid-19 are not going to be adversely affected. If we stay connected and make connections, even though they are not face-to-face, we will see friendships actually strengthened.

If connections strengthen human relationships, the same principle carries over to our relationship with God. Our relationship with the Lord is built through connection. Prayer, reading the Bible, worship, and charity—these things help strengthen our relationship with the Lord. When we do not do these things, or when we do these things only sporadically, then our relationship is weakened. When a faith crisis comes, it will feel as though our relationship is hanging on by a thread. And it will be, because we don’t have a strong relationship. When we

build our relationship with God on a regular basis, the connection will be strong (just as it is in a good marriage, or with children) and the relationship will be able to sustain a faith crisis (like an illness, or a death, or the coronavirus and its collateral damage). At a time when we cannot attend worship regularly, there are other ways to sustain the relationship. Home worship is a distant second choice when it comes to worship, but a connection can still be built this way. Offering a prayer strengthens the connection. So does being optimistic, the way that God is optimistic.

I’ve written and spoken before on the phrase “count the wins.” A good team counts its wins and not its losses. When a team has lost a game, they go out with the intention to win the next one, to get a win and then celebrate the win. If any relationship you have—marriage, children, friends, parents, or with God—



is not as strong as you wish it were, then go out and get a win today by making a connection. And tomorrow make another connection. Be intentional about making connections and you will see relationships strengthened.

Spend time each day making a connection with God, with your family and with your friends. And the relationships will get stronger as a result.

Death is Not the Worst Thing

The greatest fear associated with the coronavirus is that people will die from it. Perhaps that is the greatest fear in life, is that we will die. This is why we try to preserve life at all costs. This is why we avoid death at all costs. We read in I Thessalonians 4:13-14: “But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.” It is ignorant (and that is the right word) to think that death is the worst thing that can happen to us. No one wants to die young. No one wants to see someone young die. And none of us like when someone we love dies. No one likes that. We all grieve in a very human way for the loss of a loved one. Even Jesus Himself grieved the death of His friend Lazarus, so grieving the death of a loved one is perfectly acceptable. However, if we believe in God, if we believe in salvation, then death is something that at some point in life we should embrace. I’ve met people at the end of their lives who actually embraced death, they looked forward to meeting the Lord. They died with great faith. They also had a sadness because they were leaving lov-



ing families, great marriages, wonderful children, good friends and a life they had enjoyed. But they were also devoted Christians, and they believed that at the end of life is an embrace by God as we enter eternal life.

At what cost will we try to avoid death? Every time we get in a car to go somewhere, we risk dying in a car wreck. Many people die in car wrecks every day. Does that mean we should never drive? There are people who get killed or seriously hurt playing sports. Should we avoid sports as well? If we really are going to avoid death at all costs, we wouldn't get out of bed every day. Anyone who goes out into the world risks death. That's one thing that happens when we choose to leave our houses.

Should we live in fear of death? No. Jesus said in John 12:25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." This does not mean literally that we should hate life or hate ourselves if we enjoy life. But it does mean that we live our lives for a greater purpose, salvation. We won't live forever, any of us. We will not be able to keep the lives we have forever. Thus our lives should be a preparation for eternal life. If we love our lives so much that we are not preparing for eternal life, we are not going to inherit the Kingdom of God.

In I John 4:18, we read "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." I enjoy living. I don't wish to die any time soon, not from the coronavirus, cancer, or a car wreck. I'm 48 years old. I should be at the half-way point of my life. However, there is no guarantee I'll be here next week. I'm aware of that. I don't feel entitled to 48 more years, that would be arrogant thinking. If I embrace each day as a gift, and if I embrace God as my Savior, then I am grateful for however many more days I have, and when the day comes that God says my life on earth is over, I will be grateful for what I had and I will be ready to embrace what He will hopefully have for me. Honestly, I am afraid of the dying process—I hope that the end of my life will not be a long, painful decline. But as for death itself, I believe in God, I believe in heaven, and I hope I am ready whenever He comes for me.

I spoke to a priest recently, a dear friend who has had some significant medical setbacks. He has served as a devout priest for nearly 60 years. He is one of the best liturgists I have ever seen. And now he can hardly walk. He has one of the best singing voices I have ever heard. And he can't sing. I spoke to him on the phone recently, and he said to me, "whatever the good Lord has for me in this life is fine. I just hope He will give me enough time to repent of my sins." Here is a man who

can hardly do anything and what he thinks about is repentance and preparation for eternal life. He also reads "The Messenger." Father Constantine, you are one of my heroes, not only because of how you carried out your ministry, but because of how you are preparing yourself now to eventually meet the Lord!

How do we temper the joy of life and the fear of death? The answer is to be a good steward of the day that you've been given. Be a good steward of the life you've been given. Be a good steward of the friends you've been given, the talents, the opportunities. All we have is today. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is no guarantee. So give the best we have with what we have, today. If the Lord came and tapped me on the shoulder as I'm writing this article and said "Ok, Fr. Stavros, your time on earth is done," I would be happy because He would have found me doing something edifying. I don't want Him to walk in on me when I am angry or arguing with someone or cursing. So, I try to minimize those things in my life by being a good steward. I am also a sinner, so I fall to those things frequently. But as my aforementioned hero said, "I hope I will have enough time to repent of my sins."

The Importance and Safety of Holy Communion

Holy Communion has been a topic for discussion these days. The discussion has taken on one of two forms. Either it is that people really miss it. And on the other side, there are people who are calling into question whether or not it is actually that important, or even is it safe.

The central act of the Orthodox Church is the Eucharist. We can experience many aspects of our faith outside of the church building. We should certainly pray at home, on days we go to church and on days we don't. Our experience of Scripture shouldn't be limited only to what we hear the priest read from the Gospel on Sundays, so Bible reading isn't unique to the church. We should be charitable and use our talents every day, whether we go to church or not. We've kept many of our ministries going using Zoom conferencing. More people actually are able to participate in Bible study over Zoom than when we do it face to face so in this way, this ministry has actually improved. Yes, people miss the social aspect of church life—GOYA isn't as good over Zoom, neither was the virtual coffee hour we tried. But we can still talk to church friends on the phone. I'm thankful that many church friends and Sunday school students did a "drive-by" the office after church one Sunday in May. (Incidentally, the thing I have missed most during this time of quarantine is singing Christos Anesti with many people. The highlight of that day of the drive-by was not

the beautiful signs and cards, though those were certainly appreciated. It was when people got out of their cars, and with appropriately social distancing, we all sang “Christos Anesti”.)

The most significant loss of this period has been the inability to receive Holy Communion together. Because this is the one thing that cannot be replicated over Zoom, over the phone, or in any other way. This is why home worship will never replace worship in person. Because we can’t virtually receive.

So, what is the big deal with Communion? Why is that so important? The best way to explain this in light of our current challenge is this. Many people have missed embracing other people. Why? Because there is something to a physical embrace. Unfortunately, we have had a couple of funerals in the past month. And at each one, everyone had the urge to embrace people, because this is what we do when we are sad. As a priest, I have had to still meet with people who have been diagnosed with serious illness or other challenges. These meetings have happened in person, with appropriate social distancing. At the end of each encounter, it has been weird to just get up and leave, because embracing others is what we do when we are scared or have shared deep conversation. And on happy moments, like someone celebrating a graduation, it has been weird not to go up and hug them, because that’s what we do in happy moments. A physical embrace is an important way that we connect with others. This is why physical distancing is so hard (social distancing, as I have said, is the wrong term. We should not social distance from others, it’s physical distancing that we should be doing. We should always be socially close to others).

Holy Communion is a physical encounter with Jesus Christ. It is like embracing the Lord. Christ gave us Himself in a way that we can handle. If He walked into a room in body, we would not be able to handle Him. Just like with the sun, we experience its energy (its rays and its warmth) but we don’t experience its essence. In the same way, Christ gave us Himself in a way that we can handle Him. Through the Divine Liturgy, common elements of bread and wine are consecrated and they become the Body and Blood of Christ. And then we receive them, as a way for us to physical encounter Christ, for us to touch Him, and for Him to touch us. It does take faith to believe that these ordinary elements of bread and wine can become extraordinary through the Descent of the Holy Spirit which consecrates them.

Receiving Communion is the most intimate way to encounter Christ, because there is physical contact with Him. We are physical distancing from Christ, not spiritually distancing. But physical distancing is hard, because it should be a natural desire to be physically one with Christ. And this is done in Holy Communion. We are physically distancing from one another right now, in this time of crisis. But this can’t last forever. It won’t last forever. Because at some point not only it will be found safe to embrace one another again, but we will embrace one another, even despite risks, because embracing one another is vital to life. If someone said to me, you can choose to embrace people every day but ten years will be taken off of your life or you can live ten years longer and never embrace another person again, I would choose to embrace others. This is not the case now—no one is offering this option. The point is, embracing one another is an important part of life. And embracing Christ in Holy Communion is central to our spiritual lives. And again, this is only done in corporate worship that is done face-to-face, which is why once we can return to worship in the

church, live-stream will still be offered for those who are unable to come but not as a substitute for those who can.

In the meantime, there has been some questions raised as to the safety of Holy Communion. There are those who have criticized the way we receive Holy Communion, even suggesting that the method by which we receive be changed. I believe that Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ and that no physical harm can come to anyone who partakes of Holy Communion when they come with a humble heart. The Bible actually says that one can become sick by partaking unworthily, this is true. Saint Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:27-30, that:

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died.”

Partaking of Communion unworthily can cause illness. But partaking with a humble heart leads us to “remission of sins and life everlasting” (from the Divine Liturgy, what is prayed when we receive Communion).

The Body and Blood of Christ is incorruptible. When the Gifts are consecrated, the priest is asking for the Holy Spirit to come down on Them. His mouth is only a few feet from the Gifts as He invokes the Holy Spirit. If the priest is sick as He is praying over the Gifts, does his breath somehow contaminate them? No. Likewise, if the person before us in line at Holy Communion is sick and touches the spoon, are we going to sick because we received next? No. This is a matter of faith. Either this is THE Body and THE Blood of Christ, or it isn’t. If we believe it is, we cannot be hurt receiving. If we do not believe that it is, we should not receive. If a person chooses not to receive, for whatever reason, we should not judge that person. There are times when we should not receive Holy Communion. My Spiritual Father has told me not to receive on the rare occasion I am not celebrating the Divine Liturgy, in order to acknowledge the times I have received and was not adequately prepared. So at clergy meetings, when I am not celebrating, I do not receive. And others do not judge me. But if we never receive because we never think it is safe (or worse, we can’t be bothered coming to church), what does that say about what we believe?

In Isaiah 6:1-7, we read of Isaiah’s vision of God in the temple, which is a foreshadowing of Holy Communion. I will quote it here in *italics* with some commentary in regular script:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the Seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. (v. 1-2)

Two important points here. First, in the Liturgy of St. Basil, we quote verse two verbatim. So much of our liturgical prayer and practice comes from the Bible and that is one example. Second, another example of Biblically-based practice also comes from verse two, with the “fans” or “exapteryga” that are found behind the altar table in every Orthodox Church. These are the discs that are on the end of poles that are behind the altar table and are carried by the altar boys in the processions of the Divine Services. They depict the Seraphim, in that they have faces of angels but with no bodies. Instead they have the six wings mentioned in this verse. In Greek, the word for “six”

is “exi” which is why they are called “Exapteryga” or “six-winged” angels.

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (v. 3)

This verse has been made into a hymn that is sung right before the consecration of the Gifts: “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory.”

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!” (v. 4-5)

If we really thought about it, no one would receive Holy Communion. Not because it is not safe. But because we are unworthy to receive it. If I thought about it long enough, I would not be a priest, because who am I, to stand at God’s Holy Altar and hold Him, and receive Him and distribute Him to others? From a spiritual perspective, none of this should be allowed. And yet we come to receive Him, and some step forward to be His priests, unworthy as we all are. Why? The answer is found in verses 6:-7:

Then flew one of the Seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin forgiven!” (v. 6-7)

In the pre-Communion prayers, Holy Communion is presented to us as analogous to taking a live coal and touching it to our lips. If we took a live coal, like the kind that burn bright orange in the censer, and put it in our mouths and swallowed it, it would surely burn us and kill us. Yet, this is what we do, when we take Christ, the Light of God which burns in darkness, brighter than any coal, and we place Him in our mouths. We take the burning coal and not only are we not burned, but we are healed.

In fact, after receiving Holy Communion, the priest says these words from verse 7, “Behold, this has touched my lips, taking away my iniquity and cleansing me of my sin.” This verse does not say “Behold, this has touched your lips, upping your chance of getting sick.”

It takes faith to believe that. And faith is based on our own experience and the experiences of others. I have served as a priest for 22 years and as a deacon for a year before that. For 23 of my 48 years, after every Divine Liturgy, I have “consumed the Gifts,” meaning that I have consumed whatever has remained in the Chalice after Holy Communion. If I have put the spoon in one time for one person or 300 times for three hundred people, I then put the spoon in my own mouth in order to eat and drink whatever remains in the chalice. And as everyone knows, I rarely get sick. In my 22 years as a priest, I have, on a few occasions, been sick at the altar. I’ve consecrated the Gifts while I had a cold, and on a couple of occasions even the flu, and it didn’t make the whole congregation sick. This is THE Body and THE Blood of Christ, and it is imparted to us unto remission of our sins and life everlasting, to take away our guilt and cleanse from sin, not to make us sick or harm us in any way. I can’t state that emphatically enough.

On a practical side, since I have been ordained, we have had the SARS and H1N1 pandemics and before I got ordained the AIDS pandemic, and none of us got any of these things from

Holy Communion. Once we are able to come back to church, I encourage you to prepare yourselves and receive Holy Communion when it is offered. We have all been deprived of this (well, I haven’t but most of you have) life-giving encounter with Christ for a long time. Just like when it is safe to embrace one another again, we are all going to do that, because embracing one another is important. Just like receiving Holy Communion is like a physical embrace with Jesus Christ.

(As an aside, someone asked me if they can receive without going to confession first. I’m not going to write a message on confession, you’ve heard many of them from me over the years. If you wish to go to confession, I will hear confessions whenever. Many of you go in Lent and didn’t do that this year. Confession is available at all times of the year and I encourage you not to wait until next Lent in order to go. Once Divine Liturgy is available to attend publicly, I encourage everyone to receive Holy Communion at least once, as you would have been invited to do on Pascha. And then we can figure out Confession in the near future.)

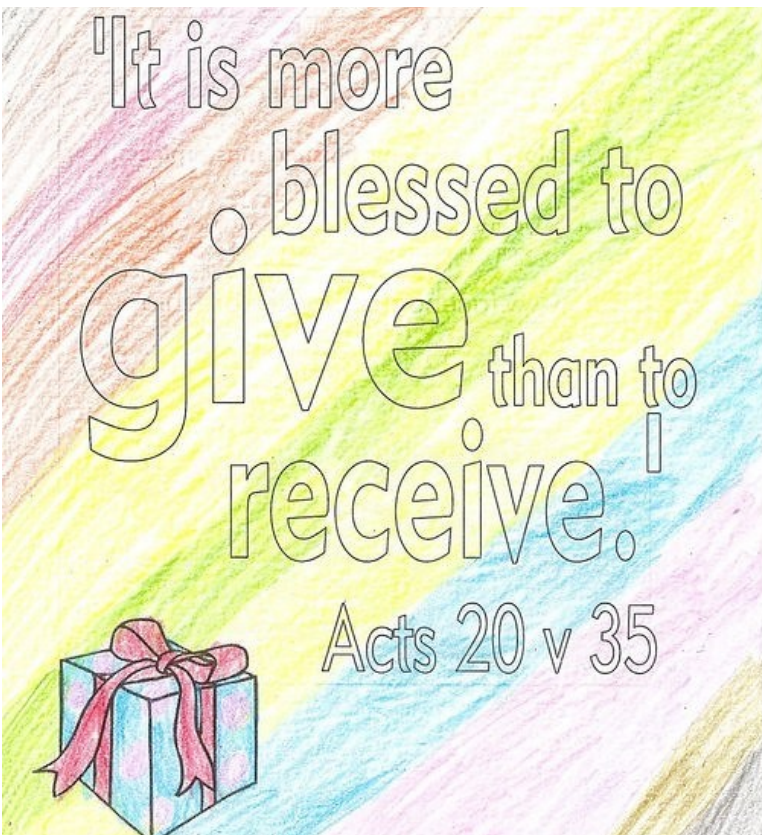
A Seminal Moment for Stewardship

Will we have a Greek Festival in November? That is a question that will not be answered for some time. The Parish Council has discussed this question and has determined that we don’t need to make a decision on this until August 1. We can wait until August 1 before investing time or money on the Greek Festival and still pull it off successfully. However, after August 1, a decision will need to be made, as to whether we feel it will be safe to hold a festival and whether we think people will actually come to it.

So, the answer on May 15, as I write this message, is that we do not know the answer to this question. We may or may not have a Greek Festival this year.

What if we don’t? How will we make up that money?

And what about those who have lost jobs? What if they can’t pay what they pledged?



I rarely lead off the Messenger with articles on stewardship, lest people not open and read the issue. Because we've given stewardship a bad connotation, because we've made it all about money. Not we at St. John, necessarily, but the church in general. I read a monthly bulletin from another church recently, where the first FIVE pages were about the need for money and the entire issue contained not one article about the faith. I try not to do it this way.

The faith leads. And when it does, then stewardship follows. We lead with Christ, not with stewardship. That being said, most of us have never given what we are capable of giving, or what the Bible teaches us to give, which is 10% back to God, the concept of the tithe.

There are people who will have to give less this year, because they have lost jobs. There are people who will be able to give the same. And there are people who can actually give more.

When the call went out about giving masks to the church to distribute to others, MANY people responded with way more masks than we needed (so far). We have masks if people need them. Perhaps this is because the need for masks is an acute and timely need. When a problem is right in front of us, it is easier to react to it.

The Church continues to operate at all times. Even when we aren't face to face in worship, worship continues. Ministries continue. And operating expenses continue.

I choose in my ministry not to belabor the fact that it takes financial resources to operate a parish and to operate it well. I encourage those who can to please consider giving more, to make up for the shortfall of those who cannot give as much.

As regards the Festival, whether or not we have one (and I hope we do), it again points us to the idea that we cannot base the ability of our parish to function based on the success of the Festival, which is based largely on the weather that weekend, or this year, the impact of the coronavirus. Christ and His stewards put the church forward, not illness, weather or festivals.

There Will Never Be a New Normal with Christ

Finally, in my thoughts, there is the question we are all asking, are we going to have a "new normal" when it comes to life?

Will we have a touchless society? Will social distancing become the new normal? Will we look at education differently—will it somehow now not be okay to have 30 kids in a classroom, or hundreds of college kids staying in a dorm? Will there be summer camps? Will people not want to fly?

The answer is no one knows. Personally, I hope not. I've been alive for 48 years and have enjoyed embracing others, going to camp, having a full church, and sitting close to others in my office. Flying has been a necessity in my life. I hope these things don't change permanently because of a few bad months.

But here are the things that won't change, ever.

- Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.
- Heaven is the destination.
- Stewardship (using our time and talents to His glory and in service to others) is the path we take to get there.
- Holy Communion is the means by which we become physically one with God and is what sustains us through this life
- Holy Communion can only be received in person, which is why the Divine Liturgy will always be celebrated, even if we do it with limited numbers for a time.
- Christ gave us exactly TWO commandments—to love Him and to love one another. We show our love for Him through prayer, worship, obedience to His commandments and acts of charity. We show love to one another by serving one another. These two commandments remain unchanged by the crisis in which we are in. No crisis is going to change them.

And here is the other thing that won't change. I enjoy your company. I miss it. I enjoy serving you and can't wait until we can be together as we are used to being together.

And here is something else that doesn't change—I enjoy writing and I write long messages. Thank you for the time you take to read them!

God bless you all!

With love in the Lord,

+Fr. Stavros

Staying Calm in Crisis

By Charlie Hambos

Christ is Risen!

Stop watching, listening and reading the news, plain and simple. If that seems too drastic, please at least severely limit the amount, we watch tv, read/watch/listen on our phones, computer and any other media.

Hopefully, by the time you are reading this in the June 2020 Messenger here at St. John Greek Orthodox Church, we will be either back in church in some limited fashion or at least very well on our way. If we are not, the following still applies and if we are, it also still applies.

If there is one reality, at this time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, is that fear plays or played a very big part in how we shaped our understanding of what was or is going on around the world. We have the media constantly bombarding us with information, death counts and badgering of the world wide response. Before we knew it, there were conspiracy theories floating around

coming up with all kinds of things. And we were all at home, with almost no choice but to be bombarded by all of this information, unless one did not have internet, cable or a smartphone. (Perhaps, you should consider yourself lucky if that is you.)

The question, remains? What is the Orthodox Christian response to the COVID-19 Pandemic? What is the Orthodox Christian response to the closing of the churches?

One major attribute of our response needs to be the combination of two Greek words. Both words mean sober and their contextual use will help guide us in the proper response. The first is σωφρόνως an adverb coming from σώφρων, which is a combination of σῶζω and φρήν. This means to be of safe mind, of true moderation. So in response, to everything in this crisis and all crises we need to be calm, take in all information and have a sober response. We don't need to respond in anger or fear or frustration. We find σωφρόνως in a few different places in Holy Scripture. The first is in, Titus 2:11-14 which says, "For

the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” We have to put everything in perspective of our salvation and of Christ. Specifically His grace and his mercy are needed to train us. To train us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions which are rampant in today’s society but also in every society. The opposite of those things is to live sober (σωφρόνως), upright and godly lives.

The second occurrence of σωφρόνως is found in Romans 12:1-5, which says, *“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”* As Christians, we cannot be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of our mind.

This means that as Christians we must refrain from thinking the same way the world does. We must not let ourselves be bogged down and controlled by the something as simple as the media to something as dangerous as the demons and all their evil machinations. How do we do this? Paul says, *“For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.”* We have to be humble and we have to have sober judgment (σωφρόνως). We can not take either side of any story. We have to take all the sides and find ourselves in the middle.

The second Greek word is νήψατε which comes from νήφω, meaning to be sober, not intoxicated, not only with wine but with anything, especially sin and our emotions.

The first instance is found in 1 Peter 5:2-11 where the letter is being written to the church leadership but applies to everyone. *“Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober (νήψατε), be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. 11 To him be the domin-*



ion for ever and ever. Amen.” We need to be humble and we need to, once again, allow the grace of God to give us mercy and to be merciful. All of our fears and worries, during a pandemic or not during a pandemic needs to be cast on the Lord because he cares. Not only do we need to cast our fears upon Him, but we also need to be sober and watchful for a very important reason. This is because the devil is real and is wants to control us. This has been very real in this pandemic because it has caused so much confusion within the church and outside the church and this is only the result of the devil who likes to confuse and pit people against each other. If we are not watchful and sober on what we believe, we will fall into that trap.

Another occurrence of νήψατε is found in 1 Peter 1:13-15, which says, *“Therefore gird up your minds, be sober (νήψατε), set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

We as Christians are called to be holy, we are called to be separate from this world but of this world. How well are we doing it? We need to be reminded that we need to be sober-minded in all of our decisions and intake of information.

When it comes to the closing of the churches, it is something very scary and the first time in church history. We need to be watchful, yet sober when it comes to our thoughts about this. Hopefully, when reading this we will be open and it will only have been a few months. If it goes any longer, we must say something. We as a church, the people, have a voice and we must use it. We must use it in a way that is sober and moderate and of sound mind. We can not let the passions and emotions flare up inside of us in response to any of these things. May we be watchful and given the strength we need to have faith and express it not only in words but in action. Christ is Risen!

Liturgical Schedule for June 2020

Tuesday, June 2	Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, June 3	Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.
Saturday, June 6	Saturday of the Souls Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Memorial Service to be held at the end of the Liturgy
Sunday, June 7	Pentecost Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit 11:00 a.m.
Monday, June 8	Holy Trinity Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, June 10	Sacrament of Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.
Thursday, June 11	Sts. Bartholomew and Barnabas Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.
Saturday, June 13	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 14	All Saints Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Saturday, June 20	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 21	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, June 24	Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.
Saturday, June 27	Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, June 28	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, June 29	Sts. Peter and Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday, June 30	Holy Apostles Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, July 1	Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary 6:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 5	Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Opt-in on 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.

Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over **2637** people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 5 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 Charlie at charlie.hambos@gmail.com and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Charlie 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 frstav@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.

Liturgical Notes for June 2020

Additional Services in the month of June—We anticipate that the church will reopen for worship in small groups on Sunday, May 31. Because we will only be able to accommodate a small number of parishioners during this time, additional services will be offered. Divine Liturgies have been added on Saturdays (June 6, 13, 20 and 27) and during the week (June 2, 6, 8, 11, 24, 29 and 30), with the hope that every person will be able to attend the Divine Liturgy once within a two-week period. We add or subtract services as needed in order to accomplish this for as long as this is needed.

Additionally, the Sacrament of Holy Unction will be offered to a small group of people on Wednesday, June 3 and Wednesday, June 10. If there are more people than can be accommodated on these two nights, additional Holy Unction services will be scheduled.

We will resume the Wednesday evening Paraklesis services on Wednesday, June 24, until the end of this crisis, at which point, a Holy Unction service will be held to mark the end of this crisis.

Please read the specific guidelines for how services will be conducted and the appropriate protocols during this interim period.

Saturday, June 6 -Saturday of the Souls- There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 6. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please send the list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided). **One very important note: PLEASE DO NOT BRING KOLYVA to the Saturday of the Souls. One Kolyva will be offered for the entire community.**

Sunday, June 7 - Pentecost This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!!. A special Vespers Service will be held after Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (June 16), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feast day. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.” There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. However, there is a fast for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which lasts from the Monday after all Saints Day (June 15 this year) - June 28. So there is a 13-day fast before the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. The length of the fast period is determined by the date of Pascha each year.

Monday, June 8 – Feast of the Holy Trinity- The day after Pentecost is known by two names, either the Feast of the Holy Trinity, or the Monday of the Holy Spirit. Because Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit, the day after Pentecost commemorates the Holy Trinity. Normally, our church is closed for this feastday and we worship at Holy Trinity in Clearwater, as they celebrate their feastday. With the current rules of the coronavirus, we will celebrate this service at St. John on Monday, June 8.



Sunday, June 14 - Sunday of All Saints The period of the Pentecostarion is now complete with the commemoration of “All Saints.”

Wednesday, June 24 - Nativity of St. John the Baptist This marks the feastday of the Nativity (birth) of St. John the Baptist, the Forerunner of the Lord and patron saint of our parish.

Monday, June 29—Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Paramounts of the Apostles. Sts. Peter and Paul are the two greatest of the Apostles who were at one time two of the greatest sinners. St. Peter denied Christ and St. Paul was persecuting and killing Christians. God used these men for good despite their sins, a lesson for all of us.

Tuesday, June 30 – Synaxis of the Holy Apostles- On the day following Sts. Peter and Paul, June 30, the Church commemorates the Twelve Apostles.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

Live Streaming

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

To access this page

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



Pictures

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

On the lighter side

1. I used to spin that toilet paper roll like I was on the wheel of fortune; now I turn it like I'm cracking a safe.
2. If you keep a glass of wine in each hand, you can't touch your face
3. I swear my fridge just said "what the heck to you want now?"
4. Just sent a dove out my window. When it comes back with a piece of toilet paper, I will the virus is finished.
5. What is your next travel destination?
 - a. Las Kitchenas
 - b. Los Lounges
 - c. Santa Bedrooms
 - d. Porto Gardenas
 - e. Los bed
 - f. Costa Del Balconia
 - g. St bathroom
 - h. La Rotonda De Sofa
6. Wearing a mask inside your home is now highly recommended. Not so much to prevent covid-19 but to stop eating.
7. I might sleep on the couch to cut down on my morning commute.
8. I stepped on the scales this morning and it appears that being quarantined isn't flattening my curve.
9. If you see my kid on zoom in the same clothes he's been wearing the past five days mind your business, our homeschool has a uniform.
10. Today the devil whispered in my ear, "You're not strong enough to withstand the storm." And I whispered, "Six feet back, Lucifer!"
11. Pretty wild how we used to eat cake after someone had blown on it. . .good times. . .
12. Sometimes someone unexpected comes into your life out of nowhere, makes your heart race and changes you forever. . .We call these people cops.

Names to be Commemorated for Saturday of Souls

Please write the names of all those whom you wish to be commemorated in the Saturday of Souls Service.

Please mail into the office or bring to church as soon as possible.

Fr. Stavros will commemorate all the names that were turned in earlier this spring, so there is no need to send in new names if you already sent them earlier this year.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

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

By Fr. Stavros

In January 2019, we began the “Fifty-Two Verses in Fifty-Two Weeks” Bible Challenge, to memorize one Bible verse per week for fifty two weeks. I will provide a verse per week (four or five per month in *The Messenger* and then repeated weekly in the bulletin). I will choose verses that are meaningful to me. You are welcome to submit verses via email to me as well, as many of you have. Most of us don’t spend enough time in the Bible. Sadly, some of us don’t spend any time. 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 and contemplate the verse each week. Read it, memorize it, and then contemplate it. 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 June. 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. Contemplate the Scripture each week and let it speak to you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you through your reflection on Scripture.

June 7-13

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation, the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. Matthew 26:41

Jesus said these words to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was about to be betrayed, arrested and crucified. He was scared. He asked three of His disciples to “watch” while He prayed. He didn’t need them to do anything in particular, just to be with Him, so He wouldn’t feel alone. And I’m positive they wanted to comfort Him. It was late at night, perhaps they were tired, perhaps their anxiety got the best of them, and they fell asleep. They couldn’t even stay awake and watch. There are times in our lives when our spirit is not willing. We willingly go and do things that are not nice or helpful. But there are many more times when we want to do the right thing, or even try to do the right thing and for some reason we cannot do the right thing, because our bodies won’t go along with us. We try to do something with great intentions and hunger, or fatigue or illness or something else will not allow us to do what we want to do. In this time of covid-19, there are many things we want to do but all of a sudden can’t do, either because we are sick or we fear being sick. What is most important to remember and do is that when our flesh is weak, keep our spirits strong. Because the spirit leads and the spirit is what God judges. He knows that our flesh is weak, He knows we will get sick or tired or hungry or anxious. But our spirits can still serve Him and one another regardless of how the flesh feels. We need to tell ourselves “The flesh may be weak but the spirit will remain willing.”

June 14-20

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s

love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5

I once read a book written by a former major league baseball pitcher who suddenly lost his ability to throw a strike and quickly lost his job and a lucrative career playing baseball. There was a quote from that book which I will paraphrase, which said something akin to “There is the life we want and the life we have.” Character is built in how we handle that gap. These days of the covid-19 crisis have put a gap in every life, between the life we want—going to school, going to the beach, going on vacation, or even just safely going to the grocery store, or going out without wearing a mask—to the life we have—being overly cautious, social distancing, watching our finances take a hit, losing jobs, anxiety, etc. How we deal with this gap reflects our character as people and also reflects the character of our relationship with God. We know that in our sufferings, we will gain endurance. Endurance produces character. And in building our character, we will find purpose, which ultimately leads us to hope. When that hope is placed in God, then we will not be disappointed.

June 21-27

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who to you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16: 13-16

Normally for these Bible verses, I choose one verse that will be easy to memorize. The actual verse to memorize is in bold, but the other verses are necessary to give this one context. Jesus asked His disciples who did they say He is. They gave answers about what “others” were saying about Jesus. Then Jesus made it personal—who do YOU say that I am. This question is very pointed and very personal. There is no “let’s say what is popular or what we should say.” Simon Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. How do YOU answer this question? Who is Jesus Christ to you? If we are honest, for many of us He is an insurance policy, only called upon in times of trouble. For others, He is a crutch when we are unsure. For others, He is something to do, something to belong to. For others, He is a good role model for children. For others, He is a moral authority. He is our Lord and Savior, our guide, our purpose, our destination, our present, our future, our everything. At least, that is who He is supposed to be for us. He is these things, the question is, is He these things for you? Answer these questions, “Who do YOU say that He is?” and “who is He for you?”

June 28-July 4

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. Matthew 16:18

This verse appears immediately after the verses of last week. After Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus turned to Him and told Peter that he would be the rock on which the church was built. In fact, in Greek, the name “Peter” is “Petros” which means rock. The more important takeaway from this verse is that Jesus said that the “powers of death”, also translated as the “gates of hell” shall not prevail against the church. People have often asked me, “do you think this is the end of the church?” I’ve been asked this question regarding the coronavirus, and

whether I think this will bring the end to the church. I have been asked this in relation to the political climate in America. I have been asked this about the church in general, and about our church in Tampa specifically. If we cannot have a Festival this year because of the coronavirus, or if stewardship goes down considerably, this question will come up again, regarding our parish. And the answer I always come back to is this verse. If the gates of hell and the powers of death cannot prevail against God's church, then neither will the coronavirus, a recession or anything else. I believe that God wants our churches to succeed. I believe that He wants us to have a church in Tampa. I also believe that we have to work for both success and solvency. But I believe that God will work with us, because He wants the Gospel to be furthered, and because He promised us that nothing will prevail against the church. This verse should give us confidence in these uncertain times.

St. John the Baptist Community News

Parish Registry

Condolences to Cindy Xenick, on the death of her cousin George Psaros. May his memory be eternal!

Interested in serving as an altar boy? Any of our young men who will enter 4th grade in the fall, or who are older and are not serving presently, are welcome to serve in the altar beginning in August. If you are interested in having your son added to an altar team, please contact Fr. Stavros by June 30. The new schedule will not take effect until this crisis period has passed. Until further notice, only two people will serve in the altar at each service that Father will assign. Please do not call and ask about whether you can serve during this crisis. Father will let people know as they are needed. **Until further notice, as per the protocol of His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios, two ADULTS will be allowed to serve in the altar at the Divine Services.**

"I will wash mine hands in innocence: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord: That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwells." Psalm 26:6-8

GOYA—We will have a zoom GOYA meeting on Sunday, June 7 at 5:00 p.m. Information will come via constant contact.

Recognizing Aris Rogers—In the "count the wins" category for our parish, we'd like to congratulate Aris Rogers, our head altar captain, as well as aspiring actor, on his recent guest appearance on the season finale of Chicago PD. Congratulations Aris! Great job!

Monday night Bible study will continue in June via zoom. The Monday night Bible study with Charlie will be held on June 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. If you are not currently part of the Monday night Bible study and would like to join in, please contact Charlie at chambos@stjohntpa.org and he will add you.

Women's Bible study will also continue in June via zoom. The women's Bible study will meet from 10:00-11:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, June 2 and 9, before recessing for the summer. If you are currently not part of the women's Bible study and would like to join in, please contact Fr. Stavros at frstav@gmail.com and he will add you.

GriefShare to resume in late Summer—Thank you to Donna Hambos for finishing our second semester of GriefShare, our small group ministry dedicated to people who have lost loved ones. This group will resume either in later August or early September with another 13-week program. We know that there have been several people this spring who have lost loved ones. Please keep this very beneficial program in mind over the summer so that you can participate in the fall.

Men's Group Meeting—There will be a men's group meeting via zoom on Sunday, June 14 at 5:00 p.m. If you'd like to join our men's group, please email Fr. Stavros and we will send you a zoom invite.

MEN'S
GROUP

Congratulations Graduates!



Nedi Ferekides graduated from the University of Florida with a degree in behavioral and cognitive neuroscience and a minor in health science. She will be attending the University of Miami School of Medicine.



Eugene Freeman graduated from the University of South Florida with a Masters of Education focusing on Educational Leadership.



Christina Diniaco graduated Florida State University with a degree in Business focusing on professional sales.



Michael Sandborn (above) graduated from Vanderbilt University with a BS in Computer Science and a BS in Applied Mathematics.



Mary Sinadinos (left) graduated from Kent State University with a Bachelors of Arts.

Camille Halkias (right) graduated Saint Leo University with a Masters in Business.



Imad Hanhan is graduating with a Ph.D. in Aeronautics and Astronautics from Purdue University, Indiana.

Dawn Cyhan (right) graduated from Youngstown State University with a Bachelors of Allied Health.





Alexandra Kara Patrascoiu graduated from Land O Lakes High School and will be attending the University of Florida as part of the International Business Honors Program.



Matthew Robinson graduated from High School through a joint program between homeschooling and HCC. He will be attending Florida Southern College to study Economics.



Mia Lenardos graduated from Cambridge Christian School and will be attending the University of Miami to study chemistry.



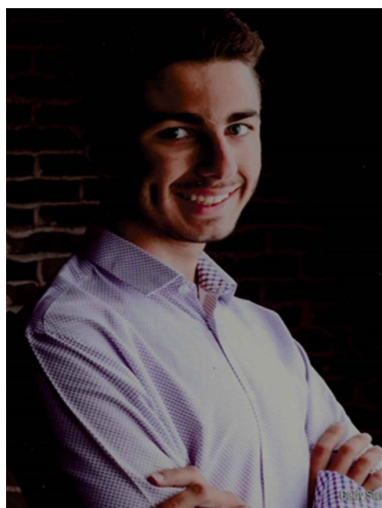
Artemis Xenick graduated from Plant High School and will be attending Florida State University and hopes to study Music Therapy.



Stephanie Sandborn graduated from Alonso High School and will be attending Lee University to study nursing.



Athanasios Owens graduated from Cambridge Christian School and will be attending the University of Florida to study engineering.



Dimitri "DI" Tsetsekas graduated from East Lake High School. In the fall he will be attending Florida Polytechnic University. He will study Cybersecurity Engineering.



Sophia Crassas graduated from Robinson High School and will be attending Hillsborough Community College to study Nursing.



Dominic Garcia graduated from Jesuit High School and will be attending FSU in Spring 2021.

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME: **First Thursday of Each Month at 11:30 AM (unless otherwise posted)**

LOCATION: **Currently via ZOOM until we are able to meet again in person.**

Everyone is welcome.

We welcome people of all ages to join our email list as a member or a friend of YAH.

We were surprise and want to give very special thank you to St John's Sunday School for sending cards to our YAH members.

OUR ACTIVITES ARE BASED ON OUR ST JOHN'S CHURCH CORE VALUES

LOVE: We check on our Church family wellness by frequently communicating with them especially during this East-er period. We share happiness events in our lives. We celebrate birthdays and have humor time during our meetings

WORSHIP: Attended computerized Church live stream services at St John and from many other services around the country and around the world.

COMMUNITY: We donate to the Church's food pantry.

LERNING: Our seniors have learned how to celebrate our services using Live Streaming and video conferencing for our meetings with Zoom.

SERVICE: We check on our members to see if they need assistance or food. We circulated where to get free testing for the Coronavirus in Hillsborough County.

OUR EVENTS

June 4 at 11:30 am YAH Meeting using Zoom Video Conferencing and telephone

Cancelled - May 9, 2020 - We are planning on a trip to the Greek Monasteries in Ocala

May 7 at 11:30 am YAH Meeting using Zoom Video Conferencing and telephone

March 5th - Visited St Michael Greek Orthodox Shrine in Tarpon Springs

February 6, 2020 – Pot Luck Lunch in the Zaharias Room at St John Church

January 2, 2020 – Lunch at the new Psomi Bakery and Restaurant

December 7, 2019 - Trip to the Show Palace Dinner Theatre featuring Elf the Musical

October 5, 2019 - Ybor City Museum State Park and lunch at the Soup Stone Grill

For more information, contact

Michael Trimis, President, 813-784-4872 (vm/t) TrimisM@gmail.com

Mary Nenos, Vice President 813-508-5553 MaryNenos@gmail.com

Broken

Author Unknown

Me: Hey God.

God: Hello.....

Me: I'm falling apart. Can you put me back together?

God: I would rather not.

Me: Why?

God: Because you aren't a puzzle.

Me: What about all of the pieces of my life that are falling down onto the ground?

God: Let them stay there for a while. They fell off for a reason. Take some time and decide if you need any of those pieces back.

Me: You don't understand! I'm breaking down!

God: No - you don't understand. You are breaking through. What you are feeling are just growing pains. You are shedding the things and the people in your life that are holding you back. You aren't falling apart. You are falling into place. Relax. Take some deep breaths and allow those things you don't need anymore to fall off of you. Quit holding onto the pieces that don't fit you anymore. Let them fall off. Let them go.

Me: Once I start doing that, what will be left of me?

God: Only the very best pieces of you.

Me: I'm scared of changing.

God: I keep telling you - YOU AREN'T CHANGING!! YOU ARE BECOMING!

Me: Becoming who?

God: Becoming who I created you to be! A person of light and love and charity and hope and courage and joy and mercy and grace and compassion. I made you for more than the shallow pieces you have decided to adorn yourself with that you cling to with such greed and fear. Let those things fall off of you. I love you! Don't change! ... Become! Become! Become who I made you to be. I'm going to keep telling you this until you remember it.

Me: There goes another piece.

God: Yep. Let it be.

Me: So ... I'm not broken?

God: Of course Not! - but you are breaking like the dawn. It's a new day. Become!!!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

CHRISTOS ANESTI...CHRIST IS RISEN!!!! What a crazy way to end our Sunday School Year. Let's pray that we will never have a pandemic again, that will prevent us from going to church. Congratulations to our all of our students and especially our High School Graduates for a successful school year.

We would like to take a moment to say that our families at St. John's Orthodox Church are outstanding. We are so impressed with all that you did during Holy Week to bring the services and the lessons into your home. Thank you for participating in all of our projects, lessons, and supporting what we ask of you. You are all wonderful role models, Sunday School teachers, and loving parents to your children.

Our Sunday School lessons for the month of May were Appreciating our Spiritual Leaders, The Theotokos (Mother's Day), The Samaritan Woman, St. Constantine and St. Helen, and The Ascension. Jenivieve Elly created our virtual lessons every week and we truly thank her for that.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU for making FR. STAVROS, CHARLIE HAMBOS, AND JOHN KOKENIS feel so appreciated on May 3rd. It was wonderful seeing everyone drive by in their cars with amazing posters, cards, and notes. We decorated their offices and the outside of the administration building with these posters and it will be a great reminder of how much we love them.

Our ACT OF LOVE PROJECT for our older parishioners was a huge success. As a matter of fact, a number of our students have received cards and letters in response to their cards. It is so sweet to think that this project may create some pen pal relationships. Thank you all for participating in this project of sending cards, letters and drawings to our senior citizen members of St. John's.



FATHER STAVROS, CHARLIE HAMBOS and JOHN KOKENIS are such an inspiration to all of us and we appreciate everything that they do for the Sunday School. We are very thankful for their leadership, guidance, and teachings throughout this school year.

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

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham
Director of Music/Special Programs: Maria Xenick
Music Assistant: Pam Irwin
Toddler 2's: Anastasia Stonestreet
Pre-K (3 and 4 year olds): Alexis Scarfogliero and Denise Panos
Kindergarten: - Debbie Nicklow and Donna Trakas
Grade 1: Jenivieve Elly and Maraquet Edquid

Grade 2: Oliviana Catrone and Georgia Kane
Grade 3: Amy Kafantaros and Stame Garcia
Grade 4: Debbie Ferekides
Grade 5: Vickie Peckham
Grade 6: Stefanie Moran
Middle School: Heidi Borgeas, Marina Choundas, and Vivian Samuel
High School: Charlie Hambos and Isidoros Passalaris

We are already planning for next year. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A STAFF MEMBER and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call 406-5626.



***MORE PHOTOS MAY BE FOUND ON
OUR FLICKR PAGE. PLEASE VIST
STJOHNTPA.ORG TO FIND IT.***



Please do your best to support local businesses in general, and of our parishioners in particular.

Below, please find a list of small business owned and/or operated by our parishioners.

ABC PIZZA

(Owned by Anthony and Carole Fotopoulos)
1242 WEST HILLSBOROUGH AVE. TAMPA
(813) 237-3324 Take Out Only

Accustar Accounting Inc.

Fran Prokos, Founder and CEO
Tax Preparation, Business and Personal
Accounting, CFO services, Business Consulting, Business
Start Ups. Working from Home Office during Covid 19
Direct: 727-510-7378
Office: 813-886-4644
Fax: 813-888-8097
AccustarTax@gmail.com/AccustarTax@aol.com

AlexRoyEvents Music Entertainment.
Email alexroyevents@gmail.com
Ph. 813-455-2461 Website:www.djalexroy.com
Facebook: Alexandros Roy
Instagram : @djalexroy
Live Streams on Facebook and Instagram daily.

Bavaros

514 N Franklin St Downtown Tampa
813-868-4440 Bavarospizza.com
Tues-Sat 11-9pm
We offer Uber and Bitesquad for delivery and curbside pickup
with call ahead ordering/payment.

Bradenton Flower Shop

(Owned by Maria Geis)
5262 East St Rd 64
Bradenton FL, 34208
941-727-4111 www.bradentonflowershop.com
bradentonflowers@gmail.com
We are taking online and phone orders for curb side pickup and
no contact delivery.

Peggy Bradshaw

<https://peggybradshaw.floify.com/>
(727) 244-1374
Branch Manager of Van Dyk Mortgage South Tampa
3502 Henderson Blvd. Tampa, FL

George S. Chagaris, CPA, P.A.

2901 W. Busch Blvd., Ste. 405
Tampa, FL 33618-4582
(p): (813) 282-1990 e-mail: GChagarisCPA@aol.com

John Demas - Classical Guitarist - Greek Bouzouki

813.240.5199
<https://sites.google.com/site/livemusicintampa/>
Instagram:<https://www.instagram.com/john.demas.music/>
<https://sites.google.com/site/johndemastheomegaproject/>

EVOS South Tampa

For other locations near you visit evos.com
Open 7 days for lunch and dinner
Order Delivery: UberEats-EVOS or evos.com
Order Takeout: EVOS/Toast app or evos.com
Text/email an EVOS gift card: EVOS eGift Cards
EVOS is locally owned and operated by the Crassas family.

Alexandra Fitos

Weichert Yates and Associates

Cell phone 813-943-6464

I am a realtor specializing in residential and commercial sales
in Hillsborough, Pinellas and Pasco counties. I am currently
working remotely Via virtual consulting and appointments.

JoAnn Hartung

Realtor with Fazzini Group at REMAX Realtec
Residential agent specializing in Pinellas County
727-432-0228

Markissia Toulaiatos Portraits and Other Fine Art

www.markissia.com
markissiat@gmail.com
727-560-8161

I am a freelance artist working from home in my own studio. I
specialize in corporate and private original oil painted por-
traits. I do art restoration as well. I work from photographs that
can be emailed to me.

Qvita Health and Wellness

Primary Care and Cosmetic Services
Peggy Demetriou, FNP, APRN-BC
2734 Windguard Circle, suite 101
Wesley Chapel, FL 33544
813-501-4130 www.qvitahealthandwellness.com

Retina Vitreous Associates of Florida

(Dr. Karina Findlay)
multiple offices throughout Tampa Bay
retinavitreous.com
(813)987-2000
Open 8:00-5:00 M-F with on call physicians nights and week-
ends Retinal care and urgent ocular needs

Robinson Essentials -Young Living Essential Oils

text: 813-278-7450
www.TanyaRobinsonEssentials.com
Products for immune support, emotional support, and various
other things

The Sakkis Group / KW Tampa Properties

Full service real estate with over 30 years experience
813-309-1073 ksakkis@sakkisgroup.com sakkisgroup.kw.com/

South Tampa Sugar Mama

Home baking business owned by Maria Xenick.
Custom homemade, hand-decorated cookies for holidays and
special events. I operate under the Cottage Food Law of Flori-
da, and during this time, I am also offering free delivery for
contactless transactions.
maria@southatmpasugarmama.com
<https://www.facebook.com/southtampasugarmama/>

True Life Wealth Management (Owned by Alex Skijus)

www.TrueLifeWealthManagement.com
We are a financial services business that specializes in reducing
unnecessary taxes for individuals and business owners for their
retirement.

Zomesa, LLC

John P. Zelatis
Accounting, Bookkeeping, Payroll, Taxes Back Office Support
15459 Martinmeadow Drive. Lithia, FL 33547
P: (813) 654-5144 F: (813) 433-2516 C:(813) 727-2271
zelatis@zomesa.com www.zomesa.com

Announcing the Parish Assistance Program (PAP)

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

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

Through BayCare Behavioral Health, your parish has access to help for those suffering from the emotional turmoil that results from the challenges of everyday life. These challenges span a lifetime.

BayCare Behavioral Health understands the importance of compassionate care. Our network providers are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve.

Help is available for life issues including:

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

Services offered:

- Toll-free confidential helpline available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year
- Problem identification
- Assessment
- Referral to face-to-face counseling
- Referral to community resources

For more information: (800) 878-5470



Community Outreach Saturday, June 20 We Want You to Serve with Us!

Hello and WELCOME! My name is Greg Melton and on behalf of our Community Outreach Ministry I want to thank you for your interest in participating with our group. **On the third Saturday of each month**, we volunteer our time to provide for those of our community in need in downtown Tampa. We partner with Matthew 25 local charity, USF Medical School, and Metropolitan Ministries to serve breakfast, provide clothing, and care for the medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Go to our Sign Up Genius, see URL below or scan the QR CODE and sign up.

Place: First Presbyterian Church @ 412 Zack Street East, downtown Tampa. The entrance for volunteers is on the Polk Street side of building.

Time: 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Volunteer Check-In Process:

- 1) Sign in and choose the job you want on the Duty Sheet
- 2) Prepare and wear your name tag
- 3) Don't be shy...if not sure where to go or what to do to get started, ask someone who looks like they know what they're doing.
- 4) Set up and Preparation 8-9 a.m., Serving 9-10:15 a.m., Cleanup 10:15-10:30 a.m..

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Bill Stone from Metro Ministries, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

Here is the URL for the Sign Up Genius for every upcoming 3rd Saturday of Month. Find the dates that work for you and sign up.
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48a5a62da3f49-community>



Please don't hesitate to ask any questions. Thank you and God Bless
Greg Melton 813-967-2074 gmelt12@gmail.com

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

George & Maria Andros - Birmingham, AL	Bessie Bliziotis - Palm Coast, FL
Barbara Akrotirianakis - Whittier, CA	Suzanne Alvarez - Tampa, FL
William J Camarinos - Alexandria, VA	Lazarus & Maria Kavouklis - Tarpon Springs, FL
Richard & Mickie Bass - Asheville, NC	William & Kane Chapman - Palmetto, FL
Jason & Kelly Bangos - Clearwater, FL	Lillian Thomas - Highland, IN
Gabriel & Irene Hurst - Tampa, FL	Kathleen Mendez - Ponte Vedra, FL
Nicholas & Anna Karnavas - New Port Richey, FL	Theodora Poletis - Baltimore, MD
Michael Kapetan - Ann Arbor, MI	Basil & Dorothy Nosal - Fredericksburg, VA
John & Cathie Koch - Tarpon Springs, FL	Nicholas & Vaso Anton - Dunedin, FL
Perry & Fay Stamatiades - Asheville, NC	Kay Nastopoulos - Atlanta, GA
Melvin & Violet Tamashiro - Kaneohe, HI	Katherine Beasley - Vero Beach, FL
Wesley & Melissa Thompson - Clearwater, FL	Artemis & Eric Mellen - Longwood, FL
Demitrius & Katherine Klimis - Boardman, OH	Mary Spanos - St. Augustine, 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.

~ Thank You for your gifts of Stewardship ~

We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and wish to acknowledge each and every one! Our pledges for the 2020 Stewardship year are **\$487,239** with **\$254,945** collected from **342** loyal stewards of St. John. We are very grateful for your gifts.

During this unprecedented time, we hope your Lenten journey brought peace and a sense of renewal. Although we were unable to worship together our faith remains strong. Our sense of community shined brightly as we supported one another and worshiped from our respective homes. More time at home, for many of us, brought deep reflection and a shift in priorities to the importance of Faith & Family! It became even more apparent, as the world paused, that every Gift truly does come from God. We remain grateful that our church has not only been able to keep its doors open but truly bring the Liturgical experience and Word of God into our homes. This would not be possible without your gifts of Stewardship. Now more than ever we need your support!

We lovingly remind you to recommit to our church if your name is missing from this list. We understand circumstances may have changed and will be happy to make any adjustments, as needed, to your Stewardship Gifts. Contact our church office or a member of the Stewardship committee with any questions on your commitment or renewal. Pledge forms are also available on line at <http://greekorthodoxchurchtampa.com/2020-stewardship/>

** Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge package and the form can also be completed on-line. Keep in mind pledges in writing help us adequately plan financially for our church and also bring voting privileges, which are critical to support the mission of our church.*

It is our hope the EVERYONE on our mailing list provides gifts of stewardship OR becomes a Friend of St. John the Baptist, for those who do not live in Tampa.

Abramis, John G & Nicky M.,Mr. & Mrs.
Afloarei, Michael & Mariana,Mr. & Mrs.
Akrotirianakis, Stavros & Lisa, Fr. & Pres
Alastanos, Jennifer,Ms.
Alexander, John & Anetta,Mr. & Mrs.
Alithinos, Ekaterini,Ms.
Alsina, Angel & Lisa,Dr. & Mrs.
Ameres, George & Zackie,Mr. & Mrs.
Anagnost, Constantine,Mr.
Anastassiades, Andrea, Ms & Mr. Joshua
Pyszk
Anderson, Karl,Mr.
Argyros, Harry & Linda,Mr. & Mrs.
Armstrong, Jim & Myra,Mr. & Mrs.
Artzibushev, Constantin,Mr.
Assimiadis, Paul,Mr.
Axelrod, Scott & Christine,Mr. & Mrs.
Badrane, Denise,Ms.
Bakirdgi, Joan,Ms.
Balasis, Mathew & Suzy,Mr. & Mrs.
Barrett, Sara,Ms.
Barrett, William,Mr.
Bavaro, Daniel & Anna Maria,Mr. & Mrs.
Beach, Kevin, Dr & Ms. Heidi Borgeas
Bedan, Matt & Christi,Mr. & Mrs.
Bedran, Rita,Ms.
Berdos, Frank & Isabel,Mr. & Mrs.*
Berdos, Niki Pauline & Mr. David Silber,Ms.
Bilthouse, Kevin & Carena,Mr. & Mrs.
Blackburn, Robert T. & Kathryn,Mr. & Dr.
Blankenship, Alexander,Mr.
Blankenship, Wayne & Athanasia,Mr. & Mrs.
Bougas, Constantine & Angela,Mr. & Mrs.
Bouzinekis, Andrew & Kathryn,Mr. & Mrs.
Bradshaw, Harold & Pelagia,Mr. & Mrs.
Burchill, George,Father
Calamunci, Alex & Sarah,Mr. & Mrs.
Calamunci, Catherine,Ms.
Calamunci, Chris & Crystal,Mr. & Mrs.
Cantonis, George & Maria,Mr. & Mrs.
Carter, John & Genie,Dr. & Mrs.
Cathopoulos, Mary Ann,Ms.
Chagaris, George & Kalliope,Mr. & Mrs.
Chakonas, Ethel Athena,Ms.

Chandler, Robert & Viviana,Mr. & Mrs.
Cherpelis, Basil & Alyssa,Dr. & Dr.
Choundas, Peter & Adis,Mr. & Mrs.
Christ, John E.,Dr.
Christodoulou, Kyriakos & Raquel,Mr. & Mrs.
Christodoulou, Mary Ann,Ms.
Christopher, Louis & Dr. Penny Plakas,Mr.
Christopoulos, James & Georgia,Dr. & Mrs.
Clipp, David & Michelle,Mr. & Mrs.*
Colado, David & Alexandria,Mr. & Mrs.
Comminos, William & Margaret,Mr. & Mrs.
Copulos, Vasiliki,Ms.
Costas, Antonia,Ms.
Costas, Maria,Ms.
Costianes, Kathleen,Ms.
Cotterman, Sandra,Ms.
Crassas, Alkis & Aime,Mr. & Mrs.
Cyhan, Dawn,Ms.
Dalaklis, Joanne,Ms.
Damian, Gabriela & Mihnea Anghelescu,Ms.
De Maio, Alexandra,Ms.
Demas, Anna K.,Ms.
Demas, John,Mr.
Demetriou, Nektarios & Peggy,Dr. & Mrs.
DeYoung, John & Jenna,Mr. & Mrs.
Diamantakes, Georgia,Ms.
Dimas, Gregory & Ms. Evelyn Patsavos,Dr.
Dimitrijevič-Jones, Stephen & Mrs. Alin,Mr.
Diniaco, Peter & Rebecca,Mr. & Mrs.*
Doucas, Deborah,Ms.
Douglas, Dean,Mr.*
Doxas, Joan,Ms.
Edquid, Marc & Maraquet,Mr. & Mrs.
Edwards, Jeffery,Dr. & Mrs. Christina Cardy
Eggleston, Charles & Catherine,Mr. & Mrs.
Ekonomou, Anthony & Diana C.,Mr. & Mrs.*
Elly, Jonathan & Jenivieve,Mr. & Mrs.
Evdemon, Stanley & Mary Ellen,Mr. & Mrs.
Fallieras, George,Dr.
Fallieras, Lauren,Ms.
Fallieras, Nicholas & Susan,Dr. & Mrs.
Fellios, Alexander,Mr.*

Fellios, George & Zeina,Mr. & Mrs.
Ferarolis, Alexandra,Ms.
Ferekides, Christos & Debbie,Dr. & Mrs.
Findlay, Karina, Dr. & Mr. Andrew Findlay
Fitos, Alexandra, Ms. & Mr. William
Hamann
Forde, Dwight & Ewana,Mr. & Mrs.
Fotopoulos, Anthony & Carole,Mr. & Mrs.
Frantsvog, Eric & Maria,Mr. & Mrs.*
Frazier, Chris,Ms.*
Freeman, Eugene & Jacqueline,Mr. & Mrs.*
Frey, Carlos & Ms. Sophia Sorolis-Frey,Mr.*
Galin, Mary,Ms.
Gallos, Vasiliki,Ms.
Garcia, Rick & Stamie,Mr. & Mrs.
Gavalas, Debbie, Mrs. & Mr. Robert Ritchie
Geis, Jeffrey & Maria,Mr. & Mrs.*
Genever, Robert & Stacy,Mr. & Mrs.
Georgas, Thomas & Janet,Mr. & Mrs.
George-Malatin, Gabrielle , Mrs. & Mr. Michael Malatin
Georgiou, Arista,Ms.
Georgiou, Speros & Eleanor,Mr. & Mrs.
Gerecke, Alexandra,Ms.*
Gerecke, Christina,Ms.*
Gerecke, Ed & Terri,Mr. & Mrs.
Giallourakis, Michael & Artemise,Mr. & Mrs.
Gorter, Maria,Ms.
Grapsas, Constantine & Irene,Mr. & Mrs.
Gregory, Daniel & Alicia,Mr. & Mrs.*
Guzman, Alexandria, Mrs. & Steven, Guzman, Dr.
Hakim, Fady & Mrs. Mary Guirguis,Mr.
Halikoytakias, Michael & Edith,Mr. & Mrs.
Halkias, Chris,Mr.
Halkias, Demetrios & Camille,Mr. & Mrs.*
Halkias, Evangeline,Ms.
Hambos, Charlie,Mr.
Hambos, George & Donna,Mr. & Mrs.
Hanhan, Amin & Gloria,Mr. & Mrs.
Hartsfield-Molina, Christie & Mr. David,Dr.
Hartung, Mark & JoAnn,Mr. & Mrs.
Harvie, Evan & Brittany,Mr. & Mrs.
Heilman, Anthony & Theresa,Mr. & Mrs.

Henderson, Kenny & Nickollet, Mr. & Mrs.
Higdon, Skip, Mrs.
Hoff, Eleni, Mrs.
Hoffman, Robert & Christal-Line, Mr. & Mrs.
Horack, Scott & Rena, Mr. & Mrs.
Horton, Maria, Mrs.
Hunter, Pauline, Ms.
Iakovenko, Anastasiia, Ms.
Ioannidis, Theodore & Sharon, Mr. & Mrs.
Iraklianos, Mike, Mr.
Irwin, Jon & Pam, Mr. & Mrs.
James, Arthur M & Abby, Mr. & Mrs.
Jewtushenko, Raissa, Ms.*
Johnson, Aphroditi, Mrs.
Johnston, Angela, Ms.
Kaburis, Kathy, Mrs.
Kaburis, Mihail, Mr.
Kafantaris, Michael & Amy, Mr. & Mrs.
Kalojiannis, Nicholas & Alicia, Mr. & Mrs.
Kane, Lance & Georgia, Dr. & Dr.
Kapetan, Martha, Ms.
Kappiris, Stanley & Erin, Mr. & Mrs.*
Kargakos, Joan Williams, Mrs.
Karoutsos, George, Mr.
Karoutsos, Thomas & Sheena, Mr. & Mrs.
Karpelenia, Loretta, Presbytera
Katsadouros, Konstantin & Katherine, Mr. & Mrs.*
Katsaros, Andreas & Stacey, Mr. & Mrs.
Katsifis, John & Thomas, Mr.
Katsouli, Paulina, Ms.
Katzaras, George & Angelina, Mr. & Mrs.
Katzaras, Nick & Helen, Mr. & Mrs.
Katzaras, Stefan & Kara, Mr. & Mrs.
Kavouklis, Nicholas & Edie, Dr. & Mrs.
Kelly, Brian, Mr. & Ms. Amanda Cotterman
Kent, Thomas & Jennifer, Mr. & Mrs.*
Kladakis, Manuel & Cynthia, Mr. & Mrs.*
Kladis, George & Charlene, Mr. & Mrs.
Klimis, Christina, Ms.
Klimis, Manuel & Jenny, Mr. & Mrs.
Kokenis, John & Konstandina, Mr. & Mrs.
Kokkas, John, Mr.
Kolovos, Demetrios & Dr. Eleni Markoutsa, Mr.
Konstas, Demetrios & Mary Ann, Dr. & Mrs.
Korakis, Alexandros & Louise, Mr. & Mrs.*
Koudouna, Anthony, Mr.
Koudouna, Dora, Ms.
Koutroumanis, Dean & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Krajacic, Joseph & Alyssa, Mr. & Mrs.
Krasias, Yianni, Mr.
Kremydas, Nick & Pauline, Mr. & Mrs.
Krinos, Dimitri & Melissa, Mr. & Mrs.
Krinos, John & Sue, Mr. & Mrs.
Kwasny, Foti & Fatin, Mr. & Mrs.
Kyrus, Chris & Katherine, Dr. & Dr.
L'Hommedieu, Tim & Tia, Mr. & Mrs.
Labatos, Angelika, Ms.
Labatos, Anthony, Mr.
Langas, Dimitrios & Maria, Mr. & Mrs.
Lappas, Christos, Mr. & Ms. Alexandria Echeva
Larino, Michael & Amanda, Mr. & Mrs.
Laskey, Fred & Coleen, Mr. & Mrs.
Lenardos, Peter, Mr.
Lenardos, Steven & Melissa, Mr. & Mrs.
Leontsinis, Nicole, Ms.
Letobarone, Domenic & Melanie, Dr. & Dr.*
Limberatos, Alexander & Alexandra, Mr. &

Mrs.
Maas, Mary, Ms.
MacLaury, Kathryn, Ms.
Makrides, Peter, Mr.
Malacos, John G. & Lucy A., Mr. & Mrs.
Maltezos, Chris, Mr.
Mamero, Diana, Ms.
Mangarides, Markos & Ekaterini-Petranell, Mr. & Mrs.
Manikas, William & Nancy, Dr. & Mrs.
Mantzanas, Chris & Nicole, Mr. & Mrs.
Markowski, Katina, Mrs.
Martinez, Alexander & Andriana, Mr. & Mrs.
Mason, Rex Garrison & Maria Nicole, Mr. & Mrs.
Matassini, Nicholas G. & Christina, Mr. & Mrs.
Meadows, Alexander & Elishia, Mr. & Mrs.
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Our Thoughts Do Determine our Life!

by Fr. Tom Tsagalakis

At Pentecost, we are reminded of the glorious gifts the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the faithful. We are reminded that God wants to be in relationship with us, and He wants the message of the “good news” that lives in our hearts spread to all nations. We are reminded that God wants to nurture and direct our thoughts, words, actions, habits, character, and destiny to the path of love and compassion.

A quote attributed to Frank Outlaw invites us to be concerned of the thoughts we entertain. “Watch your thoughts, they become words. Watch your words, they become action. Watch your actions, they become habits. Watch your habits, they become your character. Watch your character, it becomes your destiny”.

Indeed, we are created in God’s image, and we are the temple of the Holy Spirit: good thoughts and “life should flow out of us”! Thoughts do become our destiny and life! That is why our Church reminds us at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit wants to touch and ignite our hearts to be motivated and directed by thoughts that empowered the Holy Apostles, thoughts filled by God’s Holy Fire.

The simple fishermen became transfigured and were engulfed with the Holy fire of God’s love, and they changed the world with their thoughts and words. The same Holy Spirit wants to stir up our life, to rekindle and to fan the flame in our hearts to burn with His love so we can allow living water to flow from our hearts and irrigate the world with His virtues.

And to allow God’s living water to flow from our heart, we must desire it with all our heart. We must know that we are thirsty for His love and thirsty for His help so we can ask Him for drink to quench our thirst. If anyone thirsts, let him come to

me and I will give him drink. This is a promise and Christ’s drink heals and changes lives.

One way of knowing if we are drinking of this living water, and if this life of living water is flowing out of us is to pay attention watching to see if our thoughts are feeding our soul or if our thoughts are eating at our soul. God wants our thoughts to be guided, inspired and motivated by the Holy Spirit to heal and feed our soul.

When we tune into this frequency we will speak with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, not from anger, anxiety, fear, worry. Please know that when we are constantly being fed by the frequency of fear, anger, frustration, panic, anxiety or depression, we are being tuned into thoughts that hurt and eat at our soul.

So the challenge and invitation at Pentecost and every day of our life, is to become a vessel of the Holy Spirit receiving that light so we can offer it back to God and the world. Elder Thaddeus said, “The man who has within him the kingdom of heaven radiates holy thoughts, divine thoughts.”

The Elder also says, “We have Divine power, Divine life, and Divine energy. On the day of the final judgment we shall have to give an answer for the way we have used this Divine power, life, and energy which have been given to us, whether we have contributed to the harmony in the universe, or have sown disharmony.”

Decide to radiate, offer, and emit into the world, kind thoughts, loving actions and a peaceful heart!

Fr. Tom Tsagalakis is the Proistamenos of All Saints Greek Orthodox Church in Shoreline, Washington.

I am an Orthodox Christian

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I’m not shouting that “I am clean living.”

I’m whispering “I was lost, but now I’m found and forgiven.”

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I don’t speak of this with pride.

I’m confessing that I stumble and need Christ to be my guide.

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I’m not trying to be strong.

I’m professing that I’m weak and need His strength to carry on.

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I’m not bragging of success.

I’m admitting I have failed and need God to clean my mess.

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I’m not claiming to be perfect.

My flaws are far too visible, but God believes I am worth it.

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I still feel the sting of pain.

I have my share of heartaches so I call upon His Name.

When I say “I am an Orthodox Christian,” I’m not somehow holier than thou.

I’m just a simple sinner who received God’s good grace somehow.

Statement of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava, Romania, in Light of the Coronavirus

(Editor's Note: A VERY COOL STORY)

The Holy Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava, Romania, contains the sacred relics of the Holy New Martyr John the New of Suceava, which are highly honored for being the source of many miracles. Even the primary local hospital of the area is named after the saint, the Saint John the New Hospital.

The 90-year-old Archbishop Pimen of Suceava and Radauti recently was tested positive with the coronavirus. His Archdiocese and where he lives is located in the Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava. He began feeling symptoms at the beginning of Holy Week. This past Easter and on Bright Monday, Archbishop Pimen served the Divine Liturgy as well as other services through the week and communed from the same cup as all the other clergy and monks. However, on Bright Monday, April 20, he became seriously ill and was admitted to Saint John the New Hospital. Because he had a severe case, he was flown that night to Bucharest and admitted to the Matei Bals Institute for Infectious Diseases, after being tested positive with the new coronavirus. Saint John the New Monastery immediately went under lockdown, and an epidemiological investigation was initiated.

When the results of the investigation were released, the father of the Monastery of Saint John the New in Suceava released a statement that said the following:

"We wanted you to know that our Hierarch, His Eminence

Pimen, liturgized for the Paschal Divine Liturgy, as well as the next day, together with all the fathers of the Holy Monastery of St. John the New. They all communed from the same Holy Chalice, as is usually done in the Divine Liturgy, except one, the Deacon, who performed the duties of the sexton and took care of the order of the Services. Now, after many discussions and negative comments heard on television, the laboratory results of the fathers and lay ministers of the Holy Monastery have come in. Of all those who submitted the test, only one was found to be positive, and this was the Deacon who did NOT commune from the Holy Chalice held by the Bishop. This was determined by God for all those lukewarm people who approach the Holy Chalice and the "humble" tongs (editor's note: the Communion spoon is sometimes referred to as the "tongs", in reference to Isaiah 6:6-7) with the fear of being infected by a virus and for those who do not want to understand that it is in fact the Holy Body and Holy Blood of the Savior Christ, which is the source of life and is all grace."

It was also announced by the local Health Committee that 25 priests of the Holy Archdiocese, apart from the Holy Monastery, who came into contact with His Eminence during his illness, were subjected to diagnostic tests and found to be negative.

Archbishop Pimen is still in the process of recovery.

Holy Communion: Wrong Questions at the Wrong Time

By Archimandrite Bartholomew, Abbot of Esphigmenou Monastery (translated by John Sanidopoulos)

(Editor's Note: While some of the points in this article are difficult to understand, it makes a lot of good points and provokes thought at a time when people are asking questions about Holy Communion.)

"Can someone catch the coronavirus from Holy Communion or not?"

This is a question that has been in the spotlight during this time.

Many of our fellow citizens are worried. Believers, however, propose their firm belief that it is impossible for someone to catch a disease by Holy Communion, as Holy Communion is a "medicine of immortality" and you only "catch Christ."

But is this question reasonable and useful at this stage we are in?

Holy Communion takes up a small amount in the holy tongs. (editor's note: the Communion spoon is sometimes referred to as the "tongs", in reference to Isaiah 6:6-7) Therefore if one can't catch the coronavirus from Holy Communion, who can guarantee that no one will catch it from the entire environment of the sacred temple? Or who can guarantee that the coronavirus will not be transmitted by the believer's breath to the priest or vice versa, when the believer is very close to the priest to communicate? Is there a doctrine for this or do we have magical perceptions that have never been recorded until now concerning the faith?

There are many "opportunities" for someone to catch the coronavirus, and if someone gets sick they can't know where or how they caught it.

If someone receives Holy Communion and catches the coronavirus somehow, wouldn't there be a disturbance at first within

their family if they all got sick? Perhaps a couple's relationship will become shaky? Perhaps the one who got sick will be in danger of losing their faith?

Perhaps, because we have so persistently been "caught" up in the question as to whether we can catch anything from Holy Communion, and someone who communes becomes sick with the virus, will this be attributed exclusively to Holy Communion, causing a scandal within the body of believers?

Perhaps we are blinded by arrogance and unable to see reality?

Perhaps God "will allow" something fatal to happen, so that we can finally gain humility, be like Him, and truly share in Him? Because, if we communed arrogantly, we would commune towards the condemnation of our souls.

Perhaps the whole question is a trap of the evil one to divert our thinking away from what is essential?

Perhaps the question is a trap of logic, so that the division will conquer and take the place of the Resurrection?

Let us not forget that the Lord Jesus did not answer questions that were asked in a cunning way, neither when He was tempted in the desert or in conversation with other people who were trying to trap Him?

Holy Communion is not a means of reaction and showing pride.

Holy Communion is not a "human right" one can claim, but a gift, a concession, a consent from God.

Holy Communion is not a tool of controversy nor a tool of a trade union to be used for confrontations between people.

Holy Communion is neither a material "medicine" nor a

“hospital” of this transient world, it does not abolish our physical death in the present life, but is a source of immortality of the soul, a source of eternal life.

Resurrection and the incorruption of bodies await after the Second Coming of the Lord.

Since we believe that Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Christ and that we commune of Christ, then, by extension, we also commune the basic “characteristics” of Christ, namely meekness, peace and love. If we approach the Holy Chalice with other dispositions, we are more likely to damn ourselves than to benefit! If we use Holy Communion for other purposes, we should be concerned about whether we are blaspheming.

Let us all, therefore, accept as a “penance” the temporary non-communication imposed on us from above through nature—the Creation of God, which operates according to the rules He

set—and our own misuse. Otherwise, could we appear sinless before God and react to the unjust “penance?”

Let us not shy away from our responsibilities, creating fantastic stories for imaginary enemies, for imaginary persecutions of the faith and that the situation is supposedly not critical.

Let us not let our stubbornness, selfishness, reaction and passion for “others who want to harm our faith” blind us by following the path of loss of body and soul at the same time! Only the eternal enemy of man would rejoice at the loss of bodies and souls.

Let us purify our hearts and minds so that we do not fall into the traps of the evil one. So instead of mangling one another, let us focus on the real enemy, who finds a way to act through our passions.

One Thing We Know For Sure Is God’s Will for You...

By Eric Geiger

Pastors are often asked questions about God’s will for a particular decision someone is facing. “How do I know which job is God’s will for me?” Or which relationship? Or which city to live in? Often I do not know the answer to a question about God’s will in a specific situation, but I can always point to one thing I know for sure is God’s will. And it is not a small matter. In fact, if we understand this and commit to this, the answer to a lot of decisions becomes clearer.

“For this is God’s will, your sanctification” (I Thessalonians 4:3). The word sanctification means to be set apart.

In the Old Testament the Sabbath is set apart from other days (Genesis 2:3).

After God rescued His people from Egyptian slavery, He commanded them to set apart the firstborn son in every family to Him (Exodus 13:2).

When the tabernacle and temple are built, the priests were set apart to serve, their clothing was set apart, and objects in the temple were set apart (Exodus 28:38).

A day was differentiated from the other days. Clothes were set apart from other clothes. Objects were set apart. Now God has set us apart by declaring us to be His! Because we are His, we are commanded us to live as if we are set apart – to walk in holiness and become more and more like Him. “For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness” (I Thessalonians 4:7). This is His will for you.

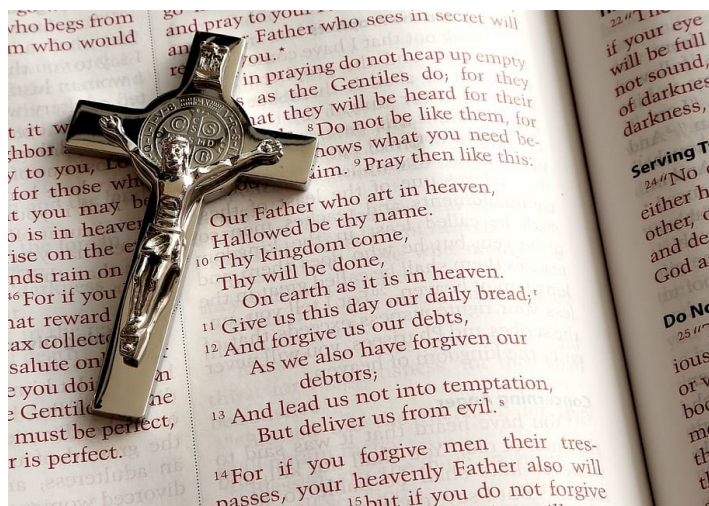
This passage was initially written to people who lived Thessalonica. Like most cities in the Greco-Roman world, sexual activity

was rampant. One of the Greek orators wrote about life in that time period: “We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day bodily needs, but we have wives to produce legitimate children and serve as trustworthy guardians of our homes.” Women were mistreated and objectified. Men commonly pursued multiple sexual partners. And then there were these new Christians living in the city and Paul, who penned the passage, connected their sanctification with the sexual ethics of the day. He reminded them “you are set apart. God’s will for you is that you would not be like the world, that you would be pure.”

Sanctification is not just about sex; it is about growing in our commitment to our Savior. But sanctification impacts all our lives. God has already revealed His will for us – that we would become more like Him, more holy, living our identity as those who are set apart.

As we wrestle with decisions, a good question to ask is “Will this make me more like Jesus?” “Will this make me more holy?” If there are multiple job offers, ask which one will make you more like Jesus. If there are multiple choices on the dating front, ask which person will help you know Jesus more. If there are multiple options on a decision ask, “Which one is more likely to help me know Jesus more and make Him more known to others?” If both options help you grow in holiness as a set apart child of God, then make a choice and go for it.

Yes, He cares about your job and your hobbies but He cares about your joy and your holiness more. Yes, He cares about where you will live, but He cares more about your walk with Him. This is His will – your sanctification.



~ June 2020 ~							
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
	1 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	2 WBS 10:00 a.m. Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	3** Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.	4 Young at Heart 11:30 a.m.	5**	6 Saturday of Souls Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	
7 Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m. Kneeling Service 11:00 a.m. GOYA 5:00 p.m.	8 Holy Trinity Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	9 WBS 10:00 a.m.	10** Holy Unction 6:00 p.m.	11 Sts. Bartholomew and Barnabas Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	12	13 Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	
14 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	15** Holy Apostles Fast Begins Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	16**	17**	18**	19**	20** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	
21** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	22** Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	23**	24** Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	25**	26**	27** Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	
28** Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	29 Sts. Peter and Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	30 Holy Apostles Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.					

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

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