

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*

May 2022

VISION:

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

MISSION:

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

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros' Message

Christ is Risen! (Insert your response!)



Christ is Risen!

Χριστός Ανέστη

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

For the next forty days, we will greet each other with these joyous words proclaiming the Resurrection of our Lord. The response, as we know, is "Alithos Anesti" in Greek and "Truly He is Risen," in English. Notice that the verb is in the present tense "is", "Christ IS Risen!" We do not say "Christ has risen" or "Christ rose," as if to mark an event that happened nearly two thousand years ago. Rather, we say it in the present tense, as a reminder that the Resurrection is a PRESENT reality, and should affect our lives in their present state.

While many of us will respond with "Truly He is Risen" when we hear the words "Christ is Risen," will our actions back up our statements? Indeed, there were many reactions to Christ's Resurrection nearly two thousand years ago. And there are many reactions to it to this day. We find at least ten reactions in the Bible. Let's look at some of them.

Christ is Risen! No, He's Not!

In Matthew 28: 11-15, we read about the reaction of the guards: *While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the*

city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sum of money to the soldiers and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

Their reaction to the Resurrection—it simply did not happen. This is also the answer of many skeptics in modern times. Surprisingly, it is also the reaction of many

Christians. I read a newspaper article many years ago that said 80% of Christians believe in the Resurrection while 20% do not. I have often wondered what those 20% believe in, or what the foundation is of their Christianity. Christ is Risen! This is truth. Yet the world tries to cover up the truth the same way that the elders and counsel paid to silence the guards. There are probably many people in churches who don't necessarily think that Christ didn't rise from the dead, they just don't think about the Resurrection at all. To some, Christianity is more akin to a moral movement, about being good. The reality of the Resurrection doesn't really affect them. Are you in this camp?



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Christ is Risen! I'm afraid!

In Mark 16: 1-8, we read the account of three women who went to the tomb early in morning and found it empty. They were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. Instead of finding the Body of Jesus which they had come to anoint with burial spices, they encountered an angel who told them plainly that Christ is risen from the dead. Mark 16:8 reads: *And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.* Now, we know that these women eventually went and told the other disciples. They spread the good news of the Resurrection to many. All three are regarded as saints. But their initial reaction was fear—fear of how people would react? Fear of what might happen to them? They were in awe (they were trembling and astonished) but they kept their feelings to themselves, afraid of how others would react. Many times, we seem to do the same. We believe in the Resurrection, yet we are unable or lack the courage to spread the message. Has anyone believed in Christ because of something you have said or done?

Christ is Risen! What does that mean?

In Luke 24: 13-35, we read about an encounter that Jesus had with two of His followers on the road to Emmaus. One of them was Cleopas, and the other, unnamed in the Bible, is probably the evangelist Luke. They were not members of the “twelve” but of the “seventy”, another classification of Jesus’ followers. In the account, they are walking on the road talking about the things that had happened in Jerusalem to Jesus over the past few days. Jesus appears and begins walking with them but they do not recognize Him. Jesus pretends not to know anything about what has happened and the two followers give their version of the story. They talked about how Jesus was *“a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him. But we had hoped that He would be the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find His body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. Some of these who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”* (Luke 24: 19-24) These disciples had witnessed everything that Jesus said was going to happen to Him. And all of it happened, just as He said it would happen. He said He would be crucified and rise from the dead. And both those things happened. And these two disciples were witnesses of what had happened. And yet they couldn’t understand what it all

meant. There are many of us who come to church faithfully who probably feel like these two disciples. We come, we see, and we don’t get it. We get older, yet we don’t think about heaven. We get to the end of our lives and we are scared and confused. In our young lives, we do not understand where it’s all leading and then we lose interest. Yes, this story in the Bible is very relevant to us. Lots of us are on the road to Emmaus, discussing what it all means. Even more concerning are those who are not on the road, not discussing what it all means. Jesus was eventually recognized by the two disciples. How? *“He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread,”* (24:35) In other words, in the Holy Eucharist. The two disciples had conversed with Jesus, they had invited Him to stay with them, and they had partaken of the Eucharist, and this opened their eyes to Him. If you feel like the two disciples on the road, invite Jesus to stay with you, give Him a more significant piece of your heart and your life. Spend time with Him in prayer and Scripture. Continue to receive Holy Communion often. Give your heart and your time to Him, and let Him fill you and reveal Himself to you. Those two disciples would never have had that revelation had they not invited Jesus to walk with them, had they not spent time listening to His words and had they not broken bread with Him.



Christ is Risen! I doubt it!

Most of us are familiar with the story of “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas was one of the twelve disciples. On the evening after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples who were locked behind closed doors. He suddenly appeared to them. They were glad when they saw the Lord. Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. The disciples ran to tell Thomas that they had seen the Risen Lord. His reaction to this good news was skepticism. He told them, *“Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in His side, I will not believe.”* (John 20:25) There are a lot of people in the Thomas camp. They demand tangible proof that the Lord is risen. They set up parameters, as Thomas did: If I win the lottery, I will believe. If my life gets easier, I will believe, etc. Contemporary society doesn’t promote faith in the Resurrection. It promotes materialism, keeping up with the Joneses. Where Christ tells us to serve and not be served, society tells us it’s “kill or be killed.” Where Christ tells us to give away one of our coats if we have two, society tells us that “you’re a nobody if you don’t have three coats.” So, do we go with Jesus or with popular culture? A recent study shows that the largest single “religious group” in our country are the “nones,” the people who have no religion. There are now more non-religious people than Catholics and that number is growing. There are a lot of doubting Thomases out there. Are you one of them? And if you believe, how does that affect your life? If you are more concerned with materialism or keeping up with the Joneses, if you are not already in the Thomas camp, you’ll soon be making your way there.

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Christ is Risen! I believe!

Thomas is a very redeeming figure. He is very real, and very refreshing. I love his story. It gives me a lot of hope. Continuing reading in John 20, we read that eight days after Jesus' initial encounter with the disciples, the time when Thomas was not there, that this time Thomas was there, and Jesus again appeared to the disciples. Jesus said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."* Thomas answered Him, *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus said to Him, *"Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."* (20:27-28) Many are quick to comment on how Thomas believed only because he saw tangible proof. Many think that Jesus chastised Thomas because He needed to see in order to believe. I see the critical moment of this passage being that fact that Thomas was with the disciples, despite his doubts. Despite his doubts, he still showed up. And eventually it clicked for him. Yes, he needed to see to believe. But don't we all? When we "show up" for God repeatedly, we will understand that He in fact, shows up for us. Someone asked me recently when do I really know there is a God. And my answer was, when I surrender more, I feel God more. When I take leaps of faith and trust in God, then I feel God's presence more. When I hold back in serving and giving, I feel God less. In other words, the more I "show up," the more I experience God. The more I hold back, the less I experience Him. There are times in my life when I have surrendered all the time I had and held nothing back, there are times when I surrendered money I didn't have and held nothing back, there are times when I have surrendered effort and held nothing back. Mind you, these are not things I do on a daily basis. But as I look back at my life, if you asked me, at which points did you feel closest to God, it's always at the points where I have surrendered the most, when I have "shown up" the most. My spiritual father reminds me that "80% of life is just showing up," because showing up makes things possible. Showing up that day made it possible for Thomas to encounter Christ. Showing up for God makes that possible for us as well. Thomas didn't just believe because he saw. He believed because he showed up. The message to us, keep showing up, keep surrendering, because the more you believe, the more your surrender, the closer to God you will be.

Christ is Risen! I'm going fishing!

I remember a seminary professor talking about the post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus as well as how the faithful respond to the Resurrection. In jest, he pointed to John 21:3, when Simon Peter said to the other disciples, *"I am going fishing."* (John 21:3) He mentioned that a lot of the people in the churches have the same reaction. Christ is Risen, I'm going fishing, see you at the end of summer. It's true that across Christianity, one of the lowest attended Sundays is the Sunday after Pascha. It seems that the Resurrection causes more fatigue than joy. The week after Pascha is called "Renewal Week," not recovery week or fishing week. The Holy Week experience has hopefully led to



renewal of faith, added joy, and increased commitment. Yes, I look forward to a little down time after the long journey of Lent and Holy Week, but that's down time from standing, not down time from praying or worshipping. Pascha is a sign that we are closer to summer. However, it should not mean an exodus from the church for the summer, or an exodus from prayer. Remember the lesson of Thomas above, keep showing up!

Christ is Risen! What's in it for me?

In John 21:15-23, we read about an encounter between Jesus and Peter. Peter had denied Jesus when it mattered the most. He had denied Him three times. Jesus asks Peter three times *"Do you love Me?"* He uses the word "agape", does Peter love Jesus as if he would die for Him. Twice Peter answers that He loves Jesus, but as a friend, he answers using the word "filia." The third time Jesus asks Peter if he love Him like a friend. Peter is grieved because now he understands that Jesus was asking him to die for Him, and Peter was professing love for a friend. Peter told Jesus that he loved Him, and would die for Him. And Jesus confirmed that that would actually be the case. Some say that this encounter is called the restoration of Peter. Peter denied Jesus three times. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him three times. Peter is now restored as the leader of the Apostles. There is an important lesson here for us. Do we love Christ enough that we would die for Him? Do we love Him "more than these" (21:15) "These" include everything in our life—our families, our hobbies, our jobs, food, sports, everything. Do we love Him more than these?

After this "restoration" however, Peter saw John, the beloved disciple, following nearby. Peter said to Jesus, *"Lord, what about this man?"* (20:21) Perhaps Peter hoped to have some kind of bonus. If Peter was eventually going to die for Jesus, he wanted to know if John would suffer the same fate. Would Peter end up better off than John, or worse? Jesus said to Peter, *"If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow Me!"* (20:22) Many times in our Christian walk, we are like Peter, wondering if our faith will somehow garner us favor over others. Christianity isn't a competition. We should certainly care about the faith of others, but not whether we have more faith than us, or we more than them. How God chooses to bless others is up to Him. We should be thankful for our blessings, and we should be concerned with our own journey in the faith.

Christ is Risen! It's going to be easy now.

In Acts 1, the Disciples ask Jesus *"Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1: 6) In their minds, this is the next logical step. Jesus will now provide political and military freedom from the Roman overlords. Jesus' answer must shock and disappoint them. He responds *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority."* (1:7) In other words, political freedom was not going to happen at that moment. The Resurrection does not provide the path to easy living. It provides the path to salvation. And that path could very well be very hard. The Resurrection opens the path for salvation. It is up to us to walk that path, a road that will be very different for each of us. Some of us will live in relative "freedom" our entire lives. Think economic success, fame, fortune. And some of us will live in relative "oppression" our whole lives. Think long term illness, misfortune, economic challenges. Jesus tells us that the times and seasons granted to us are the Father's to know.

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Why some live to see 20 and others live to see 100 are things that only God know. It is up to us to follow God, wherever life's path leads us. This is what faith is. If we knew the times and seasons, there would be no faith involved. Sometimes things don't go the way we think they should because it is not the time or season. Sometimes things work out in a way we don't expect and we can look back and recognize that it was the time and season where that particular thing should have happened.

Christ is Risen! I will go!

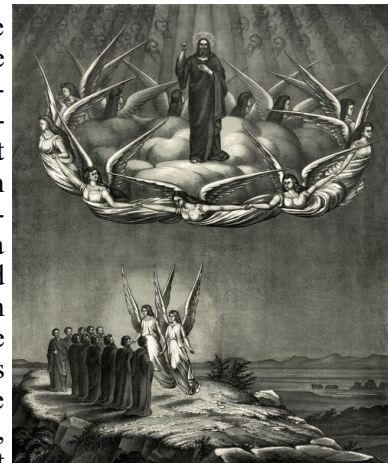


In Mark 16:20, we read *"And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it."* Doubts aside, fear aside, uncertainty aside, the disciple went forth and preached everywhere. And the Lord worked with them, He gave them wisdom and clarity. He sent signs to accompany their message. And a few followers took Christianity to the entire world. They changed the world. Christ meant for Christianity to change the world. He wanted to inaugurate a new kingdom, one based on love and not on fear, one based on service and not on conquest. Our world seems set on gain and fun. The more we gain the more fun we can have. It is not set on love and service. God rewards effort. Will you make an effort to go, to love and to serve Christ? How will this play out against our gain and fun? These two questions are two of the most pivotal questions we need to answer.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

In Luke 24: 50-52, we read about the Ascension, that Jesus led the disciples *"out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."* We know that the Ascension happened forty days after the Resurrection. We know that Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We now know that the Holy Spirit descended upon them on Pentecost, only ten days later. They did not know at the time of the Ascension that the Holy Spirit would come on them in only ten days. They didn't know how exactly the story would play out. But they returned to Jerusalem, following the instructions of Jesus. They were obedient, even without knowing the outcome. They were continually in the temple. This might not have been the safest place in the world, especially since there was still unrest over the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, which was still being disputed by both Jews and Romans. However, this did not stop them from going to the temple and proclaiming publicly the Resurrection of Christ. And they were praising God. Even in a time of stress and uncertainty, they were praising God.

We live in a similar way as we celebrate Pascha in 2022. We live in a world which is increasingly critical and intolerant of Christians. It seems that we must change our views on Christianity in order to conform to what society thinks a Christian should be. To stand in the temple and proclaim Christ is an uncomfortable proposition. Praising God is the first and foremost thing we are to be doing as Christians, not only on Pascha, and not only on Sundays, and not only in church. We should be praising Him daily in prayer, throughout our days in how we behave, especially in how we behave towards others. We should be praising Him weekly in worship. And we should be praising Him with our entire lives. Our entire life should be a praise of God. If we are working toward God's heavenly kingdom, and THAT is going to be a continual praising of God, we need to practice that in this life so that we will be ready for eternal life.



Christ came to earth to inaugurate a new kingdom. He came to change the world. Christianity is a movement that is supposed to change the world. The Apostles passed this down to the next generation, and this has been passed down to every generation up to our own. Will you take your place in church history as one who proclaims the Resurrection, or one who ignores it? Will you go fishing for fish, or for disciples? Will you still show up even when you have doubts? Will you share the truth of the Resurrection, be indifferent to it, or say that is never happened?

The Resurrection is the single most important event in the history of the world. It demands a response from every person who has ever lived in the world. For the next forty days we will greet each other with the words "Christ is Risen!" The response traditionally is "Truly He is Risen!" Regardless of whether we are in the Paschal season or not, regardless if anyone greets you with these words or not, every day when we wake up to see a new day, God proclaims to us essentially, "Christ is Risen!" The question is, what is your response TODAY?

Christ is Risen! _____ (Fill in the blank)

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!
Christos Anesti! Alithos Anesti!

With love in the Risen Lord,
+Fr. Stavros



Surrender

By Fr. Stavros

Editor's Note: This was the Sunday sermon on April 10, 2022. Several people have requested copies of it. Several people have asked me to share it in The Messenger. April 10, for some reason, was not a heavily attended Sunday, so if you were not here, please take a few moments to read this. And if you were here, please read it again, and consider sharing it with others.

I'm going to open up by reading two Bible verses:

Romans 7: 19-21 *"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self."*

Psalms 51:6 *"Behold, you desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart."*

Everywhere we turn it seems that there is bad news. Politics, the economy, our own personal issues, anxiety, depression, questions on what is right and what is wrong, even as we just read in Romans 7, we might even know what is right and what is wrong, but we cannot or do not do that good we want, but the evil we don't want is what we do. Maybe you're struggling in some way, or even a few ways.

Each of us has a heart that beats, that's how we are alive. It's the single most important thing we do, have a heart that beats. Stop the heart from beating and we are not alive, we can do nothing. Deep within each of us is a secret heart, that's our soul. We talked about our souls a couple of weeks ago. And this is the heart that beats for God. This secret heart contains our innermost and intimate thoughts, some of which are not shared with anyone. The secret struggles, the secret guilts, the secret doubts. We all have them. We might have a good family life, we might have good friends, we might have a successful career, and an outward appearance that exudes confidence. But there is still the secret heart and its secret struggles. There is still the soul that wants to do good, but the evil we do not want to do becomes exactly what we do.

In our church this Lent, we've made the theme of the journey about HABITS, HABITS we chose intentionally to help us grow in some positive way towards Christ this Lent. We started off with have a plan. *I'm sure there are some of you who made a plan and stuck with it and feel positive as we come to the home stretch. And I'm sure there are some of you who didn't stick with your plan, or perhaps didn't even make one and you are where you were five weeks ago.* [Editor's Note: *With Holy Week now over, it is a good time to review how your plan for Lent and Holy Week went. If your plan went well, it's time to make a plan for how to keep yourself moving forward in a spiritual direction. If the plan didn't go well, now is a good time to go back to the drawing board. In this season of the Resurrection, where everything is supposed to begin anew, it is not too late (and really it's never too late) to begin anew. Don't wait until next year, or next Lent to make a plan. You can make a plan and begin to execute it at any time.*]

Week two the theme was affirm your faith. The faith is both personal and communal. We are not expected to figure this all out on our own. This is one reason we have community, to be strengthened in a group of people who are struggling to believe the same thing. And if you are not struggling, if this journey is bringing you great joy, then share that joy, so that those who

are struggling with the faith will feel encouraged by your joy.

Week three the theme was be a friend. We all need friends. We all need friends to help us get to Christ. But on an even more basic level, we just need friends. The struggles of the secret heart are lessened when there is a friend to bear them. They are made greater when we feel there is no one we can really trust. And even if we have lots of people we can really trust, there will still be baggage in the secret heart that goes to no one, there will just be less of it.

Week four the theme was Intentionally Choose Him. The emphasis here was on intention. We wake up every day with intentions. We intend to work, or get the kids ready for school, or to go to a social function. We don't accidentally end up at work or at school or at a party. These are intentional actions. No one accidentally prays, or worships, or makes Godly choices or serves others. These things are intentional. So is avoiding them. To intentionally choose Christ is to connect with Him as we do with the other things we are intentional about.

Week five, this last week, was about trusting God. This is hard. Because in the world today, it seems like God is more silent than active. I'm reminded of the opening verses of the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, a prayer from one of God's prophets at a time when the people were in exile, and felt estranged from God. He lamented to God:

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear? Or cry to You "Violence!" and You will not save? Why do you make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is slack and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted." (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

This prayer was uttered hundreds of years before Christ, and it feels like it still applies today, yet another reason to read the Old Testament and not just the new. Because the Old Testament is filled with stories of brokenness, as well as amazing stories of trust in God even in times of hardship. Trust is when we keep walking, even when we aren't sure where we are going or why, when we learn to have faith in God, even when what He does or allows doesn't always make sense, when we show up even when we are filled with doubt.

Which brings us to this week, and the last theme of this journey, which is also the most important, and the most difficult. Surrender to Him. At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned the struggles of the secret heart, and the battle of not doing the good we want but the evil that we do not want is what we do. That battle is so real and so vicious that it leaves even the best and strongest of us wanting to put up the white flag of surrender and just quit. That is truth.

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I have served as a priest for nearly 24 years, and I have things in my secret heart that make me want to quit, not only this call to be a priest but the call to be a Christian. The battle is too great at times, and I want to put up the white flag and surrender.

There are really two choices for the struggles of our secret hearts. The first choice is put up the flag, lay down and stop fighting. The second choice is to put up the flag and hand these struggles over to God, to surrender them to Him. Galatians 5:1 reads "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Yes, these secret thoughts, struggles and guilts zap our freedom. However, it is surrendering to God that brings God's blessings, not the other way around. It is not God's blessings that bring us to surrender. It is surrender that brings us to God's blessings. The secret heart cannot be filled with God's wisdom until one surrenders the secret heart to God.

We are reminded six times each time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy to commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God. That's the ideal. Let's start by surrendering our struggles to Him. So that as we continue to celebrate in this Paschal season, the light of the resurrected Christ can fill some of those dark spaces with light.

Surrender is not easy! It takes maturity, obedience, trust, and devotion. Surrender is also not a one-time event. We did not make the Holy Week journey with the thought that this was the be all and end all fix for the struggles of our lives. Surrender is actually something that we do on a daily basis. We should continually think more carefully, purposefully and intentionally about the things in your life that you just need to let go of, and the things that are defeating you, and begin to move your secret heart to a posture of surrender.

It's never too late to make new HABITS. Making a plan, affirming your faith, being a friend, Intentionally choosing Him, and trusting Him and important steps to the ultimate goal, which is surrender to Him, where we let go and let God. We hope this journey of HABITS this Lent has reinforced this framework. We can surrender some of our secret heart to God and fill it with His light if we have the faith, the encouragement, the intentionality and the trust to open the secret heart more to the Lord.

"For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." I do that. We all do that. Aren't we tired of that yet? Come with a desire for truth in the inward being, and allow God to give us some wisdom in our secret hearts. This is done each time we surrender. Today, tomorrow, during the Paschal season, and throughout our lives.



On the Serious Side

If you cannot labor with your body, at least make efforts in your mind.
If you cannot fast for two days, fast at least till evening.
If you cannot fast till evening, be careful not to overeat.
If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be addicted to strife.
If you cannot close the mouth of a man who is judging his brother, at least refrain from joining him in this.
~St. Isaac the Syrian

World: Follow your heart.
Jesus: Follow Me.
World: Believe in yourself.
Jesus: Believe in me.
World: Discover yourself.
Jesus: Deny yourself.
World: Be true to you.
Jesus: Be true to me.

Cast your burden on Me, and I will sustain you. No matter what your circumstances may be, I can—and will—carry you through them. Sometimes you are weighed down by a situation that seems too heavy for you. Do not try to cope with this burden alone. Instead, bring it into My presence and cast it on Me, releasing it into My care and keeping. Although your circumstances may not change right away, you can find real relief through this process. Casting your burden on Me is a spiritual transaction. You acknowledge that I am in charge of your life and that outcomes are ultimately My domain. This lightens your load immensely, relieving you from feeling responsible for things beyond your control. When you come to Me weary and burdened, I have promised that I will give you rest. *Take My yoke upon you—trusting in My unfailing love—and let Me carry your heavy load. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

I will no longer allow the negative things in my life to spoil all of the good things I have. I choose to be happy.

A kid falls more than fifty times to learn to walk. He never thinks "Maybe this isn't for me."

Time is very slow for those who wait, very fast for those who are scared, very long for those who lament, very short for those who celebrate; but for those who love, time is eternal!
~William Shakespeare

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
I'll always get up after I fall.
And whether I run, walk or have to crawl,
I'll set my goals and achieve them all.

Safe Spaces

by Fr. Stavros

The main “theme” if you will, based on the dozens of confessions and conversations I had this Lent, is that many people lack a safe space in which to sort through a problem or a failing. I dare say, based on what I’ve heard, that this is an epidemic in our society. I’ve given a lot of thought to the Gospel of the healing of the Paralytic, from Mark 2:1-12, that we read on the second Sunday of Lent, which was the basis of our discussion on “Be a Friend” as part of our HABITS series. As we remember from the story, a Paralytic was carried through town by four friends in order to get to Christ. When they got to where Christ was, teaching in a house, they couldn’t get in the house because there were too many people, so they cut a hole in the roof of the house and let them man down on the bed. Christ then healed the man.

“He’s not going to change.”

“Once she’s decided something, she isn’t going to budge.”

Many of us feel like this in our marriages, with our kids, with friends, and with co-workers. If you have ever felt this way, know that you are not alone.

There are lots of people who don’t feel that they have safe spaces in which to talk. If they start to talk, they get an eye roll or start an argument. Life would get a whole lot easier if we learned the art of creating safe spaces in which to talk, and be heard. Where we could talk and not yell, where we could be heard and not tuned out. Where we could speak freely, knowing that if we overstep, we can take a step back. Where we could forgive as quickly as we get frustrated.

In the Gospel of Mark 2:1-12 we read the story of the healing of a paralytic. As I reflected on this Gospel passage, I keep coming back to the “unknown back story” of how four friends brought a paralytic to Christ and because of that, the man was healed. The Bible doesn’t tell us what happened before the story, what events led up to this.

There are five people in the story—one of them paralyzed, four of them able-bodied. We don’t know how the man was paralyzed or how long they had been friends. We don’t know if he was paralyzed from birth, or had had an injury during his life. We also don’t know whose idea it was to go to Christ—was it the paralyzed man who had heard about Him? Or one of the friends suggested they go?

There are four things for sure that were in play in this “back story.”

1. There was a safe space in which to talk—because someone had to have had the idea that Christ could make this man walk. Someone had to have had the idea to scale the walls of the house. If it was the paralyzed man who had the idea, the friends didn’t discourage him and tell him there was no way he was going to be healed. If it was one of the friends, the paralyzed man didn’t discourage the idea, nor did the other friends. No one shot down this idea. Because there was a safe space in which to talk.

2. Trust—imagine being the paralyzed man, being carried through town, hoisted up the walls of the house, how much worse it could have gotten for him had they dropped him. It took an incredible amount of trust for a wounded

man to place whatever was left of his life in the hands of friends who could have made a mistake that would have made his situation much worse.

3. Teamwork—We aren’t told which friend led the charge up the wall, but all the friends had to work together. Imagine trying to hoist a mattress up to the roof of your house, with a 150 man lying on it, with only four people to lift it. It would have taken teamwork, creativity, patience, strength and sheer willpower.

4. Encouragement—Think about how much negativity was in this situation. A paralyzed man, did he think he could be healed? He either encouraged the friends to take him or they encouraged him to go, or one of them led the charge. When they met a road block, like the full house, there had to have been encouragement there.

These four elements are missing from many corners of our society. I see how easily feelings get hurt among teenagers—that doesn’t happen if these four elements are at play. I also see how easily feelings get hurt among adults, in marriages, with our children, with our parents if there isn’t a safe space to talk, if there isn’t trust, if there isn’t teamwork, if there isn’t encouragement.

I want to focus though on the safe space in which to talk—because when there is no teamwork, trust breaks down, and people feel discouraged, and when people are discouraged there needs to be a safe space in which to talk. There needs to be a safe place in which to talk about how discouraged we feel. If a person brings up a sensitive subject that is bothering them, the answer can’t be “we’re not going to talk about this.” Because that doesn’t show love, sensitivity or concern for a spouse, friend, child, etc. Rather than not talking about a subject, figure out a way that the subject can be talked about safely, so that each person’s feelings get heard. If communication is totally broken down, (and hopefully before it gets to that point) consider seeing a counselor or a therapist. There are professionals who are experts at opening up paths to communication. I am happy to begin the conversation with you, and if I can’t get you anywhere, to refer you to someone who can.

Creating boundaries that can’t be crossed is a key in establishing safe spaces in which to talk. When you come to confession, as an example, there is an implied boundary—“I love and respect you before you start, I’ll love and respect you when you are finished.” This “boundary” creates a safe space in which a person can say anything and not fear being written off or thought less of by their priest. Imagine if there is no boundary. Imagine if I say “say what you want and I’ll think what I want,” then no one is going to feel safe talking.

So in our relationships, it is essential that we create safe spaces in which communication can happen. We have to create boundaries that let the other person know we aren’t going to “write them off” or leave if we are annoyed with the topic. If there are no boundaries, no safe zone, then there isn’t going to be honesty, and without honesty, there is not trust, and with no trust there can be no love.

Continued...

Going back to the Bible story, we all play the role of both the paralyzed man and the four friends.

We need people who will care about us and encourage us. We need people we can trust and count on. We need people we can work with. We need people we can talk safely with.

We are all the paralyzed man in some way. And we all can use help and encouragement from supportive friends we can trust. We've all been wounded in some way in life and need help getting "healing" We all need help and encouragement to get to Christ.

We are all the four friends as well. We all know people who need encouragement. We all know people who need someone to talk to. We all know people who have been wounded in life and need someone to help them get healing. We all know people who need help getting to Christ.

I read somewhere recently that the appropriate ratio of encouragement to discouragement that we need to stay "in balance" is 5:1. That means we should hear 5 encouraging things for every discouraging thing we hear. On the other side, it also means that we should say 5 encouraging things to people for every one discouraging thing we say. Think about how you talk to your spouse, your children, your friends, your co-workers. Do you keep the 5:1 ratio? Think about how others talk to you. Do you get 5:1 encouragement to discouragement? If we are honest, most of us are on a deficit for getting enough encouragement. And further, most of us contribute to the deficit of saying too many discouraging things. This is something we can all work on.

We all need at least four friends to carry us.

We all need to carry at least four people.

Who are you carrying?

Who is carrying you?

Are there people you can safely tell that you are paralyzed and need help?

When someone tells you they are paralyzed, do you give them a safe space in which to talk?

The miracle was granted by Christ, but it was made possible by the four friends.

Getting to Christ requires others, it also requires encouragement. Do you encourage or discourage others to get to Christ? To worship? To Pray?

There is a back story to all of our stories, good or bad. If things are going well, it's probably because there is a safe space, and if they are going badly, it's probably because there isn't one.

So focus on safe spaces this week—purposefully encourage, do your part on the ratio.

Be bold, like these four friends. They took a chance and a friend was healed. Take a chance and see what kinds of relationships can be healed in your life, if you approach them with safety and with encouragement.

WORDS OF TRUTH, WORDS OF COMFORT, WORDS FOR TODAY



"We have within us deeply rooted weaknesses, passions, and defects. This can not all be cut out with one sharp motion, but patience, persistence, care and attention. The path leading to perfection is long. Pray to God so that he will strengthen you. Patiently accept your falls and, having stood up, immediately run to God, not remaining in that place where you have fallen. Do not despair if you keep falling into your old sins. Many of them are strong because they have received the force of habit. Only with the passage of time and with fervor will they be conquered. Don't let anything deprive you of hope."

-St. Nektarios of Aegina



"Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement."

-St. John of Kronstadt

Liturgical Schedule for May

Sunday, May 1 **Thomas Sunday**

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

Thursday, May 5 **St. Irene**

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

Sunday, May 8 **St. John the Theologian/St. Arsenios/Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearers**

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

Wednesday, May 11 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 15 **Sunday of the Paralytic**

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

Wednesday, May 18 **Mid-Pentecost**

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

Saturday, May 21 **Sts. Constantine and Helen**

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

Sunday, May 22 **Sunday of the Samaritan Woman**

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

Sunday, May 29 **Sunday of the Blind Man**

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

Tuesday, May 31 **Leave-Taking (Apodosis) of Pascha (Evening Divine Liturgy)**

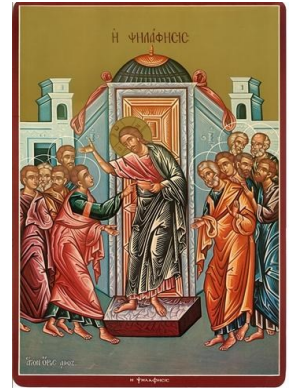
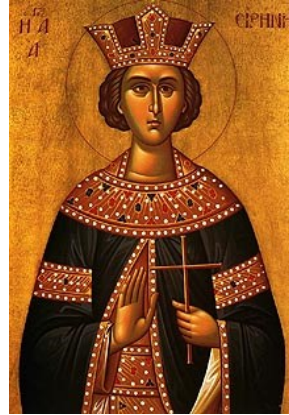
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, June 2 **Ascension**

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

Sunday, June 5 **Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council**

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



Liturgical Notes for May

The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the “Pentecostarion.” The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the specific celebration of Christ’s glorious resurrection. It is a celebration of “rebirth”. . . .The rebirth of God’s creation which surrounds us, and the rebirth of the spirit within each and every one of us! This period is not merely a ritualistic celebration but a celebration which can be seen, felt, heard and talked about. It is a very REAL celebration which CAN make our entire being jump with JOY. It is a celebration which offers us HOPE. It is a celebration which offers us the TRUE FREEDOM found only in Jesus Christ! During the 40 days of Pascha, we are to greet each other with the greeting “Christ is Risen” or “Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!,” to which the response is “Truly He is Risen” or “Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!”

No Kneeling until Pentecost It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we’ll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after April 24 is on the Feast of Pentecost (June 12) 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.”

Sunday, May 1 - Sunday of St. Thomas The Church brings to our mind the unbelief of Thomas followed by his belief after seeing the scars of Christ

Thursday, May 5 - Feast of St. Irene - St. Irene was a martyr of the 4th century. Many miracles have been attributed to her. She is the patron saint of law enforcement officers.

Sunday, May 8- Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women They came to anoint Jesus’ body, but found an EMPTY tomb. We also commemorate Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Sunday, May 8 - Feast of St. John the Theologian and St. Arsenios On May 8, we celebrate the feast days of St. John the Theologian, the author of the fourth Gospel, as well as the Epistles of St. John and the book of Revelation, and also celebrate the feast of St. Arsenios, a monk of the 5th Century.

Wednesday, May 11 – Paraklesis Service of Supplication to the Virgin Mary - We will continue to offer Paraklesis once a month, so that we can pray for all the members of our community by name, out loud. We will alternate some in the evening and some in the morning. For May, the Paraklesis will be offered on Wednesday Evening, May 11, from 6:00--7:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 15 - Sunday of the Paralytic The healing of the paralytic who was afflicted for many years. This event bears witness to Christ’s authority over the human body: He who can overcome death in His own body has power over all human flesh.

Sunday, May 15 - Feast of St. Pachomios—Fr. Stavros’ Anniversary of Ordination - Fr. Stavros was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church on May 15, 1998. This will mark his 24th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. Every year, Fr. Stavros marks this anniversary by celebrating Divine Liturgy in thanksgiving for the gift of priestly ministry.

Wednesday, May 18 – Feast of Mid-Pentecost

The icon depicts Christ the teacher, foreshadows the teaching to the Samaritan Woman, celebrated the following Sunday, and it is the feast day of teachers. About the middle of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went up again to the Temple and taught. The Jews, marveling at the wisdom of His words, said, “How does this man know letters having never learned?” But Christ first reproached their unbelief and lawlessness, then proved to them by the Law that they sought to slay Him unjustly, supposedly as a despiser of the Law, since He had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath. This feast is held mid-way between Pascha and Pentecost.

Saturday, May 21 - Sts. Constantine and Helen May 21 commemorates the feast of Sts. Constantine and Helen. St. Constantine was the emperor of the Roman Empire who decided to make Christianity the official religion of the empire. For the first time in history, the Christian church would not fall under persecution. St. Constantine also moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey), where he inaugurated the Byzantine Empire which flourished from 325 until 1453. He also convened the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325, which inaugurated what is known as the “golden age of Orthodoxy,” and resulted in the writing of the Nicene Creed (edited to its current version in the year 381). St. Helen, the mother of St. Constantine, is recognized as being the person who found the true cross of Christ in Jerusalem. She went on a pilgrimage to the Holy City and searched diligently for the Cross, finding it under a patch of Basil (Vasiliko) on the Mountain of Golgotha. Sts. Constantine and Helen have the title *Isapostolou*, “Equal to the Apostles” because of the tremendous contributions they made to the Orthodox Christian Church.

Sunday, May 22 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman Christ talks about the water of eternal life which will never make us thirst again. The woman here is St. Photini.

Sunday, May 29 - Sunday of the Blind Man - The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

Tuesday, May 31- Apodosis (Leave-Taking) of Pascha -This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, May 31, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:00 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

Thursday, June 2 - Ascension

This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry.

St. John the Baptist Community News

GOYA—Our GOYA meeting for March will be Sunday, May 15, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served.

GOYA Lenten Retreat—Our 17th Annual GOYA Lenten Retreat was held from March 25-27 at the Mary Help of Christians Catholic Conference Center. We had about 40 people in attendance. Special thanks for our advisors, Michael and Bessie Palios, for organizing this event, and to all the parent volunteers who helped. We had a big contingent from St. John, and joined with several GOYAns from Sarasota, Ocala and Tarpon Springs.

Men's Group—The Men's group will meet on Sunday, May 1 at 5:00 p.m. We meet once a month, go to a restaurant for fellowship and discussion. We finish by 7:30 p.m. All men of our parish are welcome to join. New people are welcome, and bring your non-Orthodox friends, they are welcome also.

Women's Bible Study meets on Tuesday from 10:00-11:30 a.m. with both in-person and zoom options. Fr. Stavros leads this group. In May, our meeting will be on Tuesdays, May 3, 10, 17 and 24. We are studying St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

Monday night Bible study—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Monday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. In May, Fr. John's Bible study will take place as follows; Monday, May 2; Tuesday, May 10; Monday, May 16 and Monday, May 23.

Meeting of Ministry Heads—We will have a meeting of ministry heads on Monday, May 9, in the Kourmolis Center at 6:30 p.m. We ask that each ministry send at least one representative. We meet periodically to check in and to look over the next few months in the life of our parish.

GriefShare to resume in August—Thank you to Donna Hambos for finishing our fourth 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.

College student night—Monday, June 6—we are planning a summer get together at the church for any college students in the area for Monday, June 6, from 6:00-9:00 p.m. There is no cost. Please RSVP to Fr. Stavros by Wednesday, June 1 at frstav@gmail.com

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

Congratulations to Arianna Choundas-Thatcher and Kaitlin Zelatis, who represented our parish at the district level of the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival held at St. George Greek Orthodox Church in New Port Richey on Sunday, April 10. Both Arianna and Kaitlin won their respective categories, Arianna in the Junior Category and Kaitlin in the Senior Category. Both are advancing to the Metropolis level of the Oratorical Festival which will be held on May 14-15 in Birmingham, AL. We will print their speeches in the Messenger after the competition is over. Thank you to Peggy Bradshaw for organizing the event and to all our judges & timekeepers.

Registry

Baptism—Nolan John Gregory, son of Daniel and Alicia Gregory (and grandson of Fr. John and Pres. Denise Stefero) was baptized on Saturday, March 26 by Fr. John Stefero. John Stefero III was the Godparent. Na Sas Zisi!

Baptism—Theodore Philip Arnaoutakis, son of Konstantinos and Diana Arnaoutakis, was baptized on Sunday, April 10. Christina Cardy was the Godmother. Na Sas Zisi!

Funeral—Fotini Rallis passed away on March 14. Funeral services were held on March 17. May her memory be eternal!

Funeral—Eleni (Helen) Liras passed away on March 10. Funeral services were held on March 17. May her memory be eternal!

Funeral—Anastasia Smyrnakis passed away on Tuesday, March 22. Funeral Services were held on March 31. May her memory be eternal!

Trisagion—Peter Zeban passed away March 4. A Trisagion was offered at Serenity Meadows Memorial Park on March 17. May his memory be eternal!

Trisagion—Andrew Harvie passed away on March 12. A Trisagion was offered in March 20. May his memory be eternal!

Condolences to Jorge and Theresa (Smrynakis) Rodriguez on the passing of his mother, Maria Garcia, on March 15. May her memory be eternal!

Condolences to Arty Giallourakis, whose father Leontios, passed away on March 28. May his memory be eternal!

Footprints

By: Alex Limberatos

*As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.*

*For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more. -Psalm 102 (103):15-16*



In the hospital, some images crossed my mind before and after my son was born. These were images of my son and my daughter, in the future. In one image my son was standing where I was, as an eager father. In the other image my daughter was an expecting mother with her spouse at bedside. I was grandfather, at home, eager to welcome the next generation of our family. As

my mind lingered on these images, the pictures began to evolve, becoming an image of my children not as parents, but as grandparents, with myself either reposed or a great grandparent. The thought continued to unravel, generation begetting generation, the joy and novelty of new parenthood and grandparenthood echoing through time. But what became unnerving about the image was how the most significant parts of my life (and my forefathers lives) could be forgotten in human history, passed by, undocumented. How can these big steps fail to leave behind a footprint?

Our Orthodox faith reassures us that our memory is eternal through our relationship with Christ, that He is the one who ensures not a single one of us is truly forgotten, not a single one of us truly dead. Sometimes we confuse “memory eternal” to mean our hope that the person we are losing may be remembered on earth from generation to generation. It’s a common misconception, but it comes from a very human fear...

What happens to us when we are forgotten on the earth?

It’s a holy thing to pray for our departed love ones, to continue to intercede on behalf of their souls; some of us have lists that we pray for that go generations way back! That being said, sometimes I wonder if we think the memory and soul of our departed loves vanishes completely when they are no longer remembered on the earth. A vivid illustration of this is depicted in the movie *Coco*, wherein the memories of the departed remain in a blissful astral space *until* the last person on earth forgets about them—and then their soul vanishes entirely out of all existence.



Again, our faith tells us that our souls live forever in relationship or “in memory” of Jesus Christ rather than in memory of those living on earth. Nonetheless, I’d like to appeal to this fear we all tend to have: how will our name be remembered on the earth long after we have walked upon it?

Back in Ancient Greece, and even to this day, one thought of keeping one’s memory alive comes through physical honors such as statues, plaques, names, and the like. While philanthropy is a beautiful and necessary virtue, we ought to be mindful of what Christ warns us in Matthew 6 how we are to give and what treasures we should look to invest in:

*“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. **Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you...** Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.**” (Matthew 6:2-4, 19-20).*

Christ warns us that the hospitals and institutions we put our names on or the plaques that bear our name will all at one point physically disappear be it through natural or manmade disaster or through our common eternal enemy: time.

But what nature, man, and time all cannot touch is the treasure that Christ tells us to store up. This treasure is not a manifestation of honor or legacy. It is a treasure that is refined and polished like gold, thrown in a furnace of prayer & martyrdom and buffeted and made shining through a true love for our fellow man and self-denial. The treasure is sainthood.

Continued...



We are so blessed to have a beautiful church depicting dozens of saints. But what's most remarkable about our church walls is not the way in which those icons made it on the walls of our church, but the lives of those saints which are replicated throughout centuries. Romans, Ottomans, Soviets, earthquakes, fires, storms, time itself and the devil himself...none of these forces could bury the legacy of our Church's saints. Even St. Phanourios and the story of his martyrdom were discovered centuries later after his icon and relics were discovered. The saints enjoy not only a heavenly legacy (being in the remembrance of Our Lord), but an earthly one too despite all opposition.

I look at my children and come to the realization that my earthly memory, and their earthly memory, will be buried and forgotten lest I invest in the treasure that Christ speaks to us of...the treasure of HIS memory and HIS glory. Lest I put the pursuit of holiness and living a consecrated life over a vain and selfish one, my memory in heaven and on earth will be like a vapor that passes. It matters not if I have a son to carry a name, but rather if my entire family--as well as friends, neighbors, parishioners--will have been inspired and molded to pray for me at the time of my repose (whenever that may be) and pray for many other departed souls. But for such a succession of intercessors, it will need to start with me (each one of us) to emulate intercession and holiness. If my efforts to be remembered are all vain and earthly, I will perish at the hands of nature, mankind, and/or time. But if I put forth my effort to be remembered by the Lord, I will have achieved eternity, and if my name is nothing on earth it can still be great in heaven if I aim for sainthood. The only footprint that matters is the imprint of our name in the book of life.



My brothers and sisters, our faith tells us it is a healthy thing to think on our death that we may repent and recommit ourselves to Christ each day. Let us think on legacy not in terms of superficial footprints that wash and fade away with the waves of time, but the print of our hands as we reach out towards heaven. Let us not fret how our name will survive on the earth, but that it will be found in the book of life. Let our concerns of our memories and being remembered not tie us to our temporal dwelling here, but live a life memorable to the Lord and His Saints.

Christ is Risen!

Our Pastoral Assistant, Alex Limberatos, Will Be Returning To Chaplaincy

In January 2019, my wife and I joined our community of St. John the Baptist as parishioners. To this day, we count our blessings to be part of such a warm, welcoming community.

In 2020, I received a call from Fr. Stavros while I was working a 2nd shift in the hospital as a chaplain. It was an opportunity to serve our community as a Pastoral Assistant. Although I still felt a calling to continue serving in the hospital, I couldn't help but God inviting me, nudging me to something new and holy. Certainly, that is what this ministry has been.

It has been a special honor to serve this community. Our ministries are Christ-centered, the atmosphere of our congregation is warm and inviting, our worship has a focus on engagement, and we have shown to be particularly resilient. In a time of much uncertainty during the pandemic, St. John continued to thrive, offer its ministries, and sustain itself by keeping our aim on our values and vision as an Orthodox Community.

Again, I came here in a capacity to serve feeling God was nudging me into this new ministry and set of responsibilities. And at the same time, I've still felt an itch for my former ministry of chaplaincy. After much deliberation and prayer, I have decided to return to the ministry of hospital chaplaincy and to step down as Pastoral Assistant.

While I anticipate some sadness in regards to this news, my wife and I would both like to reassure we intend to remain part of our St. John community and serving as volunteers. This isn't a good-bye, nor is it a loss. We shall remain as stewards, resources, and engaged worshippers to our beloved parish.

My family is so overjoyed and thankful for the love and support poured out upon us through every milestone, especially with the support and prayers received as we welcomed our son Lukas to our family and to our church family.

Thank you all again for the opportunity to serve and I look forward to our continued work in worship and service in this awesome vineyard.

In Christ,

Alex Limberatos



Thirsty? Come and Drink a New Drink! **Christ is Risen! Χριστός Ανέστη!**

By Vasili Panagopoulos



If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. - Jesus Christ (John 7:37)

Water. We use it every single day of our lives for numerous purposes. When we were in the womb of our mother, the amniotic water sustained us for

nine months. At the time of birth, just as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as though from one life to the next, we too passed from our mother's womb through the birth canal and into the world. Just "As He (Christ) did for Peter walking on the stormy sea, like a midwife Christ catches us by the hand and fishes us from the waters" (Jansson); we are caught and brought to our mother for the first time, and shortly thereafter, given food that sustains us - milk which contains water. The very atmosphere that is constantly around us contains water. We have to drink water daily in order to sustain ourselves. We water our gardens to give us sustenance throughout the year. We also bathe in water to stay clean and refreshed. The significance of water in our earthly lives highlights a great truth we often take for granted: "Water is a precious element. Without it, there is no life"; as a matter of fact, "In Genesis we learn that all life began in the waters and is sustained by water." Yet, "We might say life is water and water is life, but equally, it represents death. Dirty water kills people, including 5,000 of the world's children every day. Even clean and pure water can be a danger: too much of it, and we are swept away under its tremendous weight."

Water is also just as much of a staple in our spiritual life as it is in our physical life. We use it to die and rise and literally put on Christ in Baptism; just as we began in the amniotic fluid and were sustained by it, so too, in baptism we are reborn which

marks the beginning of our new life in Christ which sustains us until our last breath. We especially need water to make bread for the Eucharist, to mix it with the consecrated wine, and finally, to bless ourselves and our homes all year round. In St. Basil the Great's Hexaemeron, he says, "The same water, pumped up through the root, nourishes in a different way the root itself, the bark of the trunk, the wood and the pith. It becomes leaf, it distributes itself among the branches and twigs and makes the fruits swell...How, again, does this water become wine in the vine, and oil in the olive tree? Yet what is marvelous is, not to see it become sweet in one fruit, fat and unctuous in another, but to see in

sweet fruits an inexpressible variety of flavor. There is one sweetness of the grape, another of the apple, another of the fig, another of the date." Water supplies nourishment to all things, and as a result, we are given grapes from the vine, and oil from the olive tree. We then take these grapes and make wine, which then becomes the Blood of Christ during the Di-



vine Liturgy. We take the oil and use it in different aspects of our Church. During the baptism, it is blessed and becomes Holy Oil, during the sacrament of Holy Unction, it is blessed and sanctified, and becomes Holy Unction. We take olive oil, put it in our candelis above the relics of saints, and anoint ourselves with it. We do all these things, as a result of God's creation, because of the element of water.

The theme of water and thirst comes to a climax during the five Sundays from Pascha until Ascension. During the entrance hymn we chant *In congregations bless ye God, the Lord from the Well-springs of Israel (Psalm 67:27). The Gospel accounts transport us to the Sheep's Pool, the Well of Jacob, and the Pool of Siloam.*

Continued...



We are invited by the Paschal Canon to “come and drink a new drink” that is “not from a barren rock” as from the Old Covenant, but “which springs forth from the tomb of Christ” because it is precisely within the tomb that the very Source of Eternal Life (Jesus) was laid, and Who identifies Himself as the “Living Water” of which, if anyone drink, “he will never thirst.”

Jesus Christ is the “Fountain of life and immortality” as St. Basil the Great writes in the first prayer in the Preparation of Holy Communion, therefore we must go to Him and drink of this new drink - Holy Communion - by drawing near at every Divine Liturgy. We are invited by Christ Himself through the priest to “Approach with the fear of God, with love and with faith” so that we may *taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8)*. Just as we need to drink water every single day to sustain us physically, we **NEED** to drink the Living Water - Jesus Christ - as often as possible to be spiritually sustained and nourished.

If we do not run to drink deeply from the “Wellspring of Life”, as the Mid-Pentecost Dismissal Hymn calls Christ, then we die. Our Lord warns

us: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). Likewise, St. Nikodemos of Mt. Athos says: “Frequent Communion is necessary for those Christians who do not have an impediment so that we can have life, which is Jesus Christ, in ourselves, and so that we do not die a spiritual death. For as many as are not frequently nourished by that spiritual food will most surely die. Even if it appears that they are physically alive, they are spiritually dead, because they have distanced themselves from the spiritual and true life brought by Holy Communion.”

We must run to Christ, to drink the new drink. We must partake of the “well-spring of Life,” and quench our spiritual thirst. From birth, and through baptism, we were sustained by water. Through the receiving of Holy Communion, we continue to be sustained and nourished. I urge you, during this Paschal season, come to Church to receive Christ. Just as you would go to drink water when you are thirsty, realize how thirsty your soul is and go and drink of Christ, the Fountain of Life. May we have the faith and the desire to go to Christ as did those who suffered many illnesses and waited in the porticoes for the water to move and receive healing.

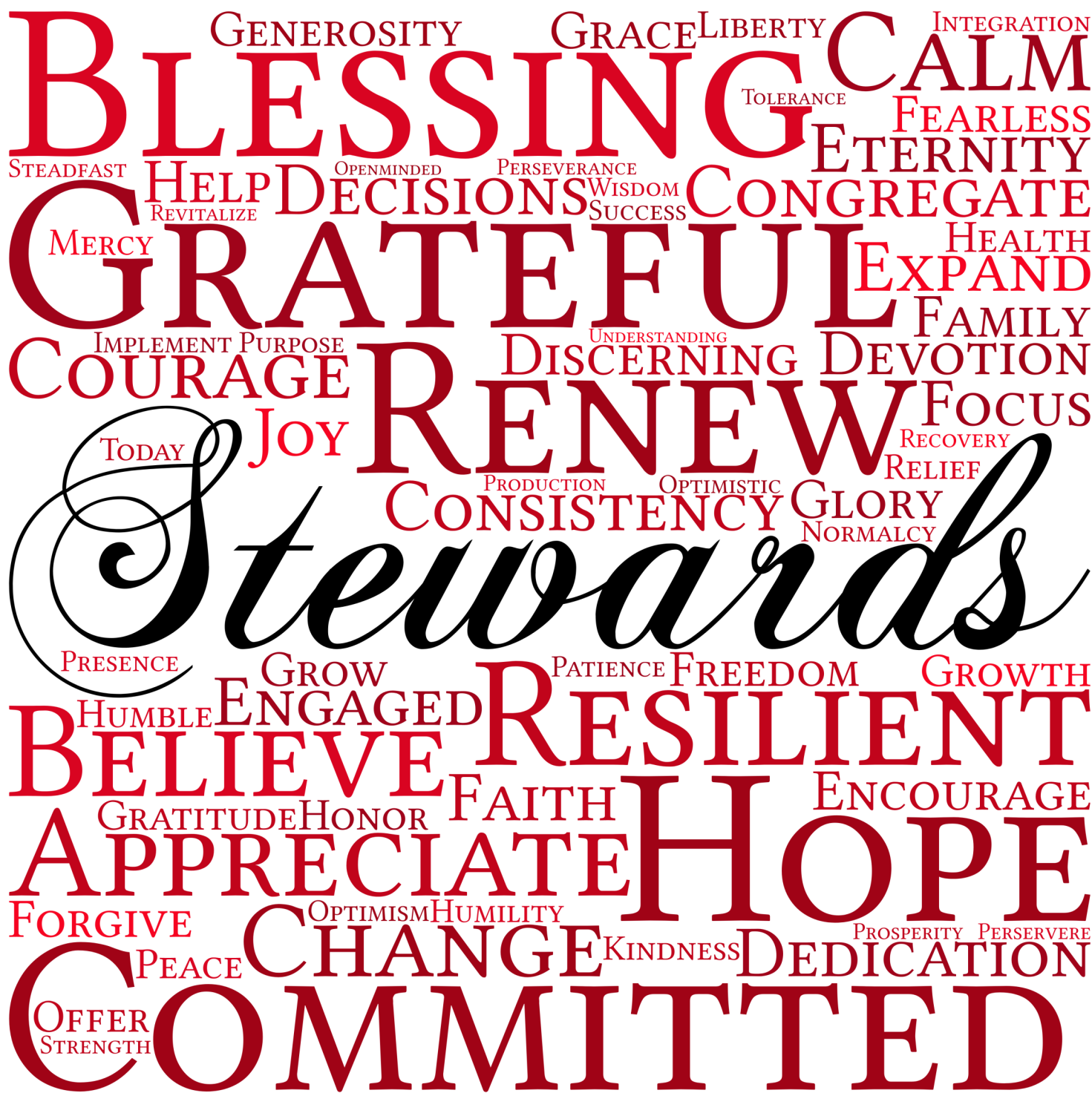
Truly He is Risen!

Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη.

With love in the Risen Christ,
Vasili

This article was possible by the help and editing of Savvas Bournelis.





Our word for our parish for 2022 is “Stewards”. Here are the words that our parishioners chose to mark their year.

Verse of the Year—I Peter 4:10

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

Stewards of God's Grace - Stewards of Your Time

By: Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis

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

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

The most valuable thing we can have is faith. Because faith is eternal. It transcends time. Faith is what will lead us into eternal life. The most valuable thing we have on earth is time. Because time is the only thing we can't get more of. Even if we are sick, we can hope to get better. If we lose money, we can work to get more. But we can't get more time. Now, one might argue that family is the most important thing we have on earth, but what good is family if we don't have time for them? What good is family if you aren't healthy and around to see them. Time is something that once it is lost, we can't get it back.



Recently, we met a family in our church from Greece, whose ten-year-old daughter is very sick. When I asked her father what her life expectancy is, how much time he thinks she has left, he answered with one of the most mature responses that I've ever heard someone say. He said "Father, we are all guests in this life." Wow! That is true, we are all guests. Time is temporary for every one of us. At some point, time will run out on each of our lives. Thus, we need to protect our time and be a good steward of our time.

You can tell a lot about what a person values based on how they spend their time. If we spend two hours a week with God, and we live 80 years, over the course of our life, we will have spent exactly one year with God. If we spend ten hours a week watching sports, we will have spent the equivalent of five years of our lives on sports. If you carefully audit your time, where does it go? How much is wasted on social media versus how much is given to volunteering? How much is spent working, relaxing, sleeping, exercising, praying? Most people spend way too much time on screens. And for the most part, this is wasted time. As an example, I check the news every day. Does a deep dive into news and opinion really affect my life? No, not really. That's why I try to limit it to a cursory glance at a few news stories to know what is going on in the world.

We all need to be careful to guard our time, as it is our most precious commodity. As we get older, time becomes more val-



uable, because it moves more quickly, and we perceive that we have less of it. As I wrote in The Messenger last month, I savored this Holy Week more than usual, knowing that for sure there are more Holy Weeks in the rear-view mirror of my life than over the horizon. Time really should be savored and valued, rather than used frivolously and wasted. It's fine to spend time relaxing, nothing wrong there. But even that time should be savored. Time is a gift, not an entitlement. We feel like we are owed 80 years of life, and when we turn 80 we feel like we are entitled to 90. It's rare that a person feels grateful for life rather than entitled to more life. Ideally we see each day as a gift that God has blessed us with, and we savor each day, and more importantly, we take time each day for God, to thank Him and to be with Him, honoring Him for the time He has given us.

Please pray for the health of Sophie Kovatsef and her family.



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

By Fr. Stavros

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

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

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

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

May 1-7

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John 20:30-31

The Gospels are not an exhaustive document of everything Jesus did. We all know that there are four Gospels. While there are many similarities in the Gospel accounts, there are some significant differences. I heard on a podcast recently that the Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as King, Mark presents Him as servant, Luke presents Him as man, and John presents Him as God. Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because there is a lot of overlap between them. John's Gospel is called the "Theological Gospel" because it presents the highest level of theology of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. For instance, it is in John where we read about Jesus as the "Bread of Life." Regarding Christmas, Matthew tells the story of the Magi, while Luke focuses on the Shepherds. Each Gospel has an account of both the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Luke has the story of the repentant thief, while John has the encounter between Jesus, where He entrusts His mother to His beloved disciple John. Taken together, or even individually, the Gospels speak the truth of the Divinity of Christ. No amount of books could contain every conversation Jesus had over His three-year earthly ministry, nor the impressions of those who heard and saw Him. These are written, as the verse says, so that by hearing and reading, we may believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you (we) may have life in His name."

May 8-14

And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Mother of James, and Salome, brought spices to that they might go and anoint Him.

Mark 16:1

On the second Sunday after Pascha, we commemorate the Myrrh-Bearing women. There were seven women, plus the Virgin Mary, who ministered to Jesus at the time of His death and Resurrection. Three women, we are told in the Gospel account of St. Mark, went to the tomb early in the morning after the Sabbath was past, so that they might anoint the body of Jesus according to the burial rites of the Jewish tradition. These women showed great courage, traveling through a hostile city in the dead of night. Indeed, this was a journey of faith, because they did not know what they would find at the tomb. They didn't know who was going to roll the stone away from

the door of the tomb. Most likely they knew that Roman soldiers were guarding the tomb. But they went anyway. And of course when they arrived, they found the tomb empty and heard from the angel that Christ had risen. The myrrh-bearing women provide us with an example of faith and courage.

May 15-21

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1: 18

The cross, at the time of Jesus, represented the most heinous and humiliating way to die. If someone two thousand years ago, would have said that two thousand years later, people would be adorning their necks with crosses, no one would have believed it. And even now, wearing a cross might bring some ridicule or consternation. Why go to church? Why wear a cross? For those who do not believe, indeed what we believe and what we do might be seen as folly. However, for those who believe, who carry their cross and follow, who adorn themselves with a cross and match it with Christian behavior, we know that the cross is the power of God, the symbol of our salvation, our purpose, our hope and our destiny.

May 22-28

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4: 23-24

The Gospel lesson this week is about the Samaritan woman, who is the first person to spread the news that Jesus is the Christ. His conversation with her is "revolutionary" in that He, a Jew, is talking to not only a woman, but a Samaritan woman, as Jews and Samaritans were enemies. Another revolutionary idea brought forth in this conversation is the idea that worship can be done anywhere. Up until this point, the Jewish people had the notion that God resided in the temple in Jerusalem, that one could only worship in the Jerusalem Temple. In fact, during the years when the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon, there were those who thought that God had died, since the temple had been destroyed. Once they returned and rebuilt the temple, the temple became a place of abuse by the temple priests, a place of commerce rather than a place of worship. Jesus was about to turn the idea of worship only in the temple on its head. We know that we can pray to God anywhere, He is not tied to a specific location. We worship Him as a community in a church, as opposed to a home or outside. But there is nothing that prohibits prayer and even informal worship anywhere.

May 29-June 4

And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24:52-53

This week, we celebrate the Ascension of Christ. This event was both amazing and confusing. It was amazing in that Jesus went up to heaven in great glory. Movies depict a flash of light, we know that the angels spoke to the disciples from the clouds, telling them that Jesus would return. That was probably the confusing part. How did their friend and Lord just leave them? When would He return, and how? Jesus had told them to remain in the city of Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. And so that's what they did, they waited in Jerusalem, with joy, with anticipation, and were blessing God in the temple. We also wait, not in a fatalistic way, like for life to pass so we can get on to heaven. We are supposed to enjoy this life but we are also supposed to make something of our lives, we are supposed to honor God with our lives and with the talents He has given us. And one of the best ways to do this, is to make sure we are continually in the temple (church) blessing (worshipping) God and be strengthened by the sacraments we receive in Church.

May 2022 Sunday School Update

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

We hope your Holy Week and Pascha experience reaffirmed and will continue to strengthen your faith in Christianity. Approximately 50 students actively participated in the many services of Holy Week and Pascha, which made the week even more special. As always our Altar Boys did a fabulous job throughout the many services. Our many Maidens for the Bridegroom Services on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evening were adorable. And our beautiful Myrhh Bearers did a wonderful job during the Good Friday Lamentation Service. We are so proud of all of our students' devotion to our Lord.

It was fabulous to see all of our Sunday School Students participate in the PROCESSION OF THE PALMS on April 17th and learn about Palm Sunday and Holy Week using The Resurrections Eggs. Our other Sunday School topics for the month of April were St. John the Ladder and Faith. Melissa Krinos taught her last lesson of the year with our High School Boys. All of our Sunday School children made and learned about Prosphoro under the direction of Melissa. We can't thank her enough for her dedication to our Sunday School.

THANK YOU ALL for participating and bringing food to the dinner after the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on April 6th. The dinner was followed by the Lenten Learning series on H.A.B.I.T.S. The service was beautiful, the food was delicious, and Father's presentation was inspiring.

We would like to thank the families who attended the Saturday of Lazarus Service on April 16th. We had a beautiful service, nice breakfast, and afterwards our children and parents helped to make over 600 crosses for Palm Sunday.

It was so special to have everyone together for our Holy Friday Retreat on April 22nd. The day was filled with Pascha crafts, learning activities, and worship. We must acknowledge Zackie Ameres for coordinating this event and leading the Ministry of HOPE and JOY. We would also like to thank the many people who helped out with the lessons, crafts, and the luncheon. Our older students assisted our younger ones with the crafts and stations and our teens also wrapped over 500 red eggs for Pascha. Truly we are raising such wonderful STEWARDS of St. John's Greek Orthodox Church.

The 2022 St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival took place after church on April 3rd. CONGRATULATIONS to Ariana Choundas-Thatcher and Kaitlin Zelatis for moving on to the district Festival which was held at St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in New Port Richey on the 10th. GREAT NEWS...Both of these young ladies did so well that they are moving on to the Metropolis finals in Birmingham, Alabama this month. We pray that they will go on to the national St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival.

Our last day of Sunday School, Graduation, and end of the year party is on May 22th. The party will be on the church grounds and we are ordering a bounce house. We are already starting to plan for the next Sunday School year. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH OR ASSIST IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM 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 her at 813-758-3102.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

MAY:

Sun., May 1st: Topic: St. Thomas/Holy Week Highlights

Sun., May 8th: Ascension

Sun., May 15th: Pentecost

Sun., May 22nd: Last Day of Sunday School

Sunday School Graduation Ceremony for all Students

Sunday School and Teachers' Photo taken for Directory

Sunday School End of the Year Party on CAMPUS



St. John The Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Community Outreach

Hello and WELCOME! **On the 3rd Saturday of each month**, we volunteer 2 1/2 hrs of our time to provide for the needy and homeless of our community in East Tampa. We partner with local charity Matthew 25, Metropolitan Ministries and USF Medical School to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

To Volunteer: Click on our Sign Up Genius below. If you forget to sign up, you can still come!

Place: Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave. Tampa East

Time: 8:00 AM to 10:30AM

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 8-9AM, Serving 9-10:15AM, Cleanup 10:15-10:30AM.

Matthew 25 founders Peggy & Mike Kanter, as well as Greg & Victoria Melton, are Go To people if you have questions or need direction on where you may be needed when you arrive.

Below find 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-community1>
(Or use QR code)

Greg Melton 813-967-2074 gmelt12@gmail.com



GOYA Lenten Retreat Group Photo



Congratulations to Ariana & Kaitlin!

(Our very own Ariana Thatcher Choundas & Kaitlin Zelatis moved forward from the District to Metropolis level for the Oratorical Festival)



Greek Independence Day Program

Thank you to Magda Myer & Vasili Panagopoulos for organizing the celebration, St. John's Choir for leading us in the National Anthems, Parish Council for providing lunch, Daughters of Penelope for decorations and dessert, and all those who made this such a wonderful event!



GOYA Lenten Retreat (March 25-27)



Congratulations to our Graduates!

If you have a student who is graduating, please email all information to the church office by Monday, May 16 so we can include graduates in the June/July issue of *The Messenger*! **Please provide:** Name and Picture of the graduate, the institution graduating from, any degree, in the case of a college graduate, and what college the person plans to attend, in the case of the high school graduate.



Youth Protection Program Reminder:

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



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

St. John Stewardship Report 2020-2022

Year to Year Comparison ~	2022*	2021*	2020*
Pledged Year to Date	\$417,379	\$433,353	\$459,170
Received Year to Date	\$245,514	\$197,251	\$240,555
Average Pledge	\$1,531	\$1,494	\$1,358
Median Pledge	\$800	\$774	\$600
# of Individual/Families Pledged/Giving	270	290	338
*YTD as of 4/19/22, 4/9/21, 4/23/20			

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

Here are some special requests we have:

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



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

TWELVE DISCIPLES PROGRAM

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

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

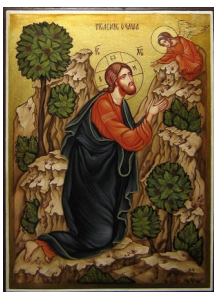
Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, there lived a remarkable and prayerful individual who offered a key prophetic service as he witnessed many visions. His name was Isaiah (Esaiah). He lived and prophesized during the reign of OZIAH (Uzziah), king of Judea, and during the reign of subsequent kings that followed for over 60 years.

Isaiah witnessed the Lord God, surrounded by the six-winged Seraphim as they sang the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with His glory!" that we hear Fr. Stavros and the choir pray during every Divine Liturgy

Isaiah felt real terror upon witnessing this, such that God sent him one of the Seraphim who held tongs holding a red-hot coal plucked from the altar of the Lord and touched it to the mouth of the Prophet*. The angel told Isaiah "this has touched your lips, and will take away your iniquities by cleansing your sins." Isaiah was then directed by the Lord to go to the people to turn them away from sin and idol worship and to seek repentance.



*Please note the mention of the "burning coal" during the Priest's private prayer just prior to Holy Communion.



Of special significance are Isaiah's prophecies that foretold the birth of the Messiah from a virgin, also describing His later horrendous suffering as He assumed the sins of the world upon Himself.

During a siege of Jerusalem, the Jews had become exhausted with thirst. To alleviate their thirst, Isaiah prayed and caused a spring to erupt from beneath Mount Zion, later named "the Spring of Siloam", meaning sent from God. This was the same spring where Jesus later directed the blind man to wash his eyes and have his sight restored.

Later, through the prayer of Prophet Isaiah, the Lord extended the life of King Hezekiah an additional 15 years. Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, a wicked man, had ignored Isaiah's prophecies and shut down the Temple in Jerusalem but later Hezekiah listening to Isaiah, reinstated and rebuilt the Temple into the service of the house of the Lord (II Chronicles 29:36). It was through Isaiah's prayers, influence and the relationship with Hezekiah that prompted Hezekiah to reverse all his father's previous blasphemous work.

The Prophet Isaiah, considered the most eloquent of the Prophets, is commemorated on May 9. He foretold of the Virgin birth and detailed prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, Christ the Savior. The prophet names the Messiah as God and Man, teacher of all the nations, founder of the Kingdom of peace and love. Isaiah fully describes the subsequent suffering of the Messiah for the sins of the world as he foretold of the Messiah's 3-day resurrection and the spreading of His church.

The Kontakion that will be chanted on May 9 to commemorate the Prophet Isaiah is as follows:

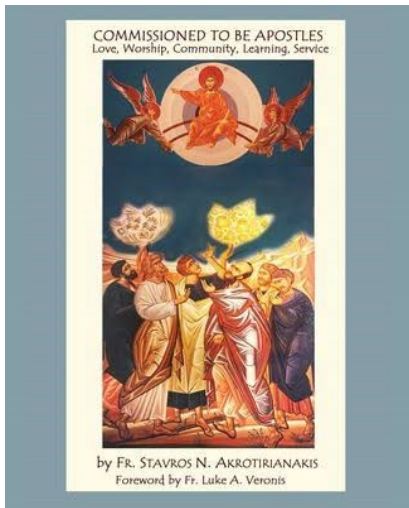
"Having received the gift of prophecy, O Prophet-martyr Isaiah, herald of God, thou didst make clear to all under the sun the Incarnation of God by crying with a great voice: 'Behold the Virgin shall conceive in her womb.'"

Participating in the Twelve Disciples group requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love for your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation (Just as fellow parishioners are also offering daily prayers for you and your family.) There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

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

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

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



JUST RELEASED—Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

Fr. Stavros has a new book out, the sixth that he has published. It was released in March and is now for sale at the bookstore. A disciple is a student. An Apostle is a recruiter, one who actively spreads Christianity. We are commissioned to be apostles, by virtue of the Great Commission that is read over everyone who is baptized. One must be a disciple before one can be an apostle. The last book focused on our call to be disciples. This one focuses on our commission to be apostles. It looks first at the Great Commission and what it means. It includes a section on the Book of Acts and how the church was established, with the hope of getting our modern churches to resemble the early church. The next section talks about what happened at our baptisms. The book discusses the work of the church and our participation in the life of the church. There is a section on bridging the gap between what the church is and what it should be. The final section is on how to transform our church into an even more dynamic and Christ-centered community.

St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

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

Live Streaming

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

To access this page

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



Like



watch at

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

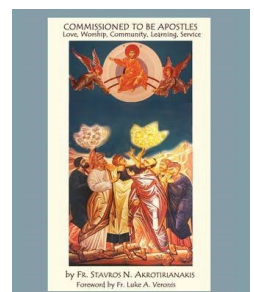
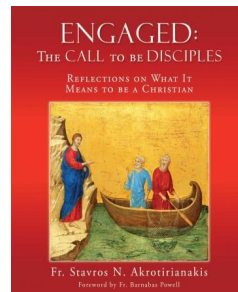
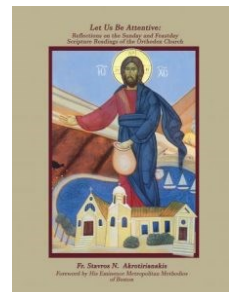
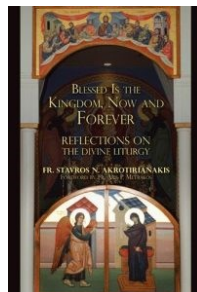
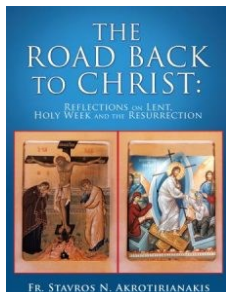
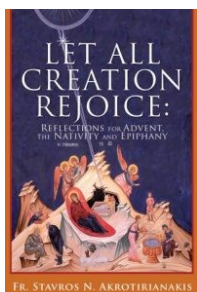
Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 3,600 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email Alex at alex@stjohntpa.org and ask him to add you. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email Alex or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

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

Father Stavros has authored SIX books that are available both in the bookstore and online. They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany
The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection
Blessed is the Kingdom, Now and Forever: Reflections on the Divine Liturgy
Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church
ENGAGED: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian
Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service



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

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

MEETING DATE AND TIME:

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

Birthdays

Dora Morgan 4/27, Jackie Voulgaris 4/8
Adis Choundas 5/19, Mary Voykin 5/7
Mike Trimis 5/24, Suzanne Payne 5/9

New Members

Alexis Delashaw

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

We continue to reach out to those who are homebound due to illness or are in assisted living facilities as part of our Church's fulfillment of the core values of love and community. We contacted Anastasia Smyrnakis, Dora Koudouna, Mary and Peter Nenos, Marina Paris, and Kathy Kapetan

Planned Activities

The **December** meeting was a Lenten pot-luck luncheon and holiday gift exchange at the St John Kourmolis Center. Elections were held and Bill Manikas was chosen to be president and Dora Morgan was re-elected as recording secretary.

The **January** meeting was held at the **Carrabba's Italian Restaurant**. The president passed out a list of potential fieldtrips that we may go on. These potential fieldtrips are in a radius of two hours from Tampa. We welcomed a new member, Frances Spirides.

The **February** luncheon/meeting was held at **Mykonos restaurant** in Tarpon Springs, and

then we went to the Agora and Greek Boys to shop for Lenten Foods. We had a good turn out—18 people.

The **March** meeting was held on Saturday, the 12th, after the service of **Saturday of the Souls** at 10:00 a.m. Afterwards, while in church, Father Stavros led the group in a religious scavenger hunt. It was an exciting way to learn about Orthodoxy. Afterwards we had a Lenten lunch at the Kourmolis Center which was catered by the Evos restaurant. Turnout was very good.

The **April** luncheon/meeting was a potluck luncheon held at the Kourmolis Center, and it was well attended. We watched a video on the Holy Sepulcher. It was a tour conducted by Father Panayiotis.

The Significance of Icons

The scavenger hunt on March 12th made us realize that while we venerate the icons, often we do not see the details in them, nor what they symbolize, or why certain items are portrayed in them. We learned that all details of icons have symbolic meanings based on Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers, traditions and other theological sources. Icons are used primarily within the context of worship.

Because icons are a part of Holy Tradition, the iconographer is not free to adapt or innovate as he pleases; his work must reflect, not his own aesthetic sentiments, but the mind of the Church.

Next time you are in church, before or after a service, try to find the 13 icons John the Baptist is in.

For more information and to get on our email list, contact:

Bill Manikas at wmanikas@gmail.com or 813-716-8185

Dora Morgan at 813-613-3738

St. John's Nursing Ministry

Core Value: Learning

“People don’t fake depression; they fake being okay.” - Robin Williams (1976-2014)

What is depression? Depression is **a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in most everything**. Depression robs people of things they once loved, and many they feel like nothing will bring them joy again. Depression can suck the joy out of life and leave you feeling overwhelmed — in some cases, unable to complete daily functions. Depression is so much more than being sad. Major depressive disorder also called clinical depression, affects how you feel, think, and behave. Depression can lead to emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.

Depression is different from sadness or grief/bereavement

The death of a loved one, loss of a job or the ending of a relationship are difficult experiences for a person to endure. It is normal for feelings of sadness or grief to develop in response to such situations. Those experiencing loss often might describe themselves as being “depressed.” But being sad is not the same as having depression. The grieving process is natural and unique to each individual and shares some of the same features of depression but should not be confused with depression. Both grief and depression may involve intense sadness and withdrawal from usual activities.

Important differences between depression and sadness

In grief, painful feelings come in waves, often intermixed with positive memories of the deceased. In major depression, mood and/or interest (pleasure) are decreased for most of two weeks.

In grief, self-esteem is usually maintained. In major depression, feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing are common.

In grief, thoughts of death may surface when thinking of or fantasizing about “joining” the deceased loved one, for example. In major depression, thoughts are focused on ending one’s life due to feeling worthless or undeserving of living or being unable to cope with the pain of depression.

What Does Depression Look Like?

Negative feelings-persistent negative feelings about self and the world are some of the most common signs and symptoms of depression.

A loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed-As you become increasingly overwhelmed by negative thinking, depression can also cause you to lose interest in activities you once enjoyed. In many ways, depression can make you feel like a deflated balloon: small, worthless, and pur-

poseless. Depression can even make the activities you love most seem less engaging.

Constant fatigue-Depression is often associated with fatigue and a general lack of energy. Medical experts report that more than 90% of people living with depression struggle with fatigue.

Appetite and weight changes-You may not notice the shift at first, but depression can cause gradual appetite and weight changes. Feeling depressed can increase or decrease your appetite.

Unexplained physical pain-Most people tend to think of depression as a medical condition characterized by emotional pain. Even though that’s true, depression can also manifest itself physically.

This means that depression can trigger physical ailments. Some of the most common pain associated with depression includes:

- Nausea
- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Bloating
- Digestive problems
- Joint pain

What it’s like inside a depressed person’s head

While not everyone’s experience is the same, when people have a major depressive episode, generally the world looks, feels, and is understood completely differently than before. During a major depressive episode, the world can literally seem like a dark place. What was beautiful may look ugly, flat, or even sinister. The depressed person may believe loved ones, even their own children, are better off without them. Nothing seems comforting, pleasurable, or worth living for. There’s no apparent hope for things ever feeling better, and history is rewritten and experienced as confirmation that everything has always been miserable, and always will be. Major depression feels like intense pain that can’t be identified in any part of the body. The most pleasant and comforting touch can feel painful to the point of tears. People seem far away—on the other side of a glass bubble. No one seems to understand or care, and people seem insincere. Depression is completely isolating.

There is terrible shame that depression dictates. Everything seems meaningless, including previous

Continued...

accomplishments and what had given life meaning. Anything that had given the person a sense of value or self-esteem vanishes. These assets or accomplishments no longer matter, no longer seem genuine, or are overshadowed by negative self-images. Anything that ever caused the person to feel shame, guilt, or regret grows to take up most of his or her head space. This causes the person to feel irredeemably unlovable, and sure everyone has abandoned or will abandon him or her. It's difficult to describe all of this in a way that someone who's never experienced it can make sense of it. I can't emphasize enough that when this happens, what I am describing is absolutely the depressed person's reality. When people try to get the person to look on the bright side, to be grateful, change his or her thoughts, minimize, or try to disprove the person's reality, they are very unlikely to succeed. Instead, they and the depressed person are likely to feel frustrated and alienated from one another.

What should you do if you think you are depressed or if you notice a family member is depressed?

Do not stay silent. **Depression will not "go away" without treatment, it only gets worse.** Make an appointment with your primary care doctor, he/she can prescribe medications to relieve symptoms.

Medications and psychotherapy are very effective for most people with depression.

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program offered to our church community in collaboration with **BayCare Behavioral Health**.

The Parish Assistance Program utilizes a network is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL.

Parishioners can contact BayCare to request up to three free and confidential counseling sessions by a licensed mental health professional.

The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7.

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

Untreated depression can cause serious complications that include other health related conditions like heart disease, cancer, insomnia, and even suicidal tendencies.

Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255

Marcelle Triantafilou,

An Exhortation from St. John of Dalyatha

Hold Him in your arms like Mary His mother.
Enter with the Magi and offer your gifts.
Proclaim His birth with the shepherds.
Proclaim His praise with the angels.
Carry Him in your arms like Simeon the Elder.
Take Him with Joseph down to Egypt.
When He goes to play with little children run up to Him and kiss him.
Inhale the sweet savor of His body, the body that gives life to every body.
Follow the early years of His childhood in all its stages, for this infuses His love into your soul.
Cleave to Him: your mortal body will be scented with the spice of the life in His immortal body.
Sit with Him in the temple and listen to the words coming from His mouth while the astonished teachers listen.
When He asks, when He answers, listen and marvel at His wisdom.
Stand there at the Jordan and greet Him with John.
Wonder at His humility when you see Him bow His head to John to be baptized.
Go out with Him to the desert and ascend the mount.
Sit there at His feet in silence with the wild beasts that sought the company of their Lord.
Stand up there with Him to learn how to fight the good fight against your enemies.
Stand at the well with the Samaritan woman to learn worship in spirit and truth.
Roll the stone from the tomb of Lazarus to know the resurrection from the dead.
Stand with the multitude, take your share of the five loaves and know the blessings of prayer.
Go, wake Him up who is asleep at the stern of your boat when the waves beat into it.
Weep with Mary, wash His feet with your tears to hear His words of comfort.
Lay your head on His breast with John, hear His heart throbbing with love for the world.
For yourself a morsel of the bread He blessed during supper to be one with His body and confirmed in Him forever.
Rise, do not keep your feet away that He may wash them from the impurity of sin.
Go out with Him to the Mount of Olives.
Learn from Him how to bend your knees and pray until the sweat pours down.
Rise, meet your cursers and crucifiers, surrender your hands to the bonds, do not keep your face away from the slapping and spitting.
Strip your back to be lashed.
Rise, my friend, do not fall to the ground, bear your cross, for it is time for departure.
Stretch your arms with Him and do not keep your feet from the nails.
Taste with him the bitterness of gall.
Rise early while it is still dark.
Go to his tomb to see the glorious Resurrection.
Sit in the upper room and wait for His coming while the doors are closed.
Open your ears to hear the words of peace from His mouth.
Make haste and go to lonely place.
Bow your head to receive the last blessing before He ascends.

+St. John of Dalyatha



Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

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

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

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

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

Help is available for life issues including:

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



BayCare Behavioral Health

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

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

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

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

Thank you for your consideration of our parish.

Friend of St. John the Baptist:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

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

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

Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards

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

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



Fr. Stavros
 <813-394-1038



Fr. John
 678-637-4425 >



Vasili
 414-254-5134>



Alex
 <262-370-0586

Opt-in on *The Messenger* -

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

Happy Birthday!

Gianna Fotopoulos - May 1

George Ciampolilo - May 2

Stefan Katzaras - May 2

Ethel Athena Chakonas - May 4

Anastasios Damianakis - May 4

Diana Mamero - May 4

Fabio Cara - May 5

Basileios Roussos - May 5

Abigail Mueller - May 6

Athena Katzaras - May 7

Corinna Robinson - May 7

Peter Zeban - May 7

Suzanne Payne - May 9

Alexis Yohai - May 9

Isadora Panopoulos - May 10

Christos Nenos - May 11

Debra Passavanti - May 13

Carlee Calamunci - May 14

Caroline Corcoran - May 14

Alexander Findlay - May 15

McAyden Krajacic - May 15

Elizabeth Mueller - May 15

David Voykin - May 15

Kaliop Skourellos - May 16

Jennifer Alastanos - May 17

Nathan Moran - May 17

Edith Mitchell - May 18

Christina Murnaghan - May 18

Dimitri Tsetsekas - May 18

Christian Corcoran - May 19

Athanasios Halkias - May 19

Alexander Demetriou - May 20

Ellie Langas - May 20

Naya Saliba - May 20

Kara Katzaras - May 21

John Kladis - May 21

Ty James Parker - May 21

Lydia Pierrotsakos - May 21

Ariana Choundas Thatcher - May 22

Jacqueline Freeman - May 22

Evan Kremydas - May 22

Alexandra Laliotis - May 22

Alexis Mulberry - May 23

Cheryl Apostolos - May 24

Markos Mangarides - May 24

Michael Trimis - May 24

Oliver Calamunci - May 25

Hannah Passalaris - May 26

Nomiki Patellis - May 26

Michael Sandborn - May 26

Daniel LeMay - May 27

Aris Kolilias - May 28

Daphne Setzer-Torres - May 28

Olivia Axelrod - May 29

Franco Capitano - May 29

Peter George - May 29

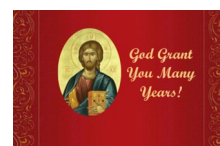
Maria Nicklow - May 29

Crystal Calamunci - May 30

Elisa Mitseas - May 30

Paul Jacobsen - May 31

Maria Pavlidis Levine - May 31



Memorial & Kolyva Protocol

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

Χρόνια Πολλά! Happy Nameday!

May 1
FILOSOFOF, ISIDORA, JEREMIA, TAMARA

May 4
IRINI, MARKOS, MELIA, NIKOS, RAPHAEL

May 5
EFRAIM, EIRINAIOS, IRINI, THEOHARIS,

May 6
IOV, SERAPHIM

May 7
KRINI, PANAGIOTIS, PIGI, POLYZOIS, ZISIMOS, ZISIS, ZOE

May 8
MELIOS, THEOLOGOS

May 9
CHRISTOPHER, ESSAIAS

May 10
SIMON

May 11
ARGYRIS, ARMODIOS, DIOSKOURIDIS, METHODIOS, OLYMPIA

May 12
EPIFANEIOS, THEODOROS

May 13
GLYKERIA

May 14
ARISTOTELE, ISIDOROS, THERAPON

May 15
ACHILLIOS, KALI, PAHOMIOS

May 17
ADRONIKOS, JUNIA, SOLON

May 18
FAEINI, GALATEIA, JULIA

May 19
MAGDALINI, MARYLENA, MENANDROS, PATRICK, THEOGNOSTOS, THEOKTISTOS

May 20
LEEDA, LIDIA, LITO,

May 21
CONSTANTIN, CONSTANTINA, HELEN, NANTIA

May 22
EMILIOS, KODROS

May 23
BATHSHEBA

May 24
CHRISTIAN, MARKIANI, PALLADIA, PHOTINI

May 26
KARPOS, SINESIOS

May 27
ALYPIOS, IOANNIS ROSSOS

May 28
DIMITRIOS, DIOSKOURIDIS

May 29
IPOMONI, OLIVIANOS, THEODOSIA

May 30
EMMELEIA

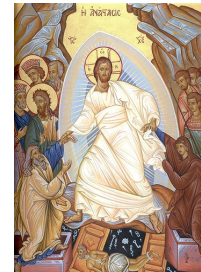
May 31
ERMEIAS, MAGOS



Veterans / 1st Responders Ministry Update!

- We were honored to have 14 members attend our initial Veterans and First Responders Ministry Meeting at the CASK Restaurant in Tampa last month. Thanks to everyone who shared their ideas and excellent suggestions which we plan to implement in the future.
- The purpose of the ministry includes the following: (1) to recognize and honor Veterans (Active and Retired) and First Responders; (2) to support local and national organizations for these people; and (3) to offer our time and talents in the local community.
- Plans were discussed for Memorial Day and Veterans Day along with inviting guest speakers to our future meetings for current updates.
- A Steering Committee was also selected to spearhead and coordinate the initial plans and programs.
- Our next meeting will be held in early May. If you would like support and join our ministry team, please let contact the church office or Father John directly.

St. John's Bookstore



Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

*Having risen from the grave, as He foretold,
He has given us Eternal Life and the Great Mercy. (The Resurrection Ode)*

With gratitude for your support and with prayers for God's blessings in this Holy Season of Pascha!

Presvytera Denise and Your Bookstore Ministry

How to Trust God, Even in Difficult Times

Brittany Yesudasan



Life is not predictable. There are ups and downs along the way. Many of us want to trust God. When times are good, it can feel easier. But when times feel difficult, it is even more important to trust God. God's unchanging character can give us a firm foundation when things feel unsteady and uncertain.

Life can be going along smoothly for a season. Your job is satisfying. Your friends and family are enjoyable. Your goals, finances, health and outlook seem bright. Then, all of a sudden, life throws a curveball. Someone you know gets sick. You lose your job. A friend or family member betrays you. The things you felt secure in all of a sudden feel shaky and uncertain.

How do you trust that God is good in these circumstances? How do you trust Him when you do not understand what is happening? When you cannot see a resolution? These are valid questions, and God wants to help you navigate them.

What Does It Mean to Trust God?

To trust is to believe in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of something. So, when it comes to trusting God, that means believing in His reliability, His Word, His ability and His strength. The Bible says that God cannot lie. That He always keeps His promises. That He loves you and has good in store for you. Trusting in Him means believing what He says about Himself, about the world and about you is true.

Trusting God is more than a feeling; it's a choice to have faith in what He says even when your feelings or circumstances would have you believe something different. Your feelings and circumstances matter and are very much worth paying attention to. God cares about them both. But those things alone are not reliable enough to base your life on. They can change at any moment, even in an instant. God, on the other hand, does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and therefore is worthy of your trust.

Trusting God is not about ignoring your feelings or reali-

ty. It is not pretending that everything is OK when it isn't. Trusting God is living a life of belief in and obedience to God even when it's difficult.

How to Trust God

Now that you know what it means to trust God, how exactly can you do that in your everyday life?

If you trust someone, you feel comfortable being honest with them about anything. God is much more reliable than even your most trustworthy friend. When things feel difficult, He doesn't ask you to keep those feelings to yourself.

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7, New International Version)
You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in Your book. (Psalm 56:8, New Living Translation)

Because God loves you, you can show your trust in Him by talking about all your feelings and circumstances with Him — the good and hard — through prayer. Don't let your emotions rule your life; bring them to God so He can help you address them. He is not disappointed or frustrated by your struggles, doubts or pain. He cares about you, and you can trust Him with those things.

When you trust, you go to God and His word when life is hard. You also act on obedience (doing what God says in His Word) and trust that He will ultimately take care of the rest. In trust, you do not look for security in other things; you look to God to hold you securely in difficult circumstances. You won't do this perfectly, but God is kind and patient with you while you learn to trust Him.

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” He said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. “Abba, Father,” He said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.” (Mark 14:34-36, NIV)

Jesus Himself felt overwhelmed by what was before Him, and He went straight to His Father.

He cares for your hurts. He pays attention. How comforting it is to know that the God of the universe is also paying attention to you. Knowing that God is for you will strengthen your trust in Him during times of hardship and the unknown.

Here are seven practical ways to trust God in your everyday life:

Continued...



1. Seek Truth in Scripture

Scripture, or the Bible, is God's Word. God knows you need somewhere to go when you feel unsure. That place is His Word. It is unchanging and completely trustworthy. The Bible records ways God has responded in difficult times in the past. It reminds you that He is trustworthy whatever your circumstances. Many people in Scripture even reference other parts of Scripture to encourage themselves and those around them.

The truth of Scripture frees you from the expectations of earning your salvation (John 8:32). It also frees you from the unrealistic scenarios that you run to in worry. If you don't run to the Word to remind you of truth in difficult times, it is easier for you to be led into lies about your life and who God is.

You need a strong foundation of Scripture to stand on, especially when you feel uncertain. The Bible is God's unfailing, unchanging Word. You can cling to its truth when life throws you a curveball.

2. Confess Unbelief

Be honest. Allow God to remind you who He is and what He promises, and then be honest with Him. You can tell God how you feel and in what areas of your life you are struggling to trust Him.

First, it is good to acknowledge that His character is good and trustworthy. You can agree with Him that all He says is true. You can also tell Him when it's difficult for you to believe.

According to Mark 9, a man brought his son to Jesus for healing from being possessed by a demon. He asked Jesus to heal him "if you can." Jesus asked the man if he did not believe that Jesus could heal, and this was his reply.

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24, NIV)

He believed, but it was a difficult thing to believe. So He asked for help.

It is one thing to know the truth. But it is sometimes hard to believe it when life takes unexpected turns. You're human. You're able to confess to God when your feelings and beliefs are not lining up with His Truth. You can ask Him to help you believe what He says is true.

This helps you accept that God is bigger than you could ever understand. Confession helps you to humble yourself

and allows you to grow in trust. He hears your requests and answers them. He wants to help you grow your faith.

3. Share Your Concerns With Your Community

You are not facing these difficult times alone. The Lord is walking with you every step of the way. He also gives you other believers to walk with.

Paul was a follower of Jesus and a leader in the early church. He shared this with a fellow believer as encouragement.

I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. (Philemon 1:6, NIV)

Paul reminded his friend that partnership is important and helps us have a greater understanding of God and His plan.

When you are struggling, share those concerns with another follower of Jesus whom you trust — someone you know is pursuing a relationship with God regularly and who knows God's Word. You do not have to share struggles with everyone, but find those people who will encourage you and share the truth with you — not just tell you what you want to hear.

Fellow believers can remind you of God's character through encouragement and accountability. They can pray for and support you. They can remind you of the truth when you're struggling. Community reminds you that you are never alone, even in hard times.

4. Remember God and Spend Time With Him

God is bigger than your circumstances. Difficult times may feel like they last forever, but they are temporary. God is present amid the bad times as well as the good. He is always faithful.

God wants you to go to Him with your circumstances. He also wants you to come to Him simply to spend time with Him. You should not let your circumstances shape your relationship with God. God can shape your view of your circumstances.

Spend regular time with God. Establishing a consistent time with the Lord when things feel good will help you to continue to go to Him when things feel rough. If you have not established that, it is never too late to start.

Read His Word. Spend time in prayer acknowledging who He is. Meet with other believers and set your eyes on things that are bigger than your circumstances. Serve those around you. These simple practices will help you see God outside of difficult things, which will establish trust in your heart that He will move in your circumstances.

5. Look for Things to Be Grateful For

Difficult circumstances feel all-consuming at times. It is really hard to see past them to other good things going on. But God's grace is in all things. In your waking up. In a sunny day. In a call from a friend. He is in all of it. But those good times often get over-

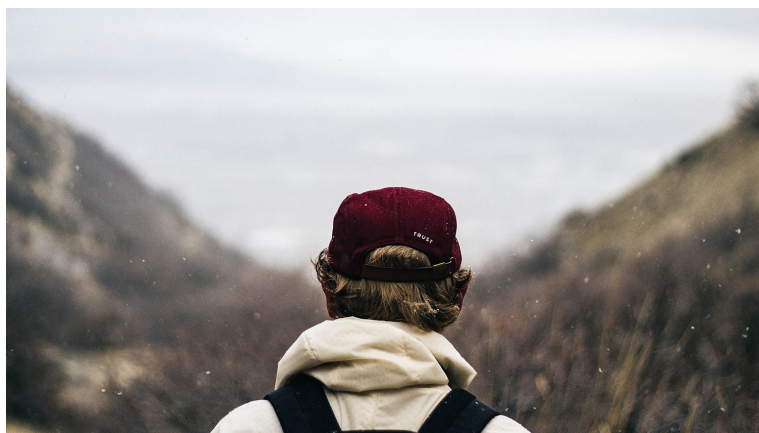
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shadowed by other more complicated things going on. In the face of those difficulties, God shares His will for you and how you should respond to them.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)

God calls you to give thanks. He is always working in your life and in the world. In the moments when everything appears to be falling apart, it can be hard to see how the Good Father is at work, but know His mercy is consistent.

Giving thanks fights the lie that everything is horrible. Even in tragic circumstances, there will be light and grace. God is present and is making Himself known. You need only to look. Trust grows as you look for God's presence in what feels dark and heavy. He never leaves.



6. Walk in the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit lives in anyone who trusts in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is your constant helper, pointing you to Jesus. When Jesus was telling His followers that He was going to be killed, He knew that they would be worried. They would feel scared about being left alone. So He shared this with them to give them comfort.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26, NIV)

The Spirit comforts and reminds you of the truth. The Spirit will also lead you in obedience. He will bring direction to you.

A common struggle in difficult times is feelings of helplessness and worry about an unknown future. The leading of the Spirit can ease struggles by guiding you to acts of obedience. He does not always give you the big picture, but He will show you the next step.

Walking closely with the Spirit will not only give you direction but will remind you that you are not alone. God is not distant. He is with you in difficulty. He is making a way for you.

Go to "How Do I Hear God's Voice?" to learn more about how to follow the Spirit's leading.

7. Wait on the Lord

The Holy Spirit will lead you to what you should do. Sometimes what you need to do is wait. Faithfully continue to seek the Lord, but wait on His timing. Wait on Him to act on your behalf. Wait on Him to do what you cannot do yourself.

In the book of Isaiah, God responds to the Israelites who thought that God had turned away from them. He reminds them that He does not sleep or take a break. He always sees them and is always working for their good.

They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31, English Standard Version)

He will help you wait with endurance. Waiting on the Lord reminds you that you are not in control. Thank goodness! He is bigger than any of your circumstances. He will sustain you and grow your faith in the waiting.

God is never neglecting your life. If He seems to be silent, remember His promise that He is always hearing your prayers and responding.

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. (Psalm 34:17, ESV)

When Trust Falters

God is trustworthy even when you don't see your prayers answered or problems solved right away. Life is unpredictable and difficult at times, and that difficulty may persist for longer than you had hoped. It may even bring you to the end of your strength. So, what do you do then?

Wait, trust and remember that God loves you. You can trust Him to sustain you, provide for you and be with you even in the midst of your hardship. Jesus guaranteed His followers that they would face hard times (John 16:33), but He promised that He would always be with them (Matthew 28:20).

God is completely trustworthy, but He does not ask you to trust Him blindly. He wants you to learn to trust Him as you get to know Him. You can get to know God through personal time with Him and through His Word. Spend time exploring aspects of His trustworthiness in verses of Scripture.

In the book of Romans, one of the early followers of Jesus, Paul, writes to believers about the present life. He reminds them that this life will have hardship and that our bodies will fail, but God is still working for our good.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV)

In times of doubt, remember His promises. Remember who He has always been. Even in doubt and uncertainty, if you keep going to Him, He will continually show Himself to be trustworthy.

May 2022							Jun 2022 ►
◀ Apr 2022	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Men's Group 5:00 p.m.	2 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	3 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	4 **	5 St. Irene Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	6 **	7 Young at Heart @ 11:30 a.m.	
8 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	9 Ministry Heads Meeting 6:30 p.m.	10 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m. Fr. John Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	11 **	12 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	13 **	14	
15 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m.	16 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	17 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	18 **	19 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	20	21 ** Sts. Constantine and Helen Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Community Outreach	
22 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Philoptochos Meeting-Zaharias Room Last Day of Sunday School, Party on Campus	23 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	24 Women's Bible Study 10:00 a.m.	25 **	26 Adult Greek School 6:00-8:30 p.m.	27 **	28	
29 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	30 Memorial Day Office Closed	31 Leave-Taking of Pascha Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	** Fast Day				

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St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

Timetable of Services

Saturdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m.

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m.

Divine Liturgy: 10:00 a.m.

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Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero
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Bessie Palios, 813-523-0347
Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963
IIAPEA, Marina Choundas 813-877-6136
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Daughters of Penelope
Diane Trimis 813-220-3389

Festival
Mike Xenick 813-340-8737

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Sheila Vukmer 412-719-1005

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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.