

Summer 2016

Jacob's Well

Proclaiming Christ to Those
in Search of the Unknown God



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*"Give me this water,
that I may not thirst . . ."*
John 4:15

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Searching, Finding, and Being Found

by Fr. John Shimchick

“What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

(St. Paul to the Athenians at the Areopagus: Acts 17:23)

Often while shopping I am startled by the sense that besides whatever it is I think I’m looking for, there is something that is trying to get my attention, trying to find me. Rarely is it completely unimaginable, rather it is usually an object that expresses or puts into words what I’ve already in some way known or wanted. G.K. Chesterton imagined “an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas.” He describes how he was such a person, and his book, *Orthodoxy*, “recounts [his] elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious.” A plaque in an antique store confirmed as well that: “We travel the world over in search of what we need and return home to find it” (George Moore).

Within this issue, we are exploring the insight of James Emery White, in *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*, that “the most significant shift of missional paradigms has taken place in our day: we have moved from an Acts 2 missional context to an Acts 17 missional context.” Within Acts 2, the Apostle Peter was speaking to those who at least believed in a monotheistic God, had an understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, and anticipated a coming Messiah. St. Paul, as recounted in Acts 17, observed at the Areopagus in Athens a “spiritual marketplace, where truth was relative, worldviews and gods scattered around the landscape.” The people, in their own way, were so open in their pursuit of religious experience that they even had an altar for “the unknown god.”

How does Jesus Christ as manifested within the life of the Church satisfy the deepest needs and desires of those who don’t recognize, think they need Him, or realize that He is actually looking for them? Archbishop Michael explains that the Church reveals this through a series of encounters. Deacon Evan Freeman shows how Jesus Christ is presented and can be known within a church’s iconographic plan. Brother Christopher, Prior of New Skete, explores the valuable formation of a holistic community life. Nicholas Samaras

examines how the poetic search for the right words can bring us into a relationship with the Word itself. *An Anaphora for Those Who are Searching* tries to lift up the common experience of what T.S. Eliot called the “permanent things” – the reality of a love that is formational, the brokenness of life that is complicated and painful, but finally also capable of being healed and renewed.

We recognize the 60th Anniversary of the marriage and joint ministry of Fr. Sergius and Faith Kuharsky and the designation of the Order of Saint Romanos Award to Maestro Aleksei Shipovalnikov. We celebrate the opening of the Mother of God Church in Princeton, the 100th Anniversary of SS. Peter and Paul Church in Manville, NJ, and are encouraged by the revitalization of St. Innocent’s Mission in Oneonta, NY. We feature several youth and parish activities. Deacon Alexander Smida, from Annunciation Church, Brick, NJ, describes his community’s efforts – following the theme of last year’s AAC – to “expand the mission in the Jersey Shore area.” We present both the historical examination of Fr. John Jillions into the life of our Church at the time of the Russian Revolution as noted within *The Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, edited by Fr. Leonid Turkevich, and Matushka Tamara Skvir’s reflection of Fr. Turkevich, her grandfather, who in 1950 was elected as Metropolitan Leonty. As we move to a new financial model for funding the OCA and our Diocese, we feature an article by Matushka Mary Buletza Breton, our Diocesan Treasurer.

“The greatest thing that happens between God and the human soul,” according to Kallistos Kataphygiotis, “is to love and to be loved.” Perhaps these are what the search and the experience of home are all about for each person wherever they are on the journey of faith – rediscovering the possibilities of loving and being loved, of knowing and being known, of searching and being found. Reduced to its basics and essentials, these indeed are everything that Jesus Christ – for many still the “unknown God” – offers to us and to all who are searching. ❖

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How We Can Encounter Christ *by Archbishop Michael*

In our technologically driven age of Facebook, e-mails and texting, it is very easy to lose sight of the Living Presence of our Risen Lord and Savior in our personal, everyday lives. It is difficult enough to communicate with others on a personal level; so many young people are “friends” with individuals they have never even met! How much more do we need to encounter the friendship of the Incarnate Son of God!

Yet our Holy Orthodox Church provides us with three incredible opportunities to meet Jesus Christ in our everyday lives. First, we can encounter Him in His word – in the pages of the Holy Gospel – together with the other expressions of the Tradition of our Faith, which is “the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church.” Second, we can meet the Risen Lord in the Holy Mysteries, especially the Sacraments of Confession, Unction, and Holy Communion. And finally, we can encounter Christ in our loving service to those in need – “the least of the brethren.”

Obedying His Word

The word that God speaks to us in Christ is not simply another word among many, but His eternal Word. So how do we come to meet, and know, and be affected by the Word of God? The story of the call of Simon the fisherman can help us in this instance; for in this account (Luke 5:1-11), Peter encounters Jesus in His word.

Saint Luke records the crowd pressing all around Christ, listening to His preaching. Our Lord gets into Peter’s fishing boat and has him pull a short way from the shore. Then, after He finishes teaching the crowds, Jesus says to Peter, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

Now, the disciples had been fishing all night without catching a thing – because they had been too close to shore. Peter must have been exhausted from a full night of fruitless effort. Still, he decided to obey Christ’s word, to take a chance and put out into the deep, despite his fatigue and the jeers of his friends – and the result was the largest catch of all.

“Put out into the deep”: Too many of us skim the surface of life, hugging the shore. If we really want to live, we must launch out into the deep. God’s kingdom is not to be reached by living on the surface. God is in the depths. To reach Him

we must break through the surface and penetrate the deep things of ourselves, of our world, and of God. We must ask the deep questions: What is the meaning of my life? Where did I come from? Where am I going?

In this account of Luke, Jesus was forming Peter to be an apostle, an evangelist, a leader of the Church. He was helping Peter realize that obeying the word of God can lead to surprising successes. They caught so great a haul of fish that their nets were about to break! But most important, this dramatic encounter changed Peter – he repented of his sins, and followed Christ. The fisherman became a “fisher of men”!

It must also be so with us. We must obey the Word of God and be willing to take risks. This formula worked not only for St. Peter in this case, but also in the account of the storm, when Jesus came to the apostles, walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33). Bidden by the Lord to walk on the water as well, Peter obeyed Christ’s word, and took the risk. As long as Peter focused on Jesus and His word, he was able to walk on the sea; but once he took his eyes off the Lord, and listened instead to the howling of the wind and the churning of the waters, then Peter began to sink.

Obedying the Word and taking risks also worked for the centurion whose servant was gravely ill (Matthew 8:5-13). Jesus offered to come and heal him. But the centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” He knew the power of Christ’s word; because of his belief, without Jesus coming to his home, his servant was healed in that very hour.

And, of course, we can cite the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44). Although Lazarus was already dead for four days, buried in a tomb, and decaying ... against these odds ... at Christ’s word, “Take away the stone,” they removed the boulder from the cave. And again, at Jesus’ words, “Lazarus, come forth!”, he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and

his face wrapped with a cloth. They loosed him, and Jesus gave him to his sisters, alive and well.

In these instances we can see the life-changing power of God's holy word. Likewise, Christ is in the boats of our lives, and His word encourages us to go out into the deep. Sometimes precisely when we seem to grow tired of leading the Christian life and following the moral laws of the Lord and His Church, these are the moments when we ought to order our lives in obedience to our Savior. In such situations, His promise awaits us, precisely because we listened and acted upon His word ... and we will encounter the Living Son of God joyfully and ever anew, and become, like Peter, changed people, who leave everything behind, to follow and serve Christ.

Receiving the Mysteries

We can also encounter the Risen Lord in the Holy Mysteries of the Church, the Sacraments of our Faith. They are the special means for us to experience the True God in the very core of our being, opening us to a living relationship with the Holy Trinity – the One God in Three Persons. This is especially true of the Mysteries of Confession, Holy Communion, and Holy Unction – which are available to us as often as needed in our sin-stained, struggling, and weakened spiritual lives.

Perhaps no better Gospel passage than the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) gives us a Scriptural basis for the sacrament of forgiveness – an encounter, in our day, with the Divine Physician. Saint Mark describes the remarkable scene: Jesus is preaching a sermon in a house, when suddenly, debris showers down on His listeners, as a huge hole in the terraced roof opens, and a stretcher with a man strapped upon it is lowered to Jesus' feet. A bold and persistent quartet is determined to bring this paralyzed person to the Lord for physical healing.

What happens, though, is not what they expected. Without questioning the paralytic about his health or the state of his soul, Jesus says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." What was planned by these four men – the physical healing of their friend – turned into the healing of his sinful soul. Not until later in the account does Christ, challenged by the scribes on his claim to forgive sins, does Our Lord turn to the paralytic and say, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

What the Gospel presents is Jesus' priority: He forgives the paralytic's sins and then heals his physical paralysis. We are challenged to see sin as spiritual paralysis, which (like physical paralysis) cannot be healed without the help of someone else. A skilled doctor, and a team of attendants, can heal a sick man. In this case, the friends bring the paralyzed man to a healing father who is able to diagnose and heal the underlying cause, the spiritual malady – the malady of sin.

This same healing ministry of Jesus continues in the Church today. We call it the Sacrament of Confession. It is a centuries-old citadel of healing and forgiveness. When we come to this holy Mystery, we think of the paralytic at Capernaum. Each of us, at some point in life, lies paralyzed and in need of healing. We need a change of heart – metanoia – a movement from our life of sin toward the forgiving Lord.

And each time we go to Confession, we receive the same forgiveness that the paralytic received – and not only him, but also the woman who had been caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), Peter who had denied Christ three times (John 21:15-19), and the thief on the cross, who after a lifetime of robbery was promised Paradise for a moment of repentance (Luke 23:39-43).

The Mystery of Repentance is a truly a personal encounter with Christ, the same Christ who spent so much of His earthly life healing others and forgiving sins. We cannot fax a list of sins, or send them by e-mail or deliver them by Federal Express. Rather, the person has an individual encounter with Christ, through the instrument of his confessor – it includes a realization of sin, a change of heart, the confession of transgressions, and the intention to amend one's life to Christ's way. Could there be a more personal encounter with the crucified, forgiving and healing Savior?

Not only can we encounter Christ in Confession, but also through the Mystery of Holy Unction. Whenever we are healed from injuries or illnesses, through the anointing with the holy oil of Unction – as I was after a car accident many years ago, in which I was left hospitalized in a coma for three months – it is by the same power of Christ that healed the woman with the bent-over back (Luke 13:10-17), or the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years (John 5:1-15), or the man who had been born blind (John 9:1-38).

And likewise, through the Mystery of Holy Communion: In it we receive the same Body and Blood of our Loving Savior that Andrew, Peter, James and John and the other apostles received at the Mystical Supper on Holy Thursday evening. In it we receive “the Living Bread which has come down from heaven.” For Christ said with His precious lips, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him” (John 6:54-56).

Forgiveness, Healing, and Communion – these are divine prerogatives and priorities. They are experiences of freeing, restoring, and reconciling; by them we experience Christ’s love, a new beginning. As the paralyzed man was healed, each of us is healed, and forgiven, and reunited with God as Christ continues His healing ministry in our day, each and every time we seek to encounter Him in the Holy Mysteries.

Extending Charity

Thirdly, we encounter Christ in our works of charity, founded on the love of God. As we imitate the love of Christ for others, we experience Him within us and in the persons that we help. This dynamic is especially clear in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

We are all familiar with this story. As a man travels from Jerusalem to Jericho, he falls victim to robbers who leave him, stripped and beaten, along the road. A priest and a Levite both come upon him, but pass him by on the other side of the road. The Samaritan who comes upon him, however, is moved with compassion, and goes to great lengths to assist the man. Jesus asks the question, “Which of the three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” The lawyer responded, “He who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.”

There are actually two neighbors in this passage – the person who acted with mercy, and the person in need of that mercy. In the deepest sense, but in a subtle way, the neighbor is the Lord Jesus in both persons. In every act of charity, we encounter Christ in ourselves and in the other person. The Samaritan was the least likely to be considered a neighbor in the parable, but he was identified as such. Like the Samaritan, each one of us – a follower of Christ – is called to be a neighbor to others, cultivating a sensitivity of heart

that reaches out and bears witness in countless, practical ways.

But Christ is also “the image of the invisible God,” crying out from the man who lies stripped and half-dead on the roadside. Christ is the member of our family in trouble, or the neighbor next door who has no one to turn to. In that person, we see the face of Christ and we encounter Him. In the Last Judgment scene in Matthew’s Gospel, Our Lord says, “Amen, amen I say to you, whatever you did for the one of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40). Christ identifies Himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, immigrants, in prison, sick, homeless – all those on the fringes of society.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is not our only inspiration to do works of charity. Christ Himself offers us other examples: His concern for the hungry, and the Feeding of the Five Thousand (the only miracle in all four Gospels – Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14); His visiting of the sick, Peter’s mother-in-law, whose fever he cured (Mark 1:29-34), and His visiting the imprisoned and ostracized, the ten lepers, whom He also healed (Luke 17:11-19).

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem represents a world of neighbors – a world of people in need, whose true face, once uncovered, is the face of Christ Himself. This is humanity, inviting us to meet Christ and be changed by Him. As we actively and concretely try to “go and do likewise,” we will also unexpectedly encounter a neighbor, a good friend, named Jesus, Who lives both within us and in the person who receives our charity and our love.

Guiding Principles

Besides and beyond ourselves and our parishes, in opening our hearts, our homes, our churches, to others, and encouraging them to encounter Christ in our midst, we must remember a few basic principles which the Gospels present us as guidelines:

1. We must accept people as they are: Christ accepted sinners as they were and touched their lives, encouraging them to change, to grow into the Saints that many of them became in the Gospel accounts. He did not tell the Samaritan woman, “Go, straighten out your sinful life, and then come back to Me.” He touched her, even with her sin-stained past and present,

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and guided her to becoming St. Photini (John 4:1-26). He did not say to Zacchaeus, correct your crooked finances, and then I'll join you for dinner; He offered to bring salvation to his home, inspiring him to change his ways, and become a co-worker of St. Peter in Rome (Luke 19:1-10). He did not turn away the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed, but tested her faith then and there, and rewarded her: "Great is your faith; be it unto you as you desire" (Matthew 15:21-28).

2. We must always offer them hope: Christ offered people hope in a better life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. To sinners, he offered the opportunity for forgiveness; to the sick and suffering, healing of soul and body; to women and children, personhood; to the rejected and outcast, restoration; to those in the valley of the shadow of death, the hope of the resurrection. We must do the same. Our parishes must be havens of hope, of positive promise, of opportunity for sainthood. Our churches must present themselves as slices of heaven – where the Word of God is offered in the eloquence of the preached word, the beauty of the visual icon, and the majesty of our liturgical music. They must say of us what St. Vladimir's emissaries said of Hagia Sophia: "We could not tell whether we were in heaven or on earth."

3. Finally, and most importantly, we must welcome them with love: In His ministry on earth, Christ touched people, taught them, blessed them, healed them, forgave them – but in each of these cases He loved them. His words ring true across the centuries: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you ..." (John 15:13). And He challenges us to the same lofty calling: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34). So great is that love that He tells us to love even our enemies ... and He gives us the supreme example by praying on the Cross to His Father on behalf of those who were murdering Him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The most important thing that can happen to anyone is to genuinely encounter Jesus – the Christ Who was born for our salvation, the Savior Who gave His life for us, the Lord who offers us eternal life. May we seek every day the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves, and in Him find the One who can help us change our lives, from sinner to saint, and give us that joy that cannot ever be taken away. ❖

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The Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors (DDB) Continue to Make a Difference

Thanks to the sacrificial generosity of DDBs from throughout the Diocese and beyond, over \$650,000 was contributed during the first five years (2011-2015) of the program!

Last year a record-breaking total of \$160,000 was received. As a result, vital ministries have received much-needed support: the work of the Church is being funded as never before! There are visible "fruits" of our labors and efforts as mission parishes are being established and supported, seminarians are receiving scholarships, and struggling parishes are being revitalized.

"2015: THE YEAR IN REVIEW"

In this video you will see some of the many ministries and activities made possible by DDBs!

http://nynjoca.org/vision_for_future_2012.html

Your support can make even more a reality this year!

*Archbishop Michael with Fr. Terence Baz,
pastor of Holy Assumption Church, Clifton, NJ*



Finding Christ in the Church: What Icons Teach Us about Him

by Dn. Evan Freeman

The iconographic program of a church is not a random collection of isolated images, but a thoughtful arrangement of icons that creates intertextual meanings within the architectural framework of the church. The church program—what icons are chosen, their composition, size, placement, etc.—is designed deliberately, with the same pastoral sensitivity as a homily. Keeping in mind that there is no one, correct church program, let us consider what the common features of many church programs teach us about Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the image of God par excellence, and the theological foundation of Orthodox icons.¹ St. John of Damascus says, “Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God.”² The basis for all icons is the incarnation of the Logos: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”³

The most prominent icon in a church program is often a large image of Christ in a dome over the nave, where he is often represented as the “Pantokrator”⁴ (figure 1) or sometimes at the Ascension. In addition to a conventional physiognomy (way of depicting Christ’s face, beard, hair, etc.) and the Greek abbreviation “IC XC,” which stands for “Jesus Christ,” various iconographic attributes help the viewer identify and interpret the image of Christ: Christ is usually depicted in ancient Roman dress and blessing with his right hand. He holds a Gospel book or scroll in his left hand, showing

that he is “the Word.” His halo always contains a cross: icons always preach “Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁵

But meaning is not limited to what is inside the icon. When analyzing (or creating) an iconographic program, think: location, location, location. In the Byzantine understanding of the church building as a microcosm, the dome represents the heavens, and

therefore the placement of the icon of the crucified and risen Christ in the dome is an image of God reigning in the heavens over all of creation. Christ is also the “head,” and the people gathered in worship below, together with the saints depicted on the wall, are his “body,” namely, the Church.⁶ The entire church program spirals out and cascades down from this singular image of Christ, evoking the words of St. Paul: “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”⁷

The image of Christ in the dome is also eschatological, anticipating Christ’s second coming. We read in the account of the Ascension in the Acts of the Holy Apostles: “While they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand

looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”⁸

Narrative scenes are often depicted below the central image of Christ. These usually depict events from the life of Christ or the Theotokos. These may



Figure 1: Jesus Christ, Pammakaristos Church (Fethiye Camii), Istanbul



Figure 2: The Annunciation, Chora Church (Kariye Camii), Istanbul

include the great feasts like the Annunciation (figure 2) as well as non-festal images like the betrayal of Christ in Gethsemane. In the pre-modern period, when many people were illiterate and when Bibles were rare luxury objects possessed only by churches and the wealthy, narrative icons were important reminders of stories that the laypeople only heard in church once or twice a year.

But these narrative icons also declare a fundamental truth of Christian belief. Christians do not worship God in the abstract, but as we confess in the Creed, we believe in the God who has revealed himself and redeemed His creation through historical actions and events. He “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures...” In the words of Fr. Robert Taft, “The salvific events of Jesus’ earthly life, especially his dying and rising for our salvation, are more than just an epiphany or sign, more than just a manifestation of salvation. They are the actual means of that salvation, its very instrumental cause.”⁹ These narrative scenes are not just ancient history; rather, as we celebrate the feasts of the Church every year, these events become immediate and present to those of us who are being saved through them.

In addition to the image of Christ in the dome, the image of the Virgin that is commonly displayed in the apse behind the altar is often one of the largest and most prominent icons in the church (figure 3). The Virgin is the Mother of God and the mother of all believers, a symbol of the Church, and our greatest intercessor.¹⁰ Her

location behind or above the altar is also liturgically significant because Christ’s incarnation in the Eucharist on the altar parallels his incarnation through the Theotokos.

This kind of “liturgical programming” can be found in many other places in the church as well, highlighting the connection between salvation history and the Liturgy. When Pentecost is depicted

over the altar, it evokes the celebrant’s prayer at the epiklesis in the Liturgy: “Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here offered...” The “Hospitality of Abraham”¹¹ may appear near the altar as an Old Testament prefiguration of the Eucharist. A priest may hear confessions in front of an icon of the Prodigal Son embracing his father: a poignant example of the role icons can play in pastoral care when they are deployed thoughtfully and deliberately.

On the lowest levels of the church walls are the saints, the holy men, women, and children who lived from the time of God’s Old Testament covenant with Israel to our present day. According to John of Damascus, the saints are “the army of the Lord” and the “friends of Christ.”¹² But they are also our friends and patrons, interceding for us before God. We may even think of them as family, because we are all members of the same body of Christ. This is why we kiss them and ask for their prayers whenever we enter the church.

The saints are usually grouped by “type,” identifiable by their attributes: clergy saints wearing vestments (figure 4), soldier saints wearing armor, healer saints carrying spoons and medicine boxes, etc. Everyone is here! This

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Figure 3: *Enthroned Virgin and Child, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul*



Figure 4: *Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Cyril of Alexandria, Chora Church (Kariye Camii), Istanbul*

Finding the Word in Words

by Nicholas Samaras

The “trick” of poetry (notwithstanding epic poetry) is the ability to fit a universe into one page. Poetry is the art of containing universal truths in the briefest of space, extolling clarity and artistry. With that in mind, here is a brief, poetic consideration of finding the Word in words:

There is no faith without language.

Perhaps, some may be familiar with Tennyson’s famous line, “With no language but a cry.”

Perhaps, some may be familiar with documented stories of Heaven or of earthly encounters with forms of Divinity (saints, angels, the Lord), in which communication has been described as telepathic. But still, even in considering telepathy, even in considering the limitations of language,



Photo by Kim Piotrowski

there is no faith without language. There is no communication without language translating thought, knowledge, experience, wisdom – all moving intention from one person to another, one soul to another. Whether in this world or in a spiritual realm, all communications, emotions, and knowledge are translated through transmission and comprehension: hence, words – our symbology that conveys meaning. Even our inarticulate cries convey meaning via expression.

This is why the value of words, enabling people to communicate intention to each other.

Even God Himself speaks to people, in the Bible. Therefore, it is wisdom for us to value the Word that has been described as containing all words – which is everything we have in order to acquire knowledge and wisdom. We need words to get us through words to reach stillness. And the stillness of being (that God extols) can only be shared with the expression of words, the way we are able to understand, clarify, and grow. We need language to get us through misunderstanding, to define and refine whatever the growth message may be. Only through language may we come to clarity and understanding.

This is why it’s not enough to read Scripture; it’s enough to reflect upon Scripture, to come to its understanding in how it may help our lives and living circumstances, how it may help us be better. Thus, we may realise that language is not only communication, but language is communion – with a sacred element to it.

If we take time to consider the elements of God, we must realise, first, that everything in creation is based on dialogue. The nature of God is dialogue. The nature of prayer is dialogue. Honestly, we may then find that there is no such thing as monologue, because everything invites a response. Everything offered invites a receipt. Consider this distilled excerpt from a writing that exemplifies this understanding:

If you understand being as the conscious atoms of your breath, then you understand God.

If you understand God as the dialogue of love, then you understand Jesus Christ.

If you understand the transfiguration of love, then you understand the Holy Spirit.

What is love but the desire to give and to share? Then, you understand the Holy Trinity.

Considering the Nature of God

From the Holy Trinity, we are offered everything in existence, and it is up to us to reflect upon this and be willing to respond. Even a silent gesture is communicative; we’ve all experienced understanding through witnessing a meaningful look.

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What we have from the living Word is to be found in the assemblies of words. All we have to do is pick up the Bible, read it, and reflect upon it: it's the only way we can enact the text.

Here is a final offering, in poetic form, that deals with the idea of offer and receipt:

Heart and My Heart

Two for the sharing, the pulse in unison.
Two for the dialogue implied in it all.

Two for the lips that press to pronounce words.
One for response and one for the call.

One for agreement on what words signify.
Two for the language that answers accord.

One for the writing and one for the reading.
Two for the grasping, the holding in turn.

One for the murmur that trembles the blue air.
Two for the hands that mirror in prayer.

One for the lamplight, one for shared silence.
Your heart and my heart, the sacred text of this.



Nicholas Samaras is the author of *American Psalm, World Psalm*, from Ashland Poetry Press (2014), available through Amazon and local bookstores.

"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'" (Isaiah 65:1)

Continued from page 9

motley gathering of holy ones reminds us that sainthood is for clergy, monastics, and laity, men and women, adults and children, rich and poor, the learned and the simple. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."¹³

Christ calls all to sainthood. Every human being has been created in the image of God. Each one of us is called to be a living icon of the crucified and risen Lord in our own time and place – at school, at work, at home – wherever we find ourselves! Therefore, as St. Paul says, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."¹⁴

The well-planned church program is far more profound than any single panel icon could ever be, employing the many facets of the church building to juxtapose icons with icons, icons with the Liturgy, and icons with people. Where one narrative icon may portray a single moment in history, a cycle of narrative images can evoke the entire economy of salvation. Where a single saint icon can bring a viewer face-to-face with a holy figure, the full array of saints in the church interior creates a three-dimensional icon of "All Saints," into which the

worshipper enters and becomes a part whenever he or she steps inside the church building. In short, the thought-out church program has the power to become a sophisticated spatial-temporal image of Christian theology, cosmology, and anthropology. Icons in church reveal to us the incarnate God, the world, the history of our salvation, and even ourselves. ♦

Dn. Evan Freeman is completing a Doctorate in Art History at Yale University.

(Footnotes)

¹ John 14.9-10, Colossians 1.15, Hebrews 1.3.

² St. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images, Treatise 1*, 16, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

³ John 1.14.

⁴ "Almighty."

⁵ I Corinthians 2.2.

⁶ Ephesians 5.23, Colossians 1.18.

⁷ I Corinthians 8.6.

⁸ Acts 1.9-11, emphasis added.

⁹ Robert F. Taft, "What Does Liturgy Do? Toward a Soteriology of Liturgical Celebration: Some Theses," in *Worship* 66.3 (May 1992), 198.

¹⁰ Revelation 12.1-2, 5, 17; cf. John 19.26-27.

¹¹ Genesis 18.

¹² St John of Damascus, *Treatise 1*, 21.

¹³ Galatians 3.27-28.

¹⁴ Hebrews 12.1.

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Liturgy Mirroring Life

by Brother Christopher, Prior, Monks of New Skete

I have been a monk at New Skete for thirty-five years, and during that time I've observed a noteworthy transition in our culture's attitudes to formal religious practice and affiliation. I cannot count how many times I've heard guests and visitors to our monastery say, "I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious. I just don't find any meaning or



value in going to church." These are the "Nones," those who answer Gallup polls saying, "Yes, I believe in God" but "No, I don't attend any church." They profess a vague, undefined set of beliefs that don't demand any practical expression save trying to be a good person. Nones certainly don't perceive any relationship between committed church membership and being good, so they often think, "Why bother? I can be just as good a person without the hassle of an hour and a half of boredom in church."

At a time when church attendance seems to be declining in all the "higher" Christian churches, what is glaringly obvious is an increasing estrangement from organized religion, most particularly from the actual experience of worship, from liturgy. The general perception of many young people is that church is stuffy, overly preoccupied with rituals and bad singing, a sterile fulfilling of a legal obligation. Many of our contemporaries seem to have lost any sense of a need to worship and so instead fill their free time with distractions and amusements. Part of the reason for this, I am convinced, is that worship is often devoid

of the beauty and personal connection that gives meaning to the ritual – it lacks the radiance that touches the soul and communicates a felt sense of transcendence. This is what the human soul longs for. Whenever we experience this, no amount of distractions will be ever able to fill the intrinsic desire human beings have to worship, to adore the Creator of the universe in solidarity and communion with those who share the same convictions. To experience the power of such moments, whenever they might occur, makes us aware that we become fully alive when we are part of a worshiping body, a group that renders true praise to God in spirit and in truth. This is precisely what good liturgy does.

As Orthodox believers, we face many challenges trying to pass on our faith to our children as well as to those who, for whatever reason, may come to our liturgical gatherings. Particularly if the services are not in English, or are conducted with opaque translations that are difficult to understand, those who have no grounding in basic Christian doctrine and tradition are apt to find the experience mystifying, something whose relevance to their life and happiness isn't immediately apparent. Unless, that is, they experience a deep beauty and grace that is able to penetrate their initial lack of understanding; unless, further, they happen to hear a sermon that truly breaks open the scriptures for them, that speaks to their heart's deepest longing and causes them to think, "What if...?" Unless, even further, they experience the warmth and friendship of a welcoming community after the liturgy, who communicate Christ's presence in their open attitude of acceptance. Then such people might be interested in learning more about what they vaguely intuited in the liturgy, and begin to recognize and understand the signs and symbols that make liturgy something living and deeply meaningful. Perhaps they might even come to recognize liturgy as that spiritual locus that gathers and offers all the fragments of our life to God, and thereby come to appreciate

the cosmic nature of our faith.

Liturgy comes alive when we experience it



Proclaiming Christ to Those in Search of the Unknown God

as a grateful offering to God of all the elements of our life. Then liturgy becomes transformative, and through its ritual we become aware of just how close God has come to us in the ordinary events of daily life. Why? Because we see presented before us signs and symbols that, far from creating a mystifying separation between ritual and life, instead seamlessly connect them together in a robust theophany. When the Church gathers as a community of faith, it offers the full range of its gifts back to God as a sign of all that is being transformed. Life is being transformed.

A grace I experience here at New Skete is that our liturgical life is precisely this. Many of the elements that are part of our worship are the products of our life together. We worship in a beautiful church we built with our own labor, that both incarnates and symbolizes our spiritual home. We wear liturgical vestments made skillfully and artistically by one of our nuns; we behold the elegant iconography produced by members of the community and the handcrafted altar tapestries; we sing music arranged by community members and pray liturgical texts translated or composed by them. Even the flowers that adorn the Church are grown from our gardens. All this makes the experience of liturgy intensely intimate and personal, connected with the broader parameters of our life. Liturgy symbolically gives expression to the truth that all the elements of our life are the means through which we go to God. For example, I think of our work training dogs. Who would have thought that training dogs can be a spiritual activity? Yet, I've discovered that working with them is a mutually enriching process; as the dog is trained, so am I trained. Working with the dog, helping to shape its behavior and allowing it to flower as a companion that is going to have a positive impact on someone's life, is deeply satisfying to me. It is a spiritual activity that I'm reminded of each day at prayer, simply one more element of my life that reveals God's presence to me.

The good news is that such an integral approach to liturgy is not solely for monastics and not solely dependent on living close to each other or using products made by the parish community itself. A parish may not be able to do all that we can at New Skete to integrate its worship and lives – but it can

certainly do the following in a way that both builds community and makes worship intensely personal: for example, by remembering by name in our litanies the suffering members of our parish – the infirmed and aged who are not able to come to church – and by organizing visitors and callers to keep them connected to the community; further, by bringing the suffering and concerns of the wider world concretely into our worship in the litanies; by taking advantage of the various opportunities that exist to participate in the liturgy (whether by joining the choir, being a greeter, helping with the serving, becoming a reader...); getting the children involved in the liturgy as acolytes and by being part of processions; continuing the eucharistic character of the liturgy in a coffee hour that warmly welcomes visitors in addition to strengthening relationships within

the parish; when possible, offering a scripture study midweek to read and reflect on the coming Sunday's gospel. The possibilities are many and allow for the creativity and resourcefulness of the entire parish – and not solely the initiatives of the priest. It is when such practices are consciously integrated into our life and worship that liturgy becomes a personal and living experience that brings us close to God and to each other.

Liturgy is far from something “escapist,” promoting a spirituality of separation that flees the world. Instead, true liturgy fosters a spirituality of integration, in which all the component pieces of life play their proper role in offering the whole of it to God. This is what we celebrate in the Eucharist; we offer God back the whole of what we have received. ♦



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Thanks for the support and friendship of my co-participants in the "Words for Worship Writing Workshop," for the staff of the Collegeville Institute, and for the vocation of the master potter, Richard Bresnahan of St. John's Pottery.

An Anaphora for Those Who Are Searching

by Fr. John Shimchick

"Now You have come and saved us through love"
(Kontakion, *Feast of The Meeting of the Lord*).

"Through the compassion of Your only-begotten Son"
(Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)

Permanent things,
Relentless questions:
Who am I? Where did I come from?
Where am I going?
What am I going to do now?

We have been formed by the love of those we have known and
who have known us.

We have been formed by what we have known and seen,
And kept alive and awakened by what we did not see and what we did not know.

In ways beyond knowing—it is also clear when something is not right,
When it is broken beyond remedy and repair.
We know—down to our very marrow—when it will never be the same.
We know—with head throbbing fear—when the one we have loved is hurt or will be taken away.
In fearing for them, we are afraid for ourselves.

What we don't know is what to do next.

There are places to go and repairmen everywhere.
They offer to meet our every need: they will console, sing, feed, and entertain us.

But the best of them have learned well from their teachers.

They know something more.
They still "keep stable the fabric of the world and their prayer is in the
practice of their trade" (Sirach 38:24).
They take what they find into their hands and rework it.
They break it open with fire and time.
They allow it to be what it can.
They give it back as a gift to everyone, changed, and receptive.

The permanent things, the relentless questions pursue us.
They come to us head on, they attack from the bushes.
Formed by love, broken by reality, and yet capable of being healed
by compassion,
We bear His seal. ❖



Made by Richard Bresnahan



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Don E. Saliers, "Artist, Clay, Fire, Ritual: A Potter's Aesthetic," in *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*, edited by Robin M. Jensen and Kimberly J. Vrudny. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 95-106.

Check out the YouTube video: *Richard Bresnahan: The Taste of the Clay*.

Sunday of Orthodoxy Joint Celebration

On the “Sunday of Orthodoxy” (March 20th), His Eminence, Archbishop Michael hosted His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph of the Antiochian



Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America for the Divine Liturgy at SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church in South River NJ. The two hierarchs concelebrated with seven priests, among them Father Joseph Lickwar (Chancellor, Diocese of New York & New Jersey) and Father David Garretson (Rector, SS. Peter & Paul Church). They were joined by Archdeacon Michael Suvak. Metropolitan Joseph preached the homily. The responses were sung by the parish choir under the direction of Basil Kozak.

After the morning Liturgy, Metropolitan Joseph and Father Thomas Zain (Vicar-General of the Antiochian Archdiocese) gave a presentation on the situation of Syrian refugees and the continuing war in Syria.

Those in attendance included Mayor John Krenzel of South River, NJ, and numerous clergy members from local Coptic, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Episcopal, and Methodist churches. Also present was a group of students from Calvin College in Michigan, visiting the Jersey Shore for a Spring Break service project.

That evening, Metropolitan Joseph presided at the Vespers for the “Sunday of Orthodoxy” joined by Archbishop Michael and more than forty priests and deacons at Brooklyn’s Saint Nicholas Cathedral. The homily was delivered by Archbishop Michael. Numerous faithful representing various jurisdictions from throughout the greater New York City area attended the Sunday evening service. A Byzantine choir led by Protopsaltis Rassem El Massih, together with the “Spirit of Orthodoxy” Pan-Orthodox Choir co-directed by Professor Aleksei Shipovalnikov and Protopsaltis Stratos Mandalakis, shared in the responses to the Vespers service.

A delicious Lenten meal was served after Vespers by the faithful of Saint Nicholas Cathedral. The evening culminated in joyous fellowship of hierarchs, clergy and faithful. ❖

Thirst for God

(From the “Daily Reflections” of Sr. Vassa Larin)

“Let whoever who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17)

This is a passage about desire and thirst at the end of the Book of Revelation; at the very end of the New Testament.

We have many, varying desires and wants and needs every day. At times there is unfulfilled desire and unfulfilled ambition. Sometimes I can’t even identify what it is that I desire. It’s just a hole in my heart.

Let me identify that it is God, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Who is lacking in my heart. Let me take small steps, in brief, daily prayer, to ask Him to come and abide in me, so that I may not

thirst like this, constantly. Let me hear Jesus say to me, as He says to the Samaritan woman, “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (Jn 4:14) Because I can take this water “freely,” as did she. Not because I am “worthy,” or for any other reason. But because I desire it, and ask for it, as did she. ❖

(Subscribe to get Sr. Vassa’s Reflections daily via email and learn more about her podcasts at: www.coffeewithsistervassa.com)

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What Does it Mean to “Serve Out of Love”?

With the blessing of Archbishop Michael, under the leadership of Father Jason Vansuch (Chairman, Department of Youth Ministry), young women from across the Diocese were asked to ponder this question at the 2nd Annual Girls' Retreat from 13-15 November 2015 at

Saint Basil Academy in Garrison NY. Thirty youth participants and nearly twenty chaperones gathered to grow in their faith and experience the fellowship offered in the beautiful retreat setting. The group was blessed to have in their midst guest speakers: Mother Christophora (Abbess, Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City PA) along with Mother Paula and Sister Christine who guided discussions of how their personal talents and abilities can be used in various aspects of church life.

Participants arrived on Friday evening carrying not only their personal items for the weekend, but also bags of hygiene products and other items to be donated to the Dutchess [County] Outreach Mission located in Poughkeepsie NY. This project was a new addition to the youth retreat program, which complimented the “Serving out of Love” theme for the weekend. Dutchess Outreach strives to meet the basic needs of low-income individuals when

no other resources are available to them and assist them in becoming self-sufficient. The generosity of our young women was overwhelming!

After enjoying pizza and getting settled in their dorms, the group gathered at the chapel for evening

prayers. Archbishop Michael spoke at the end of the service saying: “The purpose of this Retreat is to help you to grow in the Church, so that you can take your rightful place as leaders of parishes, of the Diocese, and of the national Church . . . God has given each of us talents. We have to find out what they are and what you want to do with them. But you have to remember that because they are gifts

from God, you have to give at least part of it back to Him to work with people in and out of the Church, and to help them in whatever way you can to use those talents that God has given you. The Church is your future.”

Encouraged by his words, the group went back to the dorms for icebreaker activities and to start a poster project that would be presented to him the following evening. The young women were asked to complete two open-ended statements:

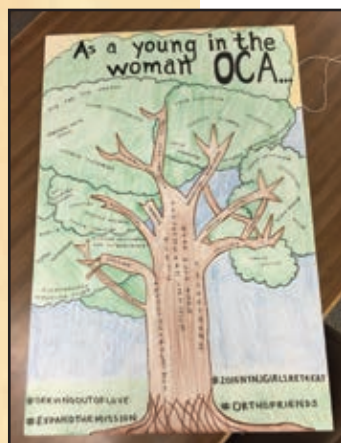
“I am good at; I’m talented at; I like doing...?”

“How could you use your talents to serve God and the church?”

While chaperones prepared s’mores and popcorn, lay youth workers Janine Alpaugh and Danielle Geeza moderated a discussion between the participants in which they shared their answers to the questions posed and then categorized their talents into five categories: artistic abilities, music, athleticism, good with kids, and traditions. Some of their specific talents were sewing, singing, soccer, mentoring, cooking, and theater. The discussion ultimately culminated in suggestions as to how they can execute their talents in their parishes, both now and in the future; for example: making vestments and altar coverings, writing icons, becoming choir directors, organizing youth sports tournaments, volunteering as camp counselors, baking prosphora (communion bread), and directing Nativity yokkas (pageants).

Special thanks are extended to Janine, Danielle, Matushka Jessica Evanina, and Christina Ioukliaevskikh who oversaw the creation of the poster titled “As a young woman in the OCA...” At its center is a tree, drawn by the talented Alexia May (Annunciation Church, Brick NJ); the trunk represents the five overall groups of talents, the branches identify participants’ specific skills, and the bunches of leaves envelop the ways these talents can be executed in order to help serve the Church.

On Saturday morning, Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Father Jason and Archimandrite Anthony (Director, Saint Basil Academy). Janet Neis (Saint Stephen Cathedral, Philadelphia PA) directed the choir of participants for the entire weekend. Following Liturgy and brunch, Mother Christophora, Mother Paula, and Sister Christine



held their educational sessions. Each of them shared their personal journeys to the monastic life – how they found, and ultimately joined, Holy Transfiguration Monastery. They reminded the young women that, “Orthodoxy is something personal,” to always communicate with God, and to not be afraid to ask Him for direction in who they are called to be, given their personal gifts.

Between sessions, Father Jason led the group in baking prosphora (communion bread) to be used in the following morning’s Liturgy. It was one of the highlights of the weekend. Some of the participants were heading home to ask their parish priest if they could help bake prosphora for the respective parishes. The girls were then given free time to enjoy swimming in the pool, playing basketball in the gym, exploring the Academy grounds, and hanging out together in the dorms.

Archbishop Michael returned in the evening for Great Vespers, dinner, and a Q&A session with the nuns and participants. Prior to kicking off the Q&A session, Danielle Geeza and Janine Alpaugh presented to His Eminence the “As a young woman in the OCA...” poster on behalf of the girls. It will be shared and distributed throughout the diocese. Mother Paula also spoke about Blessed Matushka Olga of Alaska, highlighting the ways in which she served the church and Alaskan natives, and presented participants with bookmarks that had an icon of the beloved Matushka on it.

The weekend culminated with the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. Prior to Liturgy the service of preparation – Proskomedia – was served in the center of the chapel. Over the course of the weekend the young women had the opportunity to fill out commemoration sheets, allowing them to offer prayers for their living and departed family members. The priests commemorated each and every name offered by the girls by placing a particle of bread on the diskos, or paten, while the participants recited the names of their loved ones. Everyone received their own personal prosphora in remembrance of the offering.

Danielle Geeza, one of the lay youth workers for the Department of Youth Ministry, was blown away by the girls’ enthusiasm throughout the weekend: “I can sincerely say that out of the many retreats our Diocese has sponsored over the past several years, this was one of the best. The young women were engaged throughout the entire weekend; they loved

spending time getting to know the nuns, who made an effort to learn each of their names and more about them, and especially enjoyed learning how to bake prosphora on Saturday afternoon. The Q&A session on Saturday evening lasted almost three hours! Each question posed to Archbishop Michael and the nuns was thoughtful and unique. It was just an incredible weekend!”

On behalf of the young women of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, special thanks are extended to His Eminence, Archbishop Michael; Father Jason Vansuch; Abbess Mother Christophora, Mother Paula, and Sister Christine; Janet Neis (retreat



choir director); Janine Alpaugh (photography and lifeguarding); Danielle Geeza and all of the youth workers and chaperones. Of course, many thanks are extended to the entire staff of Saint Basil Academy who once again lovingly opened their welcoming arms to all participants.

This year’s retreat is scheduled for November 11-13, 2016. As each year has a theme, based on the feedback received from attendees the focus of the 2016 Diocesan Girls’ Retreat will be “iconography.” ❖

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SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Manville, New Jersey Celebrates 100 Years

by Archpriest Fr. James Parsells, Jill Peterson, Larissa Mattei, and Pam Stone

Over the weekend of October 3-4, 2015, the faithful of SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Manville NJ, celebrated the community's 100th Anniversary. Every Sunday morning for the past 100 years, a Divine Liturgy has been celebrated, with church bells ringing, a choir singing, and the faithful gathering in prayer. Services are also held on many days throughout the week with the same joyful solemnity of the Orthodox Christian faith.

In 1915, a small group of worshippers rented a building in a lumber yard on North Main Street in Manville. With just the bare necessities, the parishioners—many of whom came to work at the

with extensive damage to the sacristy area and was immediately refurbished. After completing the church repairs in 1963, plans for the building of an education and social building began, and were completed in 1965.

Over the years, the tight-knit community was composed of large extended families that would pray together and then return home on Sunday to enjoy large dinners and fellowship. Today, the families are smaller and more ethnically diverse, but the parish gathers after the Divine Liturgy to enjoy a hearty coffee hour together, serving for many as the new extended family. The language of the services has changed over the years from Church Slavonic to English, following the prescription of St. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, who taught that services should be conducted in a country's language. This change opened the door to people from all over the world to worship together.

Worship has remained at the heart of who we are as the People of God at SS. Peter & Paul Church. Over the years, the parish has continued on the path of good liturgical services and offers worship not just on Sundays, but multiple times during the week. The physical church has been cared for and maintenance and repairs have been done to upgrade and preserve the building. Repairs took place for the stained glass windows, bell towers, and cupolas. Chandeliers were replaced and refurbishing was done to the iconostas. Church furnishings, icons, liturgical items, vestments and altar coverings were also replaced or upgraded. One of the most remarkable achievements has been the adornment of the inside of the church by noted iconographer George Filippakis, with the assistance of parishioner and parish iconographer, Austin Kachek. The ceiling and every wall inside the church are now adorned with beautiful icons. Everywhere where one looks, their eyes are met with magnificent color and an entrance into the eyes of our Lord, the Theotokos, and many of our beloved saints. The generosity, love, and free will offering of parishioners, and the grace of our Lord has enabled SS. Peter & Paul to be the beautiful church that it is today.



Photo by
Nicholas Kita

Johns Manville Corporation—built a strong bond. Their ethnic backgrounds were mostly from Russia, Ukraine, and other Eastern bloc countries. With the blessing of Archbishop Evdokim of New York and under the leadership of Father Peter Semashko, the rector of SS. Peter & Paul Church in South River, the small group began to worship at this location.

In 1916, the parish purchased the property on Washington Ave in Manville where the church sits today. The parishioners constructed an 18 foot by 37 foot wooden chapel. This structure was destroyed by fire in 1922, rebuilt, and again destroyed by fire in 1935. Immediately after the fire in 1935, the church building was reconstructed and has been the parish's home ever since. During this time nearby land was also purchased, for a parish cemetery. In 1962, the church suffered another fire

In addition, the parish cemetery has undergone a radical transformation over the past 25 years. In the late 1990's, parishioners provided funds to jump start beautification projects within the cemetery, enabling it to become a beautiful and serene offering, a sacred place for parishioners and all Orthodox Christians to be buried.

The church family has weathered both good times and bad together. When floods and tragedy struck the town and some parishioners suffered significant losses, others helped. The parish has a presence in the community and has provided outreach to many local organizations through the society of St. Philaret. It has also been blessed to assist other new or growing Orthodox communities. The Mother of God Church in Rocky Hill, NJ (now located in Princeton) was established by parishioners from SS. Peter & Paul Church. For a few years the parish was shared with a Georgian community prior to them securing a building in Manville for their new parish, St Grigol. For 8 years the Coptic Community of St. Mary and St. Athanasius utilized the upper level of the parish social center for church services. In June of 2015, they were able to move to a permanent location in the neighboring town of Hillsborough.

June 29th, 2014, on the Feast of SS. Peter & Paul, parishioners embarked upon the "Pre-Feast" of the parish's 100th Anniversary. Later that year on Sunday, November 9th, 2014 a Celebration of Faith and International Food Festival was held. With Archbishop Michael in attendance, the faithful gathered for Liturgy in the morning. That afternoon, an Akathist Service for healing, well being, peace and all other needs was served. Under the direction of Rebecca Oliver, the parish's children sang various church hymns. Afterwards, an International Food Festival took place at the VFW Hall across the street. The Festival, chaired by Jill Peterson, offered foods from many of the ethnic backgrounds represented within the parish's membership, including: Russian, Polish, Georgian, Romanian, Greek, Middle Eastern, Italian, and Spanish.

On October 3 - 4, 2015, the grand finale of the "Feast" of SS. Peter & Paul Church was held. Friends and family from years past and present were invited to a wonderful celebration. The weekend started on Saturday October 3rd with a Memorial Service for all the faithful parishioners of the SS. Peter & Paul Church. The service

was followed by a brunch in the church hall. On Saturday evening, Vigil was held, followed by a dinner. On Sunday, October 4th, a Hierarchal Divine Liturgy was celebrated. In addition to Archbishop Michael, Rector, Fr. James Parsells, Fr. Paul Shafran, Protodeacon Paul Sokol, Subdeacon Mark Federoff, and the parish's altar servers, the celebration of the Liturgy included clergy who were former parishioners. These included Fr. David Rhodes, Fr. Justin Frederick, and Fr. John Parsells. The choir was directed by Diaconessa Patricia Sokol.

Following the Liturgy, Gramotas were presented by Archbishop Michael to individuals who have provided committed and faithful service to the parish. Individuals acknowledged were: Protodeacon Paul Sokol, Tess Nevitt, Basil Kulich, George Filippakis, Edward Sarchisian, Austin Kachek, Jill Peterson, and Peter Bakeletz. Archbishop Michael was presented with flowers, letters written by the parish's children, and a picture of the youth. In the late afternoon, a grand celebration was held at the Bridgewater Manor in Bridgewater, New Jersey with over 180 family and friends in attendance. DJ services for the celebration was provided by Robert Kita from Déjà vu Disc Jockeys. Attendees heard speeches from Parish President Peter Bakaletz, Rector Fr. James Parsells, and Archbishop Michael. A film clip of *SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church 1915-2015 Celebrating 100 Years* was premiered at the Anniversary banquet. The chairperson for the 100th anniversary celebration was Pam Stone.

The year 2016 marks SS. Peter & Paul Church "Post Feast," concluding a three year celebration of remembrance and thanksgiving for the past. Events are currently being planned that will include a Fall Festival and a weekend visitation and celebration with Archbishop Michael.

Photographs for the 100th Anniversary celebration were taken by photographer Nick Kita. Please visit www.ssppoc.org to view all the photos from the weekend and see current news related to the church. The 77 minute DVD produced by Orthodox 360 entitled *SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church 1915-2015 Celebrating 100 Years* is available for preview and purchase on the website. SS. Peter & Paul can also be followed on the church's Facebook page of "Friends of SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church." ❖

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The OCA and our Diocese at the Syndesmos International Youth Festival

by Janine Alpaugh

The theme for the 2015 Syndesmos Conference held from August 24-30 in Suprasl, Poland was: *Attaining Conciliarity*, utilizing the Scriptural text:

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Syndesmos is an international organization that brings together Orthodox youth adults from around the world. The participants from France, Russia, Belarus, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Slovakia, Kazan, Serbia, and the

United States came together for one week, as Jean Reh binder said, “to communicate traditions and to share the life of the Church.”

The Orthodox Church in America, though it has previously been active, has not had representatives at a Syndesmos event in over five years. Will Kopcha, Victor Lutes, Joseph Green,

John Shimchick, and Janine Alpaugh were selected to represent the OCA (John and Janine are from our Diocese). They made presentations on the OCA’s history and about some American Orthodox organizations (such as the Seminaries, IOCC, OCF, and FOCA). The ambassadors also participated in the choir, providing liturgical hymns in English and incorporating them into the daily prayer services, Vigil and Divine Liturgy.

Throughout the Conference several priests including Fr. Chad Hatfield, the Chancellor of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, and Fr. Vladimir Misijuk of Białystok, Poland engaged the participants (Fr. Vladimir is an alumnus of Saint Vladimir’s Seminary and is Former Syndesmos General Secretary). Fr. Chad spoke about, “The Conciliar Model of the OCA: The Dream of Saint Tikhon,” and Fr. Vladimir addressed the topic of: “Attaining Conciliarity: The Task of our Daily Life.”

The group reviewed a letter written by a Syndesmos gathering in 1988. In discussing

Continued on page 25



*Pictured:
Victor Lutes,
Janine Alpaugh,
John Shimchick
and Joseph Green*

Being Faithful Where We Are: Figuring Out One’s Vocation



A mix of OCA and Greek Orthodox young people, from high school freshman to college graduate 20-somethings, met in the Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral in New York City on Saturday, May 14, to hear the stories of men and women who followed a calling to serve Christ and His Church. The discussion format made for an intimate setting and allowed for a lively dialogue. The participants also got to connect with other young people who are interested in serving the Church and discerning their own call to ministry. One participant, a young woman named Spyridoula, had this to say about her experience: “As many of us continue to search for

God’s calling, Archbishop Michael reminded us well that we ‘must be faithful where we are.’ God has a reason for everything and we must surrender our doubts to Him in order to hear His call.” And Nicholas who attended the event took this lesson away with him: “‘How does one discern what one will do in life?’ We look to the talents and influence God has given us and the needs of others He has put before us.” ♦

2016 Annual Lenten Teen Retreat

by *Danielle Geeza*

What do faith, science, church services, zip lining, rock wall climbing, and “Minute to Win It” have in common? To the average person, the answer would be “nothing!” However, if you were to ask the participants of this year’s Annual Lenten Teen Retreat held at the Taconic Retreat Center in Milan NY, they would be able to tie each of these elements together because they were all components of the event held from Friday, April 1 to Sunday, April 3, 2016.

Archbishop Michael, together with Father Jason Vansuch (Chairperson, Department of Youth Ministry) and the Department of Youth Ministry Assistants (Danielle Geeza and Janine Alpaugh), developed a wonderful weekend program centered on the sometimes controversial topics of Faith and Science and how they need not oppose each other. Peter Parsells, MS, PA-C and Heather Parsells, MD, an Orthodox married couple, led the educational sessions during which they shared their testimonies as two Orthodox professionals in the field of medical science. As medical professionals, Peter and Heather are extensions of God’s grace. Heather, a pediatric anesthesiologist, sees new life every day. Peter, a neuroscience physician



assistant, witnesses God’s healing presence through medical evaluations and procedures. Together, the couple compared and contrasted what it means to be a person born into Orthodoxy who came to discover the joys and wonders of science (Peter), versus a person rooted in the academics of science who later came to find the Orthodox Faith (Heather). Heather and Peter reminded participants that we can be people with immense scientific intelligence who are still grounded in our faith! They then went on to entertain questions from participants.

A quaint chapel was assembled in the upper room of the retreat center’s main building on Friday afternoon before participants arrived for registration, pizza, and icebreaker games later that evening. The group was blessed to have Archbishop Michael preside at Saturday’s Memorial Divine Liturgy with Father Jason, and then later in the evening at Great Vespers. During their free time on Saturday, the teens collectively played a heated game of basketball, but only after having climbed the retreat center’s outdoor rock wall and ziplining through



its wooded property – a highlight of the weekend! Following Vespers and dinner, the group was broken up into two teams and played “Minute to Win It,” a fun-filled, competitive game coordinated by Janine and Danielle and modeled after the popular TV show. Participants stayed up late into the evening as they watched the movie *Do You Believe?* with Archbishop Michael, and then enjoyed an informal Q&A session with their diocesan hierarchy.

On the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, Father Jason served Divine Liturgy following a lesson on the preparation of the bread and wine, the Proskomedie. The scent of incense lingered in the air after each service throughout the weekend, leading many non-Orthodox from other visiting groups to sit in meditation taking in the beauty of our icons and peaceful environment.

The Department of Youth Ministry is excited to announce that the next Lenten Teen Retreat is scheduled for March, 2017, date and location to be determined! If you would like to be put on an email list to be informed of future youth activities, submit your information here: <http://goo.gl/forms/L74QDAN2nY> ❖

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Expanding the Mission in the Jersey Shore Area

by Deacon Alexander Smida

For a number of years we have conducted an Adult Study and Discussion Group at Holy Annunciation Church in Brick Town, New Jersey. Whether reading the Holy Fathers, liturgical theology, or contemporary Orthodox writers, our discussions have always been open and questions welcomed; our premise is that there is nothing in our Orthodox Faith that is “out of bounds” for any believer to study; indeed, the building-up of the Faith among our membership is our primary goal. Our group now numbers fifteen participants, including four who belong to neighboring ROCOR parishes.

At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year we devoted our study to the initiatives defined and prioritized at the 2015 All American Council. Having reviewed the documents and the valuable Power Point presentations available through the Council website (<http://oca.org/PDF/18thAAC/18thaac-powerpoints.pdf>), our members chose unanimously to engage themselves in the implementation of the initiatives in the local context of the Ocean and Monmouth County area. Having considered the various programs of service of interest to our members, including those of unique need in our greater neighborhood (such as natural disaster preparedness – our area was affected acutely by Hurricane Sandy and is still recovering), it was quickly concluded that there are already volunteer agencies active to “feed the hungry” and “clothe the naked.” For us to use our efforts to duplicate their good work was not a wise expenditure of our limited time and resources.

The group resolved to research the faith-based and other organizations already experienced in these forms of outreach and to seek those who might best utilize our readiness to help. We were astonished that the opportunities we found were abundant and welcoming of our assistance. Furthermore, through these new friends, other means of outreach appeared and led us in further directions of service.

Our first priority was to build upon the food collection drive for local Food Pantries. One of our members, a leader in the Girl Scouts of the Jersey Shore, invited us to prepare a Thanksgiving basket for distribution by the state-supported Food Pantry

in Lakewood, New Jersey. This is an outreach of the Macedonia Baptist Church, which provides a meal six days a week, throughout the year, for those who struggle in the grinding poverty, need, and homelessness that characterize the lives of a very large proportion of the residents of this decaying city. Our group quickly assembled a basket and delivered it to the soup kitchen the day before Thanksgiving.

Concurrently, another of our members, who is employed in the offices of Congregation Beth Torah in Ocean Township, Monmouth County, suggested a way to develop our food collection by utilizing a simple means employed by the Congregation in their own food drives. We adopted the plan of distributing plain brown grocery bags, with a detailed list of needed non-perishable foods stapled on each, to our parishioners as they were dismissed from the Divine Liturgy, on a few Sundays before the Feast of the Nativity. The intention was to simplify the task of contributing by 1) providing a shopping list, and 2) adding a bag for easier shopping and drop off in the vestibule. The results of this first-time initiative were overwhelming: by December 18 we had delivered two pickups and at least four carloads full of food bags to Lakewood.

Our food drives will be held in alternating months throughout the year. In addition to the food items already on the “shopping list” we distribute, we have chosen to add items for which Food Stamps and WIC are not accepted, including all paper products, paper towels, and feminine hygiene products. Since these items are not covered by government assistance programs, there is a hardship that results for families in need.

“Clothing the naked” – this initiative proved intimidating at the outset. We were all aware of the collection bins for old clothing, to be found in every shopping center parking lot. But we were also well aware that the majority of clothing deposited in bins does NOT find its way to the needy. It is, rather, collected by recycling companies and shredded into rags, with a tiny allowance donated to community service organizations.

But once again one of our intrepid class members found a means to collect clean, wearable

clothing; another member knew a source that could make best use of the garments. One of the members was picking up some dry cleaning at a local establishment. On a whim, she asked the proprietor what he did with clothing that was never picked up by the customers. Apparently his eyes opened wide, and he asked, "Do you have an idea?!" She explained the collection program, after which he excused himself to make a phone call, then asked her to come back at 6:00 that day to pick up the clothing. It turned out the generous proprietor had called a friend in the business who had a similar backlog, and she went home with her car stuffed with cleaned garments on hangers and covered in plastic. Another member went out visiting dry cleaners and had the same results. Trays of cookies obtained from the Parish Cookie Walk were delivered to the donors as a "thank you." And the search for more clothing continues.

What to do with two carsful of clothing and more on the way? Again one of our members had a solution. A retired US Army officer who is a member of our group told us of the thrift shop operated at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst by the Navy Relief Organization, dedicated to helping the families of active duty personnel in all service branches. The shop is located at nearby NAS Lakehurst and he has been delivering clothing as it is collected, helping stretch the service families' clothing budget. When he asked the manager of the Navy Relief if we had delivered enough, her response was: "You keep bringing the clothes. Don't worry about the quantity. That is MY problem."

The Rabbi at Congregation Beth Torah approached us through our member in the office there with a dilemma and asked for help. Each family in the congregation was asked to contribute a toy for distribution to needy families at Christmas. It was nearly Christmas and everything that could be donated had been distributed. But there still remained a quantity of toys and other organizations couldn't take any more so close to the holiday. Could we possibly help by taking the toys and seeing they got to children who were in need? Enter the Girl Scouts from Jackson. They had a small list of struggling families they bought gifts for each year, and the toys from the temple were added to the "Secret Santa" distribution. There are some Mexican immigrant families in Lakewood whom the Scouts look after, including families who cannot afford any gifts at all for their children. So, after Nativity Eve services at

Annunciation Church, with a carful of toys and real sleigh bells jingling for atmosphere, the troop made their rounds.

A program intended specifically to assist elderly members of the Annunciation Parish with winterizing their cars, which was named "Car Care Clinic," was devised by a member of the class, assisted by other class members. The Christmas travelling season was then at hand, and he was concerned that tire pressures be correct and fluids topped off before parishioners drove any distance. Parishioners were asked to surrender their car keys on their way to Coffee Hour, the crew went to work, and when the drivers were ready to go home their cars were good to go. For supplies, our member went to his favorite garage to stock up on windshield washer fluid, antifreeze, and other necessities needed. When he attempted to pay for it all, the owner, a friend of his, asked why he wanted so much. When he explained the project, the owner accepted a \$5.00 payment and told him to take whatever he needed. And he thanked us for the opportunity to help the Church.

The Children of Congregation Beth Torah recently finished a project of making children's scarves and passed them on to us for distribution. The Girl Scouts will assist us in distributing them to those in need. The relationship between our group's outreach projects at Annunciation Church and those initiated at Congregation Beth Torah, although still in its formative stage, promises to lead to further cooperation in care for the needy in the Shore Area.

Afghans crafted by a member of Annunciation Church who reposed last year were recently distributed to a Women's Shelter in our area. Also planned for this year is the addition of household items, kitchen utensils, and items of furniture to the list of donations we collect for Navy Relief.

Having learned a great deal in the past couple of months, the class will continue its work of Expanding the Mission. We believe God has given us a great gift in sending us to so many fine and earnest members of our community. And we have been enabled to lay the groundwork for a positive, friendly, and generous impression of what Orthodox Christians are like.

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST!

GLORY FOREVER! ❖

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Mother of God Parish Opens Its New Church

The Mother of God Joy of All Who Sorrow Orthodox community in Princeton has opened the doors to their new Church with a wonderful celebration on Friday and Saturday, 29-30 January 2016. The mission began over 17 years ago and the purchase of the current property was made in 2010. Much sacrifice and hard work went to complete this project. Fr. Peter Baktis, the current rector, came to the parish after serving 25 years as an Army Chaplain. He arrived in March of 2015 with the understanding that he would work with the members to finish the building and site. The way ahead was agreed to at the annual parish meeting in April of 2015.



*Photos by
Gabrielle and
Suzanne Dragan*

There were permits to get, contractors to hire and money to raise. With the determination of the faithful and the leadership of the Parish Council, the road was walked. There were many tears of joy from the faithful as Archbishop Michael and a member of the community, Nina Robinson, cut the ribbon on Friday and for the first time many walked into the Church. Archbishop Michael gave a moving homily that night, focused on the lives of the Three Hierarchs and how they witnessed to the Faith through times of hardship and persecution. He challenged all present to do the same at the Mother of God Church in Princeton.

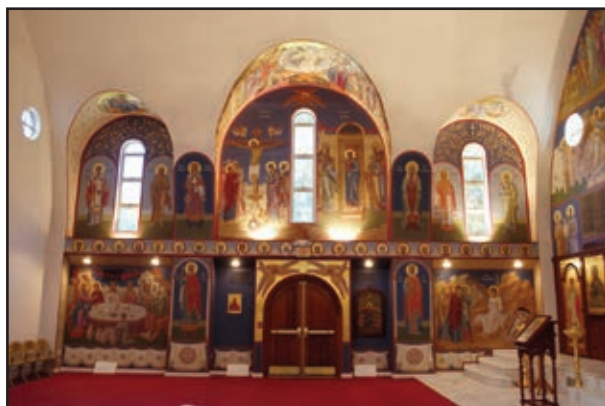
Saturday's celebration was majestic with eight priests celebrating with the Archbishop. It began with the greeting and vesting of Archbishop

Michael. The Archbishop blessed the church with holy water and consecrated the new atimension for the altar. Fr. John Jillions brought the relics of the Hieromartyr Hilarion, Archbishop of Vereiya (Dec 15). Fr. John brought greetings from Metropolitan Tikhon. Father John also spoke about the life of the Hieromartyr and how his relics connect the members of the Mother of God Church with the Universal Church. Archbishop Michael in his homily reminded the faithful that this new building is built for our children's children and challenged all to live the prayer spoken by King Solomon when he dedicated the Temple. A reception followed the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy.

The Parish offers a regular schedule of services and educational programs. More information is available at their website: mogoca.org. ♦



Iconographic Plan at Annunciation Church Continues



Annunciation Church in Brick New Jersey has completed Phase 3 of an iconography project that started in 2012. Iconographer Ivan Roumiantsev has adorned the walls of the nave with icons of saints and festal images. The parish's focus now shifts to a building project during which the parish hall and church school buildings will be demolished and replaced with a larger, more functional multi-purpose building. This project is targeted for completion by the end of 2016. ♦

Stewardship Corner

by *Matushka Mary Buletza Breton, Diocesan Treasurer*

“Glory to Jesus Christ!” That is our Orthodox greeting when we see each other and enter into our homes and our churches. It is also the main purpose of our lives here on earth—to give glory and thanks to Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. Every breath we take and every move we make should have this as its end purpose. We give our Time to God in prayer and doing good works in His name. We use our God-given Talents – whether we have received five talents, or two, or one – towards building up His kingdom here on earth. And we give and use our Treasures to ease others’ burdens and to underwrite the operation of Christ’s Church on earth.

During our All American Council in Atlanta last July, those gathered overwhelmingly agreed to change the funding model of our national Church from a per capita method to a tithing or percentage method. As of January 1, 2016, all Dioceses are contributing based on a percentage of their unrestricted receipts.

Currently, only a few DNYNJ parishes “tithes” to the Diocese. Over the course of the spring and summer, we will educate our parishes and answer questions regarding the transition to proportionate giving. At the 2016 Diocesan Assembly, a resolution will be proposed that will direct the transition. As of January 1, 2017, all parishes in the DNYNJ will begin to remit assessments to the Diocese based on a percentage method, versus the current \$145 per capita method. We are using the remaining time during 2016 to continue to discuss this transition and work with the parish councils to understand and prepare to implement this change.

In the coming months, we plan to communicate with every parish about its transition, including preliminary calculations. In order to make this exercise most effective, it is imperative that the Archbishop’s office receive current annual financial statements (income statement and balance sheet) from each parish.

In June 2016, I will present this topic at the three annual deanery Parish Council Conferences. Continuing the 2015 Diocesan Assembly workshop theme, we discussed this transition, answered specific questions, and perhaps even repeated the “role plays” from the laity workshops at last year’s Diocesan Assembly.

Some people have expressed fear and concern over this transition from per capita to proportionate giving. Often, fear of the unknown is much worse than the unknown itself. In most parish situations reviewed so far, the tithing calculations, 10% of unrestricted operating income, are very close to the per capita assessment figures.

We need to be cheerful givers at every level of the Church, giving with grateful and thankful hearts and not out of obligation or to satisfy the rules. The Diocesan Council and I will be available to work with all parishes towards this end. Please join us in praying that this transition will be smooth and embraced by all.

Please email specific questions to Matushka Mary at MatMaryB@gmail.com . ❖

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the twenty-eight questions that were proposed, they realized that each of the questions is still unanswered twenty-seven years later. Many of the points dealt with language. The members of my group discussed how they do not understand the divine services because they do not understand Old Church Slavonic. Growing up in a church that has a primary language of English has spoiled me. When I go to another jurisdiction, for example ROCOR, I expect to hear Slavonic and only understand a

small amount. I am blessed to go back to the OCA and understand each word that is said. It gives me a better understanding of my faith.

Seeing so many Orthodox Christians from all over the world that do share the same concerns allows the “wall” that has been built up to come down. Several members of our group will attend the 2016 Syndesmos Conference this July in Presov, Slovakia. ❖

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Maestro Shipovalnikov Honored by the Church

During their Spring Session in Syosset, March 29 – April 1, 2016, the members of the Holy Synod of Bishops awarded the Order of Saint Romanos to Dr. Vladimir Morosan and Aleksei Shipovalnikov in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to the field of liturgical music in the Orthodox Church in America.



Photo by
John Savastinuk

A native of Rostov-on-Don, Russia, Aleksei V. Shipovalnikov served as Artistic Director and Manager of the Moscow State University Symphony Orchestra and Academic Choir. His post-graduate studies included a master class with Leonard Bernstein in Moscow in 1988. He has also conducted in West Germany and Poland, where he established a reputation for innovative programming in spite of the political risks involved during the communist era. Such ventures included the

presentation of the first Stockhausen Festival in the USSR and the establishment of the “Fellowship of Musical Evenings” in Moscow under the auspices of Moscow University and the Russian Musical Society in 1985. Mr. Shipovalnikov immigrated to the US in 1990 and has been a guest lecturer at Columbia, George Washington, Princeton, Stanford and Southern Methodist Universities and Professor of Liturgical Music at Saint Tikhon’s Seminary, South Canaan, PA.

In 1991, he was appointed Music Director of Slavyanka Men’s Slavic Chorus. Two years later, he recorded the world premiere of Shvedov’s “Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom” for Harmonia Mundi. In 1994 he was named Artistic Director of the Concertino Chamber Orchestra in Moscow and, in the same year, he directed choral selections for the musical soundtrack of the film, *Little Odessa*, with Twentieth Century Fox. He is Founder and Director of the Spirit of Orthodoxy Choir and Music Director at SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church, Jersey City, NJ. ❖

Lord, I Call Upon Thee, Hear Me



Mother Angelina (French) and Sister Helene (Krenitsky), members of the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration, Ellwood City, PA led a Retreat on Saturday April 2, during Great Lent, at the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Medford, NJ. Entitled, *Lord, I Call Upon Thee, Hear Me*, they examined how daily prayer (Mother Angelina) prepares one for and is reinforced by the Church’s liturgical life (Sister Helene). The group of 50 participants from various deanery communities appreciated their well-organized presentations,

obviously rooted in study and personal experience. In anticipation of their Retreat, they recommended Psalm texts used during Great Lent that became the basis for a Daily Lenten Reader that was distributed in print and digital forms.

The Monastery has had the gift of being the home parish for Fr. Thomas, of blessed memory, and Matushka Anne Hopko in their retirement. The monastery had the blessing to learn much from Fr. Thomas and also were a source of encouragement, support, and daily liturgical life for father and Matushka.

Following Sunday’s Liturgy the monastics offered a more informal opportunity for questions and answers on the topics of vocation and the spiritual life. Representatives from the Penn State OCF, who

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60 Years of Love and Service to Christ and the Church

1/26/56

My dear, dear Serge,

I was very happy when I got the news of your forthcoming marriage. May God bless you and your future wife, and may also this new life – which you are beginning now – lead you even further, to a more complete, more total service of Christ and of his Church.

[He explains that he can't come for various reasons and then concludes:]

But I will be with you in prayers (I always mention your name at the Divine service) and I hope that once married – you will bring to N.Y. some day the young and the happy Mrs. Kuharsky...

With a very sincere love,

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

On Sunday May 22, Archbishop Michael, Diocesan clergy, family, friends, and former parishioners gathered with Fr. Serge and Faith at SS. Peter and Paul Church, South River, NJ to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of all that Fr. Alexander had wished for them: love and service to Christ and his Church. After a Molieben, Archbishop Michael spoke about Fr. Serge's distinguished legacy of having served at Holy Trinity Church, New Britain, CT; St. Theodosius Cathedral, Cleveland, OH; and SS. Peter and Paul Church, South River, NJ. (from which he retired in 1998). Fr. Serge was able to be present at the 100th Anniversaries of all three parishes. His Eminence spoke about the integrity of his ministry, his involvement in the greater life of the Church, and his grace in retirement, having prepared and encouraged his successor, Fr. David Garretson. He noted as well the creative talents and support of Matushka Faith, particularly in the areas of religious education.

He presented Fr. Serge and Faith with awards of recognition from Metropolitan Tikhon and the Holy Synod and our Diocese.

Other speakers included: Fr. John Shimchick, who had been an altar server when Fr. Serge was in New Britain; Fr. Paul Shafran, Fr. David Garretson (who noted that in anticipation of his ordination,

Fr. Serge sent him the cross which he himself had worn when ordained); Parish Warden, James Kornafel; granddaughter, Katarina Kuharsky; and Serge Kuharsky, their youngest son, who shared personal reminiscences and read reflections from his brothers, Andrew and Paul, and sister, Gallia, who were unable to attend.

In considering the celebration, Fr. Serge and Faith acknowledged that, "We were overwhelmed by the awards and honors presented by Archbishop Michael and by the number of clergy, friends and former parishioners who came to celebrate with us and the love and care shown by all."

A delicious reception was prepared by the SS. Peter and Paul community.

Video interviews with Fr. Serge and Faith are available as part of our Diocesan oral history series: *Gift and Grace: Stories of Orthodox Clergy and Their Wives* at: <http://nynjoca.org/interviews.html> ❖

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were traveling back to State College after a weekend project at the New Jersey shore, were also present. Sister Helene, an engineering major at Penn State and indebted to the formation she received as a member of the OCF, was particularly grateful to engage with the students.

It is hoped that this Retreat will initiate a fruitful relationship between the Holy Cross parish and the Monastic community. Women from Holy Cross and from Annunciation Church, Brick, NJ will visit the Monastery for a Retreat in the early summer. ❖

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St. Innocent's Mission

In the northern Catskills region of New York, there is a light that shines from between the mountains. That light is the Mission of St. Innocent, Apostle to America located in the picturesque town of Oneonta. Its services are attended by Orthodox faithful, catechumens, and those of other Christian confessions in their search for a home in Christ and in His Holy Church.



St. Innocent brought the word of Christ to the inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands, the Bering seacoast, and beyond. The Mission seeks to continue the work in North America that was started by its beloved patron saint by bringing the Orthodox Faith to the people of the Oneonta/Cooperstown area, making it accessible, available, and present for anyone and everyone to encounter and experience.

Founded in 1997 and with great help from its Mother Parish, SS. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Endicott, NY, the community meets and holds the divine services in a small chapel located in the basement of St. James' Episcopal Church on Main Street in "downtown" Oneonta. The parish welcomed its new full-time pastor, Fr. Vasil Dubee, in December, 2015. He was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on October 9th, 2015 at St. Tikhon's Monastery by His Eminence, Archbishop Mark, and was received into our diocese by His Eminence Archbishop Michael a short time afterwards.

Fr. Vasil and his family look forward to making Oneonta their permanent home.

The parish hopes to immediately create OCF chapters at Hartwick College and SUNY Oneonta campus. Adult religious education classes are held on Saturday evenings following Vespers, and the children are taught following the Sunday Divine Liturgy. At Christmas, new iconography was donated and mounted on the iconostas, magnificently adorning and beautifying the chapel's interior. The parish also is seeking to purchase a rectory for Fr. Vasil and his family and has created a fund for the building of an Orthodox temple. The city of Oneonta lies 60 miles northeast of Binghamton, NY, midway between Binghamton and Albany, and is an excellent location for a permanent Orthodox church-community.

Greatly blessed with many young families and very dedicated parishioners, the Mission is growing steadily. Undoubtedly, "with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), and we trust in Him and give glory to His name. We joyfully invite everyone to worship with us, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox. All are welcome! We also ask everyone to pray for



our Mission. We also ask for your financial support as well, that we may continue to do God's will and that He may bless us in return according to His great mercy.

For more information and to contact Fr. Vasil: <http://www.stinnocentmission.org/> ❖

February 1917: The Church in America Responds to the Democratic Revolution in Russia — Events in New York City

by Fr. John Jillions

One of the treasures in the Archives of the Orthodox Church in America is our collection of *The Russian Orthodox American Messenger* (*Amerikanskii Pravoslavnyi Vestnik*), published from 1869 until 1973. This was the first official publication of what eventually became the Orthodox Church in America. Over its history it was published in English and Russian, and then Russian only, and then ceased publication in 1973 (*The Orthodox Church* newspaper started in 1965.)

I was interested in how our Church reacted to the two revolutions in Russia in 1917. First, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in February 1917 and the Provisional Government was installed. Then eight months later the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in October 1917. The North American Mission has been accustomed to a high degree of self reliance, but from then on it had to adapt to completely living on its own after more than 125 years of existence under the Russian Orthodox Church.



Fr. Leonid Turkevich and family

The Messenger's editor at the time was Fr Leonid Turkevich (1876 - 1965), the Dean of St. Nicholas Cathedral in New York City (15 East 97th St) and a leading figure in the North American Mission as pastor, scholar, poet, administrator, and later as Metropolitan Leonty. I was inspired to see our church newspaper engaging with big issues well beyond parish life. To give a taste of this (from a much longer article on the two revolutions), here's how *The Messenger* covered the arrival in New York City of the new Russian Ambassador of the Provisional Government in July 1917.

Welcoming Ambassador Bakhmeteff to New York City

The first notice in *The Messenger* that the situation in Russia has changed dramatically comes

with Tsar Nicholas II's letter of abdication, signed on March 15, 1917 and published as the first item in the issue of March 29, 1917.

In 1917 the North American Mission was a multi-ethnic collection of parishes that included over 300 communities that were Alaskan, Russian, Galician, Carpatho-Rusyn, Albanian, Serbian, Arabic, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Greek. There had long been hopes that the American diocese, with its unique missionary situation in comparison to a typical diocese in Russia, would be able to organize itself more nimbly to reflect the pastoral

needs and mission in North America. Now, with the abdication of the Tsar and the installation of a democratic government, it looked like the Church both in Russia and in America would be free to order its own life without government interference.

This hopeful atmosphere is amplified enormously by the enthusiastic welcome the United States government gave the new democratic

Russian government and its ambassador to the US, Boris Bakhmeteff (1880-1951.) *The Messenger* has a substantial two-part article (in Russian by an unsigned observer – Fr. Leonid Turkevich?) in the issues of July 26 and Aug 2, 1917, reporting in detail on Bakhmeteff's reception in New York in early July. There were major events at Battery Park, a procession to City Hall, and programs at Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden.

The celebrations began in Battery Park with starring roles played by former President Theodore Roosevelt, Mayor John Mitchell (at 34 the youngest-ever mayor of New York), and the famous union leader Samuel Gompers. There were a number of brief welcoming speeches, including Fr. P Popov on behalf of Archbishop Evdokim, the Mission, clergy, and the brotherhoods. It was a glorious

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welcome. As our Archbishop Evdokim later said in his conversation with Bakhmeteff, “No Russian ambassador to America ever received from anyone or anywhere or at any time such a welcome as the new ambassador of a Free Russia received in New York.”

The main speeches were in a packed Carnegie Hall. The proceedings began with a female vocalist singing the new patriotic hymn, “America the Beautiful” (first published in 1910). The audience had the text and notes as well, and repeated the verses. All the speakers emphasized their joy at the overthrow of the autocratic regime in Russia, which now joined the United States as

a free and democratic nation. The writer noted that Roosevelt was especially well received. It was obvious that the retired President still had the affections of the crowd. He spoke at great length and with a powerful oratorical skill that held the attention of the audience, speaking on behalf of America as a venerable democracy to the new democratic Russia, warning the country against excesses, extremes and

theoretical ideologies. He exhorted Russia to give freedom to Jews and Protestants. He expressed his admiration for the armies of Russia, which for three years had stood against the German foe. But he also warned any German immigrants who might be listening to either get on board with the United States and be patriotic citizens, or go back to their homeland, and serve their beloved Kaiser.

Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) was the next speaker, the battle-scarred founder and president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). He spoke softly, without Roosevelt’s flourishes. Like Roosevelt he noted that the United States, as the oldest democracy in the world could be a mentor to Russia. But he warned that the American experience was very mixed, and he pointed to the recent news of a pogrom in St. Louis against blacks as houses were burned down, and hundreds of lives were lost as a result of inhuman cruelty.

[These were the infamous East St Louis race riots of July 2, 1917. “Men, women, and children were beaten and shot to death. Around six o’ clock that evening, white mobs began to set fire to the homes of black residents. Residents had to choose between burning alive in their homes, or run out of the burning houses, only to be met by gunfire. In other parts of the city, white mobs began to lynch African Americans against the backdrop of burning buildings.” (<http://www.blackpast.org>) Immigrants were targets as well: the previous week’s edition of *The Messenger* (July 12, 1917) printed a letter from Fr. Basil Kolesnikov of Desloges, Missouri near St. Louis, reporting that a band of rioters against Russian workers on Saturday, July 1st, shot at the church and parish house, broke into the house, beat him up, stole valuables, threatened him with murder and threw him out of the house. “We ran to [Farmington]. My parishioners left the house and ran. I ask for your holy prayers and to intercede for us with the authorities.” Archbishop Evdokim replied with concern and said he had passed this on to the Russian consulate. He asked to be updated on developments.]

Samuel Gompers went on:

“We consider ourselves to have existed 140 years. But we, the citizens of a free America, must now admit to our shame, that in the very cradle of our Republic we have examples in our time of such pogroms that would only have been possible under Russia’s old regime. What can we now say to our great and honored guests? What can we say to the representatives of the newest democracy, the largest in the world? Nothing other than this:

Gentlemen: you have proclaimed the beginning of the purest brotherhood, equality and liberty, and you desire that these beginnings would be completely triumphant in your government life. That’s wonderful. We congratulate you for this grand inspiration. But we would add one thing. To bring to life this great democratic beginning is an enormous task, it is a truly grand and high and virtuous goal. And for this reason we would only wish that in your new beginning there would be no place in your life for the kind of tragic events that we have witnessed and the terrible things now happening in St. Louis, which sets back our humanity a hundred years. Long live the great Russian democracy! And may its great beginning of equality, brotherhood, love and



The Messenger

justice be triumphant! I greet you, citizens of a Great Russia!”

The audience erupted with shouts and applause. Gompers electrified them. But Roosevelt was furious at this public washing of American dirty laundry in front of the foreign ambassador and jumped up to counter what had been said. They started a back and forth dispute that Mayor John Mitchell had difficulty stepping in to quell. Finally, after banging insistently on the lectern and calling out repeatedly, “Gentlemen,” he brought the argument to an end, restored order, reminded everyone why they were gathered, and urged everyone to behave in such a way that the honored guests of New York and America would feel that they were among a disciplined citizenry which understood the full importance and solemnity of the occasion.

Mayor Mitchell then invited Ambassador Bakhmeteff to speak. “He spoke quietly and quickly, so it was difficult to hear,” but he recounted how democracy had taken hold of Russia’s heart and soul. He affirmed Russia’s intention to bring the war to a successful peace for all against German aggression. The ambassador left a deep impression on the audience of how quickly, successfully and peacefully democracy had come to Russia.

The next evening the big event was in Madison Square Garden for a “Festival of the Russian Revolution,” where the social revolutionaries of New York were gathered to greet the ambassador. The Garden was decorated throughout in revolutionary red, with signs proclaiming: “Long live a revolutionary and free Russia!”, “The Revolutionary Army”, “The Revolutionary Navy”, “Deputies of the workers and soldiers”, “The revolutionary proletariat.” The most impressive speaker was one Reutsky, representative of the workers. He assured the new ambassador that he could count on the support of all immigrants for the war effort, to expel from Russia the enemy occupiers, and bring the war to a victorious end. But this pledge of support was met with chaotic and conflicting shouts, some saying “Bravo” and others, “Get out of here.” It was very clear that many did not at all support the war effort.

To bring order the organizers quickly moved the agenda forward and called on Ambassador Bakhmeteff to speak. He told them about the changes that had come about in Russia, and they

listened attentively and applauded loudly when he ended with the words, “The revolution has saved Russia!” The article concludes by noting that for the first time, the disparate elements of the Russian People in America had come together as one.

The North American Church in the aftermath of Revolutions in Russia

The aftermath of the February and October Revolutions in 1917 shows the North American Mission to have profited well from its over 100 years of history and its missionary expansion and struggle. The Mission was conscious even then of having its own vocation and sense of purpose in this land. It had long experience being self-reliant and working together as bishops, clergy and faithful to overcome difficulties and opponents and build the Church up without expecting much financial help from Russia. Despite the challenges, church life in America continued even as Russia was disrupted by a world war and two revolutions.

The February Revolution brought hope that the long anticipated project for reform and expansion in North America could finally move forward, with perhaps the active help of the Russian Church. The old regime had held the Church back, and under new conditions of freedom Russia and the US could join forces as democratic nations. The Mission could prosper in America as a fully engaged partner.

The October Revolution dashed some of those hopes, but also made the members of the Mission realize that they would need to draw on their self-reliance and faith and come together as never before. Perhaps here in North America the Church would be able to flourish in a manner now brutally cut off in Russia itself. But the Mission also felt a personal connection to all that was happening in Russia. Their own Archbishop Tikhon as Patriarch of Moscow was now leading the Church of Russia through its fiery ordeal and calling all to remain steadfast witnesses of faith. ♦

[This was part of an academic paper entitled, *The Amerikanskii Pravoslavnyi Vestnik (The Russian Orthodox American Messenger) 1917-18: in the Aftermath of Revolutions in Russia*, which Fr. John presented at the Northeast Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies Conference, April 2, 2016, New York University, Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia.]

Letter Written to a Very Much Loved Grandfather – 48 Years After His Repose

by Matushka Tamara Skvir

March, 2013

Read to the Synod of Bishops at Westwood in
Syosset, NY

Dorogoi Ded!

Please excuse me for communicating with you
in English rather than in Russian!

Recently, I realized that your English was very
good! So, today I will use English.

As I am sure you know, you are often in my
thoughts and prayers, but especially when I encounter



difficult times or seemingly insurmountable
challenges. At these moments I tend to wander to
the family icon corner, or to walk the long hallway
(as you used to do during your morning prayers,) or
to gaze at the bright distant mysterious moon (which
brought you a few sleepless nights.) I feel your
presence – comfort comes, challenges are met.

Today, I am at your beloved Syosset with cousins
Meeky and Julie. Did you know you are adored and
revered by far more than we, your grandchildren,
had ever imagined? People want to know more about
you! There are questions, which I cannot answer. It
is for this reason, I ask yet again for your guidance.

The first question is: “What was Metropolitan
Leonty, your grandfather, like?” I just don’t know
how to answer such a question! What could people
want to know about you from grandchildren who
knew/know you as Ded, Grandpoppy? (Were you

that different from other grandfathers? – well – you
did wear a cassock, you had a neat pony tail and a
cool looking walking stick which could be used to
shoot balls across the floor.) How to answer such a
question?

Do you think it appropriate for me to share the
personal memories sister Marina, my cousins and I
have of you? Are you comfortable with mention of
such memories as the following:

That you had vivid dreams – I thought
it was because you always slept in
my bedroom and liked my pillow – we used to
wait anxiously for your morning accountings of
these dreams,

That you never held back on blessing us – you
would come into our bedrooms after we were
asleep and give us just one more blessing –
occasionally, I’d try to stay awake wondering if
you’d remember to come in – not sure if Marina
or my other cousins did the same,

That even though you were not “a foodie” and
consumed many dry Gorton fish sticks, you did
have a food weakness – chocolate – chocolate
which you hid in various places of this very
building,

That you were fun as a baby sitter – a tease
– your training as an only parent of 5 children
and a classroom instructor kept us in check, and
as I have heard, you (The Metropolitan) were an
emergency back up sitter for the Kreta family
and other families during choir rehearsals at 2nd
street,

That you liked to “wander,” “meander,” and
could disappear as quickly as you’d appear – at
the dacha once we thought we had lost you.
Mama kept yelling “Vladyka” and there you
were, cassock and all, in the choke cherry tree
picking berries for jam. (You had missed the
instruction – beach plums – not choke cherries,
Ded – I suspect you wanted a better view of
Long Island Sound) You must have been well
into your 70s!

That you loved cats. According to your sons, you would drape Ilyador over your shoulders as you paced saying your morning prayers. Frequently, you gave a white fluffy stuffed animal cat to a small child as a gift. Cousin Darya still has her white fluffy cat,

That you could not pass by someone in need. As somewhat embarrassed grandchildren, we witnessed your kindness to the Bowery homeless when you would ask Papa to stop the car so you could give a little something “to the man over there.”

That you were good with numbers. At least so I thought, since we always practiced counting as we ascended to your 2nd street apartment (77 steps, as I recall),

That you were proud of your heritage. Not only did you write for us a detailed, at times colorful, history of the Turkevich family, but you also sat down with each of us and explained the family tree.

It is difficult to know if these personal vignettes are of general interest. Perhaps, I should take a more scholarly approach. Not that I knew you in that light. However, recently I went through your writings. They struck me as being of literary and historical significance. That is for others to judge, but people should be aware of your work. Should this be shared in my response?

Ded! When did you ever have the time to do so much writing? You loved to write post cards, poems, letters, poems, descriptions of the day's events, poems, copy letters written by you and to you, and, yes, poems.

People most likely would find your daily diary entries of interest.

Should I mention your entries written during 1917-1918 when you scribed the details of heated Sobor discussions, the tallies of votes, the lectures verbatim; described the gunfire in the streets, the church services; recounted dodging bullets as you made your way to meetings; wrote of distant monasteries along the Trans-Siberian route; described your many vivid dreams; and penned your poems – sometimes 3-4 poems in one day and each being 3-4 stanzas long? Ded, I felt I was intruding on your personal thoughts – you so missed your family, worrying about Tony, Irochka and your Anna, who was pregnant.

Should I mention your poetry, which you wrote with rhythm and in rhyme? Your topics varied as you reflected on events, nature, family, spiritual themes. Then there were the personal poems you would send to a widow or widower where your loving recollection surely brought comfort to the grieving.

Would this be of interest to others? I just don't know.

Ded, then there is the second question. “What do you think your grandfather's, Metropolitan Leonty's, legacy is?” Oh, my. I know my answer is not what others want to hear. But, Ded, first and foremost for us, your grandchildren, you were the father to our wonderful fathers. Despite one tragedy after another, one loss after another including their own mother, all three of our fathers, John, Tony and Nick, were rays of sunshine and love whenever they'd enter a room. They had bright, upbeat personalities. (Indeed, they were bright – best in their fields – Tony even clarified what that mysterious moon is made of. So, professionally, your children made noteworthy contributions to society and science.) That is not the legacy of which I speak. They weren't special because they were smart. They were special because they embraced Christ's love. We, as children, felt this all-embracing love. Our father and our uncles were men who never showed anger or malice. They were genuinely caring, kind, patient, encouraging, yes, loving not only to us, but to all who knew and worked with them. They were especially devoted and encouraging to their wives. And all three, John, Tony and Nick were like that!! How could they all have been like that unless they had experienced such genuine love from their own father, a man filled with Christ's love. Yes, your legacy is the example provided to us by your children. Just an aside, Ded, Uncle Tony, was extraordinarily humble. But you probably know that.

So, Ded, I've rambled on. Not sure how I'll end up responding to some of these questions. But, as I've mulled them over, I have enjoyed my time reminiscing with you. By the way, I'm taking good care of your wallet. It's empty – the way you liked it.

In Christ's love,

Krepko tseluyu,
Tasya



A Tremendous and Wonderful Opportunity

by Fr. Jonathan Ivanoff

We are all familiar with the story. St. Paul, in Athens, telling the Athenians that they really did believe in the God he preached, they just didn't know it, yet. And, seemingly, it worked: they were willing to return another day, to hear more, to continue the dialogue.

Today, we find ourselves as citizens of a New Athens, where "wisdom," "reason," and the pursuit of "rationality," "logic," "fact," and "science" would appear to reign supreme, and where, further, there are a plethora of "gods" and a disbelief in the supremacy and nobility of faith. Even "belief" and "truth" are considered relative.

This has had tragic results in the souls of those who live in the New Athens. They don't know what to believe in, what to adhere to; they are willing to question everything but don't know how or in what to believe, in what to put faith, respect, loyalty. And they are, as they say, not "religious" but "spiritual." They can't quite define what that spirit is, but whatever it is, they have it.

This gives us, Orthodox Christians, a tremendous and wonderful opportunity to share the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We know what that "spirit" is, and we know what it is not. And since they do not know how to define it, what it is, or how they relate to it, we need to provide those definitions for them.

The largest increasing segment of the religious landscape in America today are the "nones" – those

who, when asked to what religion they belong, reply, "none." They may actually believe in "god" but they're not sure who or what kind of God it is. But most know this much: It's not the god they grew up with, it's not the god of their childhood or their family's "god." They've left that god; they no longer like him, believe in him, or want anything to do with him. Or her. Or it. Whatever.

But this is just the beginning for us: They've never really met the Christian God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They've never had an encounter with the Living God. They've met imitations, maybe, and poor ones at that, but never the real thing. So we, Orthodox Christians, who have seen the True Light, who have found the True Faith, worshipping the Undivided Trinity, we Orthodox can make that connection. We can introduce them to the "Unknown God," the one they've always known, but have never known; the one they've never met, but who has always been there.

How? Talk to them. Ask them lots of questions: "reporter" questions (who, what, where, when, and, especially, why?), and most of all, do a lot of listening. Part of the problem most of the "nones" have is that far too many people are too quick to judge, to condemn, and to excuse and dismiss, and far, far too few are willing to listen to them, to engage them, to talk to them, calmly, lovingly, willingly.

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Why I Say "Yes" to Christ

by Steven Christoforou

We see the world as it was meant to be in the light of Christ's victory over death. We see it in the fragrant, myrrh-streaming bones of the saints. We see it in the transformed lives of the saints, whose every word and deed radiates the reality of the Resurrection. We see it in the acts of love, great and small, which sustain an otherwise dry and barren world.

And I see it in my own life, which makes far more sense in Christ than apart from Him. So I say "yes" to Christ because no temporary pleasure can compare to the eternal joy of the Resurrection; because, no matter my doubts and struggles, the same unfading Light shines through the darkness. And the darkness will not overtake it. ❖

Steven Christoforou is the Director of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. See his podcast at: *Be the Bee*.

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Nikko said, “But dumb, they were not. They sensed themselves, even as they were telling us, the individualistic quest they proposed is a dead-end. No person reaches the truth alone. The more of an individual, the less of a person. But I suppose if they don’t know, maybe it’s because we haven’t shown them, or because they feel they already know it all. I guess we have to try harder, break bread together.”

George said. “They knew something, but they knew there was something more, and they were longing for the unknown thing, but didn’t know how to know it. Like the Euclidian, what was it called?”

“Algorithm.” Nikko said.

“Yes. They taught the algorithm so we would know there were some things we didn’t need to understand or prove to know they were true.” George said. “We knew it had something to do with reality, something existing bigger than us”

“If they came to church?” Nikko said. “They’d have to let go of their faith in their own logic and reasoning, because nowadays, Georgie, there are as many logics as there are people, as there are desires and dreams. So many, they make each other meaningless. And our long held common life? They would have to give up their individual certainty, the authority of their ego, to share the one cup He offers. Never! Would rather die alone. It’s just them and God. They will speak their new word, as they see it,” Nikko snapped his fingers, “and He will do as their logic demands. The Bible by my formula. Using physics to measure metaphysics.”

George made the sign of the Cross. He said. “Hard, not to lean to our own understanding. But foolish to think we can compel the unknown to come within the limits of our understanding. How can we grasp it with the poor tools of our senses and brain? The fish is too big for the net. No, Nikko, the

unknown must come to us, to our level. Has to jump in our little boat.”

Nikko said. “Today, people don’t believe unless they understand, and since they think they can understand everything, there, Georgie, is the weakness. Their understanding is their weakness. The heel they hold it by is their limit, like Achilles’ mother. Their thought slips away when they try to hold God because He is beyond thought. So, they reason, He must not be. They’ll believe anything as long as they claim to understand it.”

“Or to feel it.” Georgie said. “And if they don’t understand it or feel it, it can’t be true.”

Nikko said. “Our priest would prefer to say what they wouldn’t find. But, what they would find is all of us, the strong and the weak, limping together, helping each other, trying to cross over in the one boat, with only Kyrie to guide our way, that, they would find.”

“Do our priests go out to sell?” George said.

“Is that how your American son-in-law joined the church?” Nikko said.

Georgie said, “No. My daughter? She just loved him. Then my wife. Then me. I think now he loves us too. We apologized about so little English in the church, but he said there are other ways there that God touches him.”

“He must have eyes in his heart.” Nikko said.

“It helps to know.” George said. “To understand the way of others. Then maybe we can help each other.”

Nikko said. “Let’s walk up to the sponge docks. Bring your hat. We don’t want your brain getting sunburned.” ♦

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Start, don’t wait. Some scoffed at St. Paul, as some will scoff (or worse) at you. But some will listen, as the Holy Spirit draws them to you when you have an open heart and see in every one of these broken, lost and confused persons the image and likeness of their Creator. There is a hunger and thirst in this world that cannot be satisfied by anything other than the Gospel. Do not be afraid. The eternal

salvation of these people may be at stake, and you may just be the person whom God calls to bring these people, like St. Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch.

Or St. Paul at the Acropolis. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, but others said, ‘we will hear you again about this.’ So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him, and believed.” ♦

Jacob's well

Summer 2016

One Beggar Telling Another Beggar Where to Find Bread

Bring Your Hat

by Fr. Stephen Siniari

“It is plain, then, that there is a God. But what He is in His essence and nature is absolutely incomprehensible and unknowable. ... All that is comprehensible about Him is His incomprehensibility.” St. John of Damascus

Early in the morning the streets of Tarpon Springs are shady and cool. Nikko and George shelter under the bakery awning sipping demitasse coffee. One fiddles with a prayer rope, his rough hands weathered from years on the sponge boats. Two young people approach, open their Bible and tell the story of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

George and Nikko think: A man named Paul came to our country, lived with us, taught us, but he didn't have a book. Have you come to correct the way of life he first introduced two thousand years ago on the Hill of Ares, west of the Acropolis, the Areopagus? But, no, the men are polite. They only interrupt to offer, “A cookie? A coffee?”

“No, thank you. We're on a mission. Pray with us and be saved. There are practical benefits too; better public morals, protecting children from the toxins of today's society, political influence in the public square, promoting good works, and promulgating our way in the marketplace of competing ideas, taking up the flag. Think of the situation in Greece.” They say. “Here, your business connections will be blessed by meeting others of the faith, sharing the good news, and most importantly, you will be saved from your sins.”

It sounded like an ideology, a business proposal, a formula, like the ones from the University for cultivating the biodiversity of the sea and thus increasing the sponge harvest. Like a fish farm. Something not in keeping with nature, like genetically engineered tomatoes that are pretty but without taste, or cloned sheep which cannot reproduce. Yes, we know, science will eventually answer these problems and tomorrow make untrue what it said today was true.

But neither man wanted to hurt the young people, dampen their enthusiasm, hamper their pilgrimage, or make them feel unwelcome. Hospitality often requires trial for the sake of others. Still, it felt like explanation had replaced experience. Logic had overshadowed love. Rationale had been substituted for relationship. Recompense overrode communion.

Later George said, “They sit for a moment, say no to our coffee, make a pitch for their sanitized copy of an old taverna, and then leave.”

“No flesh and blood.” Nikko said. “What about my cousin, who doesn't light a candle? Would they consider his suffering? The things he fears? I heard only my sin, my salvation.”

“This scheme would never work on a boat in a storm.” George said, “But they're young. They'll learn first to listen. It's a long voyage we sail together.”

Nikko said, “Georgie, this Russian Saint, Herman, by himself, lived with the people in Alaska, served them. But these? They didn't even ask, aren't we believers too? They didn't see my Cross?”

“They knew how to say, Opa!” George said.

The men were quiet for a long time. The silence did not seem awkward to them. Neither felt the need for words. The quiet was as embracing and natural as when they as children came in at the end of a long day and were held close in silence by their mother. Like liturgy.

“I wonder.” Georgie said. “What they would find if they came to our church trying to sell what someone sold them. They were full of passion, like they were trying to will themselves to believe so they could sell it to us. Wearing it like a tourist who thinks the cap he bought made him a fisherman.”

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Jacob's well

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