

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

July 9, 2017 – 5th Sunday After Pentecost

Hieromartyr Pankratios of Taormina

The Hieromartyr Pancratius, Bishop of Taormina, was born when our Lord Jesus Christ yet lived upon the earth. The parents of Pancratius were natives of Antioch. Hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, Pancratius' father took his young son with him and went to Jerusalem in order to see the great Teacher for himself. The miracles astonished him, and when he heard the divine teaching, he then believed in Christ as the Son of God. He became close with the disciples of the Lord, especially with the holy Apostle Peter. It was during this period that young Pancratius got to know the holy Apostle Peter.

After the Ascension of the Savior, one of the Apostles came to Antioch and baptized the parents of Pancratius together with all their household. When the parents of Pancratius died, he left behind his inherited possessions and went to Pontus and began to live in a cave, spending his days in prayer and deep spiritual contemplation. The holy Apostle Peter, while passing through those parts, visited Pancratius at Pontus. He took him along to Antioch, and then to Sicily, where the holy Apostle Paul then was. There the holy Apostles Peter and Paul made Saint Pancratius Bishop of Taormina in Sicily. Saint Pancratius toiled zealously for the



Christian enlightenment of the people. In a single month he built a church where he celebrated divine services. The number of believers quickly grew, and soon almost all the people of Taormina and the surrounding cities accepted the Christian Faith.

Saint Pancratius governed his flock peacefully for many years. However, pagans plotted against the saint, and seizing an appropriate moment, they fell upon him and stoned him. Thus, Saint Pancratius ended his life as a martyr. The saint's relics are in the church named for him in Rome. He is also commemorated on February 9. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 10:1-10

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 8:28-9:1

At that time, when Jesus had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed *men*, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine." And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water. Then those who kept *them* fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what *had happened* to the demon-possessed *men*. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged *Him* to depart from their region. So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Unless one dries up the inner fount of thoughts through prayer and humility - whose only weapon against them is fasting and the hardships of the body - then one's labors will amount to nothing. If, however, one cleanses the root through humility and prayer, as we mentioned, one will acquire the sanctification of one's outer self as well. It seems to me that this is what is meant by that apostolic saying, which says: "Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth." Eph. 6:14. And according to one of the fathers who most beautifully philosophized, the desiring power is girded by the perception power of the intellect, and it contracts as well the lower abdominal passions (St. Nilus the Ascetic). Of course, it is necessary to bring hardships to the body and self-control in moderation of food, in order that the body does not become rebellious and do violence to that which is of the intelligent aspect of the soul.

Therefore, there is nothing other than bodily hardships and prayer performed from a humble heart that is able to heal all passions of the flesh - that is, nothing else but poverty in spirit, which the Lord called "blessed."

The Lord presented the Beatitudes as a kind of title and contents of the Gospel of salvation. Not only has He embraced in one saying ("Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Mt. 5:3) so much virtue, and cast out so much evil by the beatitude itself, and blessed those who, through repentance, have circumcised well the passionate part of their own soul, but He has also embraced much more - not in analogy to the circumcision of passions - but in reference to troubles which come from the cold and ice, snow and frost, and from violent winds. Simply put, the miseries which plants withstand during the winter and summer, being exposed to the chill and heat. These are the miseries without which nothing on earth can ever grow, being unable to reach fruition. What is this in fact? These are the various temptations which befall us, which every person who meditates on bearing the future fruit to be brought to the Spiritual Vinedresser must necessarily undergo with thanksgiving. For example, if one has mercy, and protects the developing vegetation from miseries by building a wall around them and covering them with a roof so that they might persevere all the terrible seasonal weather conditions against them, and even takes special care of them by trimming and cleaning them - nonetheless, they will not bear fruit as a result of doing these things. Instead one must allow the plants to undergo all of this. For after the winter's unpleasantness, when springtime comes and blossoms and leaves appear, together with that beautiful renewal of budding, the unripe fruit which then grows according to its little contact with the jutting rays of the sun ripens, produces, and gives back pleasant food ready for harvesting.

In the same way, a human being who does not endure courageously the unpleasant burdens of temptations will never produce fruit worthy of the divine wine-press and eternal harvest, not even if one possesses all other virtues. For one is only perfected through zealously enduring both all the voluntary and involuntary afflictions. Some of these afflictions are inflicted upon us externally and others are borne internally. That which happens to the earthly plants naturally, during the changes of the seasons when cultivation is done by the vinedressers (who are us, the intelligent branches of Christ who are obedient to that Vinedresser of souls), is endured from self-determined free choice. Furthermore, without enduring the involuntary afflictions which come upon us, nor those voluntary things, one will not acquire divine blessings. For love towards God is received especially through the sorrows which are a result of the trial of temptations. Of course, it is necessary for the soul first to succeed in the voluntary afflictions, so that through them it may become accustomed to scorn pleasure and glory, and then we will easily bear those involuntary afflictions.

The one, then, who scorns those things for the sake of poverty in spirit and who considers oneself in need of more drastic medicine leading to repentance, has as a continual expectation every sorrow. This one will accept every temptation as something which one deserves, and rejoices at its occurrence, meeting it as an opportunity through which the soul can be cleansed. And this taking place becomes the motive for contrition before God and the source of very beneficial prayer, and at the same time it becomes the provider and protector of the soul's health. Also, such a person not only unresentfully forgives those who tempt one, but also offers gratitude to them as having performed good deeds. As a result of this, this person not only receives the forgiveness of sins and the promised reward, but also acquires the kingdom of heaven and divine blessings, in the end being called "blessed" by the Lord because of one's humble long-suffering in spirit.

– St. Gregory Palamas, *Treatise on the Spiritual Life* 8-9

Also Commemorated Today: Holy New Martyr Michael Paknanas of Athens

Michael Paknanas (or Baknanas) was born to very poor but pious and faithful parents in the famous city of Athens, Greece in 1753 near Thisseio. Consequently, he did not go to school but learned gardening instead. A devout Orthodox Christian, Michael was a parishioner at the church of Panagia Vlassarou, which today is in ruins in Ancient Agora near Thisseio. During the harvest season Michael would load his donkey with products and peddle them in the villages surrounding the city of Athens.



One day when he was eighteen years old, as he was returning from such a journey in the villages of Attica with his donkey, he was seized by some Muslims and accused falsely of transporting gunpowder to some rebel Greeks (klefts) who had become allies of the Russians. The Muslims beat him up and brought him before the kadi who had him put in jail. There, he was visited by other Muslims who threatened Michael and attempted to convert him to the Islamic faith.

A pious and zealous Christian named George, who found out about Michael, was able to visit him in prison and give him much needed support, for Michael was a rather simple and uneducated individual. George feared that Michael may deny his Orthodox faith, seeking to spare

his life since he was only 18 years old. After bribing the guards, George saw Michael in his prison cell on his knees praying with tears. For many hours they stayed together and prayed and sang hymns. After giving the young Michael words of encouragement to make firm his faith for martyrdom, they embraced and he departed.

After thirty days of incarceration, he was returned to the kadi who began to flatter Michael and promised not only to spare his life, but to reward Michael with all kinds of good things if only he would consent and embrace Islam. Michael, however, refused saying: "I will not become a Muslim! I will not become a Turk!" Consequently he was sent to the so-called kalopasha (good pasha) from Ioannina to decide on his fate. Then the same thing occurred: the same threats and promises, but also the same refusal from Michael, who, though simple, was mighty in faith: "I will not become a Muslim! I will not become a Turk!" As a result, Michael was sentenced to death.

On the way to his execution, Michael asked forgiveness from all the Orthodox Christians he encountered. The site of his execution was to be the Temple of Olympian Zeus. At the site of his execution Michael knelt and bent his head, being tied to one of the pillars of the Temple. The executioner, to frighten and cause him to weaken at the last minute, hit him with the blunt edge of the sword asking the martyr to reconsider. The martyr responded: "I told you, I am a Christian. I refuse to become a Muslim." It is said that this was done a few times to induce fear in Michael. But Michael, full of the Holy Spirit, shouted with courage: "Strike for the Faith!" This outburst infuriated the executioner who struck off Michael's head with one fatal swing of the sword. Thus Michael the Gardner from Athens, Greece

gave his life for the love of Jesus Christ in Athens on July 9, 1771. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – 141: Spiritual Education



“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciple.” (John 15:8 RSV)

Most Orthodox Christians, actually all Christians, fall into the trap of I don't need to know more! I learned all about Orthodoxy, Theology and being saved when I was in Sunday school! Sound familiar? How many of you have attended an adult education class or adult Bible class at your parish in the past year? In the past year, how many read the scriptures daily or have read a book about the Saints

or a Spirituality book? Many of you read the newspaper every day or read articles on the internet or read a “novel”? How many of you are concerned enough about your salvation and that of your brothers and sisters to further your spiritual education?

As Orthodox, we have a tendency to shy away from talking about our faith. Or, we say, “we are right, and you are wrong!” That doesn't help anyone. The primary reason we react this way is that we do not know enough about our faith to be able to express it or live it. Our faith is confined to two hours on Sunday!

We talked in previous blogs about being in communion with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ and sharing the gifts God has given us with each other that we might assist each other to Theosis. How can we do that if we fail to educate and understand ourselves? If the majority of the parish fails to be educated and fails to understand their faith, how can we make disciples to go out and help others?

The good news is that God has given us the abilities to learn, understand, remember and speak. He has given us the gifts that we need on our journey to Theosis as well as helping others on that same journey. He has given us the ability to make disciples, and He has commanded us to use those gifts for that specific purpose.

Can you say that you are using your gifts as God commanded? If not, why not? The Church offers you the opportunity to come and see, to learn, to teach. God has given you the gifts to accomplish that, will you take advantage of what He has given you in order to obtain what He has promised you? Or will you continue to be that two hour Sunday Orthodox Christian? (*from acrod.org*)

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On the Universal Priesthood

from The Eucharist by Fr. Alexander Schmemann

Being made perfect in Christ, salvation is accomplished in the world even while the hour of the final triumph of Christ, when God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28) is still to come. The whole world still lies in evil, and the prince of this world still has dominion in it. And therefore the sacrifice, offered once and for all, is always offered and the Lord is crucified for the sins of the world. He remains the priest and intercessor for the world before the Father, and thus the Church, his body, a participant in his flesh and blood, takes part in his priesthood and intercedes by his intercession. She offers not a new sacrifice, for all the fullness of salvation has been given to the world through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10), and by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb. 10:14), but, being his body, *she is herself priesthood, offering and sacrifice.* And if we live in the Church through the love of Christ, if love is the source and content and goal of her life, then this love exists in order that as he is, so are we in this world (1 Jn. 4:17). He came to save the world and to give his life for it. By what is the world saved if not by Christ's sacrifice, and how can we further fulfill the ministry of Christ if we do not take part in his sacrifice? This is also the universal priesthood of the Church: the very priesthood of Christ, in which she is consecrated, being his body. This is her first service in relation to the world, for which she was left and abides in the world: "to proclaim the death of the Lord, to confess his resurrection, to await his coming. And to this ministry everyone who in baptism was joined with Christ and made a member of his body is ordained. We are ordained so that, together constituting the Church, we may offer his sacrifice for the sins of the world, and in offering it, witness to salvation.

COMMUNION ETIQUETTE — SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

For cradle orthodox and converts alike, it's good to review from time to time the mechanics of how we are to worship – especially when approaching the Holy Gifts. All Diocesan priests recently received some formal guidance from the Bishop regarding how services are conducted in parishes throughout the Diocese. One of the items noted is how parishioners are to approach the chalice for communion.

Please approach the chalice with your arms folded across your chest, right over left – do not make the sign of the cross as you stand before the chalice or after you receive the precious Body and Blood. Open your mouth wide and allow the priest to place the Eucharist in your mouth; do not close your mouth on the spoon.

After receiving the Holy Gifts, please do not kiss either the chalice or Father's hand. The purpose of these restrictions is to reduce any possibility of the chalice being spilled or dropped.

Secondly, when we leave our seats and form a line for communion, please do not extend along the perimeter of the sanctuary. Rather, form the line in front of the tetrapod featuring the Icon of the day. Once you've venerated the icon, you may proceed to the right of the stand and wait for the person in front of you to take communion, then move forward. This announcement will be repeated for the next several weeks until everyone has heard it.

June Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! For the month of June our income/expenses were:

Operating Income: \$ 10,248.00 | Operating Expenses: \$9,298.28 | Income Over Expenses: \$949.72. Our major expense for the month was the repair of the house air conditioners - \$1,303.00. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House.

Kari

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, Josh Moore, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly departed servant of God Gordon Dewey, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)