

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

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy of
the Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

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.

April 2, 2017 – St. Mary of Egypt (5th Sunday in Lent)

A sermon from Holy Cross Monastery

Today is the 5th Sunday of Great Lent, when we commemorate our holy mother, St. Mary of Egypt. Before speaking about her, let me begin with something a little different that will illustrate the difference between Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman that we heard about in today's Gospel.

During the first Great Awakening in 18th century America, when Protestant revivals were sweeping the nation, there was one church in Enfield, Connecticut that had been largely unaffected by the widespread religious revival. On July 8, 1741, Jonathan Edwards, one of the most well-known Puritan preachers in America, was invited by the pastor of the Enfield church to deliver a sermon to them. His aim was to teach his listeners about the horrors of hell, the dangers of sin and the terrors of being lost, and thus was delivered his most famous homily, anthologized in English literary textbooks ever since, "**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.**"

I am sure you did not come to church this morning expecting to hear a message written by a Protestant minister, but bear with me, and you will see my purpose. I



will quote only a few paragraphs that capture the essence of his sermon, and that will be sufficient.

Edwards is addressing the people in this particular congregation who remained in their sin and showed no signs of repentance, ignorant of the eternal consequences. After making the point that God is angrier with these sinners who are still on earth than even with those He is tormenting in hell, he writes:

Thus it is that natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment; ... In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God. ...

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. ...

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours... It is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you were suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

What if St Mary of Egypt had been in that congregation that morning? Do you think she would have repented of her sins and understood God's loving-kindness toward sinners? Or would those pious Puritans have branded her with a scarlet letter, judging her to be under the wrath of God until *they* saw fit for her to be forgiven? Had Simon the Pharisee been there, perhaps he would have been glaring

at her, wondering how she had not dropped down into hell already. I can assure you that Edward's sermon makes very little mention of God's love and mercy for sinners. When he does, later in the sermon, he writes:

Now God stands ready to pity you; this is a day of mercy; you may cry now with some encouragement of obtaining mercy. [Here, Edwards seems to be offering some hope!] But when once the day of mercy is past, your most lamentable... cries and shrieks will be in vain; you will be wholly lost and thrown away of God, as to any regard to your welfare. God will have no other use to put you to, but to suffer misery; you shall be continued in being to no other end; for you will be a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction; and there will be no other use of this vessel, but to be filled full of wrath. God will be so far from pitying you when you cry to him, that it is said he will only 'laugh and mock'.

It is said that Edwards never finished his sermon on that day, because people kept interrupting, shouting, "What must I do to be saved?!" But what kind of conversions were they, I wonder?

Let me say emphatically, calling all the saints as my witness: this is *not* Who God is. Time does not permit me to express the errors of biblical interpretation that Edwards makes here regarding the meaning in scripture of the phrase "the wrath of God," so let's leave that aside.

But let us reflect rather on how someone like St. Mary of Egypt viewed God. We can be confident that her life is pleasing to God, because, as most of us know, hers is the only saint's biography read publicly in church as part of the liturgical services. The Church in Her wisdom, guided by the Holy Spirit, gives us an example that clearly demonstrates God's abundant compassion for even the worst of sinners. It is safe to say that most of us, in one way or another, to greater and lesser degrees, can relate to St. Mary of Egypt, in that most of us have defiled ourselves with sins and passions of various kinds, whether in the past, or even at present, and like the prodigal son, we have squandered our inheritance. Now, we are trying to repent and struggle to achieve union with Christ, but for many of us, we still view God in the way that Jonathan Edwards presents Him. Perhaps we don't even view our sins as being as bad as St. Mary's were, but still the following description might describe us. Some people, particularly us westerners,

...tend, by nature or training, to see God always as the stern, unappeasable Judge, whose dealings with man are always based on law and justice, and who demands of us an exact fulfillment of rules and rubrics. And we, in fulfilling these, do not really hope for, or believe in, the transfiguration and renewal of our souls and minds. At best, we hope that our scrupulous fulfillment of the Law will induce God to overlook our flaws and sins that we, in our heart of hearts, feel remain always

with us, unforgiven, unchanged, and unchangeable. In such an atmosphere, one's spiritual life is not really a journey into communion with God through repentance and deification, so much as a dreary pendulum of efforts to appease an inscrutable and implacable God, interspersed with the outbreaks of resentment and frustration this causes us. Naturally... this leads either to a mental breakdown, or to the abandonment of participation in church life, which we come to feel is not "working" for us.

[from 'Safely Home To Heaven: A Letter From an Orthodox Nun To a Former Calvinist' – Ed.]

And thus, we never understand who God really is, and never truly repent, not feeling in our hearts and believing that God is compassionate and loving. But St. Mary of Egypt shows us both what true repentance is, and also a deep understanding, despite our wretched state, of Who God is, and His love for us given through His Most Pure Mother and all the saints. The saints were people just like us and struggled against the very same things we struggle against.

From her life she recounts her sinful past to Abba Zosimas, the priest-monk who found her in the desert: "Already during the lifetime of my parents, when I was twelve years old, I renounced their love and went to Alexandria. I am ashamed to recall how there I at first ruined my maidenhood and then unrestrainedly and insatiably gave myself up to sensuality. ... For about seventeen years,... I lived like that. I was like a fire of public debauch. ... I had an insatiable desire and an irrepressible passion for lying in filth. This was life to me. Every kind of abuse of nature I regarded as life. That is how I lived."

Later she tells how she took ship to Jerusalem at the age of 29: "Whose tongue can tell, whose ears can take in all that took place on the boat during that voyage! And to all this I frequently forced those miserable youths even against their own will. There is no mentionable or unmentionable depravity of which I was not their teacher. I am amazed, Abba, how the sea stood our licentiousness, how the earth did not open its jaws, and how it was that hell did not swallow me alive, when I had entangled in my net so many souls."

But she does not despair, and she tells Abba Zosimas: "But I think God was seeking my repentance. For He does not desire the death of a sinner but **magnanimously** awaits his return to Him."

Magnanimously! What a perfect word to describe how God waits for us! All of the Sundays leading up to Great Lent, we have heard of God waiting magnanimously for sinners to turn to Him: Zacchaeus, the Publican, the Prodigal Son.

Again, St. Mary said: “For He does not desire the death of a sinner but **magnanimously** awaits his return to Him.” How strange! St. Mary is quoting the Bible here (Ezekiel 18:23)—the same Old Testament that Jonathan Edwards liked to quote from. How different, as we shall see, is their understanding of God.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, after failing multiple times to enter the Church on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, being held back by some invisible force, she retreats to the porch and there begins to understand that because of her impurity, she is prevented from venerating the precious and life-giving cross. She continues: *And so I stood weeping when I saw above me the icon of the most holy Mother of God. Not taking my eyes off her, I said, ‘O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well I know, that it is no honour or praise to you when one so impure and depraved as I look up to your icon, O ever-virgin, who kept your body and soul in purity. Rightly do I inspire hatred and disgust before your virginal purity. **But I have heard that God Who was born of you became man on purpose to call sinners to repentance.** Then help me, for I have no other help. Order the entrance of the church to be opened to me. Allow me to see the venerable Tree on which He Who was born of you suffered in the flesh and on which He shed His holy Blood for the redemption of sinners and for me, unworthy as I am. Be my faithful witness before your Son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross I will renounce the world and its temptations and will go wherever you will lead me.’ Thus I spoke and as if **acquiring some hope in firm faith and feeling some confidence in the mercy of the Mother of God**, I left the place where I stood praying. And I went again and mingled with the crowd that was pushing its way into the temple. And no one seemed to thwart me; no one hindered my entering the church. I was possessed with trembling, and was almost in delirium.*

Having got as far as the doors which I could not reach before—as if the same force which had hindered me cleared the way for me—I now entered without difficulty and found myself within the holy place. And so it was I saw the life-giving Cross. I saw too the Mysteries of God and how the Lord accepts repentance. Throwing myself on the ground, I worshipped that holy earth and kissed it with trembling. Then I came out of the church and went to her who had promised to be my security, to the place where I had sealed my vow. And bending my knees before the Virgin Mother of God, I addressed her with these words: ‘O loving Lady, you have shown me your great love for all men. Glory to God Who receives the repentance of sinners through you. What more can I recollect or say, I who am so sinful? It is time for me, O Lady to fulfil my vow, according to your witness. Now lead me by the hand along the path of repentance!’ And at these words I heard a

voice from on high: 'If you cross the Jordan you will find glorious rest.' Hearing this voice and having faith that it was for me, I cried to the Mother of God: 'O Lady, Lady, do not forsake me!' With these words I left the porch of the church and set off on my journey.

Even having heard these words of St Mary of Egypt, I am not sure that words alone can convince us of the unfathomable love of God for the human race. The Holy Scriptures are full of expressions and acts of God's love, the services are overflowing with this kind of language, the gifts of God in His Church, the love we receive from others, the beauty of God's creation, the intercessions and miracles of the saints, the weapons we are given against the devil, the joy that awaits those here and now who turn to God with all of their hearts, like St Mary: how can words express this, so that we believe it, accept it, embrace it and live it?

Frequently you will hear St. John say such things like "this virtue is the mother of that virtue" or "this vice gives birth to many daughters" and so on. Virtues and vices are connected with one another, like links in a chain, like steps on a ladder.

To obtain this, we must hear and believe the words of Christ: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you who is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?* (Luke 11:9-13) That is, the Holy Spirit fills us with love for God, knowing how much He loves us. Very simple instruction!

But you might reply that you hear all this, and intellectually, you know that God is a God of love and not an angry and wrathful God, but still, in your heart of hearts, you don't really believe this, even though you want to.

Be patient, and ask God to give you His love in your heart! Patience, patience, patience, with a little mustard seed of faith. If we don't give up and don't despair, gradually over time, we will be changed, and our heart of stone will be replaced with a heart of flesh, softened by our tears and the grace of God, so that we begin to love God and not just fear Him, and then we will see Him as He *really* is.

St. Ephraim the Syrian encourages those of us who feel as if our sins are too great, our hearts are too dull, or our view of God is one of sternness and wrath. He writes in the *Spiritual Psalter* (27):

Do not lose heart, O soul, do not grieve; do not pronounce over yourself a final judgment for the multitude of your sins; do not commit yourself to fire; do not say: the Lord has cast me from His face.

Such words are not pleasing to God. Can it be that he who has fallen cannot get up? Can it be that he who has turned away cannot turn back again? Do you not hear how kind the Father is to a prodigal?

Do not be ashamed to turn back and say boldly: I will arise and go to my Father. Arise and go! He will accept you and will not reproach you, but rather rejoice at your return. He awaits you; just do not be ashamed and do not hide from the face of God as did Adam.

It was for your sake that Christ was crucified; so will He cast you aside? He knows who oppresses us. He knows that we have no other help but Him alone.

*Christ knows that man is miserable. **Do not give yourself up to despair and apathy, assuming that you have been prepared for the fire. Christ derives no consolation from thrusting us into the fire; He gains nothing if He sends us into the abyss to be tormented.***

Let me repeat that! Harken, ye Puritans!

Do not give yourself up to despair and apathy, assuming that you have been prepared for the fire. Christ derives no consolation from thrusting us into the fire; He gains nothing if He sends us into the abyss to be tormented.

Imitate the prodigal son: leave the city that starves you. Come and beseech Him and you will behold the glory of God. Your face shall be enlightened and you will rejoice in the sweetness of paradise. Glory to the Lord and Lover of mankind Who saves us!

Now in case that didn't sink in, let me conclude with St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 3:

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (3:14-21) (adapted from holycross-hermitage.com)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-14

Brethren, Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 10:32-45

At that time, they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared." And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

To the extent of the rhetorical power which has been granted me, I shall perform my duty in exhorting you to what is needful, and inciting you to those deeds which are believed to keep our pact with God inviolate, which bring about victory over the Evil one, and yield the fruit of salvation in time of need. But it is necessary

that you too should not confine what is said to the hearing only, but should also transmit it inward to your souls, so that by studying the things that are conducive to virtue, your improvement in good deeds should thereby progress. For in the study of virtue lies the root of good action; and the action, as it continues, is the more easily supported by habit and more readily attracts other such actions as help-mates, and becomes productive of the like when it is regulated by speech - since speech is wont, like a skilled husbandman, to sow and help increase the virtues in one and the same sacred plot of the soul, not letting them be torn apart from each other and scattered. In this wise you must be listeners of the words about to be delivered, to show yourselves the husbandmen of such deeds, and be seen as reapers of similar fruit. For he who, while admitting the exhortations into his ears, rejects them from his mind, and neither shows the benefit in his deeds, nor makes the fruit the evidence for his toils, is like those whose bodies are diseased, and who listen readily to the physician's words and promises of health, but are yet unwilling to comply with them; for neither do the latter achieve health by merely hearing the words, nor do the former enjoy spiritual benefit, when the words of exhortation are not sown through their ears in their hearts, and do not produce an abundant crop of good works. But you who have come together with eager intent, try to comply with me yet more eagerly. Harken to my call for your own salvation and for the benefit of your soul. For even if I live my own life in negligence, yet I make it my special concern and prayer to see you conducting yourselves well, and worthily of your high calling, and I derive from that all manner of gladness and joy; for truly the good progress of the flock is the cause of much rejoicing to the shepherd, and the abundant produce of the land fills the husbandman's soul with pleasure no less than it fills the threshing-floor with sheaves. So indeed it is with this great rational flock: the harvest of virtue and the rectitude of creed are enough to gladden and exalt the leader who has been appointed to tend it, even though in his own life he is not of equal virtue.

Let us consider who we are, and no matter how long we may live here, where we shall go hereafter, and how, unavoidably, we shall pay the penalties for our deeds in this life, and let us not attach ourselves to this present life only, but let us also be mindful of the life to come. For "remember your end," says the prophet, "and you will never sin." (Sir. 7:36) Let us consider the time of death, that ultimate hour, when many of our relatives and friends stand by weeping, yet unable to shed us a single drop of benefit, or provide the hope of any assistance, and while they lament for us compassionately, they do not diminish the pains that grip us....

It is fitting, beloved ones, that we should consider ourselves in that condition of life, and to see in the deaths of our neighbors our own death as in a mirror, and to use the demise of others for our own correction. Nor let us await others to be

corrected at the sight of us, but let us correct our-selves by what we have seen and shared in suffering, and let us study death before death, so that we may live after death, having slept, according to the Psalmist, a sleep "precious in the sight of the Lord." (Ps. 115:6) As long as the market is open, let us contend zealously, that we may be provided with supplies for the voyage. The journey is at our doorstep, and the time of the end is at hand, and our need of supplies is great, and the transaction whereby they can be acquired is not difficult: it does not require great toils, nor a long journey abroad, with robbers lying in ambush or obstructed by bitter cold or the unbearable scorch of the sun beating down on the head; nor is it necessary to sail across a vast expanse of sea, made difficult by a multitude of drownings, shipwrecks and pirates, and apt to beget much hesitation. And yet to the traders of this life, these dangers, standing before their very eyes, do not restrain the eagerness of their will or abate their readiness, but the hopes of expected gain in the future prompt them to disdain the obvious dangers at hand. For us, however, who wish to take up spiritual trading, there are none of these obstacles, there is nothing to make us afraid, nothing adverse. The profits of the transaction are with us: we possess the fountain of tears, that most excellent and most beneficial thing, which drips down the cheeks yet washes splendidly the soul....

It washes off thoughts of fornication, it blots out the stains of perjury and abnegation of God, and blunts the sting of death. Let Hezekiah be to you the witness of our argument, and the harlot who wiped Jesus feet with her tears, and Peter, the first of the disciples and the key-bearer of heaven, after his tears. If you will, it breaks away Lazarus on the fourth day from the deepest hollows of Hades, where corpses dwell, and undoes the loosening of his limbs, and tightens up his joints, and places him with the living, and constitutes the prelude to the wondrous miracle; for Mary and Martha wept at the feet of Jesus, and He took pity on them, and wept with them, and the dead man rose up and stepped over to life, and became known as the never-silent herald of the common resurrection.

Do you see the usefulness of tears? Do you see their strength? Do you see their benefit? Let us weep here, that we may be comforted from above, since "blessed," it says, "are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Let us weep from the depth of our soul, that we may wipe away the filth in it, that we may wash off the mire of the passions, that we may blot out the stains, and raise up Lazarus, made dead by our sins. Let us call in the truly faithful and genuine sisters of the deceased, I mean recognition of transgressions and confession. For, "do not be ashamed to confess your sins;" (Mat. 5:4) and "when you shall turn and sigh," (Sir. 4:26) Scripture assures you, "then you shall be saved." (Is. 30:15) Again it cries out through the same prophet, "I am the Lord of all, who blots out your sins; but remember and first confess your transgressions, that you may be justified." (Is.

43:25-26) Such is the power of the outspokenness of confession and conversion for salvation!

Wherefore let us invite these sisters to shed tears at the feet of Jesus. He is present even now, He who is close to all who call on Him in truth, and hearkens to their voice, and suffers with the mourners, and offers them compassion, and stands by the grave, and endures the stench, and speaks to the dead one, and raises up our corpse. While yet that corpse has been but four days dead, let us weep and implore, lest he be further dissolved, and the bones of reason be scattered along the Hades of despair, and the firmness, as it were, and steadfastness towards piety be dispersed, and he melt away completely from the hope and desire of the future, and his source of tears be dried up, and he be deprived of repentance, and be dragged down to the abyss of utter ruin. Let us weep in time, that we may not mourn endlessly. Let us weep for our sins, that we may not lament without avail at our punishments, that we may not wail forever, condemned to the gnashing of teeth, to worms which do not die and fire which is not quenched and darkness.

– St. Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Homily 2.1-3*

Patriarchal Pence – Support Patriarch Bartholomew



During this season of increased prayer, fasting, and charity all the parishes in our Diocese send a token of our affection to support the work of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. To this end we will take a special TODAY. Please be generous! [Photo Credit: Nikolaos Manginas]

CAMP NAZARETH

Camp Nazareth is eagerly awaiting and preparing for the arrival of the Summer Camping Season, and registration is now open. Apostle Thomas campers will be attending Week 2, July 23-29, 2017. May 15th is the deadline for clergy and volunteer applications, and is the last day for registrants to receive the \$20 early bird discount. For more information, please visit the Camp website.

REGISTRATION FOR CAMP WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BE DONE ONLINE THROUGH THE CAMP'S WEBSITE – CAMPNAZARETH.ORG.

UPCOMING DIOCESAN EVENTS

The Altar Boy Retreat (ABR) and the Young Women's Encounter (YWE) are scheduled for 25-29 June. The ABR is open to our Altar Boys ages 8-18 and the YWE is open to the young ladies of the parish ages 13-18. More information will be coming out on those events in the near future.

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 121: Almsgiving



“And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelist, some pastors and some teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12 RSV)

Paul is very clear that the gifts that God gives us are for the “ministry, for the building of the body of Christ.” And you thought that the gifts God gave you were so you could live comfortably, **WRONG!** You see, brothers and sisters in Christ, our purpose in life, the time God gives us, is to seek eternal salvation, continual communion with God, **THEOSIS!** The gifts he gives us is so that we may lead others to salvation, to build the body of Christ in numbers and maturity.

As the above passage states, we all have different gifts that God has given us. Many times Orthodox Christians are afraid or don’t know how to use those gifts. Evangelizing is what the church is about. Christ gave the Great Commission to the first church, the seventy, when He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and *make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” WOW! Do we as Orthodox Christian obey His command? Are we afraid to talk about our faith to others?

Sadly, most Orthodox shy away from spreading the word, leaving it up to the priest. That’s it, it is the priest’s job not mine! Again, **WRONG!** It is your calling to evangelize, to use your time - all of your time - in the service of God giving witness and light to your neighbor, leading them to His Holy Church.

Your gifts are precious, your time is precious, use it to serve our Lord as He commanded and bring others to salvation. Minister to those in need and build the body of Christ.

“But give for alms those things that are within; and behold, everything is clean for you.” (Luke 11:41 RSV)

The above verse deals with Jesus scolding the Pharisees who complained that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating which was the Jewish custom. Jesus calls them “fools” because they did not understand that God made us wholly - within and outwardly. What did he mean? The Pharisees put on an outward show of piety but were dead on the inside.

Do we imitate the Pharisees? Do we say we love Christ and our neighbor but do nothing to help them, standing idly by as they slip deeper into secularism and sin? Where is the almsgiving that we promised to give to our neighbors? Almsgiving, *eleemosune* in Greek, means mercy, pity, charity, to show one's compassion. Do we take the **time** to help our neighbor, show compassion and be charitable? Giving alms is not just about money, it is about taking the **time** to care about your neighbor, being a steward of the gift of time God has given you.

Unfortunately, many of us are preoccupied - with watching our favorite TV program, sporting event or other secular activities - and fail to give time to save another's soul. Those precious few minutes, hours or days that you give to someone in need may show them the true nature of God within you and be the spark that brings them to Christ and Orthodoxy. God gave you the **gift of time** not to squander but to use for the benefit of your salvation *and* the salvation of others. Be a good steward of your time and give the alms that are within you! (*from acrod.org*)

ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: VENERABLE TITUS THE WONDER-WORKER

Saint Titus the Wonderworker displayed zeal for the monastic life from his youth. He pursued asceticism in the ninth century at the Studion monastery near Constantinople. By his deeds of fasting, purity of life and mild disposition, Saint Titus gained the love of the brethren, and at their request he was ordained priest.

Fervent of faith, the saint stood up for the Orthodox veneration of icons during the Iconoclast persecution. Because of his virtuous life, God granted him the gift of wonderworking. The saint was translated to the Lord in his old age. (*from oca.org*)



April Anniversaries and Birthdays



Anniversaries:

Dennis & Phyllis Thomidis 24th
Richard & Carol Wright 26th Andrew & Shannon McNeil 27th

Birthdays:

Ryan Harris 3 rd	Christos Kopan 5 th	Liam Cohoon 5 th
Isabella Hampton 7 th	Joseph Karbowsky 17 th	Norman Harris 19 th
Ashley McNeil 19 th	Kyle Samson 19 th	Bernie Vallandingham 22 nd
Mary Diane David 24 th	Elizabeth Howl 25 th	Rachel Harris 26 th

~ FROM THE LENTEN TRIODION ~

O Lord, You have granted us to reach the present day, on which in radiant light we commence the holy week of the dread raising of Lazarus from the tomb. Count us Your servants worthy to walk in Your fear, and to complete the whole course of the Fast.

(Sessional hymn from Matins, Monday in the Fifth Week)

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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, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, 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, Alex Holthus, 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, Kristen McNeil, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, 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 reposed servants of God Steve Stephanadis and Alexi Makowelski, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)