



**SAINT MARY OF EGYPT  
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
Newsletter – NOVEMBER 2012**

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**Calendar Highlights**

**November 8: Synaxis of the  
Archangel Michael and the others**

**November 15: Beginning of  
Nativity Lent**

**November 21: Entry of the Most  
Holy Theotokos into the Temple**

**November 30: Holy Apostle  
Andrew the First Called**

**The Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into  
the Temple**

**Troparion - Tone 4**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.

The Virgin appears in the Temple of God,  
in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.

Let us rejoice and sing to her:

“Rejoice, O Fulfillment of the Creator’s dispensation!”

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION ARE NEEDED FOR:

The Orthodox Church in America  
Diocese of the South  
Archbishop Nikon, Our Holy Synod,  
Archpriest Peter, Matushka Anastasia, Lottie  
Hieromonk Cyprian, Macrina and Nina  
Priest Thomas; Matushka Angela  
Archpriest Dimitri; Matushka Maryanne  
Priest Paul and Matushka Gabrielle  
Deacon Lazarus  
Metropolitan Theodosius; Metropolitan Herman,  
Metropolitan Jonah  
Our catechumens: Yolanda, Jacob, Stephanie, David, Kim,  
Ian, Matthew, Lindsay, Preston  
Natalia, Kristina and Peter  
Ioanna (Margaret) as she recovers  
Michael and Serah (Ioanna's son and daughter in law)  
The infant Juliana & family David, Elizabeth and David  
Ward (Patrick) and Cindy (Patricia)  
Marcella  
Alexander and Marina (Tanya Klimova's parents as her  
father battles cancer)  
Linda (Janice Douglass' sister recovering from bone  
marrow transplant)  
Cathie Payton (Maryanne Romano's mother – in treatment  
for breast cancer)  
Richard Romano (Chris' father)  
Elise (Chris' mother and Richard's wife and caregiver)  
Robert and Xenia Peterson  
Magdalene Marston  
Elaine Calugar and family, Carole;  
Anna, Victor; Tanya and family - especially Veronica;  
Todd (having uncontrollable stomach issues), Kimber,  
Mathew, Maggie, Amanda (and the child to be born of her)  
and her fiancé Paul, and Scott  
Niko Bouboulis battling a brain tumor; his father, Pano  
Christopher Michael  
Caleb Noble  
Thomas, Emilia, Maria, Catherine; Craig  
Anna (Lynne)  
Katherine-Theodora, Claude, and the Hunter-Terry family  
Harvey (George) and Irene Ghiz (Emily's parents)  
Christopher (Emily's cousin) and Julie Ghiz – Julie in  
treatment for breast cancer  
Christopher Tsialos (Emily's uncle)  
Rayna and family; Howard, Henry and their families  
Nancy Carolan (Fr. Tom's sister) undergoing cancer  
treatment  
Nathaniel, Maria and family (Nathaniel is a long time  
friend of the Alessandronis diagnosed with an inoperable  
brain tumor); Jim Mason friend of the Alessandroni's  
undergoing cancer treatment  
Bob Winters (Vincent Hunter's cousin's husband  
succumbing to lung cancer)  
Angela; Lisa, Maddie and Daniel (Michael Berry's daughter  
and grandchildren)  
Danielle and Michael (Ralph Geeza's niece and brother)  
Kerin Tamara, Todd Demetrios and family

Jonathan as he serves in the army and his son Jeremiah  
who is hydrocephalus (Patrick Easter's son and grandson).  
Tony (possible cancer)  
Andrea Rajski (Michaela's friend)  
St. Basil's House  
Ss Peter and Paul Gainesville Mission  
Sts Mary and Martha Monastery  
All those who have suffered devastation in the floods,  
winds and fires as results of recent hurricane and storms  
Those who have fallen asleep in the Lord:  
Archbishop Dmitri; Agnes  
All who have lost their lives in the recent storms



## The Restless Christian

By Fr. Stephen Freeman



*Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec  
requiescat in te.*

Thou hast made us for thyself and our heart is restless  
until it finds its rest in thee. Augustine's *Confessions*, 1.1  
St. Augustine speaks of restlessness within the human  
heart – an apparently timeless hunger of the soul. The  
story of his own life marks a wandering and a search. He  
did not think or reason his way into the Kingdom of God.  
Despite his wandering, God found *him*.

There is a saying from the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*:  
“Stay in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.”  
The restless heart is carried even into the desert. Unless it  
learns to remain in one place it will not find the One Place  
within itself. The restless heart now finds itself in a restless  
culture. Change is a mantra recited as a key to success,  
whether personally, politically or economically. How does  
the restless heart stay put in such a world?

In the monastic life there are four traditional vows:  
poverty, chastity, obedience and stability. The first three  
are familiar to many. The fourth is not. The form it takes in

the Eastern Church is a vow to remain in the monastery you enter until your last breath. With an abbot's blessing this last vow is often relaxed. Even monks have to *change* from time to time.

The monastic vow of stability offers important insight, however. It posits the idea that we are more likely to find salvation by staying put than traveling. The journey is therefore inward more than outward. Outward movement can prove to be a positive distraction.

Of course, *instability*, as a vice, is ubiquitous today. It is possible to stay in one place and still be witness to unceasing change. To make matters worse, in American culture, our rounds of change do not produce greater variety. The process of change in mass-culture is *homogenization*. The more things change, the more they become the same – and the more they become the same – the less real, permanent and truly existent they become. Our culture has a vision of hell as a franchise operation. Among the most unstable aspects of our civilization is our individual self-identity. The “false self” or “ego” (as some current Orthodox writers are naming the self-generated inner sense of identity) floats like a point on the edge of a bubble. The anxiety that surrounds the modern identity is manifest everywhere. Mass culture, particularly those segments aimed at youth, markets identities as though they were items on a shelf. Modern Evangelicalism often assists the culture with the same market strategies, conforming the gospel to the ever-changing fashions of the world.

Augustine's observation remains as true today as it was 1500 years ago. The heart of modern man remains as restless as ever in a sea of change. But stillness of the heart is possible.

The discipline and teaching concerning the heart in Eastern Orthodoxy go under the name of *Hesychia* (“quiet” or “stillness”). It is a recognition that there can be no growth in the spiritual life without a change within the heart, or a change of relationship to the heart, and that this can only come with stillness. An inner stability and sobriety are essential in our life in Christ.

Much that passes for Christianity today runs little deeper than slogan and opinion. As such, it fits neatly within a lifestyle of change. The latest book on spirituality will soon be replaced by the next latest book on spirituality. Most Orthodox bookshelves are filled with un-read or half-read books through which the answer has not quite arrived. The Christian life is a very serious, difficult way of living. It is made possible by grace – but just as that grace was gifted to us on the hard wood of the Cross, so its reception is through grace-filled crucifixions. “I am crucified with Christ,” is worth repeating – often.

At the very least, the restless heart needs to find some measure of rest. Here are some suggestions for being at rest:

- For [however long], I will not -
- use my phone (turn the ringer off)
- use my computer
- read a book (or anything else)
- engage in conversation
- For [however long], I will not -
- think about what I have done wrong
- think about whom I have hurt
- think about problems or difficulties
- think about physical pain
- For [however long], I will
- sit (stand if you must) before an icon of Christ
- not talk to Christ or think about what I should say
- not think about what I am doing
- will not think about another person
- will not think about God or imagine Him
- will breathe

Perhaps the list could be longer. The simple goal of such an exercise is to be *still*. It is quite difficult. This, too, is prayer. If we manage to actually do (or not do) this small laundry list, it will be very *good* prayer. In such quiet rest, thoughts do come to us. For the most part, dismiss them. You can think later. When I do this I sometimes fall asleep. It's an indicator that I'm not getting enough sleep!

Learning to be quiet, to be still, not to think or feel, not to judge or worry – all of this is surprisingly difficult. The level of difficulty is a sign of just how unquiet our lives truly are. When the noise ceases and our awareness comes back to the simple presence of the moment, the heart at rest becomes possible. It may seem surprising to some that I suggest not thinking about God or imagining Him in any way. The icon takes care of that need – it is not our job. It will seem surprising to many precisely because they believe prayer includes *thinking* about God and spiritual things. It does not.

Prayer is communion with God. Communion does not require ideas or feelings because it is *real*. I do not need to imagine my cup of coffee or even think about it in the morning. The coffee just *is*. And that is fine.

This exercise in stillness that I have suggested is a beginning. I practice something like this whenever I pray. It is essential to quiet the noise and distraction if we are to know God. Strangely, in time, the ability to enter into such quiet becomes possible in places and settings that are quite noisy and busy (like Church). The discipline is about discovering the place of the heart and the rest that can only be found in God.



## "GOD IS ALWAYS WITH YOU" AN INTERVIEW



### WITH FATHER ROMAN BRAGA

*Ms. Jessica Precop, on behalf of Wonder Blog traveled to the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery in Rives Junction, Michigan to interview Father Roman Braga, who grew up and served in Romania under a communist regime. We are very thankful to Ms. Precop, Father Roman, and the Sisterhood at the Monastery for making this interview possible. This is an excerpt of the interview which can be found on Pravoslavie.ru.*

**How did your own struggles with the communist government impact your spiritual life?**

The communists could not control what is inside of you, but you couldn't express what you were thinking, you were not able to express your opinion. And this not only as a a monk or as a priest or as a Christian, but as an intellectual in general. Not all intellectuals in Romania during the communist regime were communists. In order to survive they were forced to say one thing but they believed something else in themselves. So they had a double life. It was one thing what they had in their mind and in their soul – their convictions, and another what they were expressing aloud. It was all a matter of survival. So that was a very, very difficult life. It was not like here where you are not afraid of anything. You are not afraid to express yourself; it was not like this. People were saying exactly what the government asked them to say in order to be able to have a job, to be a teacher, to have a profession, to be able to provide for their family their daily bread. But what they thought and believed the communist couldn't control.

We were happy in prison in a way. Let aside all the physical tortures Physical tortures are nothing. You suffer from them even, you can even die. But the communist imprisonment is worse than physical torture. They want to keep you at the limit of normal and abnormal, but they couldn't control what is inside of you. In a way, for a priest the communist prison was good because there in prison we were praying. Once you are convicted (of "crimes" you did not commit) you are placed in a cell, there is nothing else. They put the intellectuals and especially the priests in solitary confinement at least one or two years, and in a way that was very good for us. Not having anywhere to go or even look out a window because there were no windows in those cells of solitary confinement you have to look, to go somewhere; and so you go inside yourself, inside your heart and inside your mind to examine yourself, to see who you are and why God brought you into this world. You question whether God even exists, and what is your relationship with God.

When we were free we did not have time to ask ourselves these questions. Our faith was superficial

because you can learn a lot of things and can have a mind like an Encyclopedia full of all the knowledge, but if you don't know yourself and who you are!. Even if you know everything in the world you are superficial if you do not ask yourself who am I? Why do I exist? What is the destiny of my life? Why did God create me? If I believe in God what does God want from me? These things when you live in freedom you do not ask yourself because you are in a hurry to do a lot of things, to read a lot of books and you become the slave of the books, the slave of the knowledge, of concepts of philosophy and so on. But you do not have the time to meditate on who you are. When you are free you are made out of quotations from books. We were not allowed in prison to have any books. In 11 years I did not see a pencil or a piece of paper, or a book, and not only myself, but all the intellectuals and all the priests. The communists gave books and papers to read to simple folks because they wanted to convince them to become communists. They wanted, however, that the intellectuals be transformed into beasts, become like animals. The interesting think is that it did not happen. Instead you became yourself because you started to examine yourself. Once you were out of prison, they were interested that you do not make propaganda to tell others what happened in prison, and so on and so many of us were expelled from the country just so we do not to tell the others what was going on in prison.

#### **How did you witness Christ in prison?**

In prison most of the time you were by yourself. I was in a forced labor camp too. In the forced labor camp we had our groups of prayer and we had priests that were hearing confessions. Each priest had a group around him. We witnessed Christ more in the forced labor camp because there was not too much control there. It was a large community and the communists were interested in how much you worked. In prison it was impossible to witness Christ, even if you were alone or maybe two in the same cell. Sometimes there were four in the same cell, but you only talked to a small group of people. In the force labor camps we even had the liturgy there

because we had priests, without vestments and without anything else other than a piece of bread, and some tonic wine that the doctors in the hospital provided. I was in a forced labor camp with 16,000 people, and there was a hospital and the doctors were from among the prisoners so they provided tonic wine for us for the liturgy and we spared two pieces of bread from breakfast and so we had liturgy. The guards did not know we had liturgy; as they were passing by, they thought we were just babbling; we sure did not show it. I remember in prison though, in the cell, a priest had liturgy under the blanket; when the guard entered he covered everything with the blanket.

#### **Why is suffering important as a Christian?**

Suffering is good not only for Christians but for everybody. Because if you do not suffer you do not understand anything. Suffering is a good experience. And in the scriptures it says that suffering is a sign that God loves you. In the Epistle to Hebrew Chapter 13, St. Paul says that if you do not suffer you are not children of God. Who is the Father who does not chastise His children? He punishes His children because He loves them. If you do not suffer you are not the sons of God. After you experience suffering, you understand more and better things in this world, much deeper than the others who do not experience any suffering. So suffering is maturing you in your spiritual life. You should not avoid suffering but you should not look for it. God takes care of that. There is a lot of suffering in the world. So many families who have children in the hospital. My doctor has a daughter 11 years of age with bone cancer; they are young, what a suffering for that family whose daughter may be dying. We ask ourselves why?

God allows into this world to have beggars and crippled people and all this because otherwise we would not be able to be charitable. We have to exercise our love because love is not just the word, is it something that we must do. And you do things for those who need them. So that is why there are orphan children and crippled people and so many other things, for us to exercise our love for our

neighbor because Jesus said love God with your whole heart and whole mind but love your neighbor as you love yourself. But if my neighbor does not need my love what is love? Just a hand shake? That is not love. Or to give him a hug? That is nothing. Go there and take a crippled person on the street and give him a hug and ask him what can I do for you? That is love. Not to live for yourself; to live for others and always to deny yourself; to forget yourself and remember that others exist. That is Christian life. Not to say "what about me, and me, and I;" Who are you? You are nobody. Try not to pay too much attention to you. But when you say can I do something for you? Maybe you need me? That is meaningful Christian love. So suffering in this world is permitted by God that other Christians might concentrate their love on those suffering people and do something for them, to sacrifice themselves for them. In our own life suffering is permitted so we understand why Jesus was crucified.

I am able to forgive. I pray for those guards that tortured us in prison. I am not against them because I understand they were forced to do that. And you forgive only when you suffer. When you do not suffer you do not want to forgive, then you are condemned. There was a movie-maker who came and made a movie with me and Fr. Calciu. The interviewer said "how can you forgive them?" Well why not? They are the image of God. We know that in that kind of regime they were forced to kill us, to torture us, to do what they were told to do, otherwise their families would not have bread to eat. You are able to forgive when you suffer. When you do not suffer you are not able to forgive. You say "no, no, no, you should not do such and such a thing and if you do you should be punished because you did it". So suffering is very important in Christian life.

#### **How is life in America different than your experience in Romania?**

I thought I came to a free country. And that is true; you have the freedom to do anything you want, as long as you do not hurt anybody. If you hurt anybody for sure you have to suffer the

consequences. Speaking of the freedom of conscious and thought, I doubt that we are free because being free to do everything you can destroy yourself if you are not mature. Freedom without responsibility is not freedom. Only when you are prevented of doing what you want to do, then you understand freedom. But when you say "I want to do everything I want" you are not free. Think about Genesis, the first book in the Bible, when God created man, he did not understand what freedom was until God told him you cannot touch this tree; the tree is a symbol, it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So if God created man free, then you ask why He gave him a limit: "do not touch this." Without this limit man cannot understand what freedom is. Freedom is just a word if you do not have restrictions. So freedom without discipline is not freedom. And many in our culture here in America think that they do not have to respect anything or anybody; they are free to do everything. This is not freedom.

#### **What are some ways we can find Christ today, in the American society?**

Well Christ first of all is in you. Christ is not just some nice guy. He is God and God is within you. God is in our conscious, in our heart, in our minds, is not something material you see outside of yourself. You find God in yourself. You descend in your personality. We are eternal, we never die, the body is going to the cemetery but the conscious, the person is continually living. So when you descend into yourself, your conscious is infinite. And this infinity is the temple of the living God. St. Paul says many times you are the temple of the living God because God lives within you. You find God when you know yourself, when you know who you are. If you neglect that, "I don't have time to think about myself" you will never find God because God is not something material, you do not find him in a specific place. God is always with you if you want Him to be with you. You find God when you find yourself. "Who am I?" Pay attention to these verses of the scriptures: "you are the temple of the living God because God lives within you." And Jesus said: "remain in Me and I in you. I am the vine and you are

the branches” if you do not remain in me you do not have sap to feed yourself and you dry up. People who complain they do not feel God they are dry branches. They have to remain in Christ and to accept Christ by saying: “Lord, come, I am here. You created me. Open my heart because You created this heart. You created the door, enter please.”

You have to talk with God everywhere you are. Walking on the street, driving the car, you can say “Lord You are in the front seat, I know that You are here tell me something. Why did You create me?” You have a lot of things, an infinite number of things to converse with God and God wants you to talk with Him because prayer is not as much as you read in the book or how long you are kneeling, prayer is the whole life. When you eat, when you drink, when you drive the car, when you discipline your children: You are in a state of prayer. Life is a liturgy. It is not only in church that liturgy takes place, the liturgy is outside the church building too. The whole life should be a liturgy- if you have the feeling of the existence of God. But you have to get that feeling of the existence of God... how? I always say, especially to young people, have a dialogue, a permanent dialogue with God. Sure you are busy: you eat, you prepare your exam if you are a student, you work and you are very busy but always say: “Lord I know You are here I didn’t forget You. Look at me and do not abandon me.” See many times this permanent dialogue with God becomes a prayer because prayer is a communication between man and God.

Prayer is not just a short time and you say “I finished my prayer” and that’s it; you never finish your prayer. The definition of prayer is this: the feeling of the presence of God in you. And if you have this feeling of the presence of God you are in a continual prayer. If you pray only when you pray you don’t pray at all one of the monks said. So don’t pray only when you pray, you pray all the time because prayer is not “give me, give me.” Prayer is to say I love you and I want to spend time with you. Ask God something. And don’t worry God is answering you even if you don’t think it. He’s giving you good hints and good suggestions on how to resolve your

problems. So to find God in our culture here is to be conscious that God exists first and God exists not outside of yourself but inside. And God is always with you and you can get the feeling of the existence of God.



***On the power and efficacy of  
good works***  
***A Sermon by St. Nikolai Velimirovich***

*For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men(I Peter 2:15).*

*Brethren, it is difficult to argue with an atheist; it is difficult to talk with a madman; it is difficult to persuade and embittered man with words. You will convince them more easily by deed. They may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (I Peter 2:12).*

*Do good to those who wish to argue with you, and you will win the argument. One deed of compassion will bring the madman to his senses and will pacify the embittered man more quickly than many hours of conversation. If atheism, madness and bitterness stem from ignorance, that ignorance is like a rage which can quickly be retrained by good works. If you argue with an atheist in his own rabid manner, you strengthen the rage of atheism. If you converse with a madman by derision, the darkness of his madness is increased. If you think you will overcome an embittered man with anger, you will stir up greater fire of bitterness. A meek and good deed is like water on a fire. Always remember the Holy Apostles and their successful methods of behavior toward men. If an atheist provokes you, it is not the man that provokes you but the devil; for man is by nature religious. If a madman swears at you, it is not the man that swears at you but the devil; for man is by nature reasonable. If an embittered man persecutes you, it is not the man that persecutes you but the devil; for man is by nature good. The devil provokes you to lengthy arguments and unfruitful conversations, but he flees from good deeds.*

*Do good in the name of Christ and the devil will flee. Only then will you have dealings with men, with true men: pious, reasonable and good. Therefore, whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord.*



## Accidental Iconoclasm

By Fr. John Hopko

Reprinted from the Diocese of the South Facebook Page

In the tenth chapter of his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul the Apostle speaks of the possibility of possessing a zeal, even for God, which is misguided. In the Church we are to be zealous, that is, enthusiastic and passionate, but in a sober and carefully thought out manner, guided by the fullness of our Orthodox Christian Faith's Holy Tradition. Also, in being guided by Holy Tradition, we must discern carefully between that which is truly of the Tradition and that which may appear to be so, but is, in fact, ill-advised. At the present time in the Orthodox world there is a phenomenon that may seem to be in accord with Holy Tradition, but which is actually misguided and mistaken. This phenomenon is the abundant reproduction and use of iconographic images in all sorts of ways and places that may initially seem acceptable, but which, upon deliberation, is unacceptable. It is this phenomenon that we will consider.

A strong and defining aspect of the Orthodox Christian Faith is our commitment to Iconography. The holy icons are not just an optional part of our Tradition; they are an essential element in the Church.

We know, of course, that the use of holy icons in the Church came into question during the Iconoclastic Controversy, which disturbed and distressed the Church in the Byzantine Empire during the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. The iconoclasts ("icon-smashers") charged that the use of icons was idolatrous and that the iconodules (those who venerated the icons) were guilty of worshiping and giving adoration to man-made images in place of God.

We know, thankfully, that the veneration of the holy icons was successfully defended in the Church, on the grounds that it was, first of all, not idolatrous; for the icon is not an idol, but a symbol. In the classic formulation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (which convened in 787 A.D. in the city of Nicea), the honor given to the image passes on to its prototype. There is also an important distinction to be made between the reverence (*dulia*) that we give the saints and the fullness of worship and adoration (*latría*) that is reserved for God alone. The veneration of the icons is also defended on the vital doctrinal grounds that to do

so is a powerful and central affirmation of the essential and foundational Christian teaching of the Incarnation. We are able to depict God in the holy icons because God became a man and took on human flesh—He became incarnate. Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, took on the fullness of human nature. Thus, being a human being, He is able to be depicted in the holy icons. Icons are indispensable in the Church, for they uphold and protect the essential and saving doctrine of the Incarnation.

The one hundred and twenty years of the Iconoclastic Controversy—which began in earnest with the persecutions of the defenders of the holy icons in 726 A.D. by Byzantine Emperor Leo III and ended with the triumphant and final return of the holy icons to the Church in 843 A.D. with the decisive support of Empress Theodora—was a period of bloody martyrdom for the iconodules. During the crisis, saintly martyrs were put death because they refused to disfigure or disrespect the holy icons when ordered to do so by the icon smashing authorities.

Given the central and vital role of icons in the Orthodox Church and the careful manner in which they have always been safeguarded and revered by Orthodox Christians, even to the point of martyrdom, it is sad, strange, and unsettling to witness the many ways in which we now allow the holy images to be subjected to the possibility of



Probably not acceptable

disfigurement and disrespect.

There are now numerous suppliers and providers who produce, for sale or free distribution, reproductions of the holy images either printed on paper or mounted on wood or cardboard. These iconographic reproductions are produced in massive quantities and disseminated widely. For example, they are being used as the opposite side of business cards or the cards that are distributed as remembrances at funerals. Sometimes, at large (often Church-sponsored) gatherings such reproductions are printed up in substantial quantities and distributed to the participants as keepsakes. Oftentimes, they are offered for



sale in the catalogues of ecclesiastical supply companies or Church entities such as monasteries and seminaries seeking to sell these items in order to fund their work. Also, beyond these so-called icon prints and mounted facsimiles, it is now possible to purchase paper goods adorned with full-color iconographic reproductions in the form of stationery (including not only the writing paper, but also envelopes), note paper, as folders for weekly bulletins or parish newsletters, so-called “sticky notes”, bookmarks, and more.

Sadly, the last end of many of these images is not a place of reverence in a pious person’s home, but rather the bottom of the nearest wastepaper basket. If an iconographic image is printed on a piece of paper or card of the type that is usually discarded without much thought, how often can we suppose that even well-meaning people are making much of an effort to discern what is going on before they toss that item into the trash? Recently, one of our major pan-Orthodox organizations sent out a bulk mailing to all their past donors. This mass mailing was certainly composed of thousands of pieces of mail. The envelope in which the mailing was sent was adorned on the outside with full color iconographic images, which were subsequently subjected to the likely deleterious effects of passing through the postal system. No doubt many of these envelopes arrived at their destinations with those holy images dirtied and disfigured; and then most of those envelopes, their primary function now fulfilled, were unceremoniously tossed in the trash, iconographic images not withstanding.

If we allow icons to be used as part of items that are perceived of as disposable (such as in and on catalogs, advertisements, flyers for various occasions, newsletters, stationery, envelopes, note paper, funeral cards, business cards, etc.) it is inevitable that they will be treated as such. No matter our efforts to educate ourselves and others about the reverence that ought to be paid to icons, the lesson that iconographic images can be treated as if of no great value—frankly, as trash—will be taught and learned if we proceed in a manner that allows for and, even, promotes such a false teaching. This process may be occurring unwittingly or unintentionally, but it is happening, nonetheless.

Another noteworthy aspect of this phenomenon is that, all too often, the particular holy image under consideration is treated in a questionable manner even before it is used. For instance, some years ago, a major Orthodox publishing house printed a large format book about iconography. On the cover, the illustration was only a portion of an icon of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In the interest of artistic effect, apparently, only the bottom left quadrant of the icon was reproduced in order to serve as the book’s cover art. The result is a dramatic and, to a degree, attractive and aesthetically pleasing representation of our Lord’s right hand held in the manner of giving a blessing. Nevertheless,

the original icon is still not being reproduced in full for its true purpose. Rather, presented in this way, the partial copy on the cover of the book has now become just another example of a practice which is endemic in the Orthodox publishing world—a practice whereby images that ought to be revered and honored are being used merely to decorate and illustrate. No doubt, it is convenient to reproduce iconographic images as cover art and illustrations, for it is an effective way of marking a given publication as “Orthodox.” Nevertheless, should we not think about the greater ramifications of the decision to use iconography in this way?

Iconographic images can presently be found printed on coffee mugs, refrigerator magnets, air fresheners, bumper stickers, billboards, clothing, and more. One can easily obtain a t-shirt on which is emblazoned a beautiful icon of our Lord, or His Mother, or one or more of the saints. Technology has now made it possible to get hold of and use (and abuse) iconographic images in ways that just a few generations ago would not have been either imaginable or permissible.

In what seems like a pious impulse, parish churches will often now purchase affordable reproductions of icons for just about every occasion, in such numbers that it is impossible to appropriately venerate all of them on a regular basis. Thus, these items end up being stacked on shelves or stored in closets and cupboards, as if they were of little value, until the day comes when they are needed. Then, for a day or two, when the time is right, they are displayed and venerated with honor, until, sadly, the occasion passes and they are again returned to the storage spot from whence they came. These images are being treated as if they were holiday or party decorations, rather than as essential elements of Orthodox Christian worship and vital witnesses to central Christian doctrines. Isn’t this simply a mistake, a sad example of misguided and misdirected zeal?



Misguided Zeal?

One must wonder: What would the great confessors and defenders of the holy icons—persons such as St. John of Damascus who eloquently and at length defended the holy

icons against the 8<sup>th</sup> century icon-smashers—say to us about what is being done with and to the holy icons today?

Repentance is necessary. It is time to consider carefully the holy images and our treatment of them. In the name and pursuit of Orthodox Christianity, we are, on the whole, no longer treating the holy images with a consistent level of appropriate reverence and honor. Thankfully, something can be done about this. For it is in the name of Orthodoxy, in the apparent effort to propagate knowledge and appreciation of the holy icons, that we are allowing circumstances to exist and persist whereby the holy images are being subject to disrespect and irreverent treatment. Ironically, most of this present misuse of the holy images is being carried out by those who probably know better and who, in fact, do care about the holy images. This means that those who need to hear the message that change is necessary should be ready to hear and heed that message.

We need to raise awareness of and sensitivity to this issue, especially within the Church, its parishes and institutions. We must revisit the Church's teachings about the holy icons and seek to apply what we learn, today. We must make sure that we are limiting the use of the holy icons to circumstances wherein they might be appropriately maintained, revered and honored. Repentance in this regard must begin with each and every one of us taking personal responsibility for the holy images and making the commitment to defend the icons with sober, rather than misguided, zeal.



## A Time of Preparation

### From Monachos.net

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The Fast of the Nativity is the Church's wise solace and aid to human infirmity. We are a forgetful people, but our forgetfulness is not unknown to God; and our hearts with all their misconceptions and weakened understandings are not unfamiliar to the Holy Spirit who guides and sustains this Church. We who fall far from God through the magnitude of our sin, are called nonetheless to be close to Him. We who run afar off are called to return. Through the fast that precedes the great Feast of the Incarnation -- which itself is the heart and substance of our calling -- the Church helps draw us into the full mystery of what that call entails.

Like Great Lent, the fast of the Nativity is a journey. *'Come, O ye faithful, and let us behold where Christ is born. Let us*

*join the Magi, kings from the east, and follow the guiding star'*.<sup>3</sup> Let us 'join the Magi', let us 'follow' and 'behold'. On the fifteenth of November, the Church joins together in a journey toward that salvation first promised to Adam in God's curse laid upon the serpent (Gen 3.14-15). The One who will crush the head of the serpent, of sin and the devil and all that is counter to the life God offers, is Him to whom the star leads us. The fast of the Nativity is our journey into the new and marvellous life of the Holy Trinity, which is offered by God but which we must approach of our own volition. In this act, we are joined to the story of our fathers. The gift of a new land and great blessings was freely given by God to Abraham, but in order to obtain it, *'Abram went, as the Lord had told him'* (Gen 12.4).

A journey is, by its nature, naturally ascetic. Unless my life is already very humble, I cannot take the whole of my possessions on a journey. I cannot transport social and political ties along a journey's path. I can never be too reliant on the plans I have made for my journey: a control lying beyond the self must be admitted and accepted. This is the spirit to which the fast calls us.

A journey is, by its nature, an act of movement, of transportation, of growth. What is old is left behind, newness is perceived and embraced, growth of understanding takes place. And even if the journey comes to a close in the same physical location from which it began, that place is transformed *for us* by the journey through which we have re-approached it. The aid shelter on a street corner in London is no different after a journey to the Middle East; but after witnessing there first-hand the struggles and torments of poverty, of suffering, of sorrow, the meaning and importance of that small shelter is indeed different *for me*.

Here the importance of the fast. As the Nativity approaches, that great feast of cosmic significance and eternal, abounding joy for which heaven and earth together rejoice, the fast calls me to consider: *do I rejoice? Why do I rejoice?* The hymnography of the Church makes it clear that this is a feast for all the world, for all creation; and the fast calls me to take my place in that creation, to realise that, despite all my infinite unworthiness, Christmas is a miracle for my soul too.

## **NEWS ITEMS:**



**Deceleration Lane:** *The contractor has been selected, the crews are ready to go, the last few details are being put into place and construction will begin in the next few weeks.*



**St. Nicholas Coins:** We are now actively collecting funds for the children of St. Mary's to help their families during the Nativity Season. Funds will be collected through early December.



**Playground:** The playground is on order and will be delivered right before Thanksgiving. Plans are being finalized for work days and details on how the

playground will be installed. We are still planning 2 work days but it looks like we'll be setting the playground first and the finishing up with the landscaping and mulch. Please let Timothy Gill know if you are available the week-end after Thanksgiving.



### **Stewardship Sunday**

**November 11:** It is time to make your annual pledge of membership

and support with your time, talent and treasury. Membership forms have been emailed to everyone on the list and additional copies are available. At coffee hour on November 11, we will also have the opportunity to volunteer for all the various areas where you can use your gifts of time and talent in faithful stewardship of our parish home and reaching out to the community.

**St. Nicholas Days:** will be held **Saturday December 1 from 10:00-4:00 and Sunday December 2 from noon to 3:00.** We'll



have children's activities including a blacksmith, delicious

foods including cabbage rolls, pirogi, desserts, Colombian drinks and Eritrean coffee, jewelry, crafts and special art of Central Asia, church tours, choir performances and the story of the real St. Nicholas. Would you like to sell your arts and crafts, gift items, homemade jams and jellies and other treats? Will you bake items? Will you just plain be there to help? Please let Anya know.

*Are you interested in serving on the Parish Council in 2013?  
Please see Fr. Peter.*

### **Parish Council Corner Treasurer's Report:**

*Income (Jan-Sept): \$134,805.20*

*Expenses (Jan-Aug): \$118,081.66*

*Actual Net Income: \$16,723.36*

*Budgeted Net Income: \$7,160.43*

*Thank you for your faithful support of our parish*

## NOVEMBER Calendar

<b>Week of Nov 4</b>	
Sun Nov 4	9:00 Choir Practice 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy
Mon Nov 5	10:00a Akathist
Tues Nov 6	10:00 a Akathist
Weds Nov 7	7:00 p Daily Vespers <b>Fr. Paul's class on the Nicene Creed</b>
Thurs Nov 8	7:40 a Hours 8:00 a Divine Liturgy <b>Synaxis of the Archangels</b>
Fri Nov 9	10:00a Various 7:00 p Great Vespers
Sat Nov 10	4:00 Confessions 5:00 Vigil
<b>Week of Nov 11</b>	
Sun Nov 11	9:00 Choir Practice 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy Stewardship Sunday
Mon Nov 12	10:00 a Akathist
Tues Nov 13	10:00 a Akathist 7:00 Catechumen Class at Starbucks
Weds Nov 14	7 p Daily Vespers <b>Fr. Paul's class on the Nicene Creed</b>
Thurs Nov 15	7:40 a Hours 8:00 a Divine Liturgy
Fri Nov 16	10:00a Various
Sat Nov 17	4:00 Confessions 5:00 Vigil
<b>Week of Nov 18</b>	
Sun Nov 18	9:00 Choir Practice 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy
Mon Nov 19	10:00 a Akathist
Tues Nov 20	10:00 a Akathist 7:00 Great Vespers
<b>Weds Nov 21</b>	<b>9:40 Hours</b> <b>10:00 Liturgy for the Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple</b> <b>7:00 p Daily Vespers</b> <b>Fr. Paul's class on the Nicene Creed</b>

Thurs Nov 22	7:40 Hours 8:00 a Divine Liturgy
Fri Nov 23	10:00 Various 7:00 p Great Vespers
Sat Nov 24	4:00 Confessions 5:00 Vigil
<b>Week of Nov 25</b>	
Sun Nov 25	9:00 Choir Practice 9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy Parish Council
Mon Nov 26	10:00a Akathist
Tues Nov 27	10:00a Akathist 7:00 Catechumen Class at Starbucks
Weds Nov 28	7:00 p Daily Vespers <b>Fr. Paul's class on the Nicene Creed</b>
Thurs Nov 29	7:40 a Hours 8:00 a Divine Liturgy
Fri Nov 30	10:00a Various
<b>Sat Dec 1</b>	<b>St Nicholas Days</b> <b>10:00-4:00</b> 4:00 Confessions 5:00 Vigil
<b>Week of Dec 2</b>	
<b>Sun Dec 2</b>	9:40 Hours 10:00 Divine Liturgy <b>St. Nicholas Days</b> <b>Noon- 3:00</b>