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2015 EPARCHIAL DEACONS' RETREAT

Deacons, candidates, and their wives at annual gathering

By Deacon Michael Opalka, Saint Basil the Great Parish, Miami, FL



Eparchial deacons, deacon candidates, and their wives gather with our Chief Shepherd, Bishop Kurt

The late Bishop Andrew Pataki would often remind us, in our calling to serve the church, that some people bring peace when they come into the room and some people bring peace when they leave the room. The attendants at the annual Diaconate retreat witnessed our heavenly Father's peace in the beauty of the Pocono Mountains; in the humble and gracious service of the Sisters at Villa of Our Lady Retreat House; in the surprise visit by our former director, Father Ed Cimbala, in the heartfelt message of the homily by Bishop Kurt; and in the spiritual guidance presented by Retreat Master, Father Deacon Daniel Dozier of Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church in Orlando, Florida.

On September 18th, deacons, lecturers, candidates, and their wives met at Villa of Our Lady Retreat Center in the Poconos for their annual retreat. Father Ed Cimbala, former Director of the Diaconate Program, was a surprise guest and reminisced with the group about the development of the diaconate program. He

also made himself available for confessions.

The retreat began at 6 p.m. on Friday with the first of many delicious meals served by the dedicated sisters. The evening prayer was a Moleben to Jesus, Lover of Mankind, led by Father Ed. In Friday's first conference, Father Deacon Daniel asked the retreatants to divide their notes into three categories: *Things I learned*; *Insights I gained*; and *Ideas to Apply in my Ministry*. He discussed two disastrous stories in the Old Testament (The Tower of Babel and The Golden Calf) and explained how these events were reconciled in Christ's fulfillment of the Scriptures and the Prophets. He also reminded us that from time to time we must rekindle our flame in following God's Word.

Saturday morning, a Panachida was celebrated for deceased deacons, lecturers, and their wives. Later, Father Deacon Daniel continued his message by focusing on the first apostles and their choosing and laying of their hands on the first deacons.

He reminded us of our first deacon, Stephen, who followed in Christ's footsteps as he was falsely accused, condemned, and put to death. At the point of death, Stephen sees a vision of Christ at the right hand of God and asked God to forgive his persecutors. Father Deacon Daniel also reminded us of the fruits of the diaconal ministry including peace in the Church, building up the Church, service done in the name of Christ, and spreading the word of God through evangelization.

Bishop Kurt was the main celebrant of the Divine Liturgy. In his homily, Bishop Kurt reflected on his own calling to the priesthood and the power of prayer. He shared an intimate event when he was a priest that reconfirmed his belief in the power of prayer. He reminded us that prayer is the first and most important step in our journey as followers of Christ.

The evening festivities included a round-table discussion for the deacons and candidates and a separate meeting for their wives.

Father Deacon Nicholas Daddona, current Director of the Diaconate Program, provided several articles on *The Deacon as a Catalyst of Service*, the Jubilee for Deacons in 2016, and continuing education for deacons. On the women's side, Dr. Maureen Daddona led the discussion entitled *Made to Know God: The Neurogenetics of Faith*. Her PowerPoint presentation discussed how faith is hardwired into our genes. A particularly interesting segment was scientific images of how several different brains responded to prayer (including nuns and atheists). Bishop Kurt also joined in on the conversation with the wives.

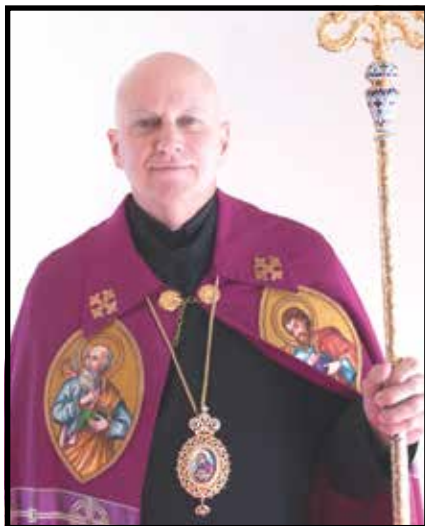
Sunday morning began with private prayer and was followed by a Holy Anointing Service led by Bishop Kurt. After brunch, the attendees exchanged good-byes as many will not see each other for another year. The Sisters at Villa of Our Lady provided a table full of goodies for everyone as they traveled to their homes with a renewed and inspired spirit.

Deacon Lewis Rabayda to be ordained to the Holy Priesthood—page 4

More photos of diaconal retreat—page 6

Blog documenting Rusyn immigration—page 7

Parish celebrates centennial—pages 8-9



I LIFT UP MY EYES...

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



NOT BY BREAD ALONE

As the days get shorter and shorter throughout October and November, and we eat dinner in the dark, it seems that life itself gets darker and a little more difficult. It's a relief to know that December 21 is the shortest day of the year, and even if winter is still ahead of us, we know that the nights are shorter, the days are longer, and eventually the sun will win out and warm the earth again. In our Church we start thinking about the approach of Lent. Lent is our yearly season of penitence, our annual effort to advance a little in the war against sin, to imitate our dear Lord who fasted in the desert and went into battle against the tempter as an example to us.

Besides fasting from food, what other weapon did Jesus use against the devil? He quoted from the Scriptures. We read throughout the Gospels that Our Lord often quoted the scriptures, sometimes to help people who sincerely sought the truth, and sometimes to confound His enemies—though that was also done with the goal of leading them to the truth if they would humble themselves. If you take the time to notice what parts of the scriptures Jesus quotes from, there are certain patterns. He chooses His quotations based on His audience.

Jesus was often talking with Pharisees. The Pharisees get kind of a “bad rap” among Christians. In fact, some of the Pharisees mentioned in the Gospels were of good will. As a matter of fact, we Christians owe an enormous debt to the Pharisees. The Jews at the time of Jesus were divided into various groups with different beliefs, and it was the Pharisees who considered the prophets and psalms to be authoritative scriptures, the Word of God. It was the Pharisees who were eagerly studying the prophets in order to recognize the Messiah. Therefore, what we now call the Bible is largely a gift to us from the Phari-

sees. When you hear Jesus quoting the Scriptures to a Pharisee, He is often quoting from a prophet or from the Psalms, and we can sometimes infer that He must be quoting a passage that was recognized as referring to the Messiah. For example, He quotes, “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool,” when He is challenged by Pharisees. Jesus is quoting from the Book of Psalms there, or as some would say, from the Prophet King David.

On the other hand, another important faction of Jews at the time of Jesus was the Sadducees, and they did not accept the authority of Scriptures except for the five Books of Moses, what is also called the Law or the Torah. When some Sadducees attempted to prove to Jesus that there is no resurrection by asking about the woman who married seven men, Jesus refutes them by quoting, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” and then saying, “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” In this case, Jesus quotes from the Book of Exodus, a book that the Sadducees accepted as authoritative. The Prophet Ezekiel also talks explicitly about resurrection, but Jesus knew that the Sadducees did not accept him as authoritative.

And finally, there are several people in the Gospels who are called “lawyers.” Some translators call them “teachers of the law” which is a little clearer because they were really experts on the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. So when a “lawyer” asks Jesus what is the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and then “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It's thrilling to hear how Our Lord moves effortlessly between the different scriptural traditions of his audience, always pinpointing their mistakes, and feeding them the right medicine for their ailment.

I say it is thrilling because anyone who reads the Scriptures now quickly discovers that God relentlessly points out our mistakes and feeds us

the right medicine from His Word as well. Since I talked about Jesus quoting different parts of the Bible for different audiences, you may wonder, which part of the Bible did the devil quote from, and which part of the Bible did Jesus use to combat each of the devil's temptations. Well, I'll leave it to you to look that up for yourself.

If you go to the Holy Land today, when you visit the Dead Sea, it is truly a bleak desert—one of the lowest places on earth. The rock is so hot and dry all year around, and even the sea is dead. The cliffs to the west are so high they don't seem real. According to tradition, it was at the top of one of these cliffs that Our Lord spent His time in prayer and fasting. He had no need for penance, but He did it as an example for us. The early Christians took His example very seriously, and they imitated both of the things that Our Lord showed us. The first one you are familiar with, namely the forty day fast. But what is the second thing that the early Christians imitated? They used Scripture to fight temptation. Some teachers, such as Saint John Cassian, recommended using a single verse for all occasions. He recommended the verse, “O God come to my assistance; O Lord make haste to help me.” In fact, some people claim the “Jesus Prayer” evolved over the centuries from Saint John Cassian's teaching. Other teachers recommended using different verses for different temptations. The most famous of these was the great teacher Evagrius of Pontus who compiled an entire book of suggestions for monks. His book is called *Antirhettikos*, which more or less means “Talking Back.” When temptation comes our way, it's important to talk back, but not with our own arguments and ideas—remember the devil is smarter than we are and knows us better than we know ourselves—it's important to talk back, but to let God do the talking for us. If we let Jesus do the talking, we know He will win the argument, and we know He is on our side. After all, He already paid for you with His life; He doesn't want to lose you.

+Kurt Brunette

DEACON LEWIS RABAYDA TO BE ORDAINED TO THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Saturday, January 30, 2016 • Annandale, VA



Bishop Kurt will ordain Deacon Lewis Michael Rabayda to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ on Saturday, January 30, 2016, at 10 a.m.

The ordination will take place at Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Annandale, VA, where Deacon Lewis was attending when he accepted his vocation to serve the Church and where Father John Basarab is Pastor.

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION CONFERENCE

Iraqi patriarch: Christian persecution has reached ‘critical, violent’ point

By Junno Arocho Esteves Catholic News Service, December 11, 2015



ROME (CNS) -- The survival of Christianity in the Middle East has reached such a critical point that the chances of dialogue and reconciliation in the region are being threatened, said Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Sako of Baghdad.

"The situation is very bad, very critical and always violent," Patriarch Sako told Catholic News Service Dec. 10. "Last year in August, 120,000 Christian people were expelled from their homes, their villages and now they are living in some camps with nothing, but the Church is helping them."

Patriarch Sako was among the keynote speakers at a Dec. 10-12 international conference on Christian persecution in the world. He told CNS that the mass exodus of Christians in the region will only worsen the situation due to growing tensions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims who "are killing each other."

"We Christians, we always bridged the groups and we promoted dialogue, reconciliation and forgiveness," he said.

Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, stressed the need for Catholics in the West to "speak up for the persecuted Christian minorities in the Middle East" who are often "omitted" and "not mentioned."

"We must not allow them to be forgotten. We must not engage in an unholy silence," he told CNS.

Archbishop Lori said religious persecution and threats to religious liberty are "two sides of one coin" and that it was crucial for Christians in the West to "keep the flame of religious liberty bright in solidarity with our suffering sisters and brothers in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere."

The conference also touched upon the reasons why terrorist groups, like Islamic State, carry out brutal attacks against Christians and religious minorities. Patriarch Sako said such fundamentalist ideologies are a "cancer not only for Islam, but other" religions in the region as well.

The Islamic State and "fundamentalists don't accept anything that doesn't fit with their vision of Islam," he said. "This is a kind of purification and, of course, Christians and other minorities are a target."

Patriarch Sako also said it was "very wrong" for Western politicians to label actions by the Islamic State as "violent extremism" rather than "Islamic extremism."

"This is not the truth because these groups, ISIS and others, are basing their actions on the holy Quran" and recited sayings of the prophet Muhammad. "Even when they burn (people) they recite" one of these sayings, he said.

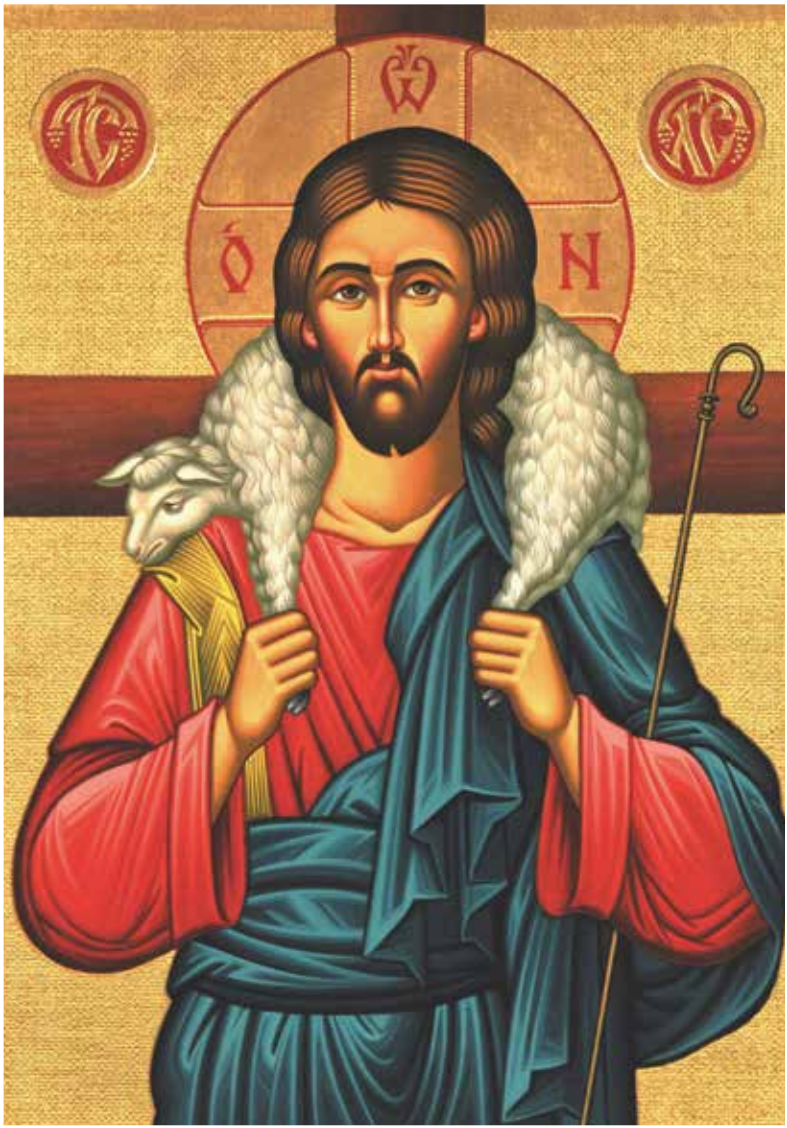
"Of course, all Muslims are not fanatics or terrorists, but there are groups that want to establish an Islamic state with Islamic law as it was in the 7th century," he said.

The conference, held at Rome's Pontifical Urbanian University, also included addresses by Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's foreign minister; Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan of the Syriac Catholic Church; and Andrea Riccardi, founder of the lay community of Sant'Egidio.

Contributing to this story was Robert Duncan in Rome.



WHAT IS A JUBILEE YEAR? Since 1300, the Catholic Church has celebrated jubilees every fifty years in keeping with a commandment given to Moses (Leviticus chapter 25). The Old Testament jubilee provided for the release



of slaves and the forgiveness of debts. The spiritual jubilee celebrated by the Church is an opportunity to be set free from sin, to experience God's mercy in an extraordinary manner and to share that forgiveness and liberation with others. The jubilee interrupts ordinary time and challenges us to step away from "business as usual" so as to enter more fully into God's eternal plan for us all. Pope John Paul II called an extraordinary Holy Year in 1983. Pope Francis has done the same for this Jubilee of Mercy.

WHAT IS AN INDULGENCE? One of the features of a jubilee is the opportunity for the faithful to obtain a plenary indulgence. Forgiveness flows from Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the Cross once and for all for the sins of all mankind (Hebrews 7:27). Jesus Himself ordained that this forgiveness should flow through the sacramental ministry of the Church (John 20:21-23) especially through the sacramental mysteries of Baptism, Holy Anointing of the Sick, and Repentance (Confession). But even confessed sins leave scars, and the damage remains to be undone. Healing this damage and satisfying God's justice require our own active embrace of penance. Fasting, prayer, works of charity freely undertaken all contribute to this atonement on our part. An indulgence is God's free gift to us of the spiritual means of repaying the debt caused by sin, a debt which must otherwise be paid by our own sufferings in this life or after death. An indulgence does not replace the need for confession. It is not absolution. It is not a "get out of jail free card" for sins we may choose to commit later. It does not condone or excuse sin. It cannot be bought or sold. An indulgence is God's gift to help put sin and all its consequences firmly in our past. God allows us to participate in the merits and the sanctity of the centuries of saints who have gone before us and with whom we are united in the one Body that is Christ's Church. An indulgence allows us to experience both God's mercy and the solidarity we share with all those who are "in Christ" whether living or dead, already saints or not yet saints. Thus, we can choose to gain an indulgence for the departed rather than for ourselves, since we are all one Body in Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27).



PEOPLE YOU KNOW...

IN LANSFORD AND NESQUEHONING...

Saint Nicholas and Christmas celebrations in both parishes

Saturday, December 5, was the annual Saint Nicholas Festival at Nesquehoning's Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church. "People traffic" inside was brisk and steady all day. Folks picked up take-out ethnic food like halupki, pirohi, haluski, and *nalysniki* (dumplings with meat) along with delicious homemade chicken and vegetable soups. They came from Lansford, Tamqua, Summit Hill, Jim Thorpe, and Nesquehoning, gathering in the social hall to celebrate the special feast.

The families who stayed ate and laughed, some even danced! Accordion music filled the air, compliments of parishioner Eddie Kusko. Visitors bought flea market items and tickets on about 90 gifts and baskets full of treasures. Of course, there was plenty of time to enjoy picture taking with the day's important visitor, Saint Nicholas!

From 10 a.m. to about 3 p.m., locals celebrated the Joy of the season. As the Pastor, Father Vasyl Chepelskyy, said it truly was "...Good food, good music, families and good company and all of this in Church! What more could you want?"

On Sunday, December 6, Father Vasyl celebrated a Christmas dinner with

his other parish family: Saint John the Baptist of Lansford. The social hall was decorated with garland and tinsel fit for any Christmas festivities. The backdrop for Saint Nicholas was an outdoor scene lined with decorated evergreens.

The parish enjoyed a variety of foods and good music and company. After a good meal, they joined in for traditional caroling in addition to Eddie Kusko serenading with his accordion. Those old cardases and songs from childhood weddings and parties never get old!

Speaking of children, they gathered at Saint Nicholas' feet for a special time of gift giving. Often times, many people give the gifts on Saint Nicholas feast to better focus on the Birth of the Infant Jesus on Christmas. Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker was Bishop of Myra in what is now Turkey who used his wealth to help many people and his blessings to cure the sick. In fact, the tradition of gold coin candy comes from a tale of how Saint Nicholas once helped a poor family by going on their roof and tossing gold coins down the chimney. They landed in the stockings below which hung on the mantle to dry.



Parishioners and friend enjoy a meal to celebrate Christmas.



Everyone enjoys a visit from Saint Nicholas!



Oh, who loves Nicholas the Saintly? Oh, who serves Nicholas the Saintly?



Father and Pan'i Chepelskyy and their children greet Saint Nicholas

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...AROUND THE EPARCHY

IN ANNANDALE...


BCY decorates graves of veterans for Christmas. Photos by Laura O’Leary



Members of Epiphany of Our Lord’s Byzantine Catholic Youth and their siblings were among those placing 240,000 wreaths on graves at Arlington National Cemetery during “Wreaths Across America” on December 12th. At each grave, BCY members paused to pray for the blessed repose of each veteran ... and to give thanks for the freedom they helped secure.



SAVE THE DATE



The Fourth Annual Women’s Retreat
“Greater Perfection”
A Women’s Retreat based upon the Spirituality of
Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich

The Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation
Retreat Center
Carey, Ohio
March 4th, 5th and 6th, 2016
Retreat Master
Father Thomas J. Loya
Contact Joan Washburn for further information
419-798-9107

Further details will follow
Sponsored by Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church

The first person to be beatified on American soil, Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich was a Byzantine Catholic from St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic parish in Bayonne, New Jersey. As a young lady she became a member of the Sisters of Charity and died on May 8, 1927 at the age of 26. She took her final vows on her death bed. While she was just a young novice Sr. Miriam’s spiritual director noticed her special gifts and holiness. He asked her to secretly write conferences which he delivered each week to the novices. Only after Sr. Miriam’s death was the true author of the conferences revealed.

Blessed Miriam Teresa stands as a model of unity within the Catholic Church. Although she joined a Latin Rite order her writings clearly reveal the influence of her Eastern Christian mystical spirituality. Her conferences have been collected into a book known as “Greater Perfection.” To anyone reading her work it is immediately evident that this young lady was a mystic who had a knowledge of God, Scripture and the matters of the spiritual life that could have only been known through the infusion of the Holy Spirit. Blessed Miriam taught that holiness, whereby we experience the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, is open to all as long as we strive at all times and in all ways with all our might to match our own personal will with the will of God. This involves the ongoing process of dying to the tyranny of our own egos and embracing the prayer and sacramental life of the Church. Blessed Miriam was beatified on October 4, 2014 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark, New Jersey.

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CELEBRATE THE HOLY JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY!!



PHOTOS OF THE ANNUAL RETREAT FOR EPARCHIAL DEACONS, DEACON CANDIDATES, AND THEIR WIVES

Continued from page 1



Bishop Kurt preaches the homily during the Divine Liturgy



The new deacon candidates and their families



The Holy Gospel is held high over everyone while Bishop Kurt chants a prayer during the Office of the Anointing of the Sick



Deacon Daniel Dozier (L), who led the retreat, chats with Lector Jack Figel (R) during a social hour



Small group discussions were held during one session



Bishop Kurt thanks the Sisters for their hospitality

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The Carpatho-Rusyns of Pennsylvania

A project over two decades in the making to write the history of the state's Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities

“THE CARPATHO-RUSYNS OF PENNSYLVANIA” Blog documents a project to publish history of state’s Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities

By Rich Custer, M.A., M.B.A.

Carpatho-Rusyns are one of the major ethnic groups of Pennsylvania. They have left an indelible mark on the state with their “onion-domed” churches, rich cultural traditions, and devotion to their roots.

Carpatho-Rusyns began to settle in the anthracite coal mining districts of northeastern Pennsylvania in the late 1870s. Small towns and burgeoning cities like Shenandoah, Freeport, Shamokin, Mount Carmel, Mahanoy City, McAdoo, Centralia, Nesquehoning, Lansford, Hazleton, Kingston, Wilkes-Barre, Plymouth, Scranton, and Olyphant were among the first places these immigrants first found work and made their homes. There they built churches, established fraternal insurance societies and social clubs, founded small businesses, met their spouses, raised children, and buried their deceased.

In the decades that followed, Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities sprang up in central Pennsylvania (primarily in Centre, Clearfield, and Cambria Counties) and in the Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Allentown areas. By 1900, there were Rusyn immigrant settlements in at least 25 counties and these communities numbered in the hundreds. In the decade 1910-1920, 54% of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States lived in Pennsylvania. A far larger number of the total had lived in Pennsylvania at one point but later moved to other states.

While they found work in the early years as anthracite coal miners or on railroad lines, in the Pittsburgh area and throughout southwestern Pennsylvania the steel industry, supported by bituminous coal mines and coke ovens, provided a livelihood for tens of thousands of Rusyn immigrants. The Lehigh Valley drew Rusyn immigrants with employment in factories, steel mills, and the cement and slate industries. Johnstown’s

steel mills and extensive nearby bituminous coal mining operations gave rise to dozens of Carpatho-Rusyn communities across west central Pennsylvania, and the industrial plants of Erie led thousands more Rusyn immigrants to northwestern Pennsylvania, where others worked in the oil or timber industries or established farms much as they had known back in their European homeland villages. In every place there were businessmen and businesswomen among their ranks: undertakers, hoteliers, shopkeepers, saloon owners, beer distributors, midwives, boarding house owners, even bankers and travel agents.

In the 1990s I began a project that continues to the present day that will tell the story of these people, whether they called themselves, or were called by others, Rusyns, Rusins, Rusnaks, Ruthenians, Carpatho-Russians, Uhro-Rusyns, Lemkos, Russians, Ukrainians, or any of a number of other names. The ultimate goal of the project is to publish a comprehensive illustrated history, in book form, of all the Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities and their churches, fraternal lodges, social clubs, and businesses in the state.

Two central themes throughout the book will be “transplanting the village” and “who are we?” The first is to present the European homeland



Saint Veronica Choir of Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church, Hazleton, PA

I have photographed almost every church (some now destroyed or decommissioned) and parish cemetery and old immigrant gravestone, collected parish histories and articles from local and immigrant newspapers, investigated fraternal organization records and parish metrical records to discern the European villages of origin of the immigrant founders/settlers in each place in Pennsylvania, and collected or scanned photographs showing the life of the community, mainly from before World War II, but also some more current photos. Many individuals have lent their voices and memories through oral history interviews to provide a direct experience of the history, and I have collected virtually every memoir written and published by Rusyn immigrants and others about the earliest days of Rusyns in America.

Please follow the progress on my blog, rusynsofpa.blogspot.com, where you will also find interesting articles about topics like researching the immigrants’ villages of origin within these communities, the debates within communities over “who are we?” the role of oral histories, and some summaries of presentations I’ve made at genealogical conferences about the development of these communities in different regions. The blog also contains some lists of books or photographs that I have not been able to locate. Any help you might offer on those missing items would be most appreciated.

The author is a founder of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society and is the editor of its newsletter, *The New Rusyn Times*, since it began in 1994. He is a member of Saint Ann Parish in Harrisburg, PA, and attends Epiphany of Our Lord Parish in Annandale, VA. You may contact him at rusynsofpa@gmail.com



Old Forge, PA, GCU Youth Lodge



Father Gary Mensinger, Pastor of Saint Michael Parish and local Syncellus, together with parishioners and members of the 100th anniversary committee

SAINT MICHAEL PARISH CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

Pittston, PA

On Sunday, November 1, 2015, Saint Michael the Archangel Church in Pittston, PA, celebrated its 100th Anniversary, with Bishop Kurt as the main celebrant of a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, which was held at 3 p.m. with parishioners, families and friends enthusiastically uniting their voices to God in thanksgiving for this milestone event.

The concelebrants for the Liturgy were: Mitred Archpriest James Hayer, Protosyncellus, Saint Thomas the Apostle, Rahway, NJ; Father Gary Mensinger, pastor of both Saint Michael, Pittston and Saint Nicholas, Swoyersville; Father Michael Salnick, Saint Nicholas Chapel, Pocono Summit and Saint Nicholas Shrine, Cresco, PA; Msgr. John Sekellick, Holy Ghost, Jessup and Saint John the Baptist, Forest City, PA; Father John Cigan, a parish vocation, Saint Mary, Wilkes-Barre, PA; Father Joseph Bertha, former Saint Michael pastor, Saint John the Baptist, Trumbull, CT; and Father Leonard A. Martin, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Mary, Scranton. Serving as Master of Ceremonies was Father Edward Higgins, Holy Ghost and Holy Trinity parishes, Philadelphia. Deacons at the Liturgy were Deacon Larry Worlinsky of Saint Michael and Saint Nicholas, Swoyersville, PA; and Deacon Basil Soroka, Saint Mary, Wilkes-Barre, PA.

Area cantors for the Liturgy were led by Cantor Raymond Mastroberte, Saint Mary, Wilkes-Barre. The faithful responded with such joy-filled responses that it was impossible not to get caught up in the beauty of it all. Sadly missed in the celebration was Saint Michael's own cantor, Paul Dzuri-sin, due to illness. Many prayers were

with Paul as he had a successful recovery. Former altar servers returned for the Liturgy and their participation was so gratefully appreciated. It was very much like a family reunion seeing all who came "home" on this special day.

A procession into the church was led by the color guard of the Pittston area Knights of Columbus, Council 372. Several area clergy were present in addition to those concelebrating.

Bishop Kurt began his homily explaining the symbolism of the Sunday Gospel; he then described some of the issues the people in Europe had faced under persecution and how things have changed so drastically today. The challenge he made to all present was to pray for vocations and he offered a Saint Therese Novena prayer card for use in that request. Bishop Kurt cited his own personal journey to the priesthood and examples of the efficacy of the power of prayer. Finally, Bishop described his participation in the Synod on the Family in Rome where he had an opportunity to mingle with bishops from all over the world. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, all the faithful were invited to receive the novena prayer card and a medal of Our Lady of Guadalupe blessed by Pope Francis, both gifts from Bishop Kurt.

With the conclusion of the Liturgy, everyone proceeded to a banquet dinner held at the Via Appia Reception Hall, Taylor. Piano music provided a relaxing ambience and a delicious full course meal awaited guests. Bishop Kurt made the opening remarks after receiving a gift of flowers presented by the children and parish ECF instructor, Darby O'Neill. He followed

with blessing of the food.

Additional initial remarks were made by Father John Cigan and Father Michael Salnick who appropriately invoked the words of the hymn to Saint Michael. Speaking during the dinner, Father James Hayer challenged everyone to engage in continued parish involvement, not only of Saint Michael's Church in asking "what comes next after 100 years", but to larger view of all united in the eparchy of Passaic. Finally, acknowledgements were made by Father Gary Mensinger to all the committee members who worked so hard over the past ten months to make this day a success in every aspect of planning, preparation and fundraising -- a huge task done by a small group of parishioners. The final benediction was offered by Father Sekellick.

Reflecting back to 1913, the founders of Saint Michael Church would not have imagined the results of their work to form a parish, but a vision they had. They began with a desire, with active determination and resolve, and with unrelenting faith and trust. Today, Saint Michael Parish owes much to them, but also to the many pastors and parishioners who have served over the years. Our challenge is to follow their example in our own lives and the life of Saint Michael Church. We offer our prayers of gratitude to those who preceded us, and ask God to continue to bless all the pastors and parish family of Saint Michael the Archangel into the future. May God grant to the parish family Saint Michael Church many blessed years!



Father Gary Mensinger, Pastor, addresses his flock on this milestone



Sister Theodosia, OSBM, and Sister Regina, OSBM, with Father Gary Mensinger, Pastor of Saint Michael Parish



Bishop Kurt and concelebrating clergy, together with servers and members of the Knights of Columbus, at the Hierarchical Liturgy for the festive occasion



Let us be attentive! Peace be to all! Wisdom be attentive!



Parishioners welcome their Chief Shepherd with bread and salt, traditional signs of Slavic hospitality



BM, with Mrs. Helen Mensinger, mother of Father parish, and Father Gary's sister, Janet Drumn



Father John Cigan, parish vocation, offers reflections on the momentous occasion



Bishop Kurt addresses the clergy, parishioners, and guests present while Father Gary Mensinger and Mitred Archpriest James Hayer listen attentively.



LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

SEEKING LIFE IN THE DESERT

The “holiday triumvirate” of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s is well behind us. We are squarely in the midst of that odd “winter desert” that exists between the joy of the Incarnation, and anticipating the end of spring’s hiatus. In January bitter cold and darkness are our constant companions, and many suffer those “blues” that accompany the season. We long for sunshine, green grass and brightly colored flowers, and the daylight that overcomes long, cold nights. We long for life because we were created to live! Of course, many enjoy winter’s outdoor activities, snow-filled romps and cozy fireside respites. Yet the often unbearable cold, stormy weather and “cabin fever” is fatiguing. As winter stretches into March – perhaps even bringing an April snow shower– it’s easy to lose hope that it will ever be warm again.

This “winter desert” is perhaps a fitting metaphor of the cultural desert in which we live; an apt description of our collective hearts in a society ever colder and more detached from community. Unfortunately, it also describes the state of our moral Union since the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*. On January 22, 1973, the high court legalized abortion in America, and along with its companion case, *Doe v. Bolton*, incredibly made the procedure permissible up to the ninth month of pregnancy. It’s fitting that such a decision was rendered in January – in the winter desert. The 57 million abortions committed since 1973 reveal that *Roe* was an earthquake (or perhaps more in keeping with our metaphor, an avalanche) that shakes us to our moral core even today. Certainly, neither *Roe* nor abortion are the cause of all sin and destruction in our world. But the practice of abortion and its approval as an uncomfortable but “necessary” choice is woven into the fabric of American society and our notion of freedom, and represents the cunning ability of Evil to masquerade as Good.

It has become cliché, perhaps even simplistic, to speak of “root causes” and “slippery slopes.” To do so opens one to charges of everything from fear-mongering to bigotry, to pure ignorance. Yet the fact remains that a view of the human person that does not take into account his essential goodness simply by virtue of the fact that “he is!” has serious implications for how we treat all human persons at every stage of life. We Christians – Byzantine Catholics – believe that all human persons are created in God’s image and likeness. Each of us is willed – loved! – into being by Him. The blastocyst who doesn’t yet know who he is (and whose mother is not yet aware of his presence); the grandmother who has long forgotten the names of her children and needs help performing the most basic tasks of daily life; the young athlete severely injured and confined to a wheelchair; the little girl with Down Syndrome. In some circles – within the philosophy department of one American Ivy League university, for example – the above mentioned are not persons at all, or may be considered so only by degree. The true measure of a person and the worth of his/her life in this view is “quality,” productivity, and the decency not to be “burdensome.”

A Christian worldview does not regard any person at any stage or in any circumstance to be a burden or liability. Without a doubt, serious illness, financial and emotional strain and yes, unplanned pregnancy, tests our ability to cope. The burdens of responsibility for ourselves and others, depression, emotional and physical fatigue, doubt and worry are real to us – and shouldn’t be discounted. But they can never overtake our obligation to each other and to Almighty God to love the weakest, most vulnerable, suffering, and “inconvenient” among us. Love isn’t a feeling, but a difficult, heart-wrenching, selfless and ultimately beautiful decision for the good of another.

The complexity of the “life issues” can’t be properly explored here. End-of-life care and treatment for persons with severe disabilities or grave illness require special consideration based upon the individual, but always respecting his intrinsic worth. Mercy is suffering alongside a loved one and caring for her with tenderness and love. Evil wears a mask it calls “mercy” when it convinces us that some lives are not worth living, or even worth being called “life” at all. There are difficult and heart-breaking situations through which families must be guided by prayer and the counsel of their pastor. When Jesus says, “my burden is easy and my yoke light,” He’s not disregarding our suffering. He’s carrying it with us, but not alone. We, the Church, the family of God, have a duty to carry each other, too.

The frigid cold and pervasive darkness of January does gradually begin to give way to daylight. Each passing day brings us closer to spring, and though it’s almost imperceptible, day after day brings just a little bit more light. So it is with us and our earthly pilgrimage through dark times and overwhelming suffering. Spring is already here: in the victory of Christ over death, in our encounter with Him in the Holy Mysteries, and in the movement of tenderness and love we make toward each and every “icon of God” who is loved and cherished by Him.

*The annual March for Life takes place Friday January 22, 2016, in Washington, DC. Check parishes in your area for bus trips to the March. If you can’t be there in person, support the cause with prayer. Visit <http://marchforlife.org/> for more information. If you or a loved one has had an abortion, there is hope and healing. Contact <http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/> or your local Catholic Charities office. [ECL](#)



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Father Jack Custer, S.S.L., S.T.D.

WITH JOY, YOU SHALL DRAW WATER

A lot of people say they want to read the Bible but are daunted by the book itself. Where should I begin? What should I look for? How can I be sure I’m understanding it all correctly?

One safe and easy way to start exploring God’s Word is to let the Church’s liturgical calendar be our guide. The saints who arranged the liturgical year have assembled a “greatest hits” of Scripture for us. They teach us how to find Christ in the Old Testament, and they point out the great themes that run through God’s revelation in both Testaments, creating one single, seamless story of our salvation.

The liturgical services for the Theophany (January 6) celebrate our Lord’s baptism in the Jordan (Matthew 3: 13-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-3) by recalling the ways water has figured in God’s revelation of Himself and His plan for us. The first lines of Genesis (1:1-13) use the image of lifeless, chaotic waters to evoke the utter nothingness before God began to create light, heaven, oceans, earth and life in all its varied forms. Water is life-giving, as the Israelites in their arid land knew so well.

But water can also be destructive. Through the flood (Genesis 6-8) God temporarily hands the world back to these lifeless, chaotic waters (Genesis 7:11) as a way of washing away the conse-

quences of generations of human sin. Regardless of how we may see it in the heat of the moment, every sinful choice in some way rejects the life-giving Law (Psalm 119: 116) in favor of chaos, nothingness and death. The Egyptian forces pursuing Israel in the first days of the Exodus find their choice against God confirmed in the destructive waves of the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15). Fallen human nature, helplessly stuck in sin, is what gets drowned in the waters of Baptism (Romans 6:3-11).

The baptismal waters also give life, thanks to our Lord’s baptism in the Jordan on our behalf. At the Great Sanctification of Water, we hear three beautiful prophecies from Isaiah.

The first (Isaiah 35:1-10) uses the image of a desert suddenly in bloom to promise God’s coming as Savior to his hopeless and defeated people. The second (Isaiah 55: 1-13) repeats this promise and expands it beyond Israel in all is grace and abundance to include “many nations.” The third (Isaiah 12:3-6) invites us to draw water from the wells of salvation (Baptism!), and to respond with joy to God’s grace in our lives. When Isaiah says “great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst” (12:6) he is pointing to the Incarnation of Christ and His appearance at the Jordan as our Savior. Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 10:1-4) looks back

at the events of the Exodus and sees how all the wonders God worked for His people during that journey toward salvation actually point to Jesus Christ. Baptism is our personal passage through the Red Sea that drowns original sin. Baptism is our personal introduction to the life-giving sacraments that continue to flow from the pierced side of Christ, sacrificed for us on the Cross (John 19:34). And so, Saint Paul can look at the rock that Moses struck in the desert to provide water for the Israelites (Exodus 17) and say simply: “That Rock was Christ.”

You can find the main Scripture readings for every day of the year on the wall calendar distributed every year in our parishes. You can find the full menu of Scripture readings (including the Old Testament prophecies for major feasts like Theophany) online at www.byzcath.org. Wouldn’t reading these daily selections for yourself be a wonderful new year’s resolution for 2016? [ECL](#)



UNDERSTANDING ICONS

Father Joseph Bertha, Ph.D.

THREE ICONS OF CHRIST

It’s All in the Eyes!

Installment 3 of 12 inadvertently published out of order

The most compelling demonstration of Mercy in shown in the depiction of the gaze of Our Lord: Our Savior looks at us from eternity. Many times, a child has been chastised in church by parents who say, “Jesus sees everything you are doing up above from heaven!” Usually, the child quietly submits to the scrutiny of Our Savior high above in the dome, or even on the icon screen.

The depiction of Our Lord’s eyes are perhaps the most gripping part of His icon, for sight is the primary of our five senses. His right eye pierces into the viewer’s soul; it is the look of righteousness, begging the question, “Did you follow the commandments?” Conversely, Our Lord’s left eye looks up and off into the distance, seeking the prodigal son, searching for the lost. This is the view of Our Lord from the Cross, it is the visualization of God the Father’s mercy. As we read in the scriptures, mercy triumphs over justice.

The pupils of both eyes of Our Lord are shown fully dilated, indicating that they are fully refulgent with light! Jesus tells His disciples in Saint John’s Gospel: “I am the Light of the World, he

who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” (John 8:12)

Since vision involves both eyes, mercy trumps justice, and the gaze of Our Lord is the abiding mercy of God the Father, not looking out in Judgment at his creation, but looking, searching, and seeking the lost.

This regard or gaze of Our Lord is exclusive only to His icons, this gaze cannot be seen in any other depictions of holy people in icons. This unique aspect of icons of Jesus needs to be noted and is sometimes overlooked and not included by iconographers.

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! Luke 10:23 (Our Lord speaking to His disciples)

The depiction of Our Lord eyes portrays the most important attribute of God, His Mercy. The primacy of the sense of sight, our vision was taught to me by one of the blind boys of Alabama when I attended the World Festival of Sacred Music in the 1990s. In May of that year, a music festival featuring sacred music of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions was featured during numerous daily performances. I stayed at the Sheraton hotel and, towards the end of the week, I was finishing my breakfast when I noticed a blind African-American man being escorted to

a table by a guide. As a fellow American, I felt I should go introduce myself to him and ask him if he wanted something for breakfast. I walked over to the table, introduced myself and inquired if he wanted anything from the buffet. “Father Joseph, I would love a bowl of Rice Krispies swimming in milk,” was his reply. I walked over to the breakfast bar, found the cereal and milk, and started to walk back to the table with a question bubbling up in my soul. I wondered how a person blind from birth could see or visualize God? As I approached the table, he asked me to join him as he ate his breakfast. We talked about colors, icons, images, etc, and he allowed me to ask him the question: How do you see God? He answer me very quickly, leaving me speechless: “when someone like you - a complete stranger - comes up and offers me hospitality, that is when I see God!” A blind man taught me a profound lesson about our sight, and the wonderful colors of paradise by his response right from the mouth of God!

The infinite Gaze of Mercy

Each of the three icons I have selected to illustrate this series of Mercy visualized demonstrate the “cross eyed” gaze of Our Lord. The most apparent display of the trio of icons is the mosaic of Christ in Deisis with Saint John the Baptist and the Theotokos from 1260 in Hagia Sophia Istanbul in the South Gallery. This thirteenth century mosaic is considered by many to be at the pin-



6th Century Icon from Saint Catherine’s, Sinai, Egypt



Deisis Christ Hagia Sophia Detail 1260 AD



15th Century Icon from Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia

nacle of the depictions of our Savior. Look into the gaze of Our Lord and notice the arrangement of his eyes, they beckon to us with God's mercy from the refulgent display of light from the outside perpendicular window reflecting the light. (see detail of countenance/face of Christ)

This mosaic crafted by Italian mosaic artisans in the Imperial Capital during a time of great upheaval still captivates viewers with God's regard of loving mercy from eternity.

The icon of Our Lord found at Saint Catherine Monastery, Mt. Sinai, Egypt, which dates from the sixth century, also shows this arrangement of the eyes. This icon panel painted on wood using hot colored wax manipulated by a spatula simi-

lar to pysanky-making is displayed at Saint Catherine Monastery, located at the foot of Mount Sinai in Egypt.

The icon is similar to the *Fayum* paintings from upper Egypt of the same period. Some of these can be viewed in the Egyptian wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC. These portrait images depict the deceased individual and were inserted into the sarcophagus over the head. These fully frontal wide eyed depictions bear a striking resemblance to our icons. They vividly portray the individual in details making them present to the viewer, most especially in the depiction of the vibrant light filled eyes. Monks in the Egyptian desert dwelling imitated this style of painting when they began to paint icons, and

seen in the Saint Catherine's Christ icon.

In the third icon, Saint Andrew Rublyov's *Spas*, an icon panel from the 15th century exhibited at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, you can also see the divergent right and left eyes of Our Lord.

Take careful notice of the eyes of Our Savior as they gaze out from the panel to the viewer. With extreme humility and kindness, they seek the lost to bring them back into the flock of faithful with God's Mercy. Let us imitate this gaze of mercy in our daily lives. Instead of using a single eye in just judgment of people in this world, let us engage the other eye of mercy in order to allow God the Father's gracious abyss of mercy to enter into this world that so desperately needs it. [ECL](#)

CATECHETICAL REFLECTIONS

Father Robert F. Slesinski, Ph.D.



OMG: A SHOUT IN THE STREET?

The Marvel of the Mind: From Doubt to Certitude Installment 10

In the very fact of grasping that knowing is a fundamental datum of human experience, we also garner another truth. The act of knowing presupposes a mind at work. There is no knowledge to be had, in other words, without a knowing mind. It is the knowing mind that is in intentional contact with the world in which we find ourselves.

No Father of the Christian Church, be it of the East or the West, who explored the workings of the human mind and the truths it reveals to us, was more searching in his investigations than Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Plumbing the depths of the human mind, Augustine, above all, sought to disclose what, to his mind, had to be an essentially triune character to human being made in the image and likeness of God, specifically the Three-Personed God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Augustine was convinced that a concerted methodology of spiritual introspection could not but disclose the profound inner workings of the human person through which, more importantly, he or she can only come into a more intimate contact with Almighty God himself, who is at the true center of human existence.

In the opening paragraph of his esteemed autobiographical account of his life and spiritual struggles, his *Confessions*, St. Augustine movingly lays out his fundamental thesis: "...thou [O Lord] has made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee" (I, I, 1). God being the ultimate Truth in his quest for meaning and purpose in life, he finds himself existentially driven to find truth. Even in the face of doubt, he remains relentless in his quest. In the

course of this spiritual journey, Augustine grasps a fundamental truth about his existence, namely, that he is a spiritual being, ultimately dependent on a Spiritual Source, his Creator, with this insight immediately being grasped in the precise context of his own self-doubt.

In face of the plaintiff cry of persistent sceptics and his own self-questioning, Augustine fashions his classic *si fallor, sum* ("if I am mistaken, I exist") argument that was to be taken over centuries later by the famed French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) with his variant *cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") argument. Most importantly, the truth Augustine articulates (and later Descartes) is not the result of reasoning as such, but is an immediate intellectual grasping of truth. Oddly enough, the obvious fact of doubt leads to at least one certitude in life. Doubt presupposes a doubting subject. In a similar vein, Descartes argues that the fact of thinking (even if erroneously) presupposes a thinking subject. The fact of the "self" is thus an absolutely secure datum of reality.

It bears quoting Augustine directly. In his *City of God* (XI, 26) we read:

They [the sceptics] say "Suppose you are mistaken?" I reply "If I am mistaken, I exist." A non-existent being cannot be mistaken; therefore I must exist, if I am mistaken. Then since my being mistaken proves that I exist, how can I be mistaken in thinking that I exist, seeing that my mistake establishes my existence? Since therefore I must exist in order to be mistaken, then even if I am mistaken, there

can be no doubt that I am not mistaken in my knowledge that I exist.

Clearly, we cannot deny the certitude of our existence. Importantly, Augustine does not stop here, but unpacks further truths from this fundamental insight. These include the immediacy of knowledge and my gladness over these truths. As Augustine himself continues,

It follows that I am not mistaken in knowing that I know. For just as I know I exist, I also know that I know. And when I am glad of those two facts, I can add the fact of that gladness to the things I know, as a fact of equal worth. For I am not mistaken about the fact of my gladness, since I am not mistaken about the things which I love. Even if they were illusory, it would still be a fact that I love the illusions.

In sum, according to this great African saint, we fully bask in a "trinity" of truths: "the certainty that I exist, that I know it, and that I am glad of it." But most insightfully, Augustine sees the image of God in human being, an image, indeed, of the Triune God. Our existence is truly reflective of the creative goodness of the Father; our knowledge of this reflects the consciousness of the Son in acknowledging his Father with our gladness over our existence and knowledge truly, however modestly, bespeaking the joy of the Holy Spirit over the mutual bonding of the Father and Son. OMG! The joy and knowledge of our being truly can bring us to the threshold of worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [ECL](#)

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"Year of Mercy"





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SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Monsignor John. T. Sekellick, JCL

THE JORDAN RIVER



The well-known Austrian composer Johann Strauss (1825-1899) immortalized the Danube River with the waltz which bears its name, the “Blue Danube.” Many rivers are known for particular qualities or events. We need think only of the Amazon and its great length in South America flowing from the Peruvian Andes into the Atlantic Ocean in northern Brazil. The Monongahela and the Allegheny which merge to form the Ohio in Pittsburgh. The Saint Lawrence Seaway and the Mississippi deep enough for shipping lanes. The Dnieper in Ukraine which was the site of the baptism of Prince Vladimir and the people of ancient Rus over 1,000 years ago. In Scripture, we read the account of Moses’ being hidden from the Egyptians in the Nile (Exodus 2:1-10), and the lowly Jordan, the site of Jesus’ baptism which is solemnly celebrated on January 6th.


The Jordan has a lengthy association with the Chosen People. Joshua led the Chosen People across the Jordan from the east into the Promised Land near to Jericho. King David made his escape from Absalom crossing the Jordan. Elijah and Elisha crossed it just before Elijah was taken up to heaven. Elisha told the Syrian general Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan and be healed. John the Baptist baptized people – including Jesus – in the Jordan on which occasion the Trinity was manifest, hence our term Theophany – appearance of God. Theophany itself is popularly known as Iordan among the Slav people.

“Jordan” means the stream that descends rapidly (“the descender”) an apt description particularly in its portion above the Sea of Galilee. Its actual length is some 80 miles, but its full length if one straightens out its twists and turns, would come to over 200 miles. Below the Sea of Galilee its width is ninety to one hundred feet, and its depth, from three to ten feet. No part of it is navigable; although it is so shallow in places, it actually can be waded. In Biblical times, it had no bridges, so it formed a major obstacle to military tactics.

The river is almost entirely useless because its bed is so low, it is not practical for irrigation. It forms a barrier between East and West Palestine so is not any means of communication. The winters are mild, but the summers are extremely hot and humid. Nonetheless, it is Israel’s main river. The northern part of the Jordan Valley is fertile; the southern end, approaching the Dead Sea, is desert

Traditionally in our Eastern Church, water is solemnly blessed with many ceremonial references to the Jordan: “The waters behold You, O Lord. The waters behold You, and they fear; the Jordan River turns back its course as it beholds the fire of the Godhead coming down upon it and entering it in the flesh; the Jordan River turns back its course as it beholds the Holy Spirit descending in the likeness of a dove and hovering above it; the Jordan River turns back its course as its beholds the invisible made visible, the Creator existing in the flesh, and the Master in the likeness of a servant; the Jordan River turns back its course, and the mountains shout with glee as they behold God in the flesh...the One Who in the Jordan River has drowned the death of sin, the thorn of error and the bond of Hades and granted the baptism of salvation to the world.”

As we celebrate this great Feast of the Theophany, may we be reminded of our own holy baptism granting us a spiritual share in that salvation. **ECL**



Icon of the Theophany of Our Lord showing the Jordan



SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian

PRAYING FORMAL PRAYERS

When we talk to God, we can and should use our own words. But there are other kinds of prayer, very important kinds of prayer, where we use a specific form of words. The most well known formal prayer is the Our Father. When we pray the Our Father, we are not being spontaneous, unstructured or informal. Rather, there is a specific list of seven petitions that we make, in words that have been predetermined and memorized. The Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory to the Father, the Psalms, Heavenly King, It is Truly Proper, the Jesus Prayer, the Divine Liturgy and the Divine Office, are formal prayers or contain formal prayers.

How do we pray formal prayers so that they do not become empty rituals? It is entirely possible to say many prayers without truly praying. The formal prayers that we pray are not magic spells that work automatically. Formal prayer, to be truly prayer, must be said with attention, understanding, reverence, and sincerity.

When we pray any kind of formal prayer, we must pay attention to the words. Saint John of the Ladder says we must try to enclose our mind in the words of the prayer (28:17). In other words we should pay close attention to the words we are reading or reciting. If we get distracted, we return our attention to the words of the prayer. When we rattle through the words of our prayers without

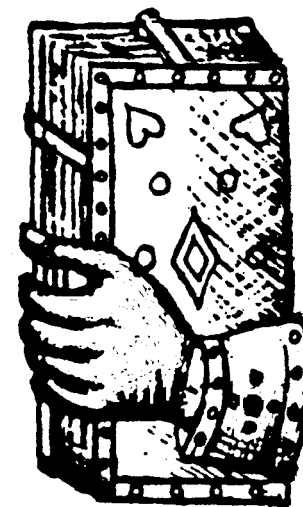
giving much thought to what we are actually saying to God, the prayer doesn't have much value.

When we pray formal prayers, we should understand what we are saying. It might be necessary to get out a dictionary and look up some of the words that are unfamiliar to us. What does "hallowed" mean? We might have to do a little research into the prayer, and its meaning. How many people understand what they are saying in the Prayer before Communion, when they pray, "I will not reveal your mystery to your enemies..." What "mystery," what "enemies," what does it mean? Wouldn't it help you to pray if you found out?

Pray with reverence. When we pray formal prayers, we usually need to slow down. Sometimes we rush through the words and miss a lot of what we are saying to God. Also, slowing down the prayer will help us pay attention to the words. Unfortunately, we may have seen a priest rush through the prayers of the Divine Liturgy, and it made us feel uncomfortable or disappointed, because it seemed irreverent. Think about how God feels when we rush through our prayers. It is as if we are saying, "God I want to hurry and get this prayer stuff over with because I've got more important things to do than talk to you." Have you ever been to a parish where the Rosary was recited so fast that it sounded like the auctioneer at the county fair? Slow down, and pray with reverence.

Pray from the heart, with sincerity. Pray it like you mean it. Even when we pray memorized prayers or prayers from a book, they should be prayers from the heart. That is to say, we must truly desire those things we are asking for in prayer. If our prayer expresses sorrow for sin, we should try to feel in our heart, as much as we are able, sorrow for our own sins. If the prayer expresses thankfulness and gratitude, we should really intend to give God thanks for his blessings and favors.

Catholic prayers, and especially Byzantine Catholic prayers, are a tremendous gift from God. They are beautiful and theologically profound. If we pray these formal prayers with attention, understanding, reverence, and sincerity, they will enable us to grow closer to God and obtain the graces we need to live the holy life, avoid sin, and get to Heaven. **ECL**



FAITH AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

By Father Carmen Scuderi, OFM, Ed.D., P.C.C.

MULTI-CULTURAL AND ELDERLY ISSUES IN SUICIDE

Teen Multicultural Issues

According to the research done by Comer (2011), suicides committed by teens have a variance when it comes to ethnicity. Again, according to Goldston and his colleagues (2008), and the NAHIC (2006), as cited by Comer (2011), in the United States, "Around 7.5 out of every 100,000 white American teenagers commit suicide each year, compared to 5 out of every 100,000 African-American and Hispanic American teens" (Comer, 2011, p.247). According to Comer, at first glance it appears that the white American teen is more suicide-prone, yet as time advances the rates among the groups approximates one another more and more. Comer states that, in the 1980's era, the suicide rate among white American teens surpassed the African-American teens by 150 percent; in the present time frame the percentage was reduced to 50 percent greater among white than African American.

The explanation given appears to be an increase in the kinds of pressures: societal, academic, peer, familial that are experienced by the white teen are beginning to be experienced by African and Hispanic as observed by Comer (2011); it is Comer who cites Duarte-Velez and Bernal (2008), as

well as Goldston and his colleagues (2008), in finding an unemployment hike between the African-American and Hispanic-Americans; this, coupled with the anxieties and economic pressures caused by unemployment, inner city living arrangements, and the rage brought about by the no-exit mentality and racial prejudices that still pervades the societal structures. Concerning Asian-American teens, according to Comer, research recently uncovered the statistics that show 4.5 out of every 100,000 Asian-Americans commit suicide per year.

The Native American Issue

The research of Alcantara and Gone (2008), along with Goldston and colleagues [(as cited by Comer (2011))], revealed that the Native-American teens represented the highest rate of suicide than any other ethnic grouping. To quote the authors, "Currently, more than 15 of every 100,000 Native American teenagers commit suicide each year" (Comer 2011, Pg. 247); this represents double the rate of white American teens and triple the number of other teens of minority extraction.

According to Comer (2011), researchers attribute this profoundly higher rate to determinants

as extreme poverty faced on the reservations, the profound limits on opportunities for education and employment, addiction behaviors specifically in alcohol and the imposed isolation experienced in reservation living.

According to the research by Bender (2006), and Chekki (2004), as cited by Comer (2011), an anomaly among certain Native-American Reservations has been identified as cluster suicides. These are extreme suicide rates, the cause of which is the communities in which the teens live. These teens find themselves exposed to suicide at very high levels of incidence; the result of which is a disruption of their lives in the observation of suicide models which risks a "contagion" (Comer 2011, p 248) for suicide.

The Experience of the Elderly

Comer observes that the elderly in societies of Western Culture have a higher likelihood of committing suicide than people in any other age group population. In Comer's (2011) research he finds, "About 19 out of every 100,000 persons over the age of 65 in the United States commit suicide. Elderly persons commit over 19 percent of all suicides in the United States, yet they account for only 12 percent of the total population" (p.248).

Vannoy and his colleagues (2007), as cited by Comer, claim many factors as contributing to the high suicide rate. Factors as failing health as age increases; the loss of friends and family; the loss of personal control over self and life in general; the loss of societal status. The results of these experiences lead to feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, depression, or a sense of inevitability in living which greatly increases the risk of suicide.

Comer cites the research of Erlangsen and his colleagues (2005) who found that two-thirds of individuals above 80 years of age who committed suicide had experienced hospitalization within two years preceding the suicidal act. The research of Ajdacic-Gross and colleagues (2008) as cited by Comer (2011) revealed that the rate of elderly who recently lost a spouse committing suicide was particularly high and according to research by Loebel and colleagues (1991) as cited by Comer, 44 percent of elderly committing suicide indicated the rationale behind the act centered upon their fear of being placed under nursing home care.

The high success rate of suicide among the elderly was the higher level of determination to commit than the young, the elderly give fewer warning signs which increases the success rate of suicide drastically according to the research by Woods (2008) as cited by Comer (2011).

The Euthanasia Issue among the Elderly

The research of Hirsch and colleagues (2009) and Awata and colleagues (2005) as cited by Comer (2011) have found that 1 out of every 4 attempted suicides by the elderly succeed. There is the argument that since the elderly are cognizant of their physical decline and the decrease in quality of life should be allowed to determine their end of life and the means by which it is accomplished. However, it is also found that clinical depression plays a vital role in 60 percent of suicides among the elderly and as such it makes a strong case for the discovery of and the aggressive treatment to the underlying depressive disorder present in such cases.

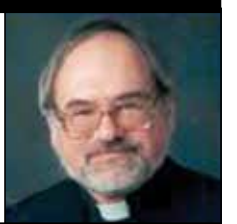
Varied studies among researchers (Alcantara and Gone, 2008; Leach and Leong, 2008; Utsey

et al., 2008; as cited by Comer, 2011) show that elderly suicidal rates among minority groups are relatively low. Although, as mentioned earlier in this report, suicide rates among Native American Tribes register as high, the specific rate among the elderly Native American peoples are low. Comer gives the reason for this as the high esteem and respect shown by the Native peoples to their elderly population. Among the Native Peoples, the elderly are sought out for their wisdom and experience gained through years of practical living. This high regard found among the Native Peoples contrasts markedly with the White population, who do not experience the respect had by the elderly among the native populations.

Our next segment will look at what treatments are utilized among people after they have attempted suicide and what constitutes suicide prevention, its effectiveness, and if space and time permit, sources of help where to go locally for help either for someone who has attempted suicide or the family and friends left behind after a loved one has committed suicide. [ECL](#)

THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD



GOD IS MERCY AND COMPASSION

As human beings, we reach out to transcendence, to the bounds of infinity. As creatures with a spirit, we can reach out and see and understand and grasp the vastness of the universe and stand in praise of its Creator. We have spoken of God, and what we know about God. We know that it is rational to believe that there is a basis for all that is, and that it is unconditional being and personal. We call him God, though the Name He revealed to us is “I am,” for, as finite beings, we cannot comprehend that which is infinite, except insofar as He reveals Himself to us. In the end, it is actually logically easier to believe in God’s existence than in our own, except, of course, that we experience our own selves because of the nature of our being, though, in reality, God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. However, it is also obvious that there is no logical reason that we should be here. The mere fact that we were born is the result of millions upon millions of coincidences that made us a unique human being. For example, in 1903 there was a landslide that destroyed much of the town of Frank, Alberta. My grandfather had lived there but moved a couple of months before the landslide. If he had not moved, I would not be here today to write this article. So it is true for all of us. God is necessary being, we are unnecessary.

How can we explain our existence in any rational way? In reality, it can be only because of the love that God has for creation. How else can we explain the infinite creating the finite? God is all in all in Himself. He has no need of us, yet he has created us, the infinite giving rise to the finite. Sometimes agnostics will point to the vastness of the universe and say, “How can one being create all of this?” They fail to understand that it matters not to God, whether there is a universe of billions of light-years or a grain of sand, to Him it is all finite. Our Lord taught, “Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one

of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. (Matthew 10:29)” The infinite can create the finite only out of an infinite love for His creation. Indeed, God loves every creature and every one with an infinite love. We use love here in the sense of “wanting the best for the other.” God’s will is that every creature be itself to the fullness of its potentiality. This is not an emotional or sentimental love, for God is spirit, not material flesh. As St. John wrote, “God is love. (1 John 4:8)” God’s love is the prototype (the ultimate model) for all created love. However, this love reveals itself in the incarnate Christ, as Jesus reveals it to the rich young man who asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him ... (Mark 10:21)” This was not what our culture usually calls love, which is sexual attraction, but the incarnation of God’s love in our Lord.

We have observed that we do not really come to God through logical reasoning, but through experience. What is true for the individual is also true for all the people as a community. God’s love for us is not only as individuals but as a people together. This is one of the goals of God’s love: to bring us together. Jesus taught, “I have given them the glory you gave Me, so that they may be one, as We are one. (John 17:22)” The human race as a whole has experienced God’s love for us. In salvation history, we see this first in the story of Abraham. In Genesis 15, we read the story: “Some time afterward, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great.” Abram complained that he had no heirs, and only a servant would inherit his property. Then God “took him outside and said: ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, He added, will your descendants be’ (Genesis 15:1.5)” God fulfilled His promise and made Abraham the father of a great nation. Moses also experienced

the love of God for His people. We have already described how God revealed His name to Moses. This was in connection with a loving promise: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exodus 3:7-8)” God did not only reveal His name, “I am,” but on Mt. Sinai, he revealed another name, “The Lord came down in a cloud and stood with him (Moses) there and proclaimed the name, ‘Lord.’ So the Lord passed before him and proclaimed: ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity.’ (Exodus 34:5-6)”

God’s mercy and compassion remained the theme of God’s revelation. We see this particularly in the Psalms. Psalm 135 (Hebrew 136) has as its constant refrain: “for His love endures forever.” The Hebrew word used is “hesed,” which has a rich meaning of “merciful loving-kindness.” In Greek, this psalm is called the “polyeleos,” which means “full of mercy,” since the word is repeated so many times. It is used in the Liturgy as the key psalm for great feastdays, likewise called “polyeleos feasts,” “feasts full of mercy.” Psalm 102 (Hebrew 103), proclaims, “The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy. His wrath will come to an end; He will not be angry forever. He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our faults. (vv. 8-10)” All of God’s love was to be incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom Saint John writes, “For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. (John 3:16)” [ECL](#)



SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

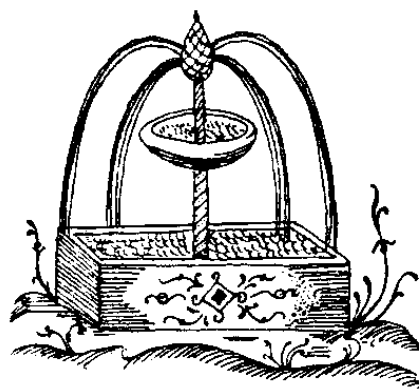
Deacon Lewis Rabayda

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

Our bodies require much care in order to continue to function properly. We know this because when we are tired after a day's work, we rest in order to be able to do it all again tomorrow. When we feel a grumbling in our stomach and begin to get weak, we know that it is time to refresh ourselves with food. Likewise, when we feel parched or even have a slight headache, we know that we need to take a drink. These signs and symptoms are part of our bodies communication to us so that we can stay alive and well. And the baptized Christian who has had even a minimal upbringing in the faith, will know when they are in need of spiritual refreshing.

It happens all too often that we find ourselves being undereducated in the Catholic Faith. We find that our families have little experience with the theology of the Church and even less experience with Holy Scripture. True, we cannot all be great theologians, but as Catholics we do have an obligation to know our faith in order to defend it against the enemy, against the ruler of this world. Those who find themselves in this undereducated state, are in no way forsaken or even forgotten. Because, in baptism we have been signed with a very real seal, a very real gift. On the outside, Baptism appears as a ritual, but this ritual is not void of actual meaning, it is an act that cannot be undone, it provides a seal that can only be broken

by our consent to commit mortal sin. Once cleansed, or once we truly repent of our sins through Confession, we are part of the Kingdom of God, we align ourselves as the children of God, and we "renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride" (Rite of Christian Initiation).



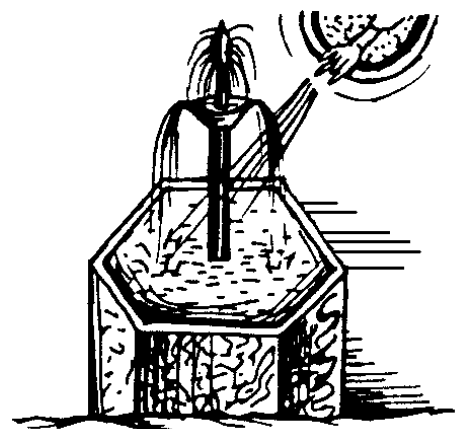
But all of us experience the great temptations of this culture and society. If we give in at this time of temptation, we experience the dark fruit our sin produces. Every act we perform produces fruit; but it can be either good fruit or bad fruit. Jesus said, "for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12:33). When we experience the bad fruit of performing acts of sin, we feel empty and void. This feeling is similar to knowing a physical deficiency in our bodies, but we have difficulty properly diagnosing the cause of this discomfort because of our lack of knowledge of the faith and our inexperience of spirituality. It is in these times, when, because of our Divine alliance, we

know that something is wrong, we know that something needs to be mended, but we often choose the wrong remedy, the wrong medicine, and definitely the wrong food.

When we choose the wrong food to refresh our spiritual failings, we find ourselves not whole again, but that we have fallen even further down a hole that does not lead to light or wholeness in Jesus Christ. If we continue to look for other sources of spiritual refreshment, then the downward spiral we are on will continue to lead to pain and suffering.

Jesus Christ taught, "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink" (Jn 7:37). When we are in need, when we find ourselves spiritually parched from the temptations and sin we encounter, we cannot ease this dryness with the sand of this world, but only with Him who has poured Himself out for us. "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life" (Rev 21:6). We can only truly refresh ourselves when we seek out the water of life. In John, Jesus continues to say that, "He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn 7:38-39).

When we seek the proper spiritual food to replenish our spiritual exhaustion, when we move towards Jesus Christ and drink from the waters of life, we will not only have a river of living water for ourselves, but it will flow out of our hearts. When these waters are overflowing from our hearts, they are overflowing from the action of the Holy Spirit working through us, and they must then flow in the direction of others. The Holy Spirit is, as we pray, "everywhere present and filling all things, a treasury of blessings" and cannot therefore be contained for our personal benefit, but by the Spirit's very nature will spread to those we encounter. If we are thirsty, as was the Samaritan Woman at the well, let us ask Jesus Christ for a drink, and He will give us living water that will fill our hearts. Then, like the Samaritan woman, we will run to tell the whole world the wonder we have experienced. [ECL](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS FOR JANUARY

Eparchial and Parish Events

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- 1 Circumcision of Our Lord * Our Holy Father Basil the Great
*Solemn Holy Day * Chancery closed *
Happy New Year!*
- 6 Holy Theophany of Our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ
Holy Day of Obligation Chancery closed*
- 29 Three Holy Hierarchs
*Simple Holyday * Transferred this year
due to All Souls' Saturday*
- 30 Ordination of Deacon Lewis Rabayda to the Holy Priesthood
*Epiphany of Our Lord Church,
Annandale, VA*