



EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

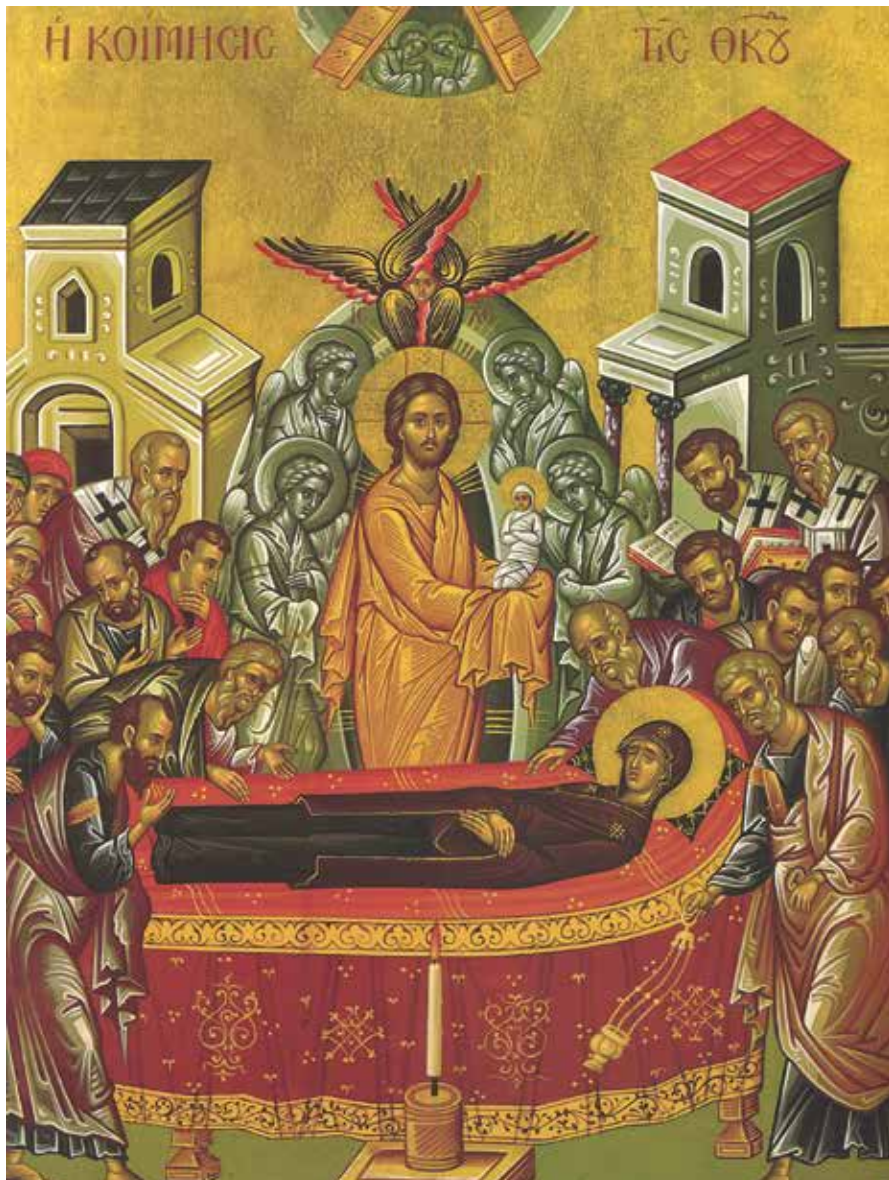
Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LIX, NO. 8

AUGUST 2023

ICON OF THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

By Father Joseph Bertha, PhD



Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos

"The grave and death did not detain the Theotokos. She intercedes without rest and is our unfailing hope of protection; for he who dwelt in the womb of the Ever-Virgin transferred to life the Mother of Life."

—Kontakion of the Dormition

The iconography for the passing away of the Holy Theotokos from this life into everlasting life is primarily based on liturgical texts, i.e., matins and vespers. Homilies for the feast, notably one written by Saint John Damascene, serve as inspiration as well since this event is not contained in the sacred scriptures. One of the earliest surviving icons of this feast dates from the 12th century and is found at the wonderfully preserved icon collection at Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai. Interestingly, the Dormition icon forms part of a *tryptych* including the feast of Pentecost and the Ascension of Our Lord. The Dormition has been likened in this icon to the Ascension of Our Lord, both depict the transfer from this earthly life into the eternity of heaven. Similarly, each of the three feasts include and depict the entire company of the apostles.

The Virgin is depicted laying on a funeral bier horizontally, eyes closed asleep to this world, with hands folded

across her breast. The Virgin sometimes appears a second time, enthroned and in heaven. Angels, usually paired, bow down from heaven in silent meditation of this solemn event. Immediately behind her stands Our Lord carrying a tiny white wrapped infant (the soul of the Virgin), which He carries up to heaven. Our Lord is surrounded by a complete body halo, the mandorla usually depicted in three shades or colors in order to symbolize the Holy Trinity. On either side of the funeral bier groups of apostles are depicted bowing in humility. Sometimes included in this group are the authors of Dormition sermons, some of them bishops, recognizable by their *polystarion*, many crossed vestments.

Byzantines used to place the Dormition icon on the west wall, so that believers on exiting church would view it and understand thereby what would happen to every believer, that the soul would be reunited with the body in heaven.

The disturbing incident included in some icons showing the severing of the hands of an unbeliever originates from the Homily on the Dormition written by Saint John Damascene (+749). He describes the man as a Hebrew who tries to violate the integrity of Ark of the Covenant, the holy funeral bier of the Virgin, who in turn has his hands severed by a heavenly protecting angel as a punishment.

This severe punishment included in some depictions of Dormition icons by the Russians seems to evoke the events described concerning the transfer of the ark by King David in 1 Chronicles 14: 9-11, as Uzzah stretched out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen were upsetting it, and the Lord became angry and struck him down, because he dared to lay his hand on the ark. The Virgin is frequently described as the Tabernacle of the Living God, and her transfer into eternity is being depicted in the Dormition icon. This rare incident has been

included in some Dormition icons to demonstrate the perpetual virginity of the Virgin.

Over time, the Dormition icon was adapted to a shroud form in imitation of the Good Friday shroud of Our Lord and used for the Vesper and procession service. Even though there is profound sorrow at the passing away of the Virgin, there is still the promise of the pattern of salvation which she demonstrates what will happen to believers after the departure from this life, that we will be reunited one day in the eternal kingdom of heaven, body and soul. Additionally, the holy Theotokos because of her unique role in the plan of salvation, as the God-bearer or Ark of God, after death remains our heavenly intercessor, petitioning on our behalf for all of our needs.



METROPOLITAN ASSEMBLY

NOVEMBER 2 - 5, 2023

LIVING OUR FAITH

Moving Forward

Appreciating Our Past

Art | History | Presentations | Prayer | Dancing

A gathering for all Byzantine Catholic faithful to learn about their past and plan for growth in the future.

Schedule

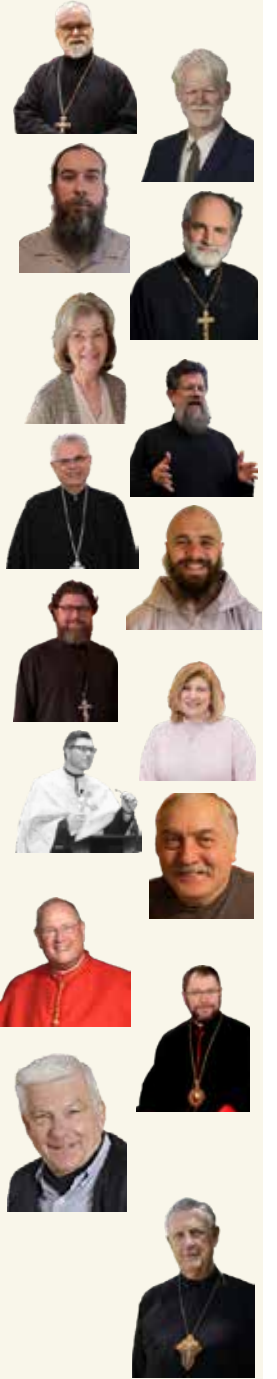


Speakers and Topics

Schedule and speakers subject to change

Thursday, November 2, 2023	Clergy Day
9:30 AM-Noon	Registration
	Vendors Throughout Assembly
Noon	Lunch
1:30 PM to 6:00 PM	Welcome and Presentations
6:00 PM to 8:00 PM	Dinner
8:00 PM	Presentation
9:00 PM	Compline
9:30 PM to 10:30 PM	Social
Friday, November 3, 2023	Clergy Days Continue
8:00 AM	Morning Prayer
8:30 AM to 9:15 AM	Continental Breakfast
9:30 AM to Noon	Presentations
10:00 AM to Noon	Laity Registration
Noon to 1:30 PM	Lunch
	Clergy and Laity
1:30 PM to 7:00 PM	Presentations to Clergy and Laity
7:30 PM to 9:45 PM	Dinner and Keynote
10:00 PM	Compline
Saturday, November 4, 2023	Clergy and Laity
8:00 AM	Morning Prayer
8:30 AM to 9:15 AM	Continental Breakfast
9:30 AM to Noon	Presentations
Noon to 1:30 PM	Lunch
1:30 PM to 5:30 PM	Presentations
6:00 PM	Vespers
7:00 PM to 11:00 PM	Gala Dinner & Dancing to the Music of Pajtaši
Sunday, November 5	
8:30 AM	Divine Liturgy
10:00 AM	Breakfast Buffet
11:00 AM to 1:30 PM	Final Presentation, What's Next?, Wrap-up, and Farewell

- Fr. Edward Cimbala** - "We Knew not Whether We Were in Heaven or on Earth" *Young Adults and Their Motives for Joining the Byzantine Catholic Church: A Case Study of St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church in New York City* - St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, New York, NY
- Timothy Kearns** - *From Light to Light: A Theological Cosmology for Our Times and a Renewed Christian Life* - St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church - Danbury, Connecticut
- Adam Kemner** - *Small But Mighty: Why Small Parish Size is the Byzantine Catholic Church's Biggest Potential Way Forward* - Iowa Outreach, Muscatine IA
- Fr. Thomas Loya** - *A Blueprint for the Growth of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America* - Annunciation Byzantine Catholic Church, Homer Glenn, IL
- Dorothy Mayernik** - *Bethany Ministry: Caring for the Sick, Homebound, and Grieving in the Parish Family* - St. Gregory of Nazianzus Byzantine Catholic Church - Upper Saint Clair, PA
- Dn. Jeffrey Mierzewski** - *All Creation Should Sing: What Our Chant Teaches Us and What Our Church Singing Can Offer to a Fractured and Anxious World* - Metropolitan Cantor Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
- Fr. Thomas Shubeck and Br. Simeon, CFR** - *Poustinia: The New Evangelization in the Light of the Byzantine East, a new and evolving outreach to young adults of Theosis in Action* - St. Nicholas Church, Dunellen, NJ; St. George Church, Linden, NJ, and College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, Seton Hall University.
- Fr. Andrew Summerson** - *What's a Byzantine Catholic Culture* - St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church - Whiting, IN
- Lynn Wardach** - *Introducing ByziMoms and ByziKids* - St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church - Taylor, PA
- Rev. Paul R. Varchola West** - *You Will Know Them by Their Fruits: Rooting Parishes in the Fertile Soil of the Divine Office* - Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church - Levittown, PA
- Phil Yevics** - *Antinomical Expectations of Presbyteral Ministry: How to Please ALL Your Parishioners... NOT!* - St. John Byzantine Catholic Church - Scranton, PA
- Seminarians** of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Pittsburgh, PA



Special Guests

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, will offer the keynote address at the opening dinner on Friday evening.

Bishop Nil Lushchak, O.F.M., Apostolic Administrator of the Eparchy of Mukachevo, the Mother Church of the Byzantine Ruthenian Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Paul Magosci - The cultural aspect of the Assembly will be addressed by Dr. Paul Magosci, focusing on the history of the founders of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America. His influential book, *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America*, has just been released in a new and expanded edition. Dr. Magosci will also present on the art and culture of this community. His book on the artists of the Transcarpathian School will be published shortly.

Fr. Christopher Zuger - Fr. Christopher Zuger will explore the history of the foundation of the Byzantine Catholic Church in America. Next year marks the 100th anniversary of the arrival of Basil Takach, the first bishop of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in America. Fr. Zuger is the author of *The Forgotten: Catholics of the Soviet Empire from Lenin through Stalin and Finding a Hidden Church*. His third book, which focuses on the history of the Byzantine Ruthenian Church from its founding to the present, will be released in November.

Registration Now Open!

Registration deadline is
October 1, 2023



Get in touch

Fr. Edward Cimbala @ 212-677-0516
Fr. Yuriy Oros @ 609-394-5004

Email: byzantineassembly2023@gmail.com
Website: byzantineassembly2023.org



Accommodations

Hilton Garden Inn Bridgewater
500 Promenade Boulevard
Bridgewater, New Jersey 08807

Location

St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church
1900 Brooks Boulevard,
Hillsborough, NJ, 08844



Registration Form

Name(s)	
Address - Street	
City/State/Zip	
Email	
Phone	
Parish & City	

Type of Registration	Number	Cost	Total
Clergy Entire Event		\$350.00	
Clergy Thursday - Friday		\$250.00	
Religious/Monastics		\$150.00	
Individual		\$250.00	
Couples		\$400.00	
Young Adults (18-35) <small>In order to have your registration underwritten by the Maria Theresa Foundation, you must be a member of a Byzantine Catholic Parish.</small>		FREE <small>Underwritten by the Maria Theresa</small>	

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Moving Forward
Appreciating Our Past

A gathering for all Byzantine Catholic faithful to learn about their past and plan for growth in the future

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Fr. Yuriy Oros
St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church
191 Norman Avenue
Roelimg, NJ 08554

Registration deadline is October 1, 2023



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Moving Forward
Appreciating Our Past**

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- 3**
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Pilgrimage to St. Therese

Holy Annunciation Monastery, September 30, 2023

Holy Annunciation Monastery, 403 West County Road, Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania 18249

Part 2–Conclusion – “Faith works the astounding miracle of permitting a sinner to attain familiarity with God.”

Thérèse reminds us of Saint Ephrem, a father of the patristic era, by her joy – a joy of deep gratitude to Jesus for His gift of salvation! It is said that the word “happy” was on his lips more than any other word. Thérèse became known for her smile and radiating joy. Like Ephrem, Thérèse knew herself redeemed, saved from hell by the suffering of Jesus the Messiah. If the word “happy” was on Ephrem’s lips, occurring more than any other word in his voluminous writings, Thérèse was equally demonstrative, equally expressive. In return for the Gift of Eternal Salvation and all that means, Thérèse would do for Jesus what He did for her. The Lord Jesus suffered in His humanity and died for her; Thérèse would imitate Him.



Icon of Saint Ephrem the Syrian

It seems not farfetched to conclude that Thérèse qualifies as a 19th century version of the Spirituality of the Martyrs. Jesus died for them, and the Martyrs would die for Him – or live to die daily for Him. The most dramatic might be Ignatius of Antioch, who longed to give his life to Jesus, albeit by being ground by lions’ teeth. His one great fear was lest someone would obtain a reprieve from the Emperor. The Acts of the Martyrs demonstrate as nothing else this passion to give their all to the Christ their Lord who died for them.



The Coliseum, Rome, Italy

Thérèse was only 14 when she visited the Coliseum but was 24 when she described the scene:

The Coliseum! the arena where Martyrs shed their blood for Christ. I wanted to kiss the ground sanctified by their glorious combats but the real arena is now buried at the depth of about twenty-six feet, the center is a mass of rubbish, and a barrier guards the entrance. One thought filled my mind—I must reach the arena. Saint Mary Magdalen remained at the Sepulcher and stooped down to look in and was rewarded by seeing two Angels, so, I kept stooping down and I saw what I was in search of! I called my sister: “Come, follow me, we shall be able to get through.” We scrambled over the ruins which crumbled under our feet... our joy increased in proportion to the fatigue and danger to attain the desired object. Céline remembered that the guide had pointed out a particular stone marked with a cross, and said it was the place where the Martyrs had fought the good fight; Céline set to work and found it! We knelt on this sacred ground. My heart beat violently as I pressed my lips to the dust reddened with the blood of the early Christians. I begged for the grace to be a martyr for Jesus, and I felt in the depths of my heart that my prayer was heard.

Although the foregoing quotation describes her teenage sentiments, that she penned them not long before her death makes them noteworthy. Thérèse was all “of a piece” – a resolution taken at 14 was fulfilled by age 24 – by both God and Thérèse.

Though so young, Thérèse’s spiritual journey is incredible. From the age of two, she would write as an adult, *I never refused the good God what He asked: death and illness of loved ones; the cold of an unheated, save one room, Carmelite convent; tuberculosis with nothing to alleviate pain; her part: silence and peace – all to save souls.* Thérèse meant what she asked in the Coliseum: *I begged for the grace to be a martyr for Jesus, and I felt in the depths of my heart that my prayer was heard.*

At times we hear, and even we believe, that the Christian culture is over, lost, and our times seem hopeless. Let us remember Saint Irenaeus, who said, “We need more martyrs.” Today, let us hear Thérèse’s message: Heaven is ours and take a strong resolution to say “yes” to the Will of God – day by day.

Faith, a family where faith was the atmosphere, Thérèse was the last child of parents who would be canonized, and as a married couple: Saint Louis and Saint Zélie Martin. Thérèse would identify with Moses: “Yahweh protected, reared and guarded her. Yahweh alone was her guide” (Song of Moses). Personal sanctification was neither her goal nor her interest: only to love God! Jesus was her all and had given His ALL (Incarnation, passion, death, resurrection). She was determined to love Him in return and rest assured that He would, day-by-day, provide the means. Later ages deviated into many, albeit excellent, steps to sanctification – purgative, illuminative, unitive stages, but maybe at the expense of appreciating that salvation is a given. But, we need faith to accept the

gift, love the Giver! The tough part is to abandon all we want to do. To a novice lamenting she had many books to read and virtues to practice, Thérèse’s advice was: “you have not a lot to do but have a lot to lose.” This is the spirituality of the martyrs, of the Desert Fathers, of monasticism and really, of every saint!



Saints Zélie & Louis Martin

EPILOGUE

When Emperors no longer killed Christians and Christianity was legalized, a new era was born. The Age of Monasticism (the Desert Fathers) would provide a spiritual combat and the heart would be the new Coliseum. The desert and monasticism produced their own heroes. Saint John Chrysostom, first a monk, was one among many who took seriously what Jesus Christ and Saint Paul commanded: *Pray without ceasing.* Later, the Archbishop of Constantinople explains the how-to of this spiritual combat: *The spiritual combat consists in keeping the mind fixed on God.* Saint John Chrysostom tells us not to be deceived. The battle will be long and tough because *the whole essence and effort of the devil is to separate and remove our attention from God.*

O Jesus! May I never seek nor ever find but You alone.

O Jesus, be to me Jesus! May I know the saving power of Your sacred Name. (Saint Thérèse)

If the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is inscribed on the memory, and the heart is filled with this memory, the soul will experience true life and salvation. (Saint John Chrysostom, Letter to Monks).

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW AROUND THE EPARCHY

IN KINGSTON...

by Mrs. Joyce Elston - Vice-principal, Good Shepherd Academy.

Recently, Good Shepherd Academy Class 7A visited Saint Mary of the Protection Byzantine Catholic Church in Kingston, PA. The students studied

Byzantine culture in their social studies class. During their studies, they created icons, learned about the Byzantine Liturgy and its history and traditions. Father Mykhaylo Prodanets, pastor of Saint Mary Parish, welcomed the students and shared a great deal of wonderful information with them.



IN MIAMI...



Christmas in July in Miami!

The parishioners of Saint Basil the Great in Miami received a Christmas in July present when they were greeted by Father Yuriy Oros and his family on July 1. His visit helped ease the lengthy journeys of Father Sal Pignato from Orlando and Father Frank Hanincik from Fort Pierce, who drive several hours each way to serve the people of Saint Basil each month. Father Sal is the administrator of the parish.

You are invited to the

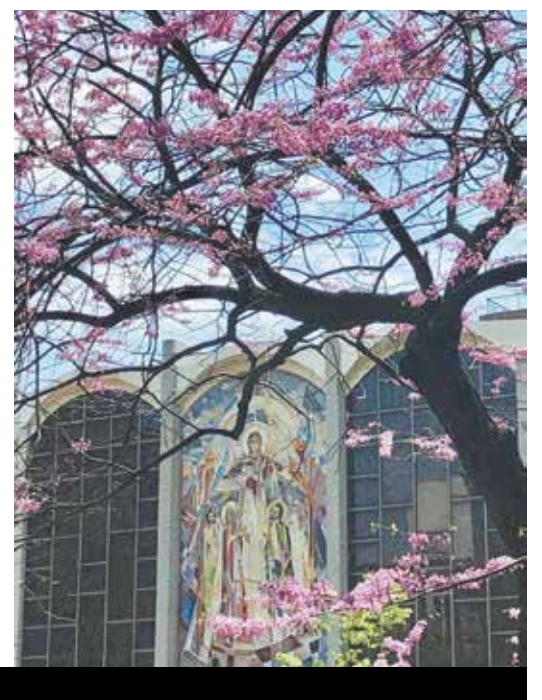
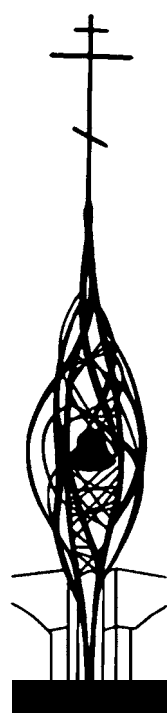
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on
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Introduction to Music
Ms. Coreen Poklembo

Catechetics
Mrs. Marie Nester

Documents of Vatican II, Part One
Dr. Matthew Miner

Sources from Antiquity, Part One (Philosophy)
Dr. Matthew Miner

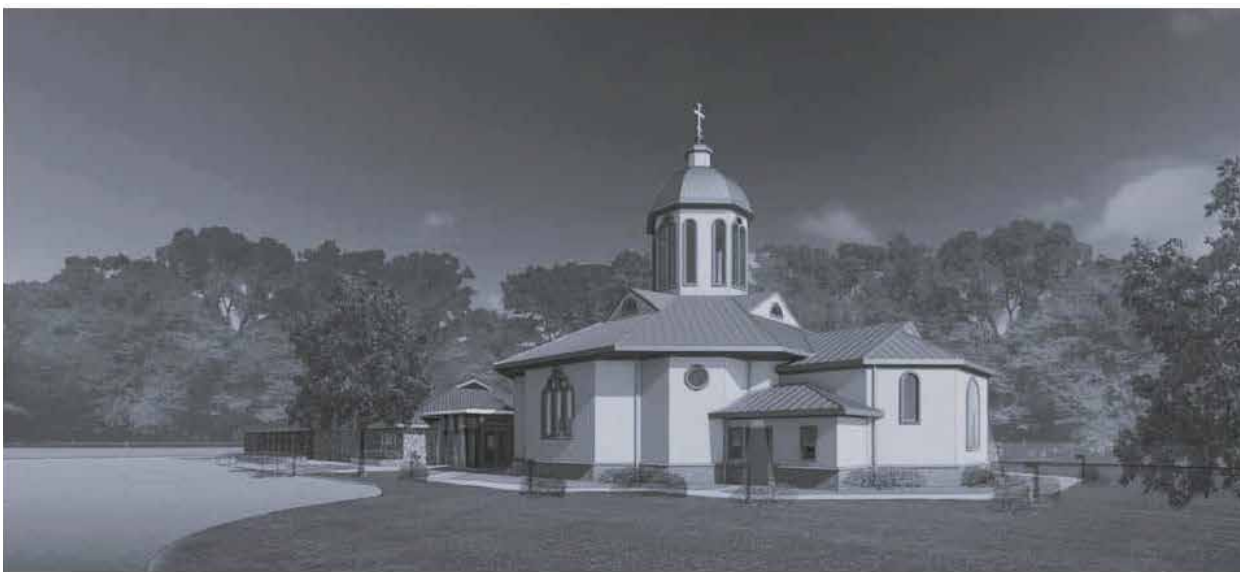
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Dr. Jared Goff

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LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

TALKING TO YOUR BEST FRIEND

One of the most beautiful and comforting aspects of Catholic Tradition is our belief in the Communion of Saints, the understanding that we have friends and intercessors in Heaven who see and hear us and are “in the fight” with us as we walk this often-difficult pilgrimage toward eternity. There are countless saints in Heaven whose likeness is not found on a holy card or captured on an icon – both people we’ve never known, and some among those closest to us while they lived on earth. This is the destiny for which we were all created, and for which we hope: that we will one day be saints. Having our story in an edition of *The Lives of the Saints* would be amazing, but the point of striving toward sainthood is not to be recognized by the world, but to be caught up in eternal union with the Trinity.

There are those whom the Church has formally recognized as saints for their personal witness of holiness, their defense of the Faith (for some, even unto death), and for miraculous manifestations of healing through their intercession, either in life or after they died. Everyone has their “favorites” among the saints, those go-to people to pray for specific intentions, to whom they have a particular devotion, and those we connect with because of their life story. For example, I pray to Saint Anthony regularly because I am always forgetting where I put something, e.g., my keys, a book, the sunglasses that are on my head. Without fail, Anthony finds them for me, but that may have more to do with my Baba putting in a good word, because she was known to have a strong devotion to him.

There are many saints I love and admire, but I have a special affinity toward Saint Ann, no surprise, and Pope Saint John Paul II, for many reasons, but also because I did my graduate work at the Institute he founded. When my husband and I pray together each night, we ask the intercession of Saints Ann and Joachim, John Paul II, Joseph, Therese, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Blessed Theodore Romzha, and the saint whose feast is celebrated on any given day. Every time I go to confession I pray to the Mother of God and ask her to hold my hand as I confess.

There are way too many saints to mention that I connect with personally or would like to emulate, but I’ll offer two examples. One whom I believe found me is Saint Teresa of Calcutta. After she died it was revealed that she lived through some forty years of spiritual darkness, without experiencing the presence of Jesus or any spiritual comfort or peace; and yet, she carried on her work of ministering to the poorest of the poor. Teresa famously said that she encountered Jesus “in the distressing disguise of the poor.” I think this is a call to me and to all of us that regardless of a person’s status, their faults, or flaws, and whether we find it “convenient” or preferable to associate with them, we must love them because God loves them. I think Saint Teresa of Calcutta “found me” because I needed to know that God’s presence in my life doesn’t rely on what I *feel*. He is always with me, and I can endure any darkness in my life by His grace.

I also feel close to Saint Mary of Egypt, who lived in the 5th century and whom our Church commemorates on the fifth Sunday of the Great Fast. Her full

story can be found online, but the short form is that Mary was a notorious sinner, gripped by sexual sin and prostitution. In an incredible example of God’s hand in her life, Mary ended up among a group of pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem, and when she followed the crowd to a church she was stopped in her tracks. She tried to enter three times, but was mysteriously repelled and could not go in, which must have confused and frightened her. Looking up, Mary saw an icon of the Theotokos and, her heart instantly pierced with remorse and desire for God, she miraculously entered the church. This began the conversion of Mary of Egypt, who was received into the Church and promptly went into the desert to live a life of penance and worshipping God. There is much more to the story after her conversion, but Mary inspires me because I am a sinner, too. Our stories aren’t the same, but I’ve often felt separated from God, “blocked” from His presence or feeling like He didn’t hear me. In those moments, of course, it’s *I* who am the obstacle, not God – but like Mary of Egypt, I’m sometimes confused and scared. She also reminds

me that I, too, must *go to the desert* – that is, to a place of quiet where I can better hear God’s voice in my heart.

There’s no time to tell why I love Saints Nicholas, Macrina, Teresa of Avila, Mary Magdalene...I could go on! It may seem like this column is about my personal story of the saints, but I’ve shared all of it to invite you to consider what the saints mean in *your* life. We can easily see them as far above us, having never doubted, suffered, or been anything but holy all their lives. The saints are much richer and more complex, and that’s why they are our friends. You may have saints you pray to for specific intentions, and that’s great, because they love to intercede for us. I invite you to go a little deeper and discover those saints to whom you can relate and whose example you want to follow. Who are the saints you feel most drawn to – and which saints might be *choosing you*? No matter how many friends we have in this life, we have many more in Heaven. Discover them, pray to them, and allow them to inspire you to live a good life and draw closer to God. **ECL**

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PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

"LAKE REFLECTIONS"

My family and I were fortunate enough to join my parents on their annual pilgrimage to the lake once again this year. For those who are new to this column, my parents have a friend who owns a lake cabin, and this person usually gives my parents access to the cabin for a couple of weeks in the summer. My parents are then gracious enough to share their time at the lake with us. More often than not, this annual respite at the lake inspires an article...so here is this year's installment of "Lake Reflections!"

To be clear, we do not own this cabin, but over the years our family has become a fixture in that section of the lake. All the neighbors know who we are and treat us as "one of their own." They all come by to visit, our children play together and goto each other's houses. Their dogs all play with us and saunter onto the property unaccompanied by their human counterpart. We share stories and get caught up on all the juicy lake gossip, and my father and I have become accustomed to the calls of "catch anything?" as we drift down the lake in an old, rickety row boat with our lines in the water. There is a true sense of community there and, unbeknownst to me, I was desperately in need of this refreshing lesson in true community and how this pertains to faith.

This year, we happened to be at the lake on the day I celebrated my third anniversary of priestly ordination. Having some much-needed time to reflect on the significance of this, I began to

wonder why I have been feeling a bit "off" lately. Contrary to popular belief, priests have emotions and we, at times, perhaps deal with feelings of isolation; struggles in our ministry; grappling with matters of friendship, community, and even faith. As with ANY relationship, a man's relationship with the priesthood is one that requires work and communication; communication with the Lord through private and liturgical prayer, with one's spiritual father/mother, and with one's self. As my wife and I happily celebrated our 14th wedding anniversary a week after my 3rd ordination anniversary, I can certainly speak on hard learned lessons in communication!

As I grow in my priesthood, and my priestly relationship with the Lord, I have been grappling with the typical growing pains of any marital-type relationship, specifically those of loss and changing relationships. As many can attest, as one grows in a marital relationship, friendships outside of the marriage tend to change, as does the relationship between spouses. Evenings of all-night partying are traded with all-night vigils spent holding sick children, or worrying about household finances, health issues amongst spouses or aging parents, and all those other things they don't necessarily tell you about in the marriage brochure. Over the past three years, I have come to learn that the same exact principle applies to the priesthood.

If we think that a man's relationship with the priesthood is a perfect blessing not requiring any amount of struggle, pain, and reflection, we are all lying to ourselves. Lately, I have been sincerely struggling with the morphology of my relationships pre-ordination. Why have I been feeling so isolated? Why do I feel alone? Why, in a sea of people, do I feel abandoned? Why do I feel a sense of community is lacking in my life?

The answers to the questions, while not easy, are plain and simple. As I have grown in my priesthood, so have those who I began this journey with me in 2016. As with childhood friendships, some stay and some dissolve. As with friendships in general, some run hot, but many grow cold. To throw in a heavy-handed Lennon/McCartney lyric:

*There are places I'll remember
All my life, though some have changed
Some forever, not for better
Some have gone and some remain*

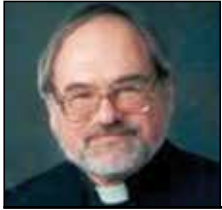
*All these places had their moments
With lovers and friends, I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life, I've loved them all*

Spending time at the lake with my lake friends, I realized exactly what the above song lyrics encapsulate. Things change. Relationships change. Places change. People change. The concept and realization of brotherhood changes. Life barrels on, unapologetically. These changes, however, while they



may be painful, do not define us. Ultimately what defines us is the place of Jesus Christ in all of this.

As we read in the *Letter to the Hebrews*, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (13:8). People change and relationships change, but through all of this, Jesus Christ does not! The friends I have made along the path of life may not always be there, either by their own choice or through natural consequence. The lake house might not always be there, but Jesus Christ will always be there. While we might mourn the loss of friendships, places, and things, we must not dwell on the negativity of the loss, but on why this loss causes us pain because we've loved them all. At the end of the day, all that matters most is that we can look in a mirror, look ourselves in the eye, bring our mind to the Risen Lord and say to Him with sincerity, honesty, contrition, and confidence that, "in my life, I loved You more." **ECL**



THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

ABSOLUTION: THE PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

Today, the confession of sins is usually done in church, though people often do seek the sacramental mystery of penance outside of church for various personal reasons. When it is done in church, it usually takes place in a secluded place, privately and away from the hearing of others. The most proper place in the Byzantine tradition, however, is to confess standing before the icon of our Lord. The penitent confesses to Christ, and the priest, standing in the place of the community of the Church, witnesses and so verifies the confession. The fuller text of the rite of confession underlines this point, for the priest may invite the penitent to confess with the words, "Behold, my spiritual son/daughter, our Lord, Jesus Christ, invisibly stands here and receives our confession. Therefore, do not be ashamed or afraid, and do not conceal anything, but without hesitation, tell all that you have done, and you will receive pardon from our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, his icon is before us, we are but witnesses, bearing testimony before him of the things you say to us."

When a person has made their confession, the priest makes the practical judgement that this has been a good and sincere confession. He usually gives words of comfort or advice. The role of the priest is to reflect the merciful Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He is to welcome the penitent with joy, and not be judgmental. When we say that the confessor is a judge, what he "judges" is whether the person has truly repented. He, as an individual, does not sit in judgement on another individual. The role of confessor is as a healer of souls and bodies. He is to help the penitents to really turn from their sins and re-commit themselves to Christ. This is not to be done in a harsh way. The judgement of penitence is a judgement of grace, of mercy and of benevolence, while the civil judicial power is a judgement of justice and reparation without conciliation. The earliest penitentials underlined the importance of welcoming people into reconciliation with joy, "keeping always a joyful face," embracing them and encouraging them that God is indeed merciful. I can attest to this personally, I once went to confession to the Servant of God Father Walter Ciszek. After confessing, he spoke words to me such that I felt completely loved by Christ, and leaving the confession, I broke down into tears.

After the confession, the priest gives a "penance" (Greek *epitimia*) to be performed. This is the continuation of the Church discipline from the age of public penance, and has an even deeper meaning in the sense that the mystery of penance was for the complete healing of the sinner. The ascetical work performed was the concrete manifestation of the person's *metanoia* (transformation of life). It may be compared to the rebirth of baptism, for penance is the "second baptism." In the ancient peni-

tential books of both the East and the West, certain penances were assigned for certain sins. Most commonly they included prayer, fasting, works of charity, and exclusion from the Eucharist for a certain period of time. Only when the penance was completed did the penitent return to Communion. Today, the penance is much milder. It usually consists of prayers to be said, and the person is able to receive Communion immediately after confession, even before they have carried out the "penance."

After confession, the priest then says a Prayer of Absolution, which signifies that God forgives our sins in the sacramental mystery of reconciliation. As he says the prayer, the priest imposes his hand on the head of the person, manifesting the healing touch of the Lord, Jesus Christ our God, who healed by the touch of his hand. The moral theology of the Church has generally held that sin is forgiven when the sinner turns away from his or her evil act and contritely repents for the sin. The turn

away from sin, however, also includes the desire for reconciliation with the Church as the people of God who have been harmed, even indirectly, by the individual's failure. We do not, therefore, seek "exact moments" of forgiveness, but look at the whole process in which the prayer of absolution is the solemn declaration of forgiveness that completes the process of repentance.

The earliest Prayer of Absolution was simply a declaration that one's sins were forgiven: "God became man for us and took away the sins of all the world. In his great goodness, brother (sister), he will receive all that which you spoke out before him to my unworthiness, forgiving all for you both in this world and in the future world. He wishes and desires the salvation of all, and is blessed forever. Amen." (The Penances of Basil, Cod. Reg. Mon. 498). The present prayer is "May our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, through the grace and mercies of his love for mankind, forgive you all your transgressions. And I, an unworthy

priest, by his power given me, forgive and absolve you from all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." It is very unusual for the Byzantine Church to have a sacramental formula in the first person. In fact, it is found only in the Slavonic and Romanian Churches, both Catholic and Orthodox ("I forgive"). It was first used in the East in a Trebnik printed in Vilno in 1618, and was introduced into the Orthodox Church by the Archbishop of Kiev, Saint Peter Mohyla in 1646. From here it found its way into the Moscow Trebnik (1671) and in all later Slavonic editions. It is taken directly from the Roman Rite: The Ritual of Paul V. Some Roman Catholic theologians even thought that "I forgive" was essential. However, the Catechism of the Catholic Church praises the original Eastern practice: "The Byzantine Liturgy recognizes several formulas of absolution in the form of invocation, which admirably express the mystery of forgiveness." (§ 1481). The *Liturgical Instruction* of January 6, 1996, has suggested that Eastern Churches using the Roman formula, "to attentively examine their liturgical books, even those of the past, to find the formulas which best express the richness of their own tradition in this specific field." (§ 89). **ECL**

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

THE WORK OF OUR HANDS

This time of year, both Church and civil calendars repeatedly draw our attention to labor. From the harvest of fruits and herbs blessed on August 6 and 15, through Labor Day and on to the harvest festival of Thanksgiving, we are reminded of the dignity of human labor and of our ability to participate in God's maintenance of creation.

The Lord Himself is described as a craftsman in His creation of our world. According to our Vesper Psalm 104, "You stretched out the heavens like a tent, above the rains You built Your dwelling ... You settled the earth on its firm foundation ... you wrapped it with the ocean like a cloak." In His response to Job, the Lord speaks like a stone mason: "I laid the foundations of the earth ... stretched the line upon it ... laid its cornerstone" (Job 38:4-7). Elsewhere, Scripture describes the Lord as a shepherd (Psalm 23 and many other verses), a potter (Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6), a vine dresser (Isaiah 5:1-7; John 15:1), a manufacturer of cloth (Malachi 3:2), and a metal refiner (Isaiah 48:10; Psalm 66:10). The Lord God Himself "planted" the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8

and created Adam, and all the other land creature,s out of the moist clay with His own hands, like a potter (Genesis 2:7 and 19). We are literally "the work of (God's) hands" (Psalm 95:7).

Made in God's image, Adam was entrusted with tending the Garden (Genesis 2:15), a pleasant task (as any gardener will attest!). The first sin, which alienated Adam and Eve from each other and from the Lord, also had an effect on their relationship to the earth. Driven out of the Garden, Adam was condemned to work a less fertile soil to bring forth bread "by the sweat of your brow" (Genesis 3:17-19). Even so, God enabled the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to prosper, and He rescued His people from unjustly hard labor in Egypt through the leadership of Moses.

In the book of Proverbs, King Solomon offers advice for success in the real world marred by Adam's sin. Hard work is praised, and laziness is exposed as a temptation to be avoided (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4; 12:11,24; 13:4; 14:23; 18:9; 20:13; 21:25; 22:29; 24:30-34;

28:19). At the end of the Exodus, God envisioned that if people observed His commandments "there will be no poor among you" because everyone would be allotted a share of the Promised Land to work (Deuteronomy 15:4). The repeated condemnation of injustice by the Prophets makes clear that this ideal was never realized. Both testaments include harsh words for those who exploit the work of others for their own gain (Deuteronomy 24:15; James 5:4).

Sirach, the newest author in the Old Testament, considers the virtues of various trades – scribes, farmers, builders, artisans, smelters, potters, who "keep the fabric of the world stable and their prayer is in the practice of their craft" – before going on to extol those who dedicate themselves exclusively to the study of God's Word (Sirach 38:24 – 39:11). This raises a delicate question. There have always been those who are tempted to hide laziness under a veil of piety. This was already a problem in the earliest Church. The community actively supported the poor and many expected Christ's second coming at

any moment. Why work if the world is going to end? Why labor when the Church will feed me? Saint Paul, who made it a point of honor always to support his ministry by his own labor (1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:8) responds simply that "those who will not work should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). This is not just about fairness. Honest labor offers us the opportunity to grow in virtue and to imitate our Creator. In his encyclical *On Human Work* (1981), Saint John Paul II teaches that our sweat and toil can participate in the Paschal mystery of Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

By the same token, we should not become workaholics through greed or bad habits. Adam and Eve were invited to be like God not only by their labor, but also by sharing in His Sabbath rest (Genesis 2:2; Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

The Bible's teaching on work is beautifully summarized in the Wedding Psalm: "Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in His ways. You shall eat of your hands' labor. Blessed are you and it shall be well with you" (Psalm 128:1-2). Conversely: "Unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do the builders labor" (Psalm 127:1) and so King Solomon's advises: "Entrust your work to the Lord and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). **ECL**

SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



READ YOUR BIBLE—RENEW YOUR MIND

"Occupy your minds with good thoughts, or the enemy will fill them with bad ones" – Saint Thomas More.

Victorious Christian living is intimately connected with our minds and thoughts. Notice how many times the mind is mentioned in Romans 8:5-6:

"Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rm. 8:5-6).

One way to set your mind on the things of the Spirit is to focus on the Word of God found in Holy Scripture.

Saint Paul tells the church at Philippi:

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Holy Bible meets the criteria and checks all the boxes. The Word of God is true,

honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise.

God told Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

The Blessed Man in Psalm 1 delights "in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2).

The historic spirituality of the Eastern Church is saturated in Holy Scripture. The great saints and Fathers of the first millennium of Christianity breathe holy scripture. The writings of Basil, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzen are saturated with scripture.

Without knowing the Bible and being familiar with its stories and teachings, one can't even begin to understand the writings of great Fathers and saints.

Fill your heart and mind with divine things, reading, re-reading, thinking about, mulling over, and meditating on the word of God.

"The reading of pious works fills the soul with holy thoughts and good desires," says Saint Alphonsus.

The Holy Bible isn't a book to be read only once. We must read and re-read it. If the Bible is going to change us, we read it repeatedly to become saturated with its wisdom.

Tolle Lege! Take Up and Read!

Saint Jerome says, "Love to occupy your mind with the reading of Scripture."

He tells the priest Nepotian, "Read the divine scriptures constantly; never, indeed, let the sacred volume be out of your hand."

Reading the Bible is not just for priests, monks, and nuns.

Saint John Chrysostom says, "I am not, you will say, one of the monks, but I have both a wife and children, and the care of a household. Why, this is what has ruined all, your supposing that the reading of the divine Scriptures appertains to those only, when you need it much more than they. For they that dwell in the world, and each day receive wounds, these have most need of medicines" (Homily 2 on Matthew).

"Faith comes by hearing" (Rm. 10:17).

Access the Bible and other spiritual books in audio format, allowing you to listen while driving or relaxing in bed.

I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11).

Memorize the Scriptures. "Lay them up in your heart." As you read, specific passages will stand out to you. Write them down, repeat them, and memorize them.

It was revealed to Saint Teresa of Avila that "all the harm that comes to the world comes from its not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth; not one iota of Scripture will fall short."

Renew Your Mind

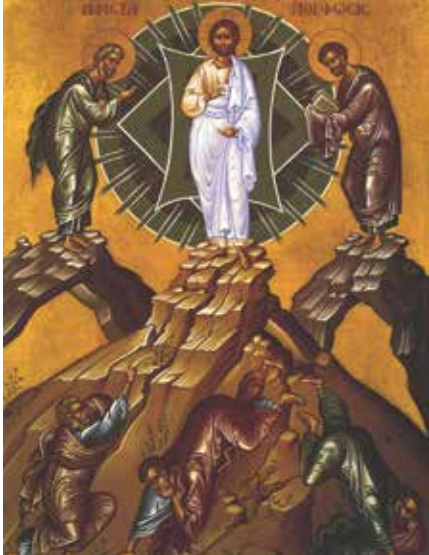
Saint Paul tells the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rm 12:2). Renew your mind with the word of God. Occupy your mind with the good thoughts that come from holy scripture. Read your Bible and renew your mind. **ECL**

SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



"YOU WERE TRANSFIGURED ON THE MOUNTAIN, O CHRIST OUR GOD..."



Icon of the Transfiguration of Christ

"O Christ our God, when You willed to prefigure Your resurrection, You chose three disciples, Peter, James, and John; and You went up with them to Mount Tabor. At the moment of Your Transfiguration, O Savior, the mountain was flooded with light, and Your disciples fell with their faces to the ground; for they could not bear the sight of Your countenance upon which no one may gaze, O Word. Angels attended with trembling and awe; the heavens were afraid; and the earth shook to its very foundations when they saw the Lord of Glory come upon the earth." – *At Psalm 140, Vespers for the Feast of the Transfiguration*

"When David, forefather of the Lord, foresaw in spirit Your coming in the flesh, he invited the whole creation to rejoice, crying out prophetically: O Savior, Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Your name, for indeed You ascended this mountain with Your disciples. Through Your Transfiguration You returned Adam's nature to its original splendor, restoring its very elements to the glory and brilliance of Your divinity. Therefore, we cry out to You: O Creator of All, glory to You!" – *Aposticha for the Feast of the Transfiguration*

I was struck by two themes of these vesperal stichera, as they pertain to Christ in His humanity and divinity, and as they also pertain to us. First, the author says, "... when You willed to prefigure Your resurrection ..." We believe that the resurrection of Christ was not merely a reanimation of His body after His death, but that He was raised in an immortal, glorified body. Here we see that this glorification is shown beforehand on Mount Tabor to His disciples. Peter, James, and John saw our Lord as He would appear to them after the resurrection, and saw distinctly His divinity radiating through His humanity. No wonder our troparion for the Feast says that He revealed "as much of [His] glory to [His] disciples as they could behold" [emphasis added]. When Moses, on Mount Sinai, asked God, "Show me Your glory, I pray," God replies: "You cannot see My face; for no

one shall see Me and live" (cf. Exodus 33:12-13). Thus, the disciples cannot bear to see but so much glory of the Son of God revealed to them on Tabor, "they could not bear the sight of Your countenance upon which no one may gaze." Yet, after the Resurrection, they would now be able to see Him in all His glory. And, in our theology, they and we see the "original beauty of Adam," and the original beauty will be manifest also in our bodies at the Resurrection of the dead! "Through Your Transfiguration You returned Adam's nature to its original splendor, restoring its very elements to the glory and brilliance of Your divinity." Thus it is that we see the eventual restoration of all of Mankind in His Transfiguration!

With His Transfiguration, we pray in the Ambon Prayer for the Feast, "Open the eyes of our minds to a sight of indescribable beauty, just as You did for

Your apostles.... Guide us also into higher things by Your all-powerful right hand. ...Give us an unfailing memory of the voice of Your eternal Father revealing You as His beloved Son, so that, putting Your commandments into action, we may shine forth among those worthy of Your eternal kingdom ..."

The Feast of the Transfiguration is also a call for us to conform ourselves to the will of God, and to carry out our vocation to be lights in the darkness, bringing the Good News to our world today. "We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith...." What is the purpose of the witness of the Transfiguration if we do not follow through by our own transformation: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and

perfect" (Romans 12:2). Everything we experience during our liturgical year is given to us for our repentance, our transformation, and our salvation. The Transfiguration is a prefiguration of the glorification that we will receive when He raises us from the dead, just as His resurrection is the prefiguration of our resurrection. God's promises are not to be shrugged off as "spiritual talk" but as assurances that we were made for Him, and that, as we pray in the Anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, "You brought us out of nonexistence into being, and again raised us up when we had fallen, and left nothing undone until You brought us to heaven and gave us Your kingdom to come." The Transfiguration is the revelation of what He has in store for us. Therefore, we glorify Him with our lives, and thank Him for this great feast. **ECL**

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Each day there will be opportunities for prayer and reflection,
including Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning

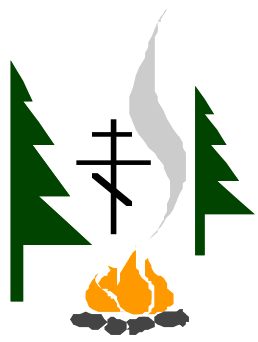


Iconographer Veronica Royal has studied icon writing with Russian, Greek, and American master iconographers since 1995. She has been painting commissioned works for private individuals and public institutions worldwide. She first conceived a love for icons in the Ukrainian community where she lived. For the last 20 years, Veronica oversees student iconographers in her Guild, which meets every Saturday morning. She enjoys teaching workshops with the Arlington Diocese, Catholic Distance University, church groups, and private individuals. Veronica frequently lectures on the history and spirituality of iconography and works full-time as an iconographer filling commissions for churches, priests, religious organizations, and

families, as well as teaching workshops and lecturing at various venues nationwide. She resides in Northern Virginia with her husband Robert, a writer of many books, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Catholic Thing*, and President of the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington, DC. Learn more about Veronica Royal at her website: <https://royaliconstudio.com/>

For More Information and to Register
Contact

Royal.icon.workshop.nyc@gmail.com
917-727-0668



Carpathian Village Saint Nicholas Shrine

802 Snow Hill Road, Cresco, PA 18326-7810
 Tel (570) 595-3265 - Cell (570) 650-3252
 Email: carpathianvillage@earthlink.net
 Father Michael J. Salnicko, Director

Carpathian Village is presently taking reservations for group retreats, ski weekends, family vacations, day of recollection weekends, parish or group picnics, and private retreats. To schedule your event or for more information call or email Fr Michael.

*Registration forms for the Congress and Rally can be found at <https://www.eparchyofpassaic.com> under Youth and Young Adult Ministries

2023 Eparchial Events

Annual Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage 2023

Sunday, August 13
 Pilgrimage Coordinator Father Michael Salnicko

Family Day 2023

Saturday, August 12
 Camp Director/Retreat Master Father Andrii Dumnych

Annual Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage Sunday August 13, 2023 At Carpathian Village



12:00 Noon Welcome and Blessing of Pilgrims Begins (Shrine Bldg)
 Food Service Begins (Picnic Pavilion Tent)
 1:15 PM Anointing Service (Shrine Bldg)
 2:00 PM Confessions Begin (Shrine Gazebo)
 2:50 PM Procession from Picnic Pavilion Tent to Shrine Altar
 3:00 PM Hierarchical Divine Liturgy (Shrine Altar)
 Ordinations to Subdiaconate
 Anointing with Oil of Saint Nicholas from Bari, Italy

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND & JORDAN 11 DAYS: JANUARY 21 - 31, 2024

VISITING: HAIFA * TIBERIAS * NAZARETH * MT. NEBO * MADABA
 AMMAN * PETRA * JERICHO * BETHLEHEM * JERUSALEM



Hosted by
FR. ED CIMBALA

\$4279 FROM NEWARK*

*Air/land tour price is \$3579 plus \$700 gov't taxes/airline surcharges

For a More Information, Please Contact:

Fr. Ed Cimbala
 Tel: (908) 872-2928
 Email: fredcimbala@gmail.com

DON'T MISS THIS TRIP OF A LIFETIME!!



Visiting The Myrtle Beach Area This Summer?

Blessed Basil Hopko Byzantine Catholic Mission
 3059 SC Highway 90
 Conway, SC

Will have visiting priests celebrating Divine Liturgy every Sunday this summer through September 10th.
 No Liturgy is currently scheduled for August 6th.
 All Liturgies will start at 10 AM.
 Follow us on Facebook for any schedule changes.

Are you called to the Priesthood? Are you afraid of College Debt?

Is God calling you to be a priest? Are you worried about college debt? Why not study in Europe and avoid college debt? Would you like to study in Vienna in the heart of Europe at the International Theological Institute in your own English Language? You can receive a university degree approved by the Pope. Contact the Director of Vocations for the Eparchy of Passaic, the Very Reverend Michael Kerestes at Saint Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, 695 N Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18705, phone: 570-822-6028



UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

Eastern Catholic Life

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AUGUST, 2023

- 6 Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord
Solemn Holy Day; blessing of fruit
- 12 Family Day
Carpathian Village, Canadensis, PA
- 13 Annual Saint Nicholas Pilgrimage and ordinations to the Subdiaconate
Carpathian Village, Canadensis, PA
- 12-13 Holy Dormition Pilgrimage
Sloatsburg, NY
- 15 Holy Dormition of the Virgin Theotokos
Holy Day of obligation; blessing of flowers; chancery closed
- 29 Beheading of the Holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist, John
Simple Holy Day

SEPTEMBER, 2023

- 4 Labor Day
*Civic holiday * chancery closed*
- 8 Nativity of the Virgin Theotokos
Solemn Holy Day
- 14 Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Solemn Holy Day

THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC subscribes to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Eparchy, within all its parishes, institutions and programs, is committed to assuring a safe environment in ministry for its children and young people that conforms to Charter requirements. For further information regarding the Eparchial Safe Environment Program please contact:

Father David J. Baratelli, Ed.S., M.Div.
 Safe Environment Program Coordinator • 732-280-2682

Dr. Maureen Daddona, Ph.D.
 Victim's Assistance Coordinator • 516-623-6456