



# EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE

Official Publication of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

VOL. LIX, NO. 11

NOVEMBER 2023



Icon of Theotokos by Christina Duchwat,  
lobby of the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic Pastoral Center



## 2023 BISHOP'S APPEAL BEGINS

*Beneath your compassion*

*we take refuge,*

*O Virgin Theotokos.*

*Despise not our prayers in our need,*

*but deliver us from dangers,*

*for you alone are pure, and blessed.*

Glory to Jesus Christ!

My dear friends,

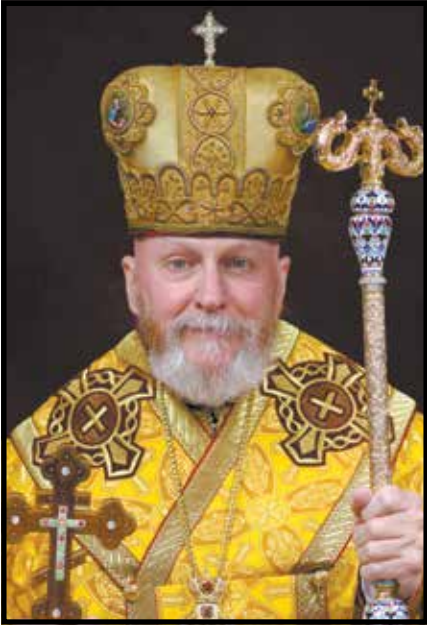
Last year, I wrote to you about the horrific escalation of the war in Ukraine, and things there are no better, as you know. In fact, the war is ten years old, but only escalated recently. The people from the region of our mother church in Transcarpathia are mercifully spared the direct artillery and missiles but are by no means spared from injury and death. The men from that area have been on the front lines for many years, and every week our own Bishop there buries young men who leave behind their mothers and fathers, their grandparents, their young wives, and their now fatherless children. I don't know how Bishop Nil can continue doing these funerals! Please pray for these poor people!

At least I can report to you that our Eparchy has been generous according to our small size with helping the refugees. When I visited, they showed me a laundromat created by Catholic Charities. We might not think about that, that the refugees have no way to do laundry. It is staffed by volunteers, so the refugees drop off their clothes and then get them back cleaned, dried, and folded. Then they added a nice coffee bar for them to wait at, and then a children's play area. I asked for a list of things for donors, and they gave me a short list of washing machines, dryers, and generators, so I just sent a check later from your donations. However, the priest who is head of Catholic Charities also asked for about \$150,000.00 for a new building. If you would like to buy a building for Catholic Charities there, just contact me and we will figure it out.

This year I am sharing with you one of the most beloved icons in our Eparchy of Passaic, the large icon of the Mother of God that is in the vestibule of the Pastoral Center in Woodland Park. The icon is by the indefatigable and vivacious Christina Dochwat who also supplied the icons and icon screens of so many of our parishes. She also remodeled the entire chapel at our Seminary in Pittsburgh. In 1974, she created our stunning and sublime chapel at the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington, DC. Next year we will meet there to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the creation of our mother diocese in the United States, the Exarchy of Munhall (now the Archeparchy of Pittsburgh). In 2014, I had the honor to meet her at the fortieth anniversary of the Chapel. Because we were one of the first ones at the Basilica, I think we have the largest chapel, and everyone else is fighting for space there now. It is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful. At that time, I was able to ask her about the large icon at our Pastoral Center. She said it was sitting in her workshop when Bishop Dudick visited. He must have just finished building the Pastoral Center in 1986 because he said, "I have the perfect place for that icon." Mary has been watching over us ever since. No matter what reason someone enters our offices, they always feel spiritually uplifted when they see their Mother hovering over them, and they know they are loved by her and by her Divine Son.

With more inflation this year, I cannot ask everyone for money. If you would like to help me with my work, please pray for me and for your priests and for our bishops in Europe. Please only send money if you can afford it and have extra after your needs.

+Kurt Brunette



## I LIFT UP MY EYES

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



### GOD TAKES HIS STAND IN THE ASSEMBLY OF GODS, AND HE JUDGES GODS

When I was first reading the psalms as someone uneducated in the scriptures, I was always fascinated by this verse: *God takes his stand in the assembly of gods, and He judges gods.* Who were these other gods? Did the Hebrews believe in multiple gods but believed that theirs was the most powerful? When I finally got around to looking up a commentary, I realized how far off I was. The rest of the psalm makes it quite clear. The inspired writer is writing about human judges. At the end it says, “I have said, you are gods, children of the Most High, but as men you will die, you will fall like one of the princes.”

The writer call judges *gods* because of their power. Judges have the power to make rich and to make poor; to inflict pain and to pardon; and even to take life. But the psalmist warns them, that the one God is standing in their assembly and is judging them. At the end, he warns them starkly: although a higher power has given you the powers of gods, you will also die.

Does the psalmist have any advice for judges--these temporary gods? Indeed, for the whole legal profession? You bet he does. He says flat out, “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless. Uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy. Deliver them from the hand of the wicked”.

In Psalm 82, the highest judge of all gives a plan of action for judges: defend the weak and orphans; uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed; rescue the weak and the needy. He sums it all up when he says, *stop favoring the wicked.*

On a more primal level, the psalmist asks us the more basic question, *what are judges for?* It's possible that judges preceded law and advocates. In primitive society, people brought their differences to a judge, someone with power in the community. From their decisions came the first laws, from their proceedings, the need for advocates. But what are they all for, judges, laws, and advocates? The psalmist says they are to defend the weak. After all, the strong don't need judges, they don't need laws, and they don't need advocates.

The Old Testament gets a bad rap. Detractors tell us it is about an angry God. I suspect most people who say things like that haven't read much of it. Open

any prophet and see what makes God angry for yourself. After idolatry, which is really God trying to save us from our own foolishness, the thing that makes God the angriest is mistreating the poor, mistreating women and children, and mistreating strangers. The Old Testament God sounds pretty compassionate to me. In fact, he says in the prophets, *I desire mercy not sacrifice.*

What does all this have to do with us Christians? Saint Paul spent a lot of time pondering the law and probably wrote more about than anyone else in the scriptures. Part of the Good News of Saint Paul was that Christians are liberated from the law by Jesus Christ. He soon found he had to qualify this joyful proclamation. The law says you shall not murder. We are not liberated from that law. The law says you shall not cheat on your spouse. We are not liberated from that law. We still have to respect our parents. We still have to tell the truth in testimony. We weren't liberated from those laws. Christian thinkers have written many words trying to sort this one out.

However, Saint Paul himself gives us a roadmap in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. After a blistering passage on sin, “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor catamites, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunks, nor slanderers will inherit the kingdom of God,” yes, after this blistering passage from the man who says we are saved by grace, not by works, Saint Paul goes on to a profound, and I think, underappre-



*The great Pantocrator in the Cathedral of Cefalu in Sicily. The Mother of God is interceding for us under the great Judge. Coincidentally, the man who is repaving our Cathedral Chapel is from a village near Cefalu.*

ciated passage. If we are liberated from the law, how are we to know the difference between right and wrong? Saint Paul tells his flock, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are good for me.” I always have to fight the urge to get lost in word studies, but the trouble translators have with this passage is quite illuminating. Some say, not all things are “helpful”, some say, not all things are “beneficial”, or “profitable”, or “expedient”. The first translation I read said,

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are convenient for me”. Convenient seemed particularly odd to me, which provoked my curiosity. Actually, convenient is a very literal translation of the word Saint Paul used in Greek which means, “come together”. Convenient is the Latin version of “come together”. In modern English, when we say, “everything came together”, we mean, somehow, in a slightly mysterious way, a somewhat surprising way, everything came out well. I find it fascinating that an expression like this would cross the millennia with the same meaning. As a scriptural aside, when I asked an expert about the word, he commented that it is the same word the High Priest used when he said, speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit according to Saint John, it would be a good thing if one man were to die for the people.

Well, Saint Paul's advice sounds a little obtuse to apply: *all things are lawful for me, but not all things are good for me.* He goes on to tell what it means. He says, I will not be dominated by anything. Some translate it, I will not be a slave to anything.

When I was in Russia (almost thirty years ago), my tutor was a Russian Orthodox woman who knew I was a Catholic priest. I was astonished during a conversation when she asked me, “Don't you believe playing cards is a sin?” I checked with a young Russian friend whether they believe that, and he said, “My grandmother told me, never play cards for money”. If you

don't know it, the highest authority in Russia in morality and everything else is your grandmother. Nevertheless, some ten years later, in Rome, I asked a classmate who was a Russian Orthodox monk from Moscow, do Russian Orthodox believe it is a sin to play cards or to gamble? His answer was straight out of Saint Paul. He said, if it enslaves me, it is a sin, otherwise, not.

The Holy Apostle goes on with an example to help his flock understand his mind, “The stomach was made for food, and food for the stomach, and God will do away with both in the end”. He seems to be saying that if we look at the purpose of things, the difference between right and wrong will fall into place naturally. He doubles down by saying, the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. If we remember what our bodies are for, even sexual morality becomes clear.

I have wondered if someone could create a whole school of Moral Theology based on this idea of Saint Paul. It is certainly the starting point of Pope Saint John Paul's epoch shaking teachings on the theology of the body.

It seems pretty far afield from the beginning psalm that warns judges, don't favor the wicked, and protect the poor and the weak. The deeper teaching is the same in both Psalm 82 and First Corinthians. If we remember we have a Creator, that we are not chemical accidents competing for survival. If we remember that the same Creator rules over the cosmos and is also the last judge, and empowers those in authority from time to time, then we remember that everything has a purpose. Judges have a purpose, the law has a purpose, advocates have a purpose, scholars have a purpose, the human body has a purpose, and even the stomach has a purpose. The stomach is for food and food for the stomach and God is the end of both. Judges are for protecting the weak. Advocates are for speaking on behalf of those who cannot speak. At the last supper Our Lord said, if any would be the first of all, he must be the servant of all. For all of us, our purpose is service.

What is our great purpose? Our reason for being alive? In his final days on earth, Our Lord Jesus Christ won a little war of words with the Sadducees, so the Pharisees stepped up to give him a test. The Gospel says one of them was a law expert and he asked Jesus, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. Our purpose is God, and God is love. Our way is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, the Alpha and the Omega, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. —Bishop Kurt was the guest homilist at the Red Mass for the Saint Thomas More Society of San Francisco on October 26 at Saints Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone was the main celebrant and Bishop Kurt concelebrated.

+Kurt Brunette

# A Double Blessing!

On December 17, 2023, the Eparchy of Passaic will observe two milestone celebrations!

First, is the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canonical Establishment of the Eparchy of Passaic; and second is the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Consecration of Bishop Kurt and his Installation as the 5<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Passaic!

The day will begin with gratitude and prayer through the celebration of a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving on Sunday, December 17<sup>th</sup> at 3PM at the Cathedral of St Michael the Archangel in Passaic, NJ, followed by a joyful dinner reception at 5PM at the nearby Venetian Banquet Facility in Garfield, NJ.

All the Faithful in the Eparchy of Passaic are invited to attend and join their voices in prayers of gratitude for our past and prayers of hope for our future – as well as to celebrate with our Chief Shepherd, Bishop Kurt on his 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

See the invitation below for additional information. Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to Him Forever!



The Faithful of the Eparchy of Passaic  
Are invited to attend:

*the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canonical Establishment of the  
Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic  
and  
The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Episcopal Consecration and Installation of  
Bishop Kurt Burnette as the 5<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Passaic*



Hierarchical Divine Liturgy 3:00PM  
Sunday, December 17, 2023  
Cathedral of Saint Michael the Archangel  
96 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Passaic, NJ 07055

Cocktail Hour and Dinner to Follow at  
5:00 in the evening at  
The Venetian  
546 River Drive  
Garfield, NJ 07026

Please Respond below:

\*\*\*\*\*

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ will attend the Anniversary Celebration

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone# \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ number attending at \$100.00 per person (Confirmation will be emailed)

Please make check for the total, payable to **Eparchy of Passaic** and return by November 17, 2023  
Eparchy of Passaic Anniversary Committee  
445 Lackawanna Avenue  
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

## SISTER CHRISTOPHER CELEBRATES DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY

### A Legend in Her Own Time

There is nothing like a Jubilee to bring Sisters together in joyful celebration. Sunday, May 21, was such a day, for on that day, the Sisters of Saint Basil in Uniontown honored Sister Christopher Malcovsky, OSBM, on her Diamond Jubilee of religious life.

Like all major events of the province, the celebration began with a Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving. As is customary on this occasion and before receiving the Holy Eucharist, Sister Christopher renewed her vows. In this, she was joined by the entire community.

In his homily, Archbishop William remarked on the many levels of service and the many different roles that Sister carried out in her 75 years of service. Speaking to the time when he was Bishop of Phoenix, he noted that faced with the enormous task of managing the apartment complex at Saint Stephen's, Sister worked hard to get everything organized, and in so doing engaged others in the parish to help.

Her purpose went beyond practicalities of the buildings, and extended to spiritual counseling when needed. Sister's ministry in the Eparchy of Phoenix for nearly thirty years actually began in 1991, assisting in organizational work in what was then the Eparchy of Van Nuys.

Sister Christopher spent her beginning years as a Basilian in the teaching ministry. Her abilities led to the assignment as Motherhouse Superior and then as Provincial Superior for two terms. In 1983, she was elected as General Superior, the highest position in the order based in Rome. In this capacity, she touched the lives of many sisters, particularly those still living under communism. Even at this date, she is fondly remembered for her courage in visiting those groups of sisters during her tenure.

After completing her term of office in Rome, Sister Christopher returned to ministry in the Phoenix Eparchy where



her responsibilities were mainly in parish ministry at Saint Stephen's. In addition, she also managed the 26 apartments for senior citizens on the parish campus. Besides engaging in direct ministry for the parish, Sister Christopher also organized and coordinated the Bishop's Appeal for the Eparchy of Phoenix, a task which she ably fulfilled over the course of her years in the West. She whole-heartedly dedicated her time, talents, and energy to these many significant areas of service.

Though separated by miles, parishioners of Saint Stephen Pro-Cathedral and the apartment residents still re-

member Sister Christopher for her prayerful and calming spirit as well as for her willingness to listen. For many of them, she is just a phone call away.

Due to health issues, Sister Christopher returned to the monastery at Mount Saint Macrina in 2018, assisting part time at the religious gift shop or wherever needed. Presently, Sister Christopher is a resident at Mount Macrina Manor where she previously offered her services as a volunteer.

At the festive dinner following the Liturgy, Provincial Sister Susan congratulated Sister Christopher and thanked her for her enthusiastic and faithful service. She then read a very special message from the sisters in Romania who are celebrating their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a Province. Sister Christopher holds a special place in their hearts, since it was through her that the Basilian Sisters in Romania became a part of the Order. Truly, one can say that Sister Christopher has been blessed with many happy and spiritually fruitful years, and all of us are grateful to share in this blessing!

## OUR JUBILARIANS: A QUARTET OF HARMONY II

“Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his.” This verse from a poem by Gerard Manly Hopkins is a celebration of God's presence in all things, stating how everything is a reflection of God's glory. It fittingly describes our quartet of Jubilarians. In their 60 years as Sisters of St. Basil, they have reflected God's presence to countless people whose lives intersected with theirs.

Our Jubilarians continue to reflect God's glory as consecrated women being a praying, healing and life-giving presence wherever they are. Each one is active, enthusiastic, and committed to the ministry and people she serves.

Father Jerome Botsko, Monastery Chaplain, conveyed this in his homily at the Thanksgiving Divine Liturgy for the Jubilarians. The Gospel reading of the Parable of the Sower in which the seed is the Word of God lent itself to a description of their lives. They represent the good soil in their faithfulness to their vocations. Over the span of their religious lives, they have produced abundant fruit for God's Kingdom. We congratulate them and give thanks to God for them. Their accomplishments are briefly described below.

Sister Margaret Ann Andrako's ministry journey has taken her to parish schools, to religious education in the Archeparchy and Passaic Eparchy, to organizational work in the Van Nuys (Phoenix) Eparchy, to director of the House of Prayer, as an administrative assistant at Byzantine Catholic Seminary and then at Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, PA. For two different terms, in 1990 and in 2015, she was Assistant

Provincial. In 2021, Sister Margaret Ann accepted a position in the Diocese of Erie as administrative assistant for the Office of Religious and for Saint Mark Seminary where she currently serves.

Sister Sylvia Burnett's ministry likewise took her to parish schools, then to retreat work and spiritual direction at Mount Saint Macrina, the Jesuit Retreat Center in Clinton, OH, and at Ecclesia Center in Girard, PA. She also worked on research, planning, and development for her religious community; served as motherhouse director; and Councilor

and Director of grounds and facilities. Sister Sylvia continues to unravel the mysteries of broken marriages in her tribunal work for the Erie Diocese, where she has served since 2007 as an auditor in the diocesan tribunal.

Sister Susan Harvey devoted 29 years in the parochial elementary schools around the Metropolia serving as teacher and principal. She taught at nearly every grade level from first through eighth. Following her years in the education apostolate, Sister Susan went on to serve in pastoral ministry and as assistant director for the Office of Religious Education for the Parma Eparchy. Returning to the education ministry, Sister Susan served on the staff of the newly orga-

nized school at Saint Gabriel Parish in Las Vegas, NV. In 2014, Sister returned to the monastery, where she took on the position of Director of Associates while assisting with the cemetery ministry and the card shop, and various other ministries at the monastery.

Following her initial ministry as a teacher, Sister Barbara Jean Mihalchick moved on to retreat work and spiritual direction at the retreat center. In 1989, Sister Barbara Jean was elected to the position of Vicar General in the General Administration of the Order in Rome. During this time, Sister traveled to all parts of the order, but especially to Eastern Europe where sisters were re-structuring public religious life and ministries. There, Sister offered on-going formation sessions with the young professed Sisters. Sister Barbara Jean returned from Rome in 2001. Following a sabbatical year, she joined the House of Prayer staff at Mount Saint Macrina where she currently serves as program director and Vocation Director for the Province. Presently, Sister is in her second term as a member of the Provincial Council.

One gift that is not listed above is the gift of listening. For a combined 240 years of religious life, each Sister has listened, empathized, sympathized or just was present as a “reflection of God's glory.” That might just be the greatest gift they gave and keep giving to the world.

No Basilian celebration is complete without a special meal. At the festive dinner afterwards, Sister Susan Sisko, Provincial, and all the sisters offered their warm congratulations to the Jubilarians. May God grant them many more happy, blessed and spiritually fruitful, years!



Front row: Sister Margaret Ann Andrako, Sister Sylvia Burnett  
Second row: Sister Susan Harvey, Father Jerome Botsko, Sister Barbara Jean Mihalchick



Sisters of St. Basil the Great  
500 W. Main Street  
Uniontown, PA 15401  
[www.sistersofstbasil.org](http://www.sistersofstbasil.org)

### A Pilgrimage Thank You from Sr. Susan Sisko, OSBM

Dear Friends,

What a blessed and beautiful pilgrimage, and how graced we were to be a part of it!

In thanksgiving to Our Lord and His Holy Mother, we are grateful for the sunshine, the gentle breezes (that kissed us occasionally), and for blessing us once again with our faithful pilgrims who traveled to be a part of the 89<sup>th</sup> annual pilgrimage.

Thank you all for your prayers, your participation, and your generosity. Though Mt. St. Macrina has been a bit quieter these past couple of weeks, a silent walk on the property rings aloud with the power of your prayers, and the beauty of your singing. We hear it, we feel it, and it sustains us as we plan for our 90<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage.

Children, teens, and young adults: Thank you for your energy, your enthusiasm, and your faithfulness. It was an absolute joy for us to witness your participation, spiritual energy, and enthusiasm for the Lord and Our Mother of Perpetual Help. You are the present, and you are the future of this pilgrimage, and of our Church, and we encourage you to embrace that role wholeheartedly.

To all our pilgrims, the extraordinary example of prayer and faithful participation you have shown throughout the years is the foundation of our annual pilgrimages and our church. You are the bedrock from which future generations will continue building strong and lasting faith structures. We are grateful for your continued support, and the support of all those who have come before you.

The Sisters of St. Basil have been blessed with your faithfulness and continued support of our Annual Pilgrimage. It is for all of you that we continue this ministry of love.

Sincerely in Christ,

Sister Susan Sisko, OSBM  
Provincial

**2023 BISHOP'S APPEAL**  
**BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC**  
**445 Lackawanna Avenue, Woodland Park, NJ 07424**  
**Donate online at [Eparchyofpassaic.com](http://Eparchyofpassaic.com)**  
**or by pledge card**  
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**BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC**  
**2023 BISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL**

**Please pledge online at [eparchyofpassaic.com](http://eparchyofpassaic.com)**  
or mail check payable to Eparchy of Passaic  
in the envelope provided.

***As challenges continue to affect us, please take care of yourself, your family and your parish first.***

\$2,500.00     \$1,000.00     \$500.00

\$250.00 \_\_\_\_\_     Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- full payment enclosed
- first payment enclosed, bill me for 4 additional payments

The 2023 Bishop's Appeal will run through the end of our fiscal year, June 2024. Contributions received prior to December 31, 2023, will count toward your 2023 tax year. Acknowledgement letter will be mailed prior to January 31, 2024.

**New Address or Correction**  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street: \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

# EPARCHIAL PRIEST RETREAT 2023

by Father Lewis M. Rabayda

Each of us, no matter what our state in life—busy mother, working father, teenager, mid aged single professional, retired, and even clergy—need to take time away from our busy lives to reflect and pray. Jesus teaches us several times through the Gospels, that our usual state in life is to be among the community, but that on certain occasions, we also need to go to a quiet place and focus on prayer. On Monday, September 25, the priest of the Eparchy of Passaic gathered at San Alphonso Retreat House, in Long Branch New Jersey for their annual retreat.



Monsignor Thomas Caserta, retreat master Diocese of Brooklyn, NY

This year the retreat master was retired Monsignor Thomas Caserta, a bi-ritual priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, NY. Monsignor Caserta chose to guide the priest through their retreat with a simple, yet very profound theme focusing on some of Jesus' questions. We have all read Scripture, and we have all read how Jesus will answer questions He has been asked, by asking a question in return. Or, in other instances, Jesus directly asks those He encounters a question, thereby asking us a question today, so that we, can search for our own answers, and not just rely on the answers of others, or answer what someone might expect us to reply with, rather than what we really think and know. This exercise is where each one of us can internalize our relationship with Jesus Christ, and make more profound our connection with Him. It is when we truly contemplate these questions for ourselves, and are forced to work through the answers, that we can come to life-changing conclusions: about who we are, and about what place

life, or to see if we have fallen further away.

There are over 300 questions Jesus asks in the four Gospels, but Monsignor Caserta chose to focus on five of them.

The first question is, *What do you want me to do for you?* (Mk 10:36). It might be good for each of us to contemplate this question for ourselves, but this elicits many thoughts. This implies that Jesus can in fact do something for us, and it is up to us to recognize this ability, and likewise, recognize that Jesus has the power to grant what we need from Him. But as we see in many of the healing encounters with Jesus, He wants us to recognize what it is in our lives that is lacking, and to ask Him for those healing changes to occur. This question also highlights Jesus' compassion for all mankind, it shows us that He came to serve us, and to help us in our lives here on earth, as well as show us the way to eternal life.

The second question, *Who do you say that I AM?* (Mt 16:15), will help us affirm our faith. Each of us needs to answer this question for ourselves continually through our lives. Is Jesus just some prophet, just some holy man of ancient history? Is He a *cleverly devised myth* as Saint Paul accused the Greeks of believing? Or is Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God who was the Word that spoke everything into existence and has taken-on flesh to be the final carnal sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins? And if this is our answer, then how should we live our lives?



Monsignor Thomas Caserta, Bishop Kurt, and Father Martin Vavrek

The third question, *Do you want to be well?* (Jn 5:6), is more profound than some of us might think. In this day and age where almost anything can be bought, many people can delude them-



then we need to tell Jesus that we do, we need to ask Him to grant this wholeness to us, and we need to recognize what our ailments and sins are, so that we can truly let them go in the Mystery of Penance, and allow Jesus to truly heal us.

world and by others to leave behind our faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity for the easy and sensual promises of a secular life. So each one of us needs to answer the question Jesus asks, after telling His disciples that they need to



Fathers Yevhenii Hradil, Iaroslav Korostil, and Andrii Dumnych

The fourth question, *What profit is there... to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?* (Mk 8:36), can help us to realize what earthly activities and endeavors are truly worth our time and energy. Many times we put our trust or faith in earthly things or even in vices such as pride, instead of focusing on that which will secure our place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus tells us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Mt 6:33).

eat and drink the actual Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ in order to have life in themselves: *do we stay and eat and drink, or do we leave?*

The fifth question presented to the priests is one that we can all ask ourselves as well, *Do you want to leave?* (Jn 6:67) An essential element of our being and a gift from God's love for us, is that we have free will to choose as we want. God gave the angels a choice: they could continue to serve Him, or they could reject Him and become dark angels, or demons and serve Lucifer. But thankfully for us, and unlike the demons who

Monsignor Caserta told the priests about a thought he had in the first grade of Catholic School. As he was walking home from class, he walked past the tabernacle and noticed that no one else was in the church praying. He said to himself, "It's not right that You are alone." God is never alone, because the Holy Trinity Itself is a community of Persons. But God desires to be with us, which is why He created us and brought us into this life, so that we can choose to be with Him for eternity. When we ponder these questions for ourselves we too can choose to keep God company for all of eternity.



Fathers Roman Vasylynka, Vasyl Sokolovych, and Ihor Vorontsov

we have let Jesus have in our lives. As was mentioned, it doesn't matter who we are or how much theology we have learned. Because we can always reevaluate and contemplate these questions to see if we have progressed in our spiritual

selves into thinking that just by admitting they desire wholeness that they have achieved wholeness. But here, when Jesus asks us directly and sincerely, we are forced to take very seriously this question. If we truly want to be well,



Fathers Taras Lovska, John Zeyack, and James G. Hayer

rejected God, as long as we are alive, we still have a choice and can always repent and turn back towards God. But many times in our lives we are asked by the



## PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

### "NOT FOR THE WORLD, BUT FOR THESE, I PRAY"

Just prior to His betrayal and arrest, Jesus Christ raises His eyes to heaven and prays, speaking to the Father in Heaven:

*I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made. "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine; all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [John 17:4-11]*

These words are merely an extract of the much longer, and far more robust, *High Priestly Prayer* of Jesus Christ that comprises the 17th Chapter of the Gospel of John. I highly recommend reading it in its entirety right now and then come back to gain the full perspective of what I am sharing here!

Quite often, I am asked to give advice regarding how a younger person can, or perhaps how a parent can guide an adolescent to live their Faith in the world we live in. I think, in a sense though, that this is a struggle we all share. Whether priest, adult, teen, or child, we all struggle with how to genuinely live our Faith in a modern context. Paradoxically, the answer, found in John

17, is simple in theory, but difficult in application, as many theories are.

Christ labels His disciples as being in the world, but not of the world [cf. John 17:15-18]. Further, Christ defines His prayerful desire for His disciples that they be united as one just as Christ (the Word) is One with God (the Father) [cf. vv22-24]. The first step in actualizing our *Call to Holiness*, to use the terminology of Vatican documents, is to realize what that call actually is. When Christ prays this prayer in John 17, we must understand that He is not praying in some odd third-person abstraction for some fictional characters in a play. He is praying for the disciples and apostles: real men who walked the face of the earth; men who were united in the Body of Christ at the institution of the Eucharist and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Further, we cannot neglect to remember that, by virtue of our baptism, we too not only share in the very same Body of Christ as the disciples and apostles, but we are also members of *THAT* very body in the *VERY* same way they are! When we read this prayer, we *MUST* realize that Christ is also praying for *US* – the Body of Christ made manifest on Earth – *the Church!* Christ desires for us in the current era exactly what He desired for those whom He knew when He walked this earth that we share in His joy completely. [cf. v. 13] What is this joy? It is to know God the Father just as Christ (the Incarnate *Logos* – the Word – the second Person of the Trinity) knows the Father. Christ desires for us to know God the way *HE* knows God. Talk about a prayerful desire!

How do we actualize this? Well, we must live the apostolic life! Yes, we *MUST* emulate the life of the apostles. I know what you're thinking,

"Father, that's impossible!" Well, is it really?

On this very topic, Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) [1896-1993] says the following.

*Authentically Christian life means living 'in spirit and truth' [John 4:23] and so is practicable anywhere, at any time, in any historical epoch. Christ's divine commandments are absolute in character. There are no circumstances in all the world – nor could there ever be any – which might make it quite impossible to observe these commandments. As Divine Spirit and Truth, Christian life, of course, in its eternal essence transcends all mundane forms. [We Shall See Him as He Is; p. 95]*

In other words, we have little choice but to live an authentically Christian life because, just as the disciples and apostles, we too are in this world, but we are not of this world. Of the first apostolic communities, we hear that,

*All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. [Acts 2:44-47]*

This is the life we too must live! But how? Well, very simply, actually. We *MUST* live the apostolic life in our homes. We must build Mt. Athos in our hearts and forge our homes to be sanctified enclaves of the authentically Christian life, a dwelling place for the Spirit. This is actually far simpler than it sounds, but it does take a little dedication on our part.

Begin and end each day with prayer. Make at least one meal per day the family meal where all members must be present at the table, except for extenuating circumstances, – **NO** devices. Always pray before meals. Follow the Fasts of the liturgical year as a family under the guidance of your pastor. Tithe from the heart, as a family, not simply mom throwing loose change found in the car seats into the parking lot while the bells are ringing. Greet each other with the Christian greeting: *Glory to Jesus Christ!* Attend services more than just one day a week on Sundays. **LIVE** the apostolic life... simply **LIVE!** Slowly amending our lives will cause abundant graces to flow, just as we hear in Acts 2. The catch is, however, that we must do these things in order to experience these graces.

This is my challenge to all of us. Let us use the time of the upcoming Philip's Fast to make the change, to amend our lives, to actualize the authentically Christian life. Make small changes at first, and go from there. We have nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

Finally, when people around you at school or work think you're insane, well, let them think that because we are in good company. As Christ prays, *I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* [John 17:14] People won't understand, and they don't have to understand. If, however, we live the authentically Christian life, they will come to understand simply by our example, and they too will share in the joy of Jesus Christ completely and be added to our numbers day by day. **ECL**



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# LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

## GIVING IS THANKS

As unbelievable as it seems, the holiday season is in full swing – as if we didn’t know that when we spied peanut butter pumpkins and all the spice-flavored drinks already being presented to us before we reached Labor Day. Before the last of the left-over Halloween candy can be eaten, we’re hit with advertisements for Black Friday deals and Christmas music blaring in the grocery store and from our radios. In between all of that are the preparations for Thanksgiving: buying food, inviting family and friends for dinner, and lots of running here and there doing errands and visiting people we may only see once a year. There is often so much to *do* that we barely have any time to just *be*: to consider the meaning of the holidays, beyond the social and material, and to enter more deeply into the spiritual aspects of this time of year.

We hear a lot about the necessity of gratitude in our lives, and that is certainly true. We all carry crosses of various shapes and weights, and in the thick of suffering it can be difficult to find anything to be grateful for, much less to have the energy to give thanks. Oftentimes Scripture feels like an old-fashioned book that presents an ideal, but it is the Word of God spoken through the reality of real people who sometimes

wrestled with Him, occasionally drifted far from Him, and were finally visited by His love and mercy “in the flesh” through the coming of Christ. The Psalms are a beautiful and quite practical place to find acknowledgment of the toll our own suffering can take on us, while offering a pathway toward thanksgiving. I can’t recommend enough praying with the Psalms, and the Book of Lamentations, which each present the tapestry of human pain and suffering, interwoven with the threads of God’s overwhelming mercy. If you haven’t cracked open a Bible in a while, look inside, because you might be surprised at how much the stories of those presented there speak to your own.

As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, I’d like to invite you to shift focus away from what we usually mean by “giving thanks,” that is, expressing gratitude to another verbally, or by writing a note. Those things are important, and we should still do them! We should also express our thanks to God, during private prayer time, before meals, and of course at the Liturgy. The shift in focus I’m suggesting requires a bit more thought and creativity. What if we began to see those things we do for others, the small (and sometimes great) gifts of self and sacrifices we make for others as an expres-

sion of thanksgiving? Is it possible to reframe how we think about our work, the chores we do around the house, what we do in the service of others, as acts of gratitude?

When Jesus gathered the Apostles in the upper room for the Passover meal, He instituted the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist, in which He invited not only those present, but each of us, to intimately unite ourselves with Him by consuming His body and blood every time we receive Holy Communion. We may not think of it in this way, but what Jesus offers in the Eucharist is both a gift and an offering of thanks. This is evident in that the word “eucharist” comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means “thankfulness,” or the “act of giving thanks.” At the Last Supper, Jesus gave us the most valuable and precious gift, next to our own lives, through the Eucharist; and He made that gift into an act of thanksgiving to the Father. In this way, Jesus shows us that everything we do – every gift of self we offer, every sacrifice for the good of another, every task and obligation we fulfill – all of these can become not only gifts, but signs of gratitude offered to God.

We rarely think of the mundane aspects of daily life as anything more than that; and we often look at the

things we do for others (in our immediate or extended family, helping a neighbor or friend, assisting at the parish, etc.) as anything more than doing what we ought, or simply being a good person. Jesus’ total gift of Himself on our behalf, offered in thanks to the Father, shows us that our very lives and all that we do, can be a *eucharistia* – an intentional offering of thanks. No matter who we are, our age or our capabilities, we can be *living embodiments* of gratitude to God, and our act of service and prayers for each other can become gifts offered to Him in thanks for His immense love for us.

During this Thanksgiving holiday, in the middle of the chores, the busyness, and the stress that comes with the holidays, take a moment to stop and call to mind all the gifts and blessings God has given you. Then, go about your day with a mindfulness and intentionality that allows you to make every task, every prayer, and every moment truly an act of thanksgiving to the One from whom “all good giving and every perfect gift” comes. (James 1:7).

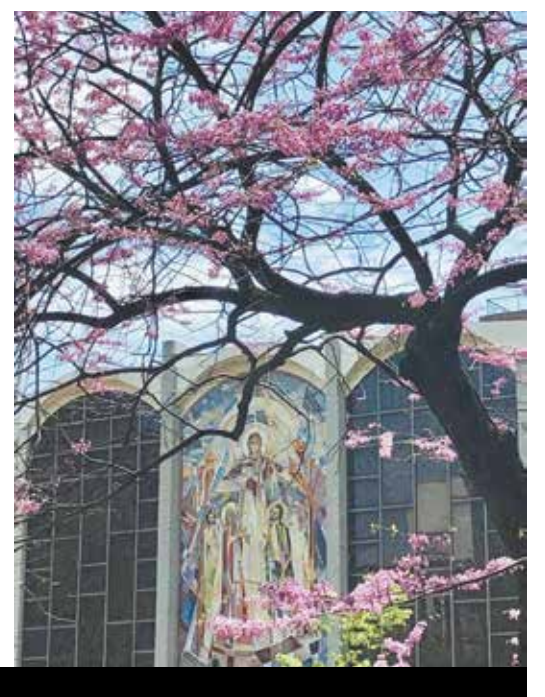
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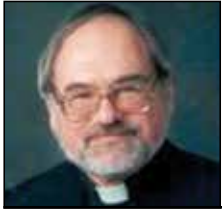


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# THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

## THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

Sickness and death are not pleasant aspects of life. In ancient times they were considered as “punishments for sin”. This attitude continued in the apostolic times. However, at least once, Jesus had to specifically exclude sin as the reason for sickness, in the story of the Man Born Blind, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him” (John 9:3). Saint Paul said the unworthy reception of the eucharist could cause sickness (1 Cor 11:30). As a result, then, there did develop certain taboos regarding sickness and death – perhaps some of these were actually sanitary regulations, and the fear of the spread of disease. For the Eastern fathers, the greatest effect of sin was the loss of immortality. Because Christ was “sinless”, he could not be held by the bonds of mortality, and so smashed the gates of Hades, and “trampled upon death by death.” Modern medical science has shown that there is no exact correspondence between sin and sickness, though studies have shown that, at least in some physical conditions, e.g., heart disease, cancer and hypertension, there is some correspondence between physical well-being and frame of mind. People do have some mental control over the health and well-being of the body, beyond proper diet and exercise.

The liturgical response to illness is the Anointing of the Sick, one of the seven sacramental Mysteries of the Church. The Anointing of the Sick is clearly a penitential rite – and during the days of

public penance, reconciliation was often delayed until the deathbed. In the Byzantine Church, this same sacramental mystery is called *in Greek Euchelaion* (a combination of the Greek words *euche*, which means “prayer” and *elaion*, oil). We have translated it as the Office of Holy Oil for Anointing the Sick. All Churches see the foundation of the sacramental mystery of anointing in the Epistle of Saint James 5;14-15: “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.”

The early Church also gave a great importance to the oil used in the rite. The earliest liturgical texts we have, therefore, are prayers for blessing the oil. The prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII, 29), reads: “Sanctify now this water and this oil, by Christ in whose name they have been offered, and grant them the strength to bring health, conquer illness, put demons to flight...by Christ, our hope”. In the fifth century we have records of the ritual for the administration of anointing. It became the exclusive ministry of the priest (the presbyter, the “elder”, as we see in the Epistle of Saint James). Isaac of Antioch, therefore, exhorts one of the faithful: “O woman, give your alms to a hermit, but receive anointing from your priest. Nourish the monk, but let your oil be that of the apostles, and re-

ceive anointing from the priest”. The anointing was intended for all illnesses and there is no qualification regarding the presence of the danger of death. By the fourteenth century, the Rite of Holy Anointing had achieved its final form in the Byzantine Church.

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick was often seen as the Last Rites, administered only when a person was dying. It was this emphasis on the connection between anointing and actual sickness that first caused the Western Church to reserve it to the actual approach of death. As an act of repentance, the people feared that this would be equivalent to enrollment in the order of penitents often delayed to the deathbed. Today, the sacrament of Holy Anointing in the Roman Church has been changed greatly by the Vatican II Council. This reform has emphasized two points: 1) It is not a sacrament of the dying, but of the sick; therefore, it has been opened to many more categories of people than before (*Catechism* 1514). 2) There has been a move to restore its public celebration. This is similar to the Byzantine celebration in Holy Week, except that the Roman Church holds to the principle that the person must actually be sick to receive the sacrament.

The Eastern Church did not go in the direction of making the Holy Anointing a sacramental mystery only for the dying. The rite of anointing would have been a penitential rite in ancient times because there was a popular connection of sin and sickness. However, the mod-

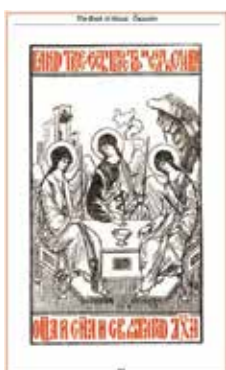
ern attitude is that sickness is no fault of our own, it is no shame and, therefore, should not require penance and absolution. Ancient people, though, often connected sin and sickness. Medical science has shown that there is no exact correspondence between sin and sickness after all; even the most holy person must grow sick and die, but many illnesses can be influenced very much by stress and style of life. It has also shown that people do have some mental control of the health and well-being of the body, even beyond the normal means of diet and exercise. The Anointing of the Sick, therefore, is considered a penitential ritual. After the anointing itself, the Gospel Book is imposed on the head of the faithful with a penitential prayer, that, in fact, can be numbered with the prayers of absolution. Saint Simeon of Thessalonica made a distinction concerning which sins may be forgiven in the sacramental mystery of anointing: “Among the seven mysteries, the holy anointing is most useful for sanctification, for the sick, as it has been handed down to us, and for all the faithful who approach the fearful mysteries (Communion), especially for all who fell into sins and have fulfilled the canonical penance (confessed mortal sins), and now approach to Communion, having been enabled by the spiritual father in the prayer of absolution. For the holy celebration and anointing with holy oil purifies sins, as the Brother of God (Saint James) wrote, and as the prayers of the priest agree.” (*Response to Gabriel Pentapolis*, PG 155:932.) **ECL**

### EASTERN CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS ANNOUNCES

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This edition of *The Book of the Hours* (Časoslov in Slavonic and *Horologion* in Greek) is an authentic and complete translation of the typical (official) Church Slavonic edition issued in 1950 by the Holy See of Rome for the Ruthenian Churches. The contents, pagination and layout match the original and include:

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## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

### A LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS: PSALM 8 AND HEBREWS 2

In the Epistle and Gospel passages chosen for the feast of Saint Michael and the Holy Angels (November 8), the emphasis seems not to be on angels at all. Admittedly angels are mentioned four times in the Epistle (Hebrews 2:2-10) but never actually in the spotlight. The Gospel (Luke 10:16-21) mentions demons, Satan, and (by implication, evil) “Spirits” but never specifically angels. In both Scripture passages, the emphasis is rather on humans.

Much of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews insists on the fact that Jesus Christ is superior to the angels. We may be surprised that even needs to be said, but it was hard for many of Jesus’ contemporaries to accept the fact that the Son of God could become so like us as to suffer even death. The Epistle quotes Psalm 8 to prove the point, asking God in awe, “What is man that You should remember him, the son of man that You should visit him. You made him for a little while lower than the angels, with glory and honor You have crowned him, subjecting all things

under his feet” (Psalm 8:5-7 as quoted by Hebrews 2:6-8).

While Psalm 8 read on its own may strike us as a celebration of God’s special plan and providence for all human beings, the Apostle applies the words specifically to Jesus. This inspired New Testament interpretation of an Old Testament passage hinges largely on the expression “son of man” (Psalm 8:5). In ordinary Hebrew and Aramaic, “son of man” normally means “human being.” However, the prophet Daniel’s amazing vision of “one like a son of man coming on the clouds of heaven” to be presented to God and to receive “dominion, honor and kingdom... and his kingdom will have no end (Daniel 7:13-14) adds a new dimension to this expression. Jesus habitually calls Himself “the Son of Man,” and His claim to be the person seen in Daniel’s vision seals his condemnation by the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:64).

Saint Paul describes Christ’s Incarnation and Passion as “emptying Himself” (Philippians 2:7); and

“therefore God highly exalted Him” (Philippians 2:9). The Epistle to the Hebrews expresses this same idea when it describes Jesus “made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). The world to come, Hebrews teaches, is not subject to angels (2:5) but rather to Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man (1 Corinthians 15:28).

God’s plan for us is greater than the remission of sin. Jesus desires no less than that we should share in His glory (John 17:1-5.22.24), just as Psalm 8:6 describes. When Jesus empowers His disciples to cast out evil spirits (Luke 10:17-20) they are already experiencing a bit of that shared glory – but “in Jesus’ name,” not in any power or virtue of their own. God’s plan is for us to surpass even the angels — at least in this: we are meant to enjoy heaven in glorified bodies, which the bodiless angels will never have.

So, Psalm 8 does celebrate the exalted position human beings hold in God’s plan after all, but it is only the Incarnation of God’s Son as man that enables us to attain to what God has planned for us. Psalm 8 is true for us only because it is first absolutely true for Jesus Christ.

Does all this talk about being “subject” and “crowning with glory and honor” sound familiar? We hear it in the sacramental mystery of Matrimony! The Epistle selection from Ephesians 5:20-33, now quite unfashionable, challenges all believers to be “subject to one another out of reverence for God,” while calling wives to “be subject to your husbands as to the Lord” and husbands to “love your wives as Christ loved the Church.” Both the husband and the wife are invited to imitate Christ’s subjection” and “self-emptying” so as to share in His glory. We may feel more than “a little lower than the angels” when the routine of washing dishes, changing diapers, and struggling to earn a living seems never to end. God’s word, as proclaimed in the Ritual of Matrimony, invites us to see even these humble tasks as a means of sacramental participation in the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection that leads to heavenly crowns of glory and honor. None of this has much to do with angels, but it has everything to do with us. **ECL**

## SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Father G. Scott Boghossian



### HEAVEN IS OUR TRUE HOME

By His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ accomplished your redemption. Now, through baptism, you are a new creation in Christ. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). You have been born again, born anew, born from above (Jn. 3:3).

In Christ, you are a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom, Zion, the New Jerusalem (Ps. 87). “You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

This world is not our home. We are aliens, exiles, pilgrims, and sojourners on planet earth. Like the Old Testament saints, we are “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). Saint Peter tells us we are “sojourners and exiles” (1 Pt. 2:11). “Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come” (Heb. 13:14).

Perfect happiness is impossible in this world. No matter how much we may acquire here on earth, we are never satisfied. “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord and our heart is restless until it rests in You,” says Saint Augustine. Only God satisfies.

Heaven is more wonderful than anything we can imagine. “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). To be in Heaven is to possess God. The essence of heavenly life is called “the beatific vision,” that is, to see God, to love Him, and to be perfectly united to Him forever.

While union with God is the essence of heavenly life, there are accessory joys as well. To be in Heaven is to be with Jesus Christ our Lord. Saint Paul tells us, “While we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord..., we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6, 8).

Saint Paul wanted to die and be with Jesus. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:21, 23). We will see Our Lady, the angels, and the saints there. Let us die and go to Heaven!

The lives and legends of the saints describe Heaven as a very real place with trees, fruit, fields, flowers, gemstones, and buildings.

Father von Cochem, in *The Four Last Things*, says that Saint Didacus, seeing into Heaven, cried out on his deathbed, “Oh the flowers of paradise, oh the flowers of paradise!”

The virgin martyr, Dorothea of Caesarea, (d. 311) had a basket of fruit and flowers sent from Heaven, which converted her pagan persecutor, Theophilus, to faith in Christ.

Saint Teresa of Avila reports receiving a necklace with a cross made out of the material of Heaven. “[Our Lady] seemed to throw round my neck a very beautiful gold collar, to which was fastened a most valuable cross. The gold and stones were so different from earthly things of the kind that no comparison between them is possible: their beauty is quite unlike anything that we can imagine and the understanding cannot soar high enough to comprehend the nature of the garment or to imagine the brightness of the vision which it was the Lord’s will to send me, and by comparison with which everything on earth looks, as one might say, like a smudge of soot” (Life, 33).

Heaven will reunite us with our family and friends who have left this life in sanctifying grace. Saint Cyprian writes,

“Why do we not hasten and run to behold our fatherland, in order to greet our parents? There a generous group of our dear ones awaits us; a numerous and swelling company of our parents, brothers, and children desires us.”

Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me” (Jn. 14:6). So “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12) and “strive to enter the narrow gate” (Lk. 13:24).

Go to confession, renew your baptismal promises, and start a new life today.

Say it now: “I renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his angels and all his service, and all his pride. I commit myself to Christ!”

“E.T., phone home!” In Christ, we are extra-terrestrials, and our home planet is Heaven. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

Heaven is our true home. **ECL**

# SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



## NOW ENTER INTO A HOLY SEASON

It seems to me that October has, more and more, turned into a season of darkness. On TV, in the secular world, the entire month is given over to the devil. It is all about scary movies and TV shows. For an entire month now, a local Roman Catholic parish has been advertising a fundraiser called “The Forest of Fear.” Hallowe’en parties with scary, frightening, and grotesque costumes are the centerpiece of the month. And most Catholic laypeople indulge in this as well as secular. I know there are those reading this who think I am going over the top, and saying, “Father, it’s all in fun! Loosen up!” And that, frankly, proves my point that Catholic understanding of All Hallows’ Eve (except for more traditional Catholics) has turned from being the eve before the Western celebration of All Saints into the beginning of the season of self-indulgence, whether it’s children with their obsession with candy and other treats, or adults dressing up and partying. What a poor way for Catholics, East and West, to prepare for the celebration of All Saints. Although it falls on deaf ears, I appreciate the fact that Eastern All Saints is the Sunday after Pentecost; at least the saints can be properly celebrated without interference from the world.

Come November, we can now scrape the mud of October aside. We enter into a holy month – at least the Eastern Church does. With November, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Archangel Michael and all the Heavenly Hosts (November 8), the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple (November 21), and prepare ourselves to enter into the time of Saint Philip’s Fast and the Advent season (November 15 until Christmas Day).

Angels are an integral part of the Christian life. In the Eastern Churches we acknowledge their role in our daily lives, and even identify ourselves mystically with them in our liturgical life. Our lives begin with the baptismal prayer which includes the line, “During (his-her) lifetime, give (him-her) the companionship of an angel of light to rescue (him-her) from every snare lying in (his-her) path, from the encounter of the evil one, from the noon-day demon and every evil imagination” (The Rite of Christian Initiation). In our Morn-

ing Prayers there may be this prayer, which I learned during my time in seminary: “O holy Angel of Christ! In homage I come to you, my holy guardian who, since my baptism, has been assigned to me to protect my body and



Icon of Saint Michael the Archangel

soul. I beseech your powerful intercession. I have often offended you by my indolence and bad habits. You are without stain in your glory, and I have often driven you away by my sins. I pray and beseech you, most holy guardian, be merciful to me, your sinful and unworthy servant. Be my defender and aid me against my enemies. Through your intercession, make me worthy to be a partaker of the kingdom of God with all the saints forever. Amen.” During our Divine Liturgy, we constantly identify ourselves with the angels, who celebrate the heavenly liturgy: “Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second liv-

ing creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and

ness...” We even have symbolism in the liturgical role of our deacons, from the flowing of their orarion reminiscent of angels’ wings, to their moving from the Holy of Holies (the Altar) to the Holy Place (the Nave), being a symbol of angels moving between heaven and earth (cf. Gen. 28:12, John 1:51). So, angels are with us, every waking moment and while we sleep, while we worship and while we work or play. “Leaders of God’s armies and ministers of divine glory, commanders of angels and guides of mortals, plead on our behalf for what we need and for great mercy, since you are the leaders of the heavenly host” (Kontakion for the Feast).

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple is an historical feast. According to Tradition, the Theotokos was taken – presented – by her parents Joachim and Anna into the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem as a young girl, where she lived and served as a Temple virgin until her betrothal to Saint Joseph. One of the earliest sources of this tradition is the non-canonical *Proto-evangelion of James*, also called the *Infancy Gospel of James*. Mary was solemnly received by the temple community, which was headed by the priest Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. She was led to the holy place to become herself the “holy of holies” of God, the living sanctuary and temple of the Divine Child who was to be born in her. The Church also sees this feast as a feast which marks the end of the physical temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. Many hymns are offered for the Vespers and Matins of this feast, but I will offer only one for you here, which highlights the glory of the Theotokos replacing the glory of the Temple: “O faithful, let us leap for joy today, singing psalms and hymns of praise in honor of Mary, His Mother, the holy Tabernacle and Ark that contained the Word Whom nothing can contain. She is offered to God as a child in a marvelous way, and Zechariah the high priest receives her with great joy, for she is the dwelling place of the Most High” (Vespers, At Psalm 40). How fitting that we celebrate this feast in the midst of the Philippian Fast as a deeper preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. **ECL**

night without ceasing they sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.’” (Rev. 4:6-8). “Let us, who mystically represent the cherubim, and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now set aside all earthly cares., that we may receive the King of All, invisibly escorted by angelic hosts. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!” (The Cherubic Hymn). We acknowledge that they are worshipping with us at the priest’s prayer at the Entrance with the Gospel Book: “O Lord, our Master and God, Who established orders and armies of angels and archangels for the service of your glory in heaven, make this our entrance an entrance of holy angels, concelebrating with us and glorifying Your good-

### EASTERN CATHOLIC LIFE (USPS 165-600) (ISSN 0894-9786)

Official Publication of the  
Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic  
Subscription Rate: \$15.00 per year.

News and Photo Services:  
Member of the Catholic Press Association of America.

Published monthly by the  
*Eastern Catholic Press Association*  
445 Lackawanna Avenue

Woodland Park, NJ 07424  
Phone: 973-890-7777  
Fax: 973-890-7175

Postage paid at Little Falls, NJ, and additional office at  
Bellmawr, NJ.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
**Eastern Catholic Life**  
445 Lackawanna Avenue  
Woodland Park, NJ 07424

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# Crowned in Love

## A Byzantine Pre-Cana Program



Sponsored by the Syncellate for the State of New Jersey  
 Saturday, February 10, 2024, 9AM to 4PM, Via Zoom

You bring the gifts that Jesus Christ will transform to make your relationship a sacrament where He Himself is present. Discover how the "ordinary" ways you share your life as a couple and a family can participate in this mystery.

Couples planning to marry before spring 2025 are urged to attend. The cost is \$75.00 payable to St Michael's Cathedral Syncellate at time of registration.

### Presenters



Father Thomas Shubeck, PhD: After many years of diaconal ministry at St Thomas the Apostle parish in Rahway and at Seton Hall University Fr. Thomas was ordained to the priesthood in December 2021. Much of his more than 30 years as a licensed psychologist has been spent providing therapy services to married couples and families. He is the husband of Caroline and the father of Adriana and John.



Michael and Lisann Castagno were married in 1994 and have three daughters. They have been involved in marriage preparation and youth ministry in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for many years, speaking especially about the beauty of God's design for marriage, by proclaiming the good news of Natural Family Planning.

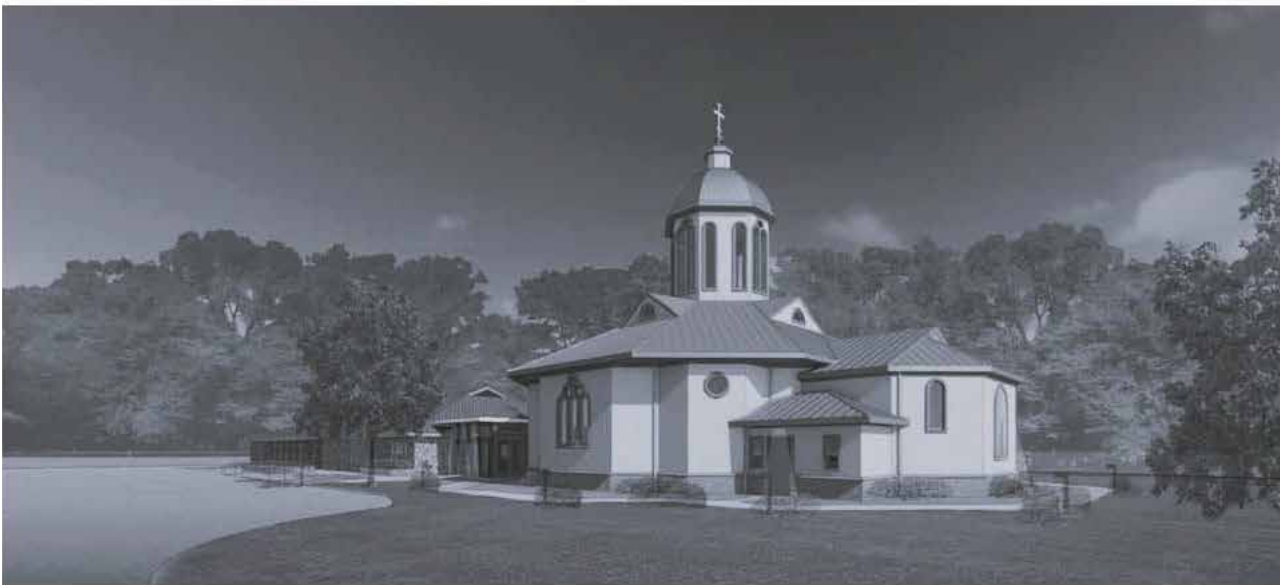


Ann Koshute, MTS, earned a Master's degree at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Washington DC. She teaches theology at St Joseph's College of Maine and co-founded Springs in the Desert, an infertility support ministry. She and her husband Keith have been married for 10 years.



Father Jack Custer has delighted in preparing couples for marriage over four decades of priesthood. He holds degrees in Scripture and Theology and currently serves as Rector of St Michael's Cathedral.

For more information, contact St. Michael's Cathedral Office at 973-777-2553 or [passaiccathedral@gmail.com](mailto:passaiccathedral@gmail.com)



New Building arriving in 2023

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Blessed Basil Hopko  
 Byzantine Catholic Mission  
 3059 SC Highway 90  
 Conway, SC  
 All Liturgies will start at 10 AM.  
 Follow us on Facebook for any schedule changes.

## UPCOMING EPARCHIAL AND PARISH EVENTS

### Eastern Catholic Life

Circulation Department  
 445 Lackawanna Avenue  
 Woodland Park, NJ 07424

Next Issue:  
 December, 2023

Copy Deadline:  
 November 24, 2023  
 The current issue of the ECL was printed at Evergreen Printing, Bellmawr, NJ, and was distributed from the U.S. Post Office via second class mailing in Bellmawr, NJ.

### NOVEMBER, 2023

- 2-5 Metropolitan Assembly  
*Saint Mary Church, Hillsborough, NJ*
- 8 Holy Archangel Michael and All Holy Bodiless Powers of Heaven  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 14 Christmas Fast/Filipovka  
*Begins at sundown*
- 21 Entrance of the Virgin Theotokos into the Temple  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 23 Thanksgiving Day  
*Civic holiday \* chancery closed Nov. 23-24*

### DECEMBER, 2023

- 6 Our Holy Father Nicholas the Wonderworker  
*Solemn Holy Day*

- 8 Maternity of the Holy Anna  
*Solemn Holy Day*
- 17 Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
- 24 Sunday of the Holy Fathers
- 25 HOLY NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST  
*Holy Day of Obligation*

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:

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