



NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

Feast Day September 8

By Father Joseph Bertha

The icon which is used for the Birth of the Theotokos on September 8th, is basically similar in style to another “birth” icon, that of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Saint Ann lies on a sofa couchette after having given birth, wearing a deep red colored *maphorion* (veil). This color subtly stresses her virginity referring to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God (celebrated on December 8, nine months prior to the Virgin’s birth).

Saint Joachim is found off to the side. He does not actively participate in the deeds of birth giving, but is present nonetheless. Handmaidens, off to one side, administer the first bath to the newborn Theotokos. Sometimes, in conjunction with the birth, the first seven steps of the Virgin are depicted. Invariably, the young Virgin wears a deep red colored *maphorion*. The stars of Virginity, each typically eight pointed, reiterate her maidenhood, she has one on her forehead, and two on either shoulder.

However, a major divergence occurs in the location of the scene: the Theotokos is born inside of a house, indicated by the drapery stretched between the two towers in the background of the scene, whereas the Nativity of Our Lord takes place inside a cave. The draped curtain is stretched between two towers and demonstrates the inverse perspective found in many icons.

Inverse perspective, a concept first coined by the art historian Oskar Wulff in 1907, means that the icon focuses inside the viewer of the icon, outside of the actual icon, and inside the soul of the person praying in front of the icon. This is the reason why figures are stretched, and architecture is contorted. Both the figures and the architecture in the scene of the icon envelope or embrace

the viewer. The concept of inverse perspective is in direct contradistinction to Western religious painting which typically employs linear perspective - where a vanishing point exists in the horizon of the image. I contend that not only does the icon use inverse perspective as one of its characteristics, but that they are mul-

tiperspectival – that is, an icon can be viewed from many perspectives simultaneously. These perspectives include: the inverse perspective which focuses on the spiritual, the physical or temporal per-

spective, prayer perspective, the threshold of eternity perspective. Both the cave and the house in the birth icons resonate with meaning from the Old Testament prefigurements of the Holy Mother of God. There are some thirteen to fifteen prefigurements of the

in Ezechiel 44:2 “he said to me: This gate is to remain closed; it is not to be opened for anyone to enter by it; since the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it, it shall remain closed,” and the Palace which Wisdom has built, the elaborate walls, turrets, towers and columns found in the background of the icon comes from Proverbs 9:1: “Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven columns.”

Interestingly, these Scriptural prefigurements are depicted in the Birth of the Mother of God icon. Since Saint Ann gives birth to her daughter inside of the House, (there is dispute among the church fathers as to whether her birth took place in Nazareth or Bethlehem), columns are depicted in the background, sometimes even numbering seven. The mystical number of seven represents the seven virtues. The Virgin was born with all of these. Sometimes, her birth scene is paired with her taking her first seven steps as at the *Kariye Djami* (Chora Church) mosaic from the fourteenth century. This indicates the life of virtue with which the Holy Mother was born! This is due to her Immaculate Conception by Saints Joachim and Ann.

Even at her birth the Virgin represents the fullness of the virtuous life. Virtues are the various Gifts of the Holy Spirit and are attributes of God Himself. They are the characteristics of Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God in human flesh, the flesh of the Virgin Mary. These divine gifts are present in creation by the gift of God of salvation in Jesus Christ. We express this in the Ambon prayer in the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom “for every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” (James 1:17) On this feast we celebrate and honor the Birth of the Virgin Mother who possesses these gifts which include: Faith, Hope, Charity, Knowledge, Wisdom, Honesty, Humility, Obedience, Patience, Courage, Faithfulness, Self-control, Kindness, Gratitude. **ECL**



Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos

Holy Virgin in the Old Testament. Two images which are frequently portrayed in the icon of the Virgin’s birth are: the Closed Gate, depicted as a closed gate in the background of the icon and found

The girls grew spiritually through liturgy, prayer, learning new hymns, and engaging conversations that encouraged growth in the faith. Fun-filled activities included outdoor games, water balloon fights, crafts, movie night and constructing their own prayer boxes. A highlight of the camp was a day trip to Aquatopia Water Park.



CAMP THEOTOKOS 2024

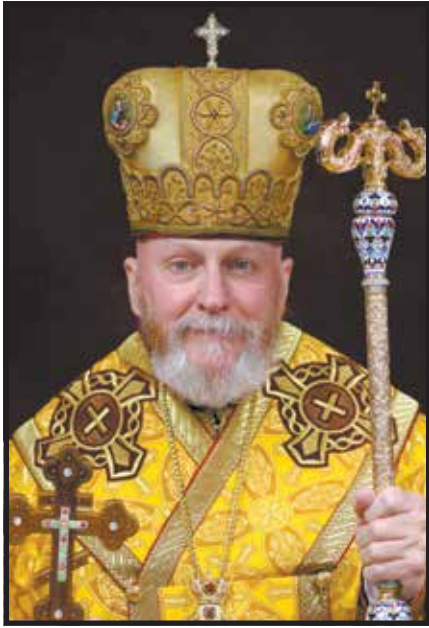
The 2024 Carpathian Village summer season welcomed its first group of campers during the second week of

July. Camp Theotokos hosted young girls from six parishes of our Eparchy, with this year’s theme being *Women in the Church*.

Father Taras Lovska served as the director of Camp Theotokos, assisted by Father Roman Vasylynka and Deacon Robert Behrens Jr. Camp counselors

included Martha Hanson-Dietz, Cantor Patricia Dietz, Mariia Remitska, Lynn Grayeske, Darby O’Neill and Mariya Kovach. Father Michael Salnicky and his assistant Miss J prepared our delicious homemade meals. We had a special guest visit by Right Reverend Archpriest James G. Hayer, Protocyncellus of Eparchy of Passaic.

Our week together at Camp Theotokos was both spiritually enlightening and enjoyable and we hope to welcome even more campers next year!



I LIFT UP MY EYES

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt



TRIP TO UZHOROD FOR THE ORDINATION OF BISHOP TEODOR MATSUPULA

Below: Sede Vacante—Bishop Milan Šašik was the shepherd of the Eparchy of Mukachevo/Uzhhorod from 2002 until his untimely death on July 14, 2020. He ordained 195 priests and consecrated 269 churches and chapels. He was truly a successor to the apostles. The Eparchy of Passaic was a major financial support to our mother Church since its re-legalization 35 years ago. After the death of Bishop Šašik, the Cathedra remained empty for over four years, while Bishop Nil Lashchuk administered the Eparchy.



Above: On July 11, all three of our Byzantine Catholic bishops in the United States flew to eastern Europe for the consecration of our new bishop, Vladyko Teodor Matsupula. Archbishop Skurla and Bishop Pipta flew on British Air from Pittsburgh through London. Bishop Kurt flew from Newark on Lufthansa because he likes to fly on a 747 while it is still possible. Most airlines phased out their last 747's during Covid, but Lufthansa still flies the Queen of the Skies from Newark to Frankfurt. The three bishops met in Budapest and drove to Uzhorod on July 12.



Above: Pilgrimage at Tyachiv. On Saturday July 13, Bishop Kurt and Bishop Robert attended the Pilgrimage of Nations at Tyachiv. In every direction, there were priests hearing confessions. People stood in line to visit the icon of the Theotokos to present their petitions, and to leave their heartaches with the Mother of God.



Above: Dinner at Tyachiv. After the Divine Liturgy, the clergy and their families gathered at the parish for a meal together. Bishop Kurt preached at the Divine Liturgy at the pilgrimages, both Saturday and Sunday.



Above: Horyanska Rotunda — This fresco from the 1300's is an unusual depiction of the Annunciation. At the top, God the Father is blessing and sending the infant Jesus, right behind the Holy Spirit, to the womb of the Blessed Virgin. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God."



Above: Some thirty years ago, our bishops and many of our priests visited Uzhhorod for the relegalization of our Church after the atheistic communist rule. In this photo, left to right, Bishop Dudick, Metropolitan Archbishop Kocisko, and Bishop Dolinay are present. Fathers Michael Popson is visible over the shoulder of Archbishop Kocisko.



Our Cathedral was returned to us after communism. Much later, the bishop's residence was returned because it was made into a secular college. The bishop's chapel was painted by Bokshay. Here you can see the Bokshay art being restored in the chapel.

Right: Cappuccino. A great many Ukrainians worked in western Europe after the fall of iron curtain, often cleaning hotels and other menial work. The workers in Italy brought back the love of good coffee, and so good coffee is now popular everywhere in eastern Europe.





Above: The Consecrators. On Monday, we gathered in Uzhhorod Cathedral for Vespers to prepare for the Consecration of Vladyka Teodor. On the left is Bishop Nil Lushchak who administered the Eparchy for over four years since the death of Bishop Šašik. In the center is the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ivano-Frankisk, Volodymyr Vityshyn, who also ordained Teodor as a priest on February 10, 2008. On the right is Jonáš Maxim, M.S.U., the recently consecrated Metropolitan Archbishop of Prešov.



Above: Nuns in the Cathedral Gallery — Bishop Teodor is a member of a relatively new religious order called “The Institute of the Incarnate Word”. Founded in Argentina on March 25, 1984, they work primarily with the poor and the youth. In Spanish it is “Istituto del Verbo Encarnado”, so Bishop Teodoro writes “I.V.E.” after his name. He is the first member of the order to become a bishop, so many members of the order attended with great joy. Bishop Teodor worked inside Russia until the war started in February of 2014. When he moved to Zakarpatya in 2014, he never imagined the plan God had for him there.



Above: Father Nicholas Bagirov served as the Archdeacon of the Eparchy for many years. He chauffeured Bishop Šašik, was the Deacon and Master of Ceremonies at all of the Liturgies, and made sure everything ran smoothly for the tireless bishop. He was always efficient and good humored. After Šašik’s death, he was ordained as a celibate priest and serves as a Chaplain in the most dangerous parts of the warfront. He presented the new bishop with this corpus from a crucifix from a church destroyed by bombing.



Above: At Vespers, the new Bishop confessed his belief in the Catholic Faith to the other bishops present, especially to the three principal co-consecrators. All three of these bishops have conducted countless funerals for the young men killed in battle, now totaling more than 70,000 for the Ukrainians.



Above: Sede Plena — After four years as an empty see, Vladyka Teodor Matsapula I.V.E. sits on the Cathedra of our mother church, established for us in 1771. Although our Church existed in some manner since the Union of Uzhhorod in 1646 and even had bishops, there was no eparchy or diocese until the decree of Maria Theresa, the Holy Roman Empress, subsequently approved by Pope Clement XIV. Pope Clement is best known for suppressing the Jesuit order or Society of Jesus. It is a custom at the Gregorian University in Rome for a graduate to present a rose at the tomb of Pope Clement in the nearby church.



Above: Just before the Consecration, the Laying on of Hands or Cheirotonia, Teodor is led around the altar still dressed as a Presbyter. Metropolitan Archbishop William Skurla and Archbishop Cyril Vasil accompany him. At the ordination of a deacon, priest, or bishop, the candidate circles the altar three times, first kissing the seated bishop three times, then kissing the four corners of the altar.



Above: Storks at Sunset — Unlike the wealthy western countries, despite their hardships, the good people of Zakarpatya are still pro-life. At sunset, storks wait on a rooftop for the night’s work delivering babies.

May the Byzantine Chapel be a living and lasting witness to our love and devotion to the Mother of God. May the dedication of our Metropolitan Province to her under the title of her "Holy Protection" assure us of her maternal care and intercession.

Given this sixth day of October, 1974, in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC.

+ Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko
Metropolitan Archbishop of Pittsburgh
+Bishop Michael J. Dudick, Bishop of Passaic +Bishop Emil J. Mihalik, Bishop of Parma



More information and register online:

www.byzantine100.com

A DUAL ANNIVERSARY
**CENTENNIAL - BISHOP FOR THE US
GOLDEN JUBILEE – BYZANTINE CHAPEL**

Saturday, October 12, 2024
Basilica of the National Shrine
Washington, DC

- 9:00 AM Welcome and Orientation for Pilgrims Great Upper Church
- 10:30 AM Hierarchical Divine Liturgy
- 12:00 PM Lunch Shrine Cafeteria
- 1:15 PM Moleben to the Mother of God Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel
- 3:00 PM Panachida-Deceased Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Religious, Benefactors of the Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel, and Christ's Faithful Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel

Pilgrims will have time to visit the chapels of the Basilica, the Gift Shop, the Bookstore, and for personal prayer. Sacrament of Penance (Confession) is available at the Confession Chapel 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, 3:00 pm-5:00pm.

In firm hope that on the foundation of the will of our Savior and the spirit of the Holy Mother Church, with cooperating work it will be possible for us to build up our Greek Rite Catholic Eparchy, in the free land of the United States of America, for the glory of Almighty God and the salvation of all our dear faithful.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."

Your humble Father in Christ.



+ Basil Takach, Bishop.
September 30, 1924.

A DUAL ANNIVERSARY
**CENTENNIAL - BISHOP FOR THE US
GOLDEN JUBILEE – BYZANTINE CHAPEL**

Saturday, October 12, 2024
Sunday, October 13, 2024
Epiphany of our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church
Annandale, VA

- 6:00 pm Festive Banquet Parish Center Hall, Epiphany of our Lord Church
- Sunday, October 13, 2024**
- 10:00 am Sunday Divine Liturgy Epiphany of our Lord Church
- 12:00 PM Luncheon Parish Center Hall, Epiphany of our Lord Church

Banquet and/or Luncheon Reservations required.
Make reservations and credit card or Google Pay at byzantine100.com
or phone Epiphany office 703-573-1584 for reservations, credit card or check.

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Father James Badeaux, *Editor*
Father Ronald Hatton, *Associate Editor*
Father Lewis Rabayda, *Layout Editor*
Mrs. Maureen French, *Circulation Editor* (mfrench@eparchyofpassaic.com)
E-Mail us at:
ECL@eparchyofpassaic.com
Eparchial Website:
www.EparchyofPassaic.com

ALTAR SERVER CONGRESS 2024

Article written by Bohdan Budash of Resurrection Church, Smithtown, New York

This year's Altar Server Congress was attended by 38 altar servers from across the eparchy; a record number of campers participated at this year's camp. Throughout the 5 days, the servers had opportunities to learn great

joyed playing games, going on a trip to the Aquatopia Waterpark at Camelback Resort, as well as enjoying the delicious meals cooked by Father Michael Salnicky and his *kitchen angels*. The altar servers had amazing opportunities for



life-long lessons about the Byzantine Catholic faith and serving at the altar. They met new friends and reestablished relationships from years past. They en-

joyed playing games, going on a trip to the Aquatopia Waterpark at Camelback Resort, as well as enjoying the delicious meals cooked by Father Michael Salnicky and his *kitchen angels*. The altar servers had amazing opportunities for



by Father Lewis Rabayda (Camp Spiritual Director) and accompanied by the choir of passionate junior cantors at the camp.

“Fear not, for I am with you!” – Isaiah 41:10

This well-known quote from the Old Testament has become one of the major themes at this year's Altar Server Congress, along with becoming great leaders. As taught by Deacon Stephen Russo (Camp Director), “Let your strength come from Him who upholds us all. Trust in his presence in your lives at all times, and be assured that He will guide and empower you to serve with grace, courage, and joy as you fulfill your duties and live your faith.” In the modern world, it is the role of the youth to protect and stand up for our faith.

Besides the waterpark and the delicious meals, altar servers had the wonderful opportunity to serve at the Basilica and Shrine of Saint Ann in Scranton, PA, where they took part in the celebra-

tion of the Divine Liturgy, serving with Bishop Kurt and other priests and deacons from the eparchy. Later that week, Bishop Kurt also visited the Carpathian Village in the Pocono Mountains to again celebrate the Divine Liturgy with the altar servers, and join them for a flavorful lunch afterward. Energized, the servers returned to their home parishes until next year.



ONLINE CHURCH SINGING CLASSES BY METROPOLITAN CANTOR INSTITUTE

The Metropolitan Cantor Institute offers an online, 2-year program in church singing for both new and experienced cantors. Tuition is \$75 for each eight-week class, which includes feedback to help you improve your singing and cantorial skills. Initial classes on liturgy and church singing are free. For details: <https://mci.archpitt.org/classes> or call Deacon Jeffrey Mierzejewski at (412) 735-1676. Classes are offered at no charge to qualified students from any parish with no current cantor.

Eastern Catholic Life New Subscription Rate

Beginning July 1, 2024, the Eastern Catholic Life subscription rate will increase to \$20.00. There has not been a rate increase since March of 2013, and in that time postage rates have increased several times, as has the cost of production.

SLAVIC AMERICAN FESTIVAL
Sunday, September 8, 2024
12 Noon til' 6:00 P.M.
 Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church

SEASONAL REFLECTIONS

Father Ronald Hatton



ENTERING THE NEW YEAR

With the beginning of September, we enter into a new liturgical year. Unlike our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, who begin their liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent, our calendar is based on the beginning of the year according to the civil calendar of the Byzantine Empire. One of the comforting things for me about how our liturgical year is set up is that the first big feast of the year is the Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8), and the last big feast is the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15). I like to say that our life is enveloped by the life of the blessed Mother of God, in that the beginning and end of the year are highlighted by her birth and death.

September also gives us the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, an historical feast commemorating the finding of the true Cross by Saint Helena

and the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was built on that site in Jerusalem. So, in a kind of synchronicity, we ended the previous year with Christ's Transfiguration and the Dormition of His Mother and open the year with her Nativity and then the Exaltation of the very cross upon which Christ died for our salvation! In that sense, August to September is truly a blessed time for us.

In the same way as Mary's death and assumption are not a part of Holy Scripture, but are a part of the Tradition of the Church, so, too, is her birth. It is set down for us in the *Proto-Evangelion of James*, a work dating from the second century AD. The story tells of how her parents, Joachim and Anna, were childless for many years. They remained faithful to God, but their prayers for a child were unanswered. One day, when

Joachim came to the temple to make an offering, he was turned away by the High Priest who chastised him for his lack of children. To hide his shame, Joachim retreated to the hill country to live among the shepherds and their flocks.

As Joachim was praying, his wife, Anna, was praying at the same time at their house in Jerusalem. An angel appeared to both of them and announced that Anna would have a child whose name would be known throughout the world. Anna promised to offer her child as a gift to the Lord. Joachim returned home and, in due time, Anna bore a daughter, Mary. Although the hymns for the feast accentuate this aspect, one hymn at the Litija at the Vespers for the Feast strikes me particularly:

Today is the beginning of our salvation, O people; for behold, the Mother and Virgin who was chosen from all generations to be the habitation of God is born and comes forth from the barren one. She is the flower from Jesse and possesses the rod from his root. May our forefather Adam rejoice and be full of joy; for behold, she who was created from the rib of Adam declares that her daughter and descendent is blessed. She says: My deliverance has been born to me. Through her, I will be freed from the bonds of Hades. May David rejoice, play on his harp, and bless God; for behold, the Virgin comes forth from the womb of a barren woman for the salvation of our souls.

With the birth of the Mother of God, we begin our celebration of the salvation of all Mankind. God's promise to us begin to find fulfillment.

If this weren't enough, we next celebrate the finding and exaltation of the Cross by which that salvation is realized. Again, many hymns are sung in honor of this feast, but I will offer one to you here:

By its elevation, the Cross is like an appeal to the whole creation. We adore the blessed passion of Christ our God Who was suspended on it. By this Cross, Christ destroyed the one who had destroyed us. In His great goodness, He brought us back to life after we had been dead. In His mercy He clothed us with beauty and made us worthy of heaven. Therefore, we exalt His name with great rejoicing and glorify His infinite condescension.

This feast is not merely a remembrance of an historical event but is a celebration of the sacrifice on that Cross and a celebration of that salvation which began with the previous feast.

There are two times in the Byzantine Church where the Cross is placed at the center of our celebrations: The Veneration of the Cross on the Third Sunday of the Great Fast, and the Exaltation this month. Maybe it is no coincidence that these two celebrations occur about six months apart, as the Church, in her wisdom, gives us these two reminders of the centrality of the Cross to our salvation, and the reminder of our Lord that, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). In Mary we see how we are to work out our salvation, and by the Cross we see the fulfillment of that salvation. All praise be to God! **ECL**

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the Eparchy of Passaic Present:

The Byzantine Catholic Experience



Saturday,
September
14th @St.
Thomas the
Apostle,
Rahway NJ

Open to all young adults (18-35)

Event Schedule

- 3:00 - Social
- 3:30 - Talk by Fr. Joseph Loya, OSA/Q&A
- 4:30 - Silent prayer/ Confession
- 5:00 - Divine Liturgy
- 6:00 - Optional Dinner

Register here:



For more information, contact:
FatherTomByz@gmail.com or
facebook.com/theosisinaction

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MONEY & POSSESSIONS

By Father Michael J. Salnicky



THE LURE, DANGER, AND FAILURE OF OPM

Protopresbyter visits are eye-opening. During the visitation of one of our parishes last year I noticed that the pastor included in the weekly bulletin the donations that came in every week but failed to include the bills. In examining that week's Sunday Bulletin, I remarked to him about the collection, which was about \$3,200 for that Sunday, and asked him if it was a good collection. He said it was "very good," above normal, and seemed pleased. I then ran the annual profit and loss for the parish and showed him that he needed a minimum of \$4,800 each and every week just to meet his normal operating expenses. This did not include repairs and unplanned for emergencies. The savings account was being used to make up the difference for those normal operating expenses and, if continued at that present rate, in five years the parish would be bankrupt. His eyes were opened and a humble and painful

report and plea to the parish family was prepared.

A parish is like any other household when it comes to income, bills, and the end of month reality. Full financial disclosure to the parish family lets them know what is needed. As one called to the priesthood of Christ part of that priesthood is necessarily proper stewardship of the parish funds. Full financial disclosure ensures proper stewardship of those parish funds. Teaching about Christian stewardship is another important part of the priesthood. We all had it preached to us that Christian stewardship is the giving of our time, talent, and treasure to God and His Church. Our good people were very generous in giving of their time and talent to parish fundraising efforts. For many years our parishes survived, and thrived, on O.P.M. — *Other People's Money* — through pirohi and kolachi

sales, annual festivals and bazaars, flea markets, roast beef, chicken BBQ or stuffed cabbage dinners, and that bastion of Catholic fundraising: BINGO!

Sadly, those days are gone! Just as opium is a drug that derails personal responsibility, so too O.P.M. became the financial drug that was used to excuse folks from personal financial responsibility — the 'treasure' in time, talent, and treasure — for their parish. Now, however, the members of our various parish families must adopt the methods used by many of our mission parishes throughout the country, especially in the west — the concept of weekly tithing combined with sacrificial giving to meet the financial demands of the parish. In these mission parish bulletins full financial disclosure of all income and expenses is made. The result is that the members of that mission parish family consider it a personal respon-

sibility to examine that weekly report, give suggestions, and adjust their financial support to meet the need.

The truth is most go beyond that need because of the love they have for their parish family and the opportunity and responsibility they accept of sharing our beautiful Byzantine Catholic Faith to those in need of hearing the Good News through our liturgical traditions and spiritual fellowship. This was clearly revealed in the Byzantine Catholic National Assembly held last November at Saint Mary Parish in Hillsborough, NJ. That must now be the goal of all of our parishes if we are to survive, and thrive, as the Byzantine Catholic Church in America.

Glory to Jesus Christ! **ECL**



LIFE, LOVE, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

By Ann M. Koshute, MTS

ARE YOU AN ATM CHRISTIAN?

As a young adult I remember how exciting it was to get my first MAC card (that was so long ago I can't even remember what those letters meant). This was the original bank card, and it gave those who had one the ability to go to a machine anytime of day or night to withdraw money from their account. As I remember it, there were strict limits on the amount allowed per transaction, but the ability to pull up to a MAC machine on the way to the mall, or before heading out for dinner and drinks, was life-altering. Nowadays, the idea of the MAC machine is a bit quaint. Today we can still pull up to what is now called an ATM and withdraw larger amounts of cash. But we can also use our cell phones to make purchases in stores, or even transfer cash from our bank account to someone else's using their phone number or email address. What seemed a lot like "magic" in the 1980's and 90's is part of what we expect today: instant fulfillment of a need.

My recent participation in Vespers at my parish had me thinking about the MAC machines of my younger days, and how often I go out of my way to find an ATM that won't charge me a fee, on those rare occasions I need to have cash on hand. Stay with me on this; I promise there's a connection.

At Saint Ann Parish in Harrisburg, we usually have a full liturgical schedule

throughout the week. Father Taras has been doing his best to both invite and challenge the faithful to pray more, become a closer family, and learn to live liturgically. Of course, we all go to church weekly and on holy days, and keep the fasts called for by the Church. But all the "extras" — I mean, we're leading busy lives out here in the world, and all those services and prayers outside of Divine Liturgy are mostly for monks, nuns, and priests anyway. After all, praying is their job. Besides, there's no obligation to pray Vespers, Matins, or other services outside of the Liturgy, right? Even as I type these words the realization dawns on me: I might be an ATM Christian.

For many of us, including me, practicing our faith and cultivating a prayer life can become automatic rather than authentic. It's way too easy to treat the Liturgy and our relationship with the Lord as "drive-through experiences," pulling up to get something, then moving on to whatever is next. The ATM is a machine, programmed to give us what we need if we use the card issued to us and input the correct information. We perform the required actions and expect to receive what we ask for in return; and if there's a problem with our card or the machine is broken, we go away frustrated. There's no point going to the ATM if you can't get anything out of it, is there? If we adopt this utili-

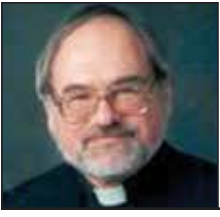
tarian attitude toward God, our prayer and liturgical life is only worthwhile if we get something in return. We might be able to go along that way for a while — or a lifetime — but it's an approach to faith that will ultimately leave us empty.

Too often in my faith walk I have sought "experiences" that gave some return on the investment of my time and energy. I've always loved the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts, which we pray during the Great Fast. For the longest time it was my only experience of praying any part of Vespers, because in the end I got something from it: the Eucharist. Uh oh, here we are again: that dangerous territory of "the ATM Christian." What I need, how I will get it, what it will require of me to come away with what I want — me, me, I, I. Prayer, worship, liturgy, community, all about me. If this is how I approach my relationship with God, then He really does become my personal ATM, a machine that is programmed to accept only what's required of me, and from which I expect to something. Any more effort needed from me, anything less than what I am obligated to do, and I'm more than likely going to just keep driving through. I have things to do, after all.

Now I want to invite you to examine your own prayer life, your attitude toward worship and the Holy Mysteries. This is a very personal reflection, one

that each of us must do for ourselves. And it's not about whether we hit a certain number of extra services outside of Sunday Liturgy, or meticulously count the hours spent in prayer during a given week. If God isn't an ATM, He is surely not a bank manager with a ledger, measuring us in terms of profit and loss. God wants us, wants a relationship with us, wants to pour out His merciful love on us. But if we stay with the bank analogy (clumsy as it is), it's not just "free money." God loves us freely and with abandon, but it is — as we pray in the Liturgy — proper and just for us to worship and glorify Him. He is our God — Creator, Redeemer, the One who holds all things in being and Who has created us for far more than the fleeting glimpses of pleasure and happiness we find on this earth. The cliché that "it is in giving that we receive" is a good summary of what our relationship with God should be: that by giving ourselves to God through worship, encounters with Him in the Holy Mysteries, and a life of love and sacrifice, we receive back infinitely more from Him.

If you have the tendency toward being an ATM Christian, it's okay. God's grace and mercy is available anytime. Just don't rely on the drive-through. **ECL**



THE BYZANTINE LITURGY

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

MARRIAGE AND HOLY COMMUNION

Because Communion is “the mystery of mysteries,” all other sacramental mysteries are joined to it, not only ideally, but in actual practice. In the fifteenth century, Saint Simeon of Thessalonica wrote, “Holy Communion is the perfection of every sacrament and the seal of every mystery.” The noted Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov, especially emphasized this point. For him, the Eucharist is not simply one sacrament among others, but the sacrament and the Church itself, from which the sacramental life of the Church flows as from a source. He wrote: “Where the Eucharist is celebrated, there is the Church, and whoever is a member of the Church takes part in it, for in the Eucharist is Christ – the true promise that was made – with us until the end of time.”

Because the Eucharistic Liturgy has become “the service” in the Roman Church, eclipsing the Divine Office, some wishing an Eastern liturgical

restoration have rejected the union of sacraments with the Divine Liturgy as a “latinization.” This especially affects the proposal for the union of marriages with the Liturgy as seen in the official books published by the Ruthenian Metropolitan Province. However, this opinion does not correspond with the tradition of the Church. Every sacrament was practically joined to the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the case of marriage, it appears that presanctified Communion was an essential part of the ritual. Early Christian marriage was simply the reception of Communion at the Sunday Liturgy by the newly married spouses after some sort of home ritual. Later, marriage was completed by the celebration of a Presanctified Liturgy, not to be confused, with the penitential Lenten Liturgy, but was a special rite designed just for marriage. In fact, the remark of Saint Simeon of Thessalonica on Holy Communion as the perfection of every

sacrament was made in the context of marriage. Saint Theodore the Studite also wrote, “The head and perfection of the union is the holy and one body and blood of Christ.” (Letter 50) The common cup that is a part of the Byzantine marriage ritual may have been originally the cup of unconsecrated wine that was used for the distribution of Communion, though most liturgists today believe that it has a separate symbolism of the sharing of the lives of the husband and wife. Every sacramental mystery was joined to a rite of Communion. In every case, this was the Divine Liturgy except for marriage, which was joined to a special Presanctified Liturgy.

From the facts of this liturgical practice, we can state the following principle: the Eucharist is the center of the sacramental life of the Church. It is the goal of the celebration of each of the sacramental mysteries, and was considered by the ancient Church Fathers as the “mystery of mysteries,” or simply as the

mystery. Therefore, we can speak of a seven-fold mystery as easily as of “seven sacraments,” and that seven-fold mystery is Christ, the Church is His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23), and the Eucharist is His Body. Christ Himself is the Eucharist and the Church, the Church is the Body of Christ which is the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is the foundation of the community of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

This can be seen in the Epistle, the apostolic letter of Saint Paul that is read at the marriage ceremony. In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul explains how the spiritual love of God for His people the Church, is much greater and real than the love of marriage. It is for this reason, then, that marriage can be an image and a reflection of God’s love. Saint Paul writes, “For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:29-32) This great mystery, of course, is fulfilled in Holy Communion, for in our Communion our bodies are joined to the Body of Christ. Marriage is like a distant echo of the reality of Christ united with us in Holy Communion. In the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus teaches about this mystery.... Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” (John 6:53-54)

Holy Communion has historically been the seal set upon the sacred mystery of marriage. In the later centuries of the Middle Ages, however, people received Communion less and less frequently, and so it also became a lesser aspect of people’s marriage. This was restored somewhat when the Church began the practice of celebrating marriages together with the Divine Liturgy. When our Church translated the wedding ceremonies into English, the ancient practice of combining it with the reception of presanctified Communion was restored. This was not a presanctified Liturgy as such, but the rite of Communion after the matrimonial rite of crowning. This option is not used often, as couples often prefer to have a Divine Liturgy together with their marriage rite. At the same time, another problem has emerged. Very often a Catholic man or woman will enter into marriage with someone who is not Catholic and therefore unable to receive Holy Communion. In such a case, it would be a countersign of disunity to give Communion only to one of the partners. A mixed marriage certainly does not mean that the couple love each other less, but it is a sign that the division of Churches is not the normal state of Christian faith, and that we should pray for the unity of all Churches. **ECL**

Catechetical Sunday

September 15, 2024

We are All Stewards of
God's Creation

Psalm 90:2. “Before the mountains
were brought forth, or ever you had
formed the earth and the world, from
everlasting to everlasting you are God.”



PRIESTLY REFLECTIONS

Father Paul Varchola West

"LITTLE ROOM"

Over the past six months or so I have been stuck in quite the spiritual rut: wheels spinning in the mud of my mind, and skidding on the ice in my heart. It hasn't been an easy period, but we Christians are called to struggle in prayer; persevere; and grow closer to the Lord through suffering. I know that a priest publicly admitting he is struggling might come as a shock to some, but yes, even priests hit spiritual ruts, whether or not we like to believe it; priests, after all, are human. Every so often, however, the Holy Spirit shows Himself to those who struggle in the most unassuming place to give us a push out of the mud and to sprinkle some kitty litter into our hearts to gain traction on the ice, melting it below our spiritual tires.

While I was studying in seminary, in my little room on the top floor of the building, I would find myself working on an assignment and hoping that it was good. Oftentimes, the following song by (in my estimation, one of the most underrated songwriters of our time) Jack White would come to mind.

Well, you're in your little room

And you're working on something good

But if it's really good

You're gonna need a bigger room

And when you're in the bigger room

You might not know what to do

You might have to think of how you got started

Sitting in your little room

The title of this short, yet extremely poignant, song is *Little Room*. I knew that my time in my little room on the third

floor of the seminary would undoubtedly bring me to a much bigger room, which it ultimately did. Now that I'm in that much bigger room of my first parochial assignment, where I have been for four years now, I find myself working on many good things. Sometimes I might not know what to do to make these good plans come to fruition. I am currently in one of those periods. Toiling in my mind, I could not seem to bring myself back to that little room in the seminary where so much hope lay in wait; I couldn't think of how I got started sitting in that little room.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, I was given the insight to understand that I was actually searching in the wrong little room!

Just this past August, I was asked to be the spiritual father for the reboot of Camp Saint Nicholas sponsored by our eparchy. This camp hosted at Carpathian Village for children ages 6-12 brought me back to the place where it all "started" for me. I remember attending Altar Boy Camp there at a very young age and began to recall all the wonderful memories made there. Then, something happened. I was getting my son settled into the dorm and realized something completely life changing for me. There I was, standing in the same dorm I did when I was roughly my son's age. As he was climbing up the ladder to the top bunk just as I used to do, I realized that those beds were literally the same exact bunk beds I slept in when I was a kid! At that moment, when I saw him standing at the top of that bunk ladder, smiling, eyes full of excitement and hope, it hit me. The above-mentioned song lyrics slammed into my mind, yet again; this time like a bowling ball being thrown into an empty dumpster!

After getting him settled, I took a walk down to the creek where I spent so much time as a child to process all that had just happened. It became clear to

me that I needed to remember how I got started in that little dorm room at Carpathian Village. I need to remember what brought me to this bigger room in the first place. It wasn't necessarily my seminary experience as an adult, nor was it my adult understanding of faith, or even my "answering the call." While all of these were significant formative stops along the way, they weren't the little room where I began working on something good, so very long ago. It was, in fact, my love for the Lord that drew me to the altar as an innocent little boy that brought me to where I am now, to the bigger room of pastoral ministry.

The mud in my mind may not have fully dried out yet, nor has the ice fully melted from my heart, but at least I can now think of how I got started in my little room in order to make the work in my bigger room the best work it can be.

At the outset of the ecclesiastical New Year, September 1, it is my prayer that we all think of how we got started in our little rooms. Let us recall what brought us to the Lord in the first place. If we have it all figured out, let us give thanks to Almighty God! If we are struggling in any manner whatsoever, let us ask the Holy Spirit in prayer to remove the clutter from the room of our hearts to once again make space for the Lord that we once had. Regardless of what room we find ourselves in, or what the little room where we got our start looks like, may we all make our work for the Lord the best it can be! **ECL**



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

A LISTENING ATTITUDE

Mary the Mother of God is mentioned in passing in the Gospel we hear on September 8 when we celebrate her birthday: "A woman from the crowd called out, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you'" (Luke 11:27). She is not mentioned at all in the Epistle, where Saint Paul urges us to "have that same attitude which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). We can presume that Mary herself had that attitude. But exactly what was it?

Our first clue comes from one of the Alleluia verses: "Listen O daughter and see, and incline your ear" (Psalm 45:11). This is confirmed by the Gospel's image of another Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who "seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to His words" (Luke 10:39). The Mother of God demonstrated a listening attitude.

Mary's unique vocation was to hear the Word of God and let the Only-begotten Son and Word of God take flesh in her womb. More than anyone else, she deserves the blessing Jesus pronounces on those "who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

We have constant noise in our lives. In many homes, one or more radios, TVs, or computers are producing noise from the moment we get up until the moment we go to sleep. But how much of it do we really listen to and actually hear? How much of what we choose to listen to really does us good? How much of it just provokes us, tempts us, embitters or angers us? We may attend Liturgy every Sunday, but do we actually listen to the Epistle, the Gospel, and the homily? What do we actually hear and take home with us from the Word of God? Do we act on what we have heard? Does it affect us? Even change us?

Mary heard a lot of things in her life too. The Gospel tells us that she "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19,51). She sought to find God's will in them, and she sought to say Yes to God's will. She treasured and pondered. That's not the same as worrying and brooding. Mary isn't like Martha, who is "anxious and concerned about many things" (Luke 10:41).

So, what does it mean to listen? It means to actively pay attention rather than just letting the sounds pass over us. It means to work on actively taking in what we hear. It means wanting to hear and expecting to hear something good, meaningful, and useful. It means to take in what we hear, to treasure it and ponder it and act on it. Jesus says: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Acting on God's word means letting it affect us, change us, surprise us. Mary was certainly surprised at the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel told her God's plan for her to give human birth to His divine Son. Joachim and Anna were

certainly surprised when their prayer to have a child was finally answered in their old age and in God's good time.

And so, this kind of listening requires something else. St Paul says: "Have that same attitude in you that was in Christ Jesus." What was that attitude? Paul specifies that Jesus "humbled Himself" (Philippians 2:8). That's the attitude that was also in Mary who blesses God for "looking upon the humility of his handmaid" (Luke 1:48; sung at the prokimen for the feast).

Listening in humility means being willing to be surprised. Listening in humility means admitting we haven't seen it all and don't know it all yet; that however young or old we may be, we haven't yet discovered all that God has planned for us.


Only in humility can Mary say, "The Almighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:49).

If we choose to listen and hear in humility, we may be surprised to hear the great

things the Lord would love to do with us. A thousand years before God became Man in the womb of the Theotokos, King Solomon had the wisdom to ask this gift of God: "give me a listening heart" (1 Kings 3:8). There's a reason why the Liturgy keeps poking us to remind us that, in the presence of the "Wisdom, Power, and Word of God" (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:24) it's our job to "Be attentive!" **ECL**

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OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL LAZINESS: THE NOONDAY DEMON

To be a sincere Christian entails daily prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading. But how many of us practice these spiritual disciplines on a daily basis?

Morning and evening prayers, our beads, the psalms, the daily liturgical readings, memorizing and reciting scriptures and prayers, and sometimes more in-depth intensive biblical, theological, and spiritual study will bear great fruit if we are faithful and consistent.

But that is no easy task. The world, the flesh, and the devil oppose us. We “just don’t feel like it.” Other things are more exciting or entertaining. Praying and reading are hard work, so we don’t bother. We tell ourselves that we don’t have time. But without the grace and strength drawn from prayer and reading, we get weak, succumb to temptation, and fall into sin.

Beware of spiritual laziness, or what the saints and Fathers call “acedia” and the “noonday demon.”

Acedia (Greek “akēdeia”) is described by Evagrius of Pontus (345–399) as:

“hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness, stormy weather for psalmody, laziness in prayer, a slackening of asceticism, untimely drowsiness, revolving

sleep, the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one’s cell, an adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow, a clock for hunger” (On the Vices, 6).

Evagrius calls acedia “most oppressive of all the demons,” and calls it “the noonday demon” (Ps. 91 [90]:6 LXX “the evil spirit at noonday”) because “He [acedia] attacks the monk about the fourth hour [10 AM] and besieges his soul until the eighth hour [2 PM]” (Praktikos, 12).

In the Western tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins, acedia is called sloth. Today, we use terms like spiritual laziness, boredom, or what the editorial note in Archimandrite Lazarus Moore’s translation of The Ladder calls “indifference to the work of salvation, distaste for spiritual things, spiritual sloth” (p. 52).

To overcome temptation, avoid sin, grow in holiness, die in the state of sanctifying grace, and attain heavenly glory, you must fight, struggle, and sweat. You must pray, read, and study.

Saint John Climacus (579-649) describes the tricks of the noonday demon: “When there is no psalmo-

dy, then acedia does not make its appearance. And as soon as the appointed Office is finished, the eyes open.” (Ladder, 13:11).

In other words, when we set ourselves to pray, read, or study, we get sleepy, bored, or distracted. Then, when we set aside or finish our prayers, we feel wide awake. Have you experienced this? I know I have.

Christ directs us to strive. “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk. 13:24).

Saint Paul compares diligent believers to soldiers, athletes, and farmers to give us some idea of the effort and discipline required in the spiritual life.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we [seek] an imperishable” (1 Cor. 9:24-25).

“No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops” (2 Tim. 2:4-6).

In the Ladder of Divine Ascent, Saint John Climacus recommends sorrow, repentance, and compunction to overcome the demon of acedia. Think about the sins and failures of your past life and your need to do penance.

“He who mourns over himself does not know acedia. Let this tyrant be bound by the remembrance of your sins.” (Ladder 13:14, 15).

He says that we should meditate on four last things, death, judgment, heaven, and hell, to spur us on.

The noonday demon confesses: “My enemy is the thought of death. What completely mortifies me is prayer with firm hope of future blessings” (13:16).

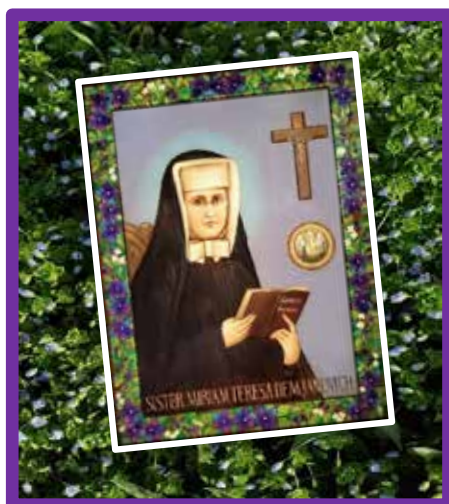
Acedia “should be brought into court by the thought of blessings to come” (13:15).

“Let the remembrance of the eternal fire lie down with you every evening, and let it rise with you too. Then acedia will never overwhelm you at the time of psalmody” (7:21).

Reciting the psalms and manual labor also stops the noonday demon who says, “my opponents, by whom I am now bound, are psalmody and manual labor” (13:16).

People today always look for shortcuts, tips, and “hacks” to make things easier. But when it comes to following Christ, there are no shortcuts.

Overcome spiritual laziness, fight acedia, trample on that noonday demon, and apply yourself to the spiritual disciplines with the help of God’s grace. **ECL**



Sunday 6 October 2024

**Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the
Beatification of Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, SC**

+++++

Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church
15 E 26 St Bayonne, NJ 07002

2:00 pm: Holy Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Confessions

3:00 pm: Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom
Celebrant His Grace Bishop Kurt Burnette, Bishop
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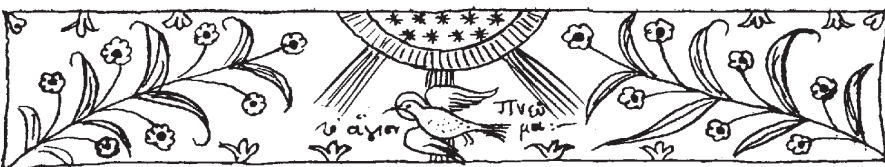
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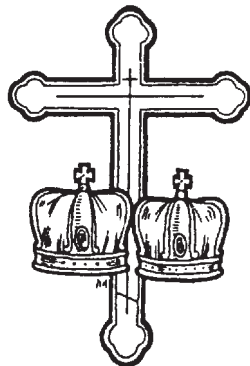
WEDDING JUBILARIANS SCHEDULED FOR FALL 2024

November 10
 New Jersey Syncellate 3:00 PM (Sunday)
 Saint Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church
 1900 Brooks Blvd.
 Hillsborough, NJ

November 17
 New York & New Jersey Syncellate 3:00 PM (Sunday)
 Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church
 13 Pembroke Drive
 Danbury, CT

November 23
 Middle States Syncellate - 4:00 PM (Saturday)
 Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church
 3410 Woodburn Road
 Annadale, VA 22003

December 1, 2024
 Pennsylvania Syncellates - 3:00 PM (Saturday)
 Saint John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church 3:00
 5 E 20th Street
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If you plan to celebrate a special wedding anniversary this year and would participate in the Jubilarians Celebration, please see your pastor.

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SEPTEMBER, 2024

- 1-2 Uniontown Pilgrimage
- 2 Labor Day
Chancery Closed
- 8 Nativity of the Virgin Theotokos
Solemn HolyDay
- 11 September 11 Commemoration
Divine Liturgy 7:30 PM, Epiphany of Our Lord Parish, Annandale, VA
- 14 Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Solemn HolyDay
- 15 Catechetical Sunday
- 22 125th Anniversary Celebration
Saint Michael Parish, Mont Clare, PA, 3 PM
- 23-26 Eparchial Priests' Retreat
- 26 March for Life
Trenton, NJ
- 28 "Beefsteak"
Saint Michael Cathedral Chapel, Woodland Park, NJ

OCTOBER, 2024

- 1 Holy Protection of the Virgin Theotokos
Simple HolyDay
- 5 Saint Therese Pilgrimage
Sugarloaf, PA
- 6 Tenth Anniversary of beatification of Blessed Miriam Teresa
Bayonne, NJ—2 PM Holy Rosary
3 PM Divine Liturgy
- 12-13 Metropolitan Centennial Celebration
National Shrine, Washington, DC

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