Theosis in Action
Bringing the New Evangelization to Byzantine Catholic Young Adults with Internet/Social Media Platform
by Father Vasyl Chepelskyy with Christopher Russo, Adriana Shubeck, Deacon Stephen Russo, and Deacon Thomas Shubeck

Bishop Kurt enthusiastically gave his blessing and support to Theosis In Action, the Young Adult Ministry of the Eparchy of Passaic on January 27, 2018. Theosis In Action is a response to the grim reality that more than half of all US Catholics leave the Church at some point in their lives, with most of them never to return. This new ministry’s mission is to “serve Byzantine Catholic young adults (ages 18-35) from the Eparchy of Passaic and beyond as well as inquirers of good will by providing them with resources to grow in their faith and opportunities for fellowship as they navigate through adulthood. Through the use of social media and in-person events, Theosis In Action seeks to equip young adults to be the light of Christ in a secular world.”

The inspiration for this new initiative grew out of last summer’s Convocation of Catholic Leaders in Orlando, FL, where people from throughout the United States gathered to take a close look at challenges, concerns, and opportunities in light of the Church’s mission of evangelization. The Convocation looked at how to form leaders who are equipped and energized to share the Gospel as missionary disciples.

Visitors to the platform will be able to find inspirational quotes and stories, regular homily reflections, opportunities to ask questions and discuss various topics, live presentations, spiritual reflections as well as interviews with theologians, and more. Theosis In Action will also provide opportunities for young adults to gather at various locations throughout the Eparchy for fellowship, learning, cultural offerings, and spiritual growth. A Convocation for Young Adults is in the early planning stages for 2019, and Theosis In Action will have a presence at the 2018 Youth Rally at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, PA, this summer and at the Annual Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mount Saint Macrina, Uniontown, PA.

If you are a young adult, check out the Theosis In Action Facebook page www.facebook.com/theosisinaction and upcoming website to learn more about this exciting new ministry. If you do not already know what theosis means, you can learn on our Facebook page and future website. Message us on Facebook, or email us at ctrusso513@gmail.com or amshubeck@gmail.com with your questions and suggestions. We are here for you!
The Wisdom of God and the Pursuit of Happiness

A
tonly who lives long enough will ex-perience great pain and disappointment. Some two thousand years ago, Cicero found his life unbearable. After a painful divorce, he owed a large amount of money to repay the dowry to his wife's wealthy family. A second marriage to a young lady failed, and then his daughter Tullia died. On the death of his daughter, Cicero wrote to a friend, "I have lost the one thing that bound me to life." As we might say nowadays, he had died. On the death of his daughter, Cicero wrote his wife's wealthy family. A second marriage to life unbearable. After a painful divorce, he owed some two thousand years ago, Cicero found his out in life, our passions move us to choose im-

 moment based on what we believe will make us the goal that all of us strive towards. No one sets Some of our most basic urges, the urge to eat, we train ourselves to deny our other passions. And indeed that His followers will fast. Why do we fast? We

 In another passage, the Pharisees ask why the fol-

 dozens of Jesus do not fast. Jesus replies, "How

 other things, the Anglican Church will do…" As Christians, we have the wisdom of over

 ers, to avoid criticizing others, to avoid placing

 ers, one of life's supreme pleasures, when we see

 about the intense loneliness that they feel. I have even heard these people say, "I was always lone-

 ev, even when I was around other people." That loneliness is present with other people, because someone who is a slave to the passions always sees other people as tools or obstacles, and so he can never really talk about the company of others. We can only enjoy the company of others, one of life's supreme pleasures, when we see them as equals to be respected as also created in the image and likeness of God. When we see them with respect, as God sees them, it is impos-

 In our tradition, we have a great emphasis on subduing the passions. No Christian teacher will tell you to eliminate the passions. The passions are part of our nature given to us by our all wise Creator, and they all have good purposes. But the problem is that we, the followers of Jesus, have been in such a long and deep slavery to the passions, that they are an enemy of our own happiness. It is a great book that describes our own creation. In the second chapter of Genesis, after Adam and God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." So God

 brings Adam some temporary relief from his loneliness, but they are not a complete answer. So then God makes Eve so that Adam can have a friend who is not a lower animal, but his equal. In this pas-

 s, we find one of the keys to happiness, that is not a lower animal, but his equal. In this pas-

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 With a different perspective, a different point of view, the pursuit of happiness (enshrined in our

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 or Hanibal and many others killed and tortured countless oth-

 r in the pursuit of power or fame and glory. For

 example, more than one hundred thousand were

 killed in the battles of Hanibal, but when he had

 the chance to actually capture Rome after wip-

 ing out two consular armies at the battle of Can-

 he didn't do it. Ruling Rome was never his goal—his goal was fame from military victories and

 cruul victories had no purpose except his fame. But the Book of Wisdom says that, " God

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 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "When you fast…" Jesus did not say, "If you fast…" Jesus

 speaks clearly to his followers that they will fast. In another passage, the Pharisees ask why the fol-

 lowers of Jesus do not fast. Jesus replies, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is

 with them? They cannot so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the

 bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." So Our Lord says clearly that

 His followers will fast. Why do we fast? We fast to subdue the passions. By disciplining one of our

 most basic urges, the urge to eat, we train ourselves to deny our other passions. And indeed our many prayers during Lent encourage us per-

 sistent subdue all of our sinful passions. We are encouraged to keep our tempers, to be patient, to

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 them as equals to be respected as also created in

 the image and likeness of God. When we see

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be generous with our hearts. Charles Dickens, after poking fun at Americans in one of his Christmas stories, said that, “Whatever little motes my beamy eyes may have descried in theirs, they belong to a kind, generous, large-hearted, and great people.” What a goal to strive for in Lent! To live up to these words of Dickens, to be “kind, generous, large-hearted, and great”!

So Aristotle said that all men desire to be happy, and Great Lent is truly the pursuit of happiness. We know from the wisdom revealed to us by our Maker that happiness does not lie in selfishness, isolation, and solipsism. We know that happiness is found in reaching out, especially to God in prayer, and to our fellows also made in the image of God. We know that our unruly passions make us selfish and self-centered, not to mention that they make us hurt other people after we hurt ourselves. So God has given us the tool of fasting and the great season of Lent to pursue happiness, to become what Dickens said about Americans, “kind, generous, large-hearted, and great.” God made us to be happy, and to be eternally happy.

Fasting Regulations
†All who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
†All adults who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products on the first day of Lent, Monday, February 12, and on Great and Holy Friday, March 30.
†These are the minimum requirements; however, the faithful are encouraged to do more.

Dispensation
†Pastors and Administrators may, for a just cause, grant to the individual faithful and to individual families, dispensations or commutations of the fasting rules into other pious practices.

Liturgical Directives
†Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts
†All Pastors and Administrators are encouraged to celebrate the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.
†A liturgical service at which Holy Communion is distributed may be celebrated on the other weekdays of the Great Fast.

We ask you to pray for peace throughout the world, and for the victims of war. Please remember in your prayers all those in the military who are serving our country throughout the world.

Lenten Vespers Schedule
Wyoming Valley Protopresbyterate
Sun., March 4, 2018 .............. Saint Mary, Wilkes-Barre
Sun., March 11, 2018 ............ Saint Nicholas, Swoyersville
Sun., March 18, 2018 ............ Saint Mary, Kingston

Susquehanna Valley Protopresbyterate
Sun., March 4, 2018 .............. Saint Michael, Dunmore
Sun., March 11, 2018 ............ Saint Mary, Taylor

Parishes in Montgomery and Chester Counties
Sun., March 4, 2018 .............. Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church, Phoenixville
Sun., March 11, 2018 ............ Saint Michael Ukrainian, Stowe
Sun., March 18, 2018 ............ Saint Michael, Mont Clare

Each Vespers will start at 3 PM and there will be light Lenten refreshments provided by the host parishes following.

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As this issue went to press, we learned of the sudden passing of Father Charles Yastishock, a priest of the Eparchy of Passaic and pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Toms River, NJ. There will be more coverage of this sad event in an upcoming issue.

†Father Charles Yastishock Falls Asleep in the Lord

From the Office of the Bishop
The tradition of our Church is to eat no meat after Meatfare Sunday until Easter, and the tradition of our Church is to eat no dairy products after Cheesefare Sunday until Easter. The regulations here are the minimum required by our Church authorities, but everyone is encouraged to follow our tradition, except for children and women who are pregnant or nursing. The reason to have an Easter basket is to eat the foods denied during Great Lent.
In Annandale...

Frozen pipe damage from cold weather

The first of the events happened the first week in January when the suppression system sprinkler pipes burst in five places. The sprinklers are located in a storage room on the upper level of the parish hall but the water traveled out in to the parish hall and down through the ceiling to the SOR classrooms which are occupied during the week by a day care. The day care was closed for two days while the service company followed demolition and abatement procedures.

The second incident occurred the next week. This time a water pipe in the ceiling of the kitchen burst. The kitchen ceiling collapsed sending water into the kitchen and the open area of the day care area on the lower floor. The water fell into the boiler room corroding seven breaker fuses in the panel.

In Beaver Meadows...

ECF teachers honored for years of service

Three long-time Eastern Christian Formation (ECF) teachers at Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Beaver Meadows, PA, retired from the parish ECF program. Combined, they have over 125 years of service to the church. Their students, fellow teachers, and pastor, Father James Demko, honored them with a reception after a recent ECF class. Pictured, left to right, are Rita Baran, Mary Catherine Pituch, and Claire Lorince.

In Mahwah...

Holy Spirit Church in Mahwah, NJ, was pleased to welcome the Saint Monica Homeschool Group from the Middletown, NY, area on Sunday, January 28. Parents and children attended the Divine Liturgy; joined the parishioners for fellowship; and then returned to the church for a lively learning session led by Father Jack Custer, administrator of the parish. Each participant received an icon and a prayer rope as a parting gift. Parishioners, Meghan and Steven Merschen, coordinated the event.

In Passaic...

The Holy Name Society of Saint Michael Cathedral marked Meatfare Sunday with a beefsteak dinner on Saturday, February 3, for a full house of parishioners and guests. Some of the youngest members of the parish served as waitstaff.
Around the Eparchy

In Smithtown...

Church of the Resurrection parishioners held their annual pre-Lenten “Italian Carnival” Sunday afternoon, to benefit restoration of the rectory. Chairpersons Jo and Joe Andrews coordinated the preparation of their treasured family recipes. The spaghetti and meatball dinner included entertainment, traditional desserts and a mozzarella making demonstration. Resurrection Parish is served by Father Tyler Strand.

In Wilkes-Barre Township...

The entire parish family of Saint John the Baptist Church in Wilkes-Barre Township, PA, would like to extend its congratulations to their cantor, Mr. George Daru, upon his reception of the Order of Bishop Andrej Bachinskij, 1st Class, from Bishop Milan Šašik of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo, Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine.

This award was presented to him during the annual parish Christmas party on Sunday, January 7, for his work in raising funds for the seminary and the Eparchy of Mukachevo through the sale of his personal collection of books and other collectibles. During the past seven years, Cantor Daru was able to send $35,000 to the Eparchy of Mukachevo.

Cantor Daru said he was inspired to work on this project because of his appreciation of Bishop Šašik sending so many priests to help Byzantine Catholic churches in the U.S., especially the Eparchy of Passaic. He thanked everyone who helped him with this project, especially Father Mykhaylo Prodanets, Administrator of Saint John Parish, and the first priest sent from Ukraine to the Eparchy of Passaic.

Cantor Daru was previously honored by Bishop Šašik with the Order of Bishop Theodore Romzha 3rd and 2nd class. The party was sponsored by Saint John’s Guild. All had a wonderful time.

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal
Lenten Evening of Recollection for Teens and Young Adults
at St Thomas the Apostle, Rahway, on Friday Evening, March 2

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church in Rahway will have as its guests Franciscan Friars of the Renewal who will present a Lenten Evening of Reflection, the centerpiece of which will be the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. The Friars’ presentations direct their words to teens and young adults who should bring hearty appetites, as their bodies, minds, and souls will be fed. The evening will begin at 6:15 PM and conclude by 9:30 PM.

To better plan for a simple Lenten supper, please RSVP to Deacon Tom by Monday, February 26, to frdeacontom@gmail.com.

For those not familiar with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, see their website www.franciscanfriars.com.
IN WILLIAMSBURG...
Bishop Kurt Surprises Ascension Parish, Williamsburg, VA

After participating in the January, 2018 Right to Life events in Washington, D.C., Bishop Kurt boarded Amtrak and traveled to Williamsburg, VA, to visit Ascension of Our Lord Parish. The entire parish family was thrilled by his surprise visit and inspired by his most informative and, at times, humorous sermon.

The Williamsburg visit was filled with events previously scheduled. Bishop Kurt blessed new vestments and, after Liturgy, he had an opportunity to visit with the parish members individually and gave the sick his blessing and prayed over them.

Bishop Kurt bestowed the Rite of Initiation during Liturgy to the newest member of Ascension, Abraham Darmadi Kusno, as the choir sang the responses. The entire community was able to visit with the Bishop during the baptism reception organized by the Ascension Outreach Committee. At the conclusion of his visit, Bishop Kurt also met with all the committee leaders for a brief explanation of their duties within the parish. He spoke highly of how Father Alex Shuter organized the parish, and was particularly impressed by the beauty of the icons written by Ascension’s own iconographer, Donald Merkley. The bishop was surprised and pleased to learn that once a month the Children’s Choir leads the Liturgy as cantors and lectors.

IN BELTSVILLE...
A Traditional Betrothal Takes Place

The first event in the Rite of Crowning in Marriage is the Betrothal. This is the part of the ritual in which the man and woman exchange rings like they normally would in an engagement. However, the rings are blessed by a priest and given to them in the Church within a liturgical rite. These rings are a symbol of their bond of peace and oneness of mind. At one time, the Betrothal happened separately from the Crowning, which is what this couple desired to do. On Saturday, February 10th, Kyle Anderson and Shelby Macy were betrothed to one another in solemn anticipation of their Crowning in Marriage. May God grant to His newly Betrothed servants, peace, health, and happiness for many blessed years!

SAINT ANN BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH
Harrisburg, PA
Parish Education Calendar: Spring 2018

Saturday March 3, 2018 from 11:30 AM - 3 PM: Parish Education Day on God of life Issues and Ethics with Mr. Vincent Leonard
Sunday, March 11, 2018 at 9 AM Palm Sunday & The Feast of the Annunciation Liturgy followed by Parish Brunch and Easter Egg Hunt
Saturday June 2, 2018 from 10 AM – 3 PM: Parish Education Day with Fr. Kevin Michalika with Fr. Victoria and St. Mary Ann of the Community of the Mother of God of Tenderness (CMGOT), “Living As Missionary Disciples”
All programs take place at St. Ann Byzantine Catholic Church, 4068 Loysport Lane, Harrisburg, PA 17110. For more details on events, location, or speakers, please contact Angelina Leres or DesireeKleb@gmail.com or at 717-480-1264.

ByzanTEEN Youth Rally 2018
July 5-8, 2018
“Who is My Neighbor?”
St. Vincent College
Latrobe, PA
www.byzanteen.com
Saint Mary Church in Jersey City Celebrates 100th Anniversary
A Joyous Day, October 15th, 2017

The joyous day, October 15, 2017, began with a celebration of a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of Thanksgiving by Bishop Kurt. The bishop was greeted with the traditional signs of Slavic hospitality, bread and salt, by Veronika Vira and Ema and Leah Purtell. Concelebrating with Bishop Kurt were Father Jack Custer, Syncellus of New Jersey, Rector of the Cathedral of Saint Michael, Passaic, and parish vocation; Father Marcel Szabo, Administrator of Saint Mary Church; and Father Edward Semko, pastor emeritus of Saint Elias Church, Carteret, NJ, and former pastor. Assisting in the Liturgy were Deacon Robert Behrens, Holy Ghost Church, Jessup, PA, and Deacon Timothy Kennedy. Altar Servers were Kyle Devitt and Adam Kmeck, grandson of the late Cantor George Kmeck. Master of Ceremonies was Father Edward Higgins, Pastor of Holy Ghost Church, Philadelphia, PA, and parish vocation. The liturgy responses were sung by the congregation and Saint Mary Choir under the direction of John Klapko.

After the Liturgy, friends, parishioners and former parishioners, some who travelled from as far as NC, MA, NH, and PA, gathered together to enjoy dinner and an afternoon reminiscing with old friends. Serving as Master of Ceremonies for the banquet was Grant Purtell. Veronika Vira and Leah Purtell gave the history of the 100 years of Saint Mary Parish. At the close of the evening, Saint Mary Choir invited past members to join them in singing “The Bells of Saint Mary’s.”
The Synod on Youth Continues
by Christopher T. Russo

This year, Pope Francis called the bishops of the Catholic Church to convene in the discussion of “Young People, The Faith, and Vocational Discernment” in the upcoming synod. During this synod, the Church will focus its attention on how to better accompany and guide young people through the various challenges and joys of life. Pope Francis asked to hear the voices of young people throughout the world during an unprecedented “pre-synod” in preparation, which will be held in Rome from the 19th through the 24th of March. Three hundred youth and young adult representatives from around the world will gather to participate in the discussion.

With the blessing of Archbishop William Skurla, I am honored to represent the Byzantine Catholic Church as a delegate from the United States for the duration of the pre-synod. The Church hopes to grow closer to young people through these discussions, and gain insight into their concerns and aspirations with the assurance that their words will serve as a vital contribution to the October Synod.

While there will be a variety of topics discussed, this pre-synod meeting seeks to address three major points and pose the following questions:

1.) Identifying challenges and opportunities of young people in today’s world.

With young people building the foundation for the future, how can the Church cultivate their ambitions and questions about tomorrow?

2.) Accompaniment through faith and vocational discernment.

Christ calls all people to something greater than themselves. In the journey of faith, what drives young people to say, “I believe?” How can the church better accompany these individuals in how they look beyond themselves to recognize Christ throughout their lives?

3.) The Church’s formative and pastoral involvement with young people.

The Church urges young people to become true witnesses in proclaiming Christ to the world. How can the Church better engage and aid young leaders within their communities and beyond?

With these questions in mind, I humbly ask for the help and input of all of our young people, clergy, and communities throughout the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia. During the pre-synod, the Vatican encourages the youth to become involved by writing and sharing their thoughts through the official website (www.synod2018.va), social media platforms, and by using the hashtag #Synod2018.

Join Father Jim Badeaux on a faith and fun-filled trip!
The Best of Eastern Canada
July 31 - August 7, 2018
“From elegant cities to Mother Nature’s Wonders”

8 Day, 7 Night trip featuring:
- Montréal, Québec City, Ottawa, Toronto, Miraculous Shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Basilica of Notre-Dame-du-Cap, Niagara Falls, the 1000 Islands.
- Includes: Full itinerary with 4-star accommodations, airfare, transfers, transportation to the airport, many meals and much more.
- Double rate: $3,059

Deadline Extended!

Please call Fr. Jim for a full itinerary or to RSVP for presentation
Father Jim Badeaux  +1(908)725-0615

Cantor Institute Announces Comprehensive Singing Program
Deacon Jeffrey Mierzejewski

Over the past two years, the Metropolitan Cantor Institute has been experimenting with ways to provide cantor education throughout the United States. Based on our experiences, we are inaugurating a comprehensive program beginning in 2018, aimed at ensuring that every parish in the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia has a cantor who can lead the liturgical singing of the parish well, to the glory of God, and in support of the prayer of the faithful.

The new program consists of online classes using the Internet combined with local mentoring where available, and an optional week-long summer program in Pittsburgh. All classes are taught each year (some twice per year), allowing students to complete the work at their own pace. New students can enter the program in January or July, and complete the entire program in as little as two years.

Two classes are free, open to the public, and can be taken at any time: Introduction to the Typikon. Students can register for further courses by submitting a registration form and the course tuition (usually $75.00 for each eight week course, with discounts available). Course tuition allows us to engage trained voice teachers who are also cantors to review student work and provide feedback.

We recommend that ALL cantors consider taking the initial class, Introduction to Church Singing, which starts in July. This class covers the essentials of vocal production, the basics of music theory for cantors, and the fundamentals of reading music, and also provides an essential introduction to rhythm and duch (spirit) of our plain chant.

Details and registration:
http://mci.archpitt.org/classes

Danube River Cruise
14 DAY CRUISE and LAND
Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland
Hosted by Fr. Ed Cimbala
Pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Byzantine Catholic Church
Leesburg, PA
October 31 – November 13, 2018
For more information, please contact Fr. Ed Cimbala at 908-872-2928 or fredcimbala@gmail.com.
Susan Prendergast
Select International Tours - 800-842-4842
susan@select-intl.com
Trip Web-page For More Details & Brochure
http://www.olphpbyz.com/Pg/DanubeCruise.html

Danube River Cruise – Join Fr. Ed Cimbala for a 14 day river cruise and land adventure to Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland – October 31 to November 13, 2018. For more information, please contact Fr. Ed Cimbala at 908-872-2928 or fredcimbala@gmail.com. You can contact the travel agency direct by calling Susan Prendergast at Select International Tours, 800-842-4842, susan@select-intl.com. For a complete presentation of the trip and an online brochure visit the Trip Web-page at http://www.olphpbyz.com/Pg/DanubeCruise.html
When my generation was growing up, we were taught about mortal and venial sins. Does the Byzantine Catholic Church today still go by the concept of mortal and venial sins? If on a day when there is a “fist” on the church calendar, if one eats meat on that day or doesn’t substitute an “equivalent penance”, does that person have a mortal sin?

Thank you for your answer, Mike.

Taking a closer look on what sin is and what are the conditions on which the gravity of it depends will help us in search for the answers to these questions, as well as it will help us to properly morally evaluate any other act and determine whether it is sinful or not, and if sinful – if it is mortal or venial sin, since there situations in which the same act could be a mortal sin in one case and venial in the other.

We know, that every sin – no matter whether big or small – is an offense against God. Every sin makes a distance between us and God and separates us from Him. As in the past, today the Church continues to differentiate between mortal and venial sins. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) is teaching us that “sins are rightly considered mortal or venial according to the gravity of their matter, circumstances and the age of the person.”

The moral quality of our actions derives from three different sources, each so closely connected with each other that, unless all three are simultaneously good, the action performed is morally bad.

1. The object of the act must be good. We should note that the object is not only the physical make up of an action, like taking what belongs to someone else, but taking it with (or without) his permission. Only in the second case is there any question of theft.

2. Along with what I do are the attending circumstances, of my action, which may change or completely alter its moral tone. Circumstances can make an otherwise good action evil, as when a man deliberately goes to sleep while on night watch duty. Sleep by itself is morally indifferent, but taken at a time when a person has contracted to keep awake, it becomes morally objectionable, or they can aggravate guilt, as when a child strikes his mother; or minimize guilt, as a sudden burst of anger under violent provocation; or multiply guilt, as when money is stolen from a person to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude, etc.

3. The end or purpose, beyond the act itself and its circumstances, also affects the moral situation. If the motive is sinful, the whole action is vitiated. Thus, for a gangster to give money to charity in order to divert attention from his crime is doing wrong even though (incidentally) people may profit from his philanthropy.

The intention element is of a great importance in Christianity. Some actions are always wrong, while others may be good or bad, depending on why we do them. Although it is morally wrong to kill another person, we may defend ourselves against an unjust aggressor and legitimate self-defense is not forbidden. Many other things we do, like walking, speaking, driving or reading, may be directed to good or evil ends, and they become good or evil according to the purpose intended – even though the immediate work performed is morally colorless.

The two foci around which imputability revolves are knowledge and freedom; when both faculties are fully operative, the responsibility is complete, but when either is somehow inhibited, the resulted imputability is lessened. Thus, ignorance, emotion or passion, fear, past habits, and external violence inhibit the activity of the mind and free will, and, therefore, limit human guilt, or (on occasion), may remove it altogether.

If the mind is in doubt, we must either refrain from taking action or resolve the doubt, we cannot act in doubt.

Subjectively, a person is guilty of mortal sin when he fully consents with his will to do what he realizes is a serious offense against God. Otherwise, although the matter is grave, if only partial consent was given, then only venial sin was committed. But the object of this consent is what God, not man, determines is gravely wrong. Consequently, a venial sin is committed either when the matter (misdeed) is not objectively serious, and the circumstances do not make it serious; or when the matter is serious but full consent is not given by the free will.

So, for a mortal sin three conditions must together be met: object is grave matter, and the act is committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent (cf. CCC, # 1857).

Moreover, we have responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them by:
• Participating directly and voluntary in them
• Ordering, advising, praising, or approving them
• Not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so
• By protecting evil-doers (cf. CCC, 1868).

As for the second question, a few things have to be considered: are we talking about strict fast or simple fast and abstinence? What are the health conditions and the age of the person? What are the person’s intentions, reasons of doing so, frequency and surrounding circumstances?

The answers to these questions will affect and determine the gravity of the situation and person’s moral responsibility.

Please note that a parish priest, for a just cause, may grant to individuals and families a dispensation or commutation of the prescribed strict or simple fasts to another equivalent penance.

The answer to this question is mainly based on and taken from: John A. Hardon, SJ, The Catholic Catechism, A Contemporary Catechism of the Teachings of the Catholic Church, pp. 283-294.

If you have ever wondered what Catholics really believe or just questioned “why is that?” about a certain topic, you now have the opportunity to find out.

We look forward to your many questions…. so ask away!
Man Before God
Being in its Unfolding: The Primacy of Being in Unity—Installment 2/9

An intrinsic moment of all our thinking is the acknowledgment of the idea of “being”—that which is as it really is—the very condition of the possibility of our conscious activity. The idea of being is thus co-affirmed whenever something is either affirmed or even negated; it remains in the penumbra of our direct knowing. Put otherwise, we can only affirm or negate states of fact in the horizon or perspective of being. The direct task of philosophy, unlike the empirical sciences that deal with concrete objects, is to probe and elaborate upon the truths embedded in the idea of being, the being, the “to be” (verbal perspective) of “being” (substantial perspective), to make explicit all that is implicit in the idea of being.

As we have already seen, the notion itself of existence deals with the “is-ness” of being. But apart from acknowledging existence, we want to know what or how a being is what it is. The “what-ness” of being concerns its essence—that by which a thing is that which it is, in other words, the content of the idea of being, the defining nature of an existent. Thus, the primal notions of existence and essence go hand in hand with one another in unpacking the significance of the real before us, the making known to an inquiring or knowing mind. Summarily expressed, being as “that which is” is distilled in the following way:

“that” (the essence at stake) “which” (in relation to) “is” (is-ness, to be, existence).

Having thus acknowledged that the notion of being as being marked by existence (“is-ness”) and essence (“what-ness”), other properties of being come to the fore, properties that are so at one with being that we can even say they are “convertible” with being, namely, they express being under another formality implied by the essence of being. As such they are said to be “transcendent” properties of being as they enjoy an absolutely unlimited extension; they mark all being in general and all beings in particular. For starters, we can grasp how all beings enjoy an internal consistency of being: being is “being one” with itself and not being other than itself. Being, in other words, necessarily excludes its negation; it is “undivided (one) in itself. Being, in other words, enjoys self-identity. Curiously, however, in the very affirmation of the self-identity of being, we also affirm along with the one there is the “many” the undivided in itself being divided from others. In the very act of affirmation, we have at least a subject and an object (thus, a “many”). Accordingly, we can assert there is a multitude of “ones,” this multitude in itself not being absolute, but a “unity” of beings in being. Every being as “being one” is identical with itself, but insofar as everything is, even in its division from others, everything is united with everything else in being.

At this juncture, we are in the position to formulate the first principle of speculative reason, the principle of identity/noncontradiction. What the principle of identity states positively is more than a mere tautology or analytic statement “A=A,” but a true synthetic insight “A necessarily=A,” affirming the necessity of every being being itself. If expressed negatively, we have the principle of noncontradiction: “A being cannot not be itself.” More expansively, “something cannot at the same time and under the same respect be and not be.” A simpler statement of each is that, on the one hand, “being necessarily is being,” and, on the other, “being cannot not be.”

Contingent being, of course, enjoys only a relative unity in itself as it is a composite of being (existence) and essence. Absolute Unity requires the identification of essence with existence, an ius esse, Existence itself, which Almighty God is. The metaphysics of the Book of Exodus states exactly this. To Moses’ question “[if they [the Israelites] ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?,” (Ex 3:13) God declaratively responds “I am who am,” adding that “this is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you” (Ex 3:14), Almighty God being absolutely at One with Himself.

Life, Love, and the Human Person

Taste Your Words

They say that “God moves in mysterious ways,” and that sentiment should resonate with Eastern Christians. We use the term Holy Mysteries to describe the Sacraments—not to be contrary to the West or imply that we have “secret knowledge.” In theological terms, a mystery isn’t a puzzle to be figured out. It implies a depth and breadth that almost overwhelms, yet into which we are invited. God Himself is a mystery, not because we can never know Him, but because there is always more to know, more to discover, more to be revealed and to surprise us. God invites us into the mystery of His love, into a relationship with Him that is ever-new, ever-deepening, and meant to be everlasting. It follows from this understanding that God would also reveal Himself to us in mysterious, and unexpected ways. God speaks to us all the time: in the people we meet, the daily tasks we perform, and the signs we see along our path. Recently I came across a literal sign outside of a church that struck me as an important message from God for all of us to contemplate, especially during this time of the Fast. The sign read: *Taste your words before spitting them out.*

Words are good. Through them we communicate information, encourage others, and show love and affection. Through words we teach and learn. Words can be strung together in expressions of beauty and wonder. They can form the essence that deal with concrete objects, is to probe and elaborate upon the truths embedded in the idea of being, the being, the “to be” (verbal perspective) of “being” (substantial perspective), to make explicit all that is implicit in the idea of being.

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ECL
trust, we've been in a battle to regain proper control of language, to use it to elevate rather than decimate.

It's no mystery that God put that church sign in my path during the Great Fast to remind me to pay attention to my thoughts and words, to fast from jumping to conclusions and judging others, and from trying to prove my superiority by cutting them down. Meditating on Christ's life, and especially His Passion and Death, should be the palatable cleanser we all need for considering how we speak to—and about—others. Scripture gives us numerous instances of people vilifying Jesus and chastising Him for not adhering to the Law as they believed He should. (See Mark 7:1-13 for one example). As He made His way toward Golgotha the crowd jeered and insulted Him. One wonders if Jesus had come today how He'd be treated on social media by any one of us: "Saw you talking to a prostitute. Is that a "good look" for a rabbi? You should know better! #Scandalous." Would any of us recognize Him, hear His words and follow Him example? Do we truly recognize Him, hear His words and follow Him now?

"Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:9). The Psalmist’s exhortation is perhaps more significant in this time of divisiveness and anger than at any other, and it’s the seasoning that should flavor our words and our thoughts. As we continue our pilgrimage toward Pascha, let’s pay attention to how our words taste before we spit them at others. Let’s taste the goodness of the Word of the Lord and be the voice of His love in the world.

When we participate in the liturgies of Holy Week we are really present at the events they tell us about. In these talks we will reflect on the liturgies of Holy Week and how we accompany Jesus on his journey from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. We will look at the meaning of hymns and rituals that help us truly participate in this part of the life of our Lord.

Walking with Jesus through Holy Week

Do they still teach Great Books of Western Literature to college freshmen? Time was you were handed a paperback book the size of a Thanksgiving turkey and two thoughts crossed your mind: "Do I have to carry this thing?" And, "How am I ever going to read all this?" Some-thing he lost and then some, living to the ripe old age of 140. Up in heaven, the story of Job seems to be about trials and rewards. That take on Job, probably approached Job (pronounced "jobe" by the pronoun “jobe” by the words and follow Him now?"

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Down on earth, the remaining 36 chapters are a series of speeches composed in exquisite Hebrew poetry. Job laments his suffering, raises questions about God’s justice, and defends himself against four “friends” who come to console him but end up accusing him of sin. The “friends” are smug and judgmental. They know their theology: Job MUST be guilty because God CAN’T be wrong! Job asks only to for a chance to hear God’s reasons. Here is the heart of Job’s outcry: “I know that my Redeemer lives and he shall stand at last on the earth and after my skin is destroyed this I know; that in my flesh I shall see God, who I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold and not another: how my heart yearns within me!” (19:25-27).

Job gets his wish. God appears and starts ques-tioning Job about the wonders of nature (chap-ters 38-41). Can Job explain the stars? Does Job know how to make a hippopotamus or a croco-dile? God’s point is if you can’t figure out earthly things, how can you demand answers to heavenly decisions about life and death? Job, satisfied to have had this chance to speak with God, agrees: “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know” (Job 42:3).

After all these beautiful, poetic speeches, many a reader may be disappointed that Job seems to care in so easily. In fact, between the covers of the Old Testament, there is no answer to Job’s prob-lem or to Job’s prayer. It is only when the book of Job becomes part of a bigger book—a Christian Bible that includes the New Testament—that Job gets his answer. Because Job’s Redeemer DID stand on earth and DOES live forever. That Redeemer experienced suffering as great as Job’s and, unlike Job, did so willingly and absolutely, undeniably innocently. Job’s Redeemer rose from the dead and was seen, heard and touched by His disciples. Job’s Redeemer promised that Job and the rest of us could also rise in our bodies: “in his flesh” Job will indeed see His Redeemer at the Resurrection on the last day (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4). In a very real way, the final chapter of Job has yet to be written and, when it is written, we will be part of the story too.

In the meantime, the book of Job argues against fast, simple answers to life’s difficult questions. It argues against an arrogant, judgmental faith. Job models trust in God even in times of temptation. Job encourages, consistent, honest, uncensored prayer that keeps the conversation with God go-ing. Job argues against believing we have all the answers. Job’s experience of suffering raises a life and death question to which Jesus Christ is the only answer.

Sample the book of Job for yourself. In addi-tion to Job’s climactic speech in chapter 19, check out the beautiful praise for Wisdom (chapter 28) and God’s questions to Job in chapters 38 through 41. ECL

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

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

The Book of Job

Do they still teach Great Books of Western Literature to college freshmen? Time was you were handed a paperback book the size of a Thanksgiving turkey and two thoughts crossed your mind: “Do I have to carry this thing?” And, “How am I ever going to read all this?” Some-where in there was probably a selection from the Bible that includes the New Testament—that...
The whole intention of any icon is to open up the portals of eternity to show us a glimpse into eternity here on the face of the earth. When we gaze at the most compelling feature of the icon, particularly the wonder-working icon of Our Lady of Mariapocs, we are enraptured by the glory of the Theotokos’ countenance (the likeness of God reflecting on her face). Upon closer examination we notice the portrayal of the eyes of the Mother of God. Her right eye looks out at her Son resting on her left arm. Whereas her left eye peers out of the icon, looking at the viewer of the icon, seeking the individual (sinner) approaching her and her Son. Of course, her sight is integrated with that of her Son. Jesus looks downwards with both eyes obedient to his mother.

Also interlinked with this gaze is the arrangement of the hands. The Hodegetria Theotokos implores, intercedes extending her entire right arm and hand to indicate her divine Son. Crossing over her hand is the right hand of the child. His fingers form the anagram of the Tetragrammaton: ICXC, the unpronounced name of the Godhead, YHWH. He responds to her petition; He grants the intercession of the Holy Virgin. With sophisticated hand and arm gestures God’s mercy is flows from Mother to Son to pestsition.

Another indirect detail in this icon is the position of the Son; He is seated at the left side, directly in front of the heart of His holy Mother. While the divine Son points directly to his mother’s throat which silently voices the petitions of the petitioners before her. His right hand extended in blessing is also directly above the black seed pod necklace of the canna lily—which can be interpreted as the ten beads of a rosary—a decade of Hail Marys encircle the Holy Mothers throat.

Liturgical aspects of the Maria Pocs Icon

Byzantines have a deep penchant for beseeching the Holy Virgin during the many cycles of the Liturgical year. Two Hymns in particular enjoy renown with the Maria Pocs icon:

The Akathist Hymn

Originally composed in sixth century Byzantium, the Akathist Hymn (akathistos means standing), was chanted as an intercession to the Holy Virgin to defend the city of Constantinople against an attack. An icon of the Holy Theotokos was processed around the imperial city which was spared from the invasion through her holy intercession. Centuries later an Akathist Hymn was specifically composed for the Mariapocs icon.

The twenty-four oikoi (literally, houses, verses) detail the historical background of the three weepings of the icon, together with the miraculous healings wrought through her intercession.

Paraklesis

In ninth century Byzantium, another Marian Hymn, the Paraklesis, dually meaning simultaneously “intercession” and “consolation,” was composed and was prescribed to be chanted daily during the fast period preceding the feast of the Dormition (15 August). This August feast is one of the primary pilgrimages held in honor of the Mother of Maria Pocs.

The Paraklesis is a series of intercessions addressed to the Holy Virgin, petitioning her delivery from all sorts of catastrophes, floods, fire, famine, earthquakes, civil wars, and riot. It consists of a series of supplications imploring her consolation, especially during these particular times of desperation. Some of the Paraklesis verses are visualized in the Mariapocs icon:

1) She is the safe Harbor depicted as calm ripples in her maphorion.

2) Significantly and most appropriately for Maria Pocs icon her tears wipe away sins, her tears are signs of repentance.

The Gift of Tears

The spiritual significance of tears cannot be undervalued. Penthos or the gift of tears is a favorite Byzantine teaching of the Desert Fathers. Tears flowing from our eyes are not only a sign of emotional release but indicate a deeper spiritual dimension of the repentance and atonement of sin.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of the compunction of tears is found in Genesis 37:50 and the account of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph weeps tears on eight occasions, each time indicates his profound intercession and atonement for his family. The Scriptural accounts of Joseph’s tear shedding is found throughout the Byzantine Lenten Triodion, they serve as a guide for our own personal repentance and contrition for sin.

In Psalm 126 we pray: “May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy.” We also recall the tears Mary Magdalene shed in the Garden as she recognizes Our Lord after His Resurrection calling Him “Rabbi,” Teacher.

Then we have the wonder working tears of Our Lady of Maria Pocs shed on three separate occasions. Her tears indicate not only her presence in the icon, but her intercession and expiation for sins as a sin of compassion and deep love for sinners.

Votive offerings

Votive offerings, offerings of wax effigies to the shrine which show the various intentions offered to the Holy Virgin, beseeching her heavenly intercession. These figures (see photos) range from farm animals, pigs, horses, chickens, etc. to various parts of ailing human anatomy. Also offerings consist of religious medals depicting the Holy Virgin with Christ child. A large collection consists of gold wedding rings which on the Maria Pocs decorative coverings which were fashioned into floreate patterns on the white silk icon covering. There are even prison ankle chains, and one of the more interesting miracles a beehive on the exterior wall of the basilica, which houses the gift of honey/bees from a healed beekeeper.

All of these gifts reveal the petitions of the countless faithful making pilgrimages to this holy site. Whether it was a rebellious domesticated animal at the family farm; or the unfair imprisonment of an individual, or the promise of the reversal of sins for an abusive marital relationship, perhaps the promise to find a spouse. All of these treasures offered to the Monastery proclaim the powerful intercession granted through the agency of the Holy Mother of God of Maria Pocs.

Countless pilgrims wend their way, chiefly by foot to pay homage to this miraculous wonder-working icon.

All pilgrims seek to make themselves present to the Holy Virgin in order to make their requests. Blessed John Paul II did this on 18 August 1991, Beethoven, Mozart, Empress Maria Theresa among others presented themselves before this Greek Catholic icon at Saint Stephen’s in Vienna.

All humbly prostrate themselves before the Holy Virgin and Christ Child addressing their supplications.

Actually, when present at the Shrine one can view the crystalline tears streaming from the eyes of believers offering in deep humility their repentance before the Holy Pair. Paying close attention to the first sentence of the Gospel passage from Saint Luke, they hear the Virgin Mary proclaim: “For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37-45)
SHEDDING COMFORT TO BE VULNERABLE TO CHRIST

Comfort on our spiritual path can lead us to destinations where we may not want to be. We often become very comfortable in our lives, because our whole idea of progress in worldly life is directed towards this end—to be comfortable. We want to make sure that we live in a peaceful home, country, and world; we want to make sure that we have enough of the foods we like; we want to have a proper home and a good and reliable car. We also want to go to a church that makes us feel good about ourselves and to assure us that we have arrived at the level of holiness that God is calling us to. However, if we achieve this comfort in all aspects of our lives, then to our surprise, we may find ourselves distant from Christ. A good question to ask ourselves is: have we valued comfort with God more, than applying His uncomfortable commandments to our lives?

Yes, we can be very comfortable when we neglect reflection on the commandments of God by assuming that we are not sinning. We have worked very long and fought valiantly through this life to get to our level of comfort, and we want to believe that we have arrived at a state of sinlessness. But the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and especially our Lenten devotions teach us over and over again the need to constantly focus on conforming our lives to Christ more and more. If we think that we have arrived at sainthood, then we have fallen for the chief of all vices: pride. The truly humble and God-fearing person knows that no matter how righteous they perceive themselves to be, there is always another level of holiness to be attained—we can always grow even closer to God.

We need Christ to be a part of our lives at every stage and at every moment. There is no time when we can look at ourselves and say that we, alone, are sufficient. There is no time in our lives when we can say that our comfort is more important than opening ourselves up to the healing salve of Christ. Because when we open ourselves up, when we bear all and expose our innermost self to Christ, we will not be in comfort, we will be in a state of vulnerability. When we freely invite Christ to see the dark parts of our soul, we freely invite His Light to shine in that darkness, and to dispel that darkness. If we can make ourselves uncomfortable for a little bit so that we can see ourselves as Christ sees us, then we will come to a new understanding of peace and love. And we will see how the peace that Christ gives, is so much better than any peace we attempt to create for ourselves.

Spiritual Reflections
Father Lewis Rabayda

DAY OF SPIRITUALITY
Sunday, March 18, Warren, OH

The Benedictine Sisters of the Byzantine Church at Queen of Heaven Monastery, Warren, Ohio, are offering a Day of Spirituality in preparation for the Resurrection of Christ, on Sunday, March 18, 2018, from 1:30 PM to 4:30 PM. It will be held at Saints Peter and Paul Parish Center at 180 Belvedere Avenue, NE, Warren, Ohio. To register, please call 330-856-1813 or e-mail qohm@netdotcom.com by Sunday, March 11, 2018.

The presenter will be Reverend Thomas Dansak. He is an excellent and knowledgeable speaker, well versed on many topics. His presentation will be, “Repentance: Asking Forgiveness for Sin.”

There will be time for reflection, questions, and refreshments, and an opportunity to receive the Mystery (Sacrament) of Reconciliation.

School of Prayer
Father G. Scott Boghossian

THY WILL BE DONE

The third petition of the Our Father is, “Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven” (Mt. 6:10). When the Apostle Paul encountered Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he asked, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Ac. 22:10). One of the signs of true conversion is a heart that says to God, “Lord, only tell me what you want me to do, and I will do it.” A true follower of Christ will say with the prophet David, “Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God” (Ps. 143:10). In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Example prayed “not My will, but Your will be done” (Mt. 26:39). When we entered the state of sanctifying grace we murmured spirit, but with joy, enthusiasm, and love praying: “Father, empower me to live a holy life in obedience to Your will.”

When we pray that God’s will be done, we are also asking to recognize and accept God’s will. Nothing happens that God has not willed or willed to permit. He is working all things together for our good (Rm. 8:28). The ancient desert fathers taught “patient acceptance of whatever comes,” and more recent saints teach “total abandonment to divine providence” and “uniformity with God’s will.” Inconveniences, temptations, trials, and difficulties of all kinds enter our lives. They come to us only because God allows them for our highest good, for our eternal salvation. Old Testament figures like Job and the patriarch Joseph show us how God brings good out of evil. The Cross of Christ is the supreme lesson in how God allows evil only to bring from it a greater good. When we pray “Thy will be done,” we are saying, “Father, I resign myself to Your care, and I accept whatever trials and difficulties You allow in my life with faith and patient resignation.”

There is a particular manner in which we should do and accept the will of God. We pray both to accomplish and receive the will of God as it is done in heaven. The traditional interpretation of the phrase “on earth as it is in heaven” is to do and accept the will of God as perfectly as the angels and saints do in heaven. The angels and heavenly spirits obey God and acquiesce to His holy will with supreme joy and intense love. When we pray, “as it is in heaven,” we intend to pray: “Father, may I do Your will, and accept all that You send me, not grudgingly or with a murmuring spirit, but with joy, enthusiasm, and love for You.”

May the will of God be done by us and in us in all things, and may it be done as perfectly as it is done in heaven. Amen.
We learn of our Lord Jesus the Messiah (Christ) through our faith. Our faith comes through hearing the preaching of the Apostles. Saint Paul describes the process: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved ... But how can they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!" (Romans 10:9-14-15) We come to faith through hearing the word of God proclaimed in the church, from reading the words of the apostles inspired by God in the Scriptures, and by the grace of God in our hearts, as Jesus taught, “No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me drew him, and I will raise him on the last day.” (John 6:44)

The question for us now is: “Who is this Jesus, and what does He mean for me?” The traditional answer is that He is our Lord, our Savior and our Redeemer. When Adam was disobedient in Eden, he brought sin and death into the world, but when our Lord was obedient to the Father even to death on the cross, He brought justification and life. The sin of Adam was a parable of how we all sin. The commandment of God was that we should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil of life. We must understand this in faith - it was not God was depriving us of life, but that we could not have true life in God by our own human powers but only through the grace of God. “That is why the serpent was able to deceive Eve and Adam by saying, “God knows well that when you eat of it of your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Having been disobedient and having rejected the grace of God, the offense against the infinite Good could only be healed by the Good Himself, by God, Who took our human nature so that in one person obedience to God’s plan for life might be restored, as again Saint Paul teaches, “For if by that one person’s transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many?” (Romans 5:15). This is all very true, but one problem is that this can be interpreted in a very legalistic way, that is, that there has to be a propitiation equal to the crime, and this propitiation could only be suffered by God Himself, offered as a sacrifice to the Father. Therefore, nothing we do or don’t do makes any difference, only that we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Again, in many ways this is very true. Saint Maximus the Confessor wrote that all the good we do is done through the grace of God. Our only contribution is our free will, choosing life or death on the cross. Our lives can be transformed only by God through the mystery of the Incarnation, just as the bread and wine of the Liturgy become the Body and Blood of Christ by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, and not by our human power, as the priest in the Liturgy of Saint Basil prays - “not because of our righteousness, for we have done nothing good on earth.” This is a model of salvation, but there is one dimension missing: the value of our liberation from sin.

The Son of God did indeed take on our human nature to free it from sin through His cross and resurrection. At the same time, He is our Teacher, our rabbi, and not simply by words. By the way He lived His human life, He gave us a model of how our lives can be transformed, achieving the desire of Adam and Eve. In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, our Lord tells us: “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). We can do this by renouncing all that is evil and committing ourselves to Christ in the grace of baptism. Jesus tells us that we must imitate His way of life: “Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 8:34). This may mean subordinating our life for the love of our neighbor, again as Jesus observes, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13).

This is why we venerate saints. Through them, life in Christ shines forth, and their lives become a part of God’s salvation. Saint Paul explains, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). We are all called to be saints, we are all called to live as He did, possible through His grace and only in His grace, as Saint Paul reveals: “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God Who has loved me and given Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20). This, then, becomes the basic moral principle of living a life in the grace of Christ. Again, Saint Paul: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Our salvation is more than simply a legal renovation through the suffering and death of Jesus, but a transforming experience by which we are really freed from sin and come to share in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). How this happens is different for every one of us, for we do not imitate the life of Christ in its historical details, but in the circumstances in which we are born and live and die, contributing to the reality of the Body of Christ and the image of Christ in every person. ECL
A Byzantine Catholic community is forming at Saint Philip Neri Church, 292 Munn Rd., Fort Mill, SC. Please join us as we grow our community and celebrate the Byzantine Divine Liturgy. Father Steven Galuschik of All Saints Byzantine Catholic Church in North Fort Myers, FL, celebrated Liturgy at the end of October and is now offering weekly Divine Liturgy in the area. This community will serve the northern part of South Carolina as well as Charlotte, North Carolina. Please share this information with your friends and family – especially those who have moved “down South.” We will be celebrating the Byzantine Divine Liturgy on Saturdays at 4 PM. If you would like to participate in any way, or have questions please contact Ron Somich at 440.477.6389 or ron.somich@gmail.com. The website https://carolinabyzantine.com/ will be coming soon – please check that out for news, upcoming gatherings, and service times.

Pre Cana Classes for those preparing for Marriage
Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church
Sundays, April 15th and April 22nd from 2-5PM
Saints Peter and Paul Church, Route 93, Beaver Meadows, PA
COST: $50 per couple for the two Sundays
Participants are asked to contact their pastors. Pastors will contact Father James Demko to inform him of the number of couples arriving from his parish. Registration is 15 minutes before the first session.

Seasonal Reflections
The Great Fast and the Cross
Father Ronald Hatton

And summoning the crowd along with His disciples He said to them: 'If anyone wishes to come along behind Me, let him deny himself utterly and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it; but whoever will lose his soul for the sake of Me and the good tidings will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole cosmos and forfeit his soul? For whoever is ashamed to forfeit his soul? For what might a man give in exchange for his soul?  For what might a man give in exchange for his soul?  For what does it profit a man to gain the whole cosmos and forfeit his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation that He has in store for us. But also, the reading from the Letter to the Hebrews says, “For we have a high priest [Christ] Who is not inca- pable of suffering along with our weaknesses, but rather one Who has been tested in all things like us…!” The popular way to look at Lent is “giving up stuff” for a month or more, and then go back to living our lives as we did before the Fast began. I give up chocolate, but it’s alright, because those chocolate Easter eggs are waiting for us. I give up meat, but can’t wait until Bright Friday, when I can have a 16-ounce steak! But this is not what Lent is about. It is about taking up our crosses and following Christ to the place where sin is crucified forever! Sin is not to be merely set aside for a time but expelled from our lives for the rest of our lives. Anything less is not coming along behind Him. To paraphrase His words, what does it profit us to “give up” something for a time, just to return to it?

In a more proper manner, those times of “giving up things” should be accompanied by a longing for those things, and yet resisting the temptation, and fighting with all our will to deny our stomachs that pleasure that it so badly desires. Fasting that leads to temptation is a constant reminder that we are slaves to our bellies, that we are slaves to our passions, and that our life is turned around backwards. We must learn how to say “no” to the things of heaven and everlasting life. But this is not what Lent is about. It is about taking up our crosses and following Christ to the place where sin is crucified forever! Sin is not to be merely set aside for a time but expelled from our lives for the rest of our lives. Anything less is not coming along behind Him. To paraphrase His words, what does it profit us to “give up” something for a time, just to return to it?

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When I first entered seminary, I was struggling with this whole concept of fasting. So, I did what any good Greek Catholic boy would do: I went and talked to Baba. She shared with me the following sage advice: “Paul. You eat when you eat and you don’t eat when you don’t eat and you don’t get sick.” Thanks Baba – What on earth does that mean? After mulling over that one over a bit, I consulted a very wise priest who met me with the following: “I challenge you to go eat a really big lunch, then go to the chapel and try to pray.” So, I did. That time spent in attempted prayer was all but wasted. I could not focus and I kept nodding off in the warm, sun-lit chapel. There was no conversation with God; I was too full! It was at that moment that I finally understood what Baba meant.

Fasting is not about denying yourself the necessary energy that enables us to complete our day. It is about growing closer to God and engaging in a conversation with Him to forge a relationship. We need to empty ourselves of the earthly food on which we rely in order that we may fill ourselves with the presence and love of Christ. This does not mean abstaining from food until one becomes ill. This means knowing our personal limits and weaknesses so that we may not be controlled by them. Fasting is about examining where one currently is and admitting, “I can do much better.” By cleansing ourselves of our bad habits we are not only making room for God within ourselves, but we are being drawn ever closer to His presence and Glory.

This by no means indicates that we may shrug off the requirements that our Bishop has placed before us. Meeting these requirements is a base from which we may begin to build ourselves. Of course, if one has medical needs that prohibits them from fully participating in fasting requirements they are encouraged to speak with their pastor. I speak from experience. I have several significant food allergies and other medical issues that keep me from fully embracing every single aspect of the fast as it pertains to food. I work closely with my spiritual father to help me develop healthy alternatives that allow me to fully embrace the spirit and essence of the Great Fast. I urge anyone in a similar situation to do the same. The results can be eye opening.

Finally, please remember that all forms of fasting are rooted in prayer. During the Great Fast we are all encouraged to pull back on the food and increase in prayer. We are shifting our priorities by making a little more room for God in both our person and our schedules. Add a few minutes to your private prayer rule. Pick up a Bible and read what our Lord has to say. Attend the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts as mean to strengthen yourself up during the week. Do not deprive yourself of receiving that life-sustaining gift that is the Eucharist. Most importantly, do not think that just because the Great Fast has already started that it is too late to enjoy its benefits. I assure you, it is never too late to turn to God and say, “Lord, today is the day I choose to make myself better, not only for me, but for You.” ECL.