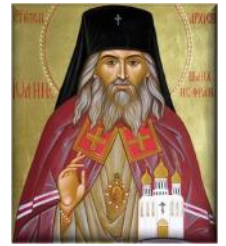


✝ THE SPIRITUAL WATCH

Η Πνευματική Εγρήγορση



“Stand fast on spiritual watch, because you do not know when the Lord will call you to Himself”
«Παραμείνετε ακλόνητοι εν πνευματική εγρήγορση, γιατί δεν γνωρίζετε πότε ο Κύριος θα σας καλέσει εμπρός Του»

+St. John Maximovitch / +Άγιος Ιωάννης Μαξίμοβιτς

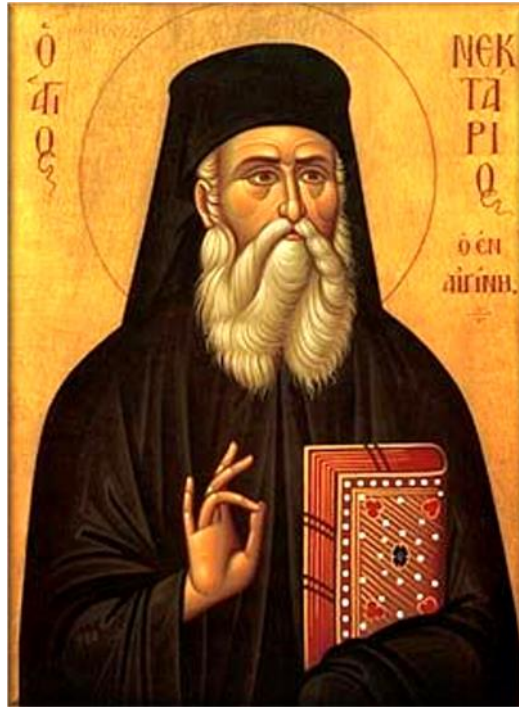
Official publication of the
Genuine Orthodox Church
of America

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The servants of Jesus Christ, particularly and especially those who became Saints of God, follow the path of the Cross, which means that they imitate the Life of Jesus Christ. Our Savior was slandered. He was hated by those who could not bear to behold His image. There were faithful people who, in their hearts, recognized His Holiness, but the multitudes, at one point or another, rebuked Him, slandered Him, spat upon Him, and rejected Him, particularly at the time of the Crucifixion. For this reason, the Christian also takes up his cross and must deal with such circumstances.

We now celebrate the Feast of St. Nektarios, who was such: a true follower of Jesus Christ. There is an oral tradition among some people which states that 100 years need to



pass before someone can be glorified or officially proclaimed a Saint. The main reasoning behind this tradition, which is certainly not a dogmatic teaching of the Church, is that most of the Saint's contemporary slanderers would have reposed in that time, and therefore would not be able to continue their foolish act of slandering the one revealed by God, nor disrupt the glorification. As our Savior was slandered, so too are many of His Saints. We actually find this among some of the Saints of our own times, like St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, and like our own Patron, St. John Maximovitch, of San Francisco. There were those who did not like his steadfast adherence to the Truth of Orthodoxy, and did not accept the official proclamation of his sanctity, in

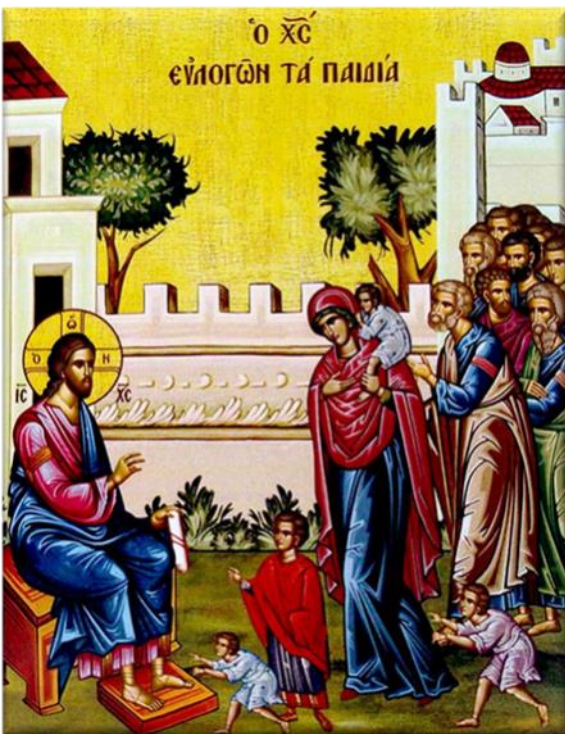
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Ask His Eminence: “Master Bless”

Q: At our parish Feast, when I was leaving, I went to get a blessing from your Eminence and from the priests gathered at the table. However, the priests did not give a blessing, saying that the Metropolitan is here. This confused me. Why will the priests not give a blessing when the Metropolitan is present? Also, why do we receive blessings from clergy in the first place?

A: There is a Greek saying, «Αρχηγού παρόντος, πάσα αρχή πανσάτω», that is, when the first is present, all other leaders give way to the first. In the Holy Church, the priest functions only with the blessing of the bishop. Therefore, the priest's blessings depend on the blessing of the Bishop. In fact, the priest represents the bishop, and the blessings that he gives represent the blessings of the bishop, who, in turn, represents the «Μέγας Αρχιερέυς», the Great High Priest, Christ. There is another saying, “The lesser is blessed by the greater,” and accordingly, the priest himself receives a blessing from the bishop—not

Cont'd on p.3



Be Careful! Watch out for your soul! Turn your thoughts away from what will soon pass, and turn towards what is eternal. Thus you will find the happiness that your soul seeks”
«Πρόσεχε! Φρούρησε την ψυχή σου! Στρέψε τις σκέψεις σου μακριά από αυτά που σύντομα θα περάσουν, και στρέψου προς τα αιώνια. Έτσι θα βρεις την ευτυχία που λαχταρά η ψυχή σου»

Volume IV ❖ Extended Issue 3

+St. John Maximovitch / +Άγιος Ιωάννης Μαξίμοβιτς

There is Always a Road Back

The long battle with persistent sins has often been disheartening for many Orthodox Christians. As a priest, I have seen many Christians struggle over the years with the embarrassment of confessing the same sins repeatedly. Being embarrassed about one's sins is natural. We, because of our human nature, are all sinful in front of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is how we respond to our sins, once we acknowledge them, that is crucial to our salvation.

Too often, this embarrassment makes many Christians keep their sins to themselves. You start believing that it is a lost cause. Many people become jaded and resentful. You envelope yourself in a cocoon of isolation. You fabricate a solipsistic world around you, and start resenting family and friends. It creates a numbness in your soul, and you find yourself lost, alone, and helpless. When a person finally builds up enough resolve to confess, some priests make the tragic mistake of emphasizing the wickedness of the sin, rather than administering spiritual medicine to help the soul heal. This leads to a fatalistic state of despondency.

This hopelessness makes us feel as if we are lost in a forest, and we do not know how to find our way back to salvation. What we must realize, and take to heart is that, in Christ, there is always a road back. This feeling of melancholia is not natural. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven. Christ's mercy is inexhaustible. To think otherwise, is to deny the love of our Lord. His endless love for us is why he took on the flesh. Christ took upon Himself the sins of



humanity. In the gospel according to St. Mark, our Lord says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17). The essential word is repentance. We must want to repent.

Trying to do good or feeling bad for our sins is a first step, but we must reach a point where we take full responsibility for our actions. Only a true repentant person turns away from the sin. In the parable of the Prodigal son, the son takes full responsibility for his sins when he states, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18). It is at this point that forgiveness is given. The father does not admonish his son for his sinful ways, but embraces him, kills the fatted calf, and has a banquet to celebrate (Luke 15:22,23).

Our Heavenly Father waits with open arms to forgive any of our trespasses. He does not judge our sins. "Christ came to save and heal, not to judge" (John

1:17,3:17). We must, however, take the first step. He will not force anyone to love Him. We must humble ourselves and be culpable for our offenses. Through sincere confession, the sins are totally absolved. The gospels tell us that great joy occurs after the repentance of one person. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety- nine persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:17).

How are we able to achieve repentance? What are the steps needed? Fortunately, Saint John Chrysostom, in his homilies, outlines five paths

Cont'd on page 5

Ordination

Fr. Leonidas Pittos Ordained to the Holy Diaconate

Worthy!

On 2/15 November, Leonidas Pittos, son of Fr. Christos and Presvytera Pittos, was ordained to the Diaconate—the first degree of the Priesthood.

We wish every blessing to him in his ministry!

Ἀξίως!

Στις 2/15 Νοεμβρίου, χειροτονήθηκε ο ευλαβέστατος αναγνώστης, Λεωνίδας Πίττος, υιός του Πατέρα Χρήστου και Πρεσβυτέρα Πίττου, εις τον πρώτο βαθμό της Ιεροσύνης εις Διάκονον.

Ευχόμεθα κάθε ευλογία εις το έργον της διακονίας του και σε ανώτερα!



Top left to right: Fr. Christos Pittos, Metropolitan Demetrius, Fr Steven Allen
Bottom left to right: Fr. Dcn. Leonidas Pittos and Fr. Dcn. Nectarios Pittos

100 Years: Saint Nektarios

Cont'd from front cover

spite of enumerable signs and miracles.

St. Paul teaches us that the tongue is an evil thing; there are many people who spend their whole lives opening their mouths and slandering the achievements of others, without a qualm, as St. John of the Ladder says.

Saints are human beings; they were not born Saints—they *became* Saints. God, knowing all things, foreknew that they would walk on the path of sanctity. However, they still had to fight their own passions. They had to struggle with the “old man,” and for this reason, they were able to leave us the incalculably precious treasury of their testimonials on how to do that—that is, their writings concerning how to fight the passions. They did not learn this art without experience. They valiantly and persistently fought the old man, or fallen nature. Oftentimes, when we find ourselves in the throngs of this same battle, fighting the old man, we read their writings and are able, in a more real way, to connect with what they are saying, because we are also experiencing similar things. However, when we do not put up a fight against the evil spirits and our fallen nature, when we do not pick up our cross, then it is very difficult for us to understand the writings of the Holy Fathers.

It has been 100 years since the repose of this great Saint and miracle-worker of our times, St. Nektarios. Early in his life, we find that he was anxious to preach the Word of God. He had set himself to teach because he had a burning desire to instruct people concerning our Savior. But



God humbled him. Certainly now, God has permitted that his voice be heard throughout all the earth through his writings, and his achievements are blazed abroad, and his miracles are well known. However, during his lifetime, he encountered some difficult times. The life of the wondrous Saint clearly illustrates the teachings of the Church on slanderous people, that, without a qualm, just open their mouths and slander the achievements of others—without realizing how sinful they are being at the time, or considering that they could actually be slandering a saint. One hears slanderous people respond, “Oh, but there are no saints anymore.” This is incorrect; there will be Saints until the end of the ages.

Let's just take one example from the life of St. Nektarios. He was slandered when he became Bishop of Pentapolis, in Alexandria. As a result, he was sent out of the Patriarchate and he was exiled from Egypt. So, he went back to Athens, and found that the Synod simply did not want to deal with him. The Patriarchate had stated that he was expelled for reasons known only to the Patriarchate. This left Saint Nektarios to make daily trips to the Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in Athens, in order to receive an assignment

where he could actually preach the word of God. Finally, by God's dispensation, after much toil and patience, he was sent to Evia.

The Saint went to the assigned church in Evia and he served the Divine Liturgy, but he noticed that there were not many people present for the Liturgy, and he was

Cont'd on page 9

Ask His Eminence: Concerning Blessings

Cont'd from front cover



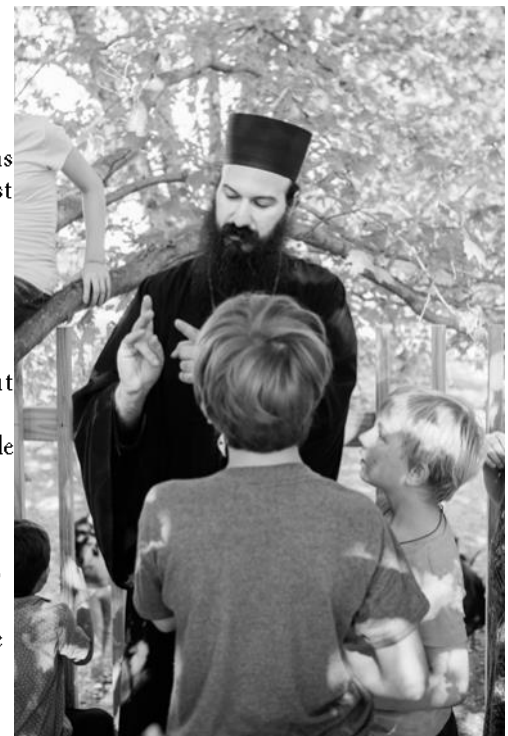
the other way around.

We see another demonstration of this order in the Holy Services. During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, for example, many items are blessed by the priest. However, when a bishop is serving, the priest would never bless the items that need blessing; it is the Bishop who blesses them. It is the Bishop who says, “Peace be unto all,” and gives all blessings, if he is serving. Likewise, in all situations when the bishop is present, he gives the blessings, not the priests. If the bishop is not present, however, then his representatives, the priests, give the blessings on his behalf. We do not make a dogmatic issue out of it, but

this is the order of the Holy Church.

But why, you ask, receive a blessing in the first place? This is a good question, because some people misunderstand the purpose of receiving blessings. Some faithful have a wrong understanding of blessings; they think it is just to give honor or respect to the bishop or priest. But it is much more than that—it is actually receiving a blessing from Christ. When we receive a blessing and kiss the hand of the bishop or priest, we are receiving God's Grace, His favor and protection. Blessings help a person accomplish any given task which is according to the will of God. We have been witness to this many times, and many faithful have been witness to this. Receiving blessings covers us, and the more receptive we are to blessings, the more they cover us.

To summarize, when a person receives a blessing from the bishop, he or she is receiving a very real blessing from Christ because the bishop represents Christ, and the priest represents the bishop. Blessings have power. The more aware we are of this fact, the more benefit we receive.



His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius, explains the blessing sign to children (August 2020)



Featured in this issue:

Holy Ascension Parish, Bearsville, NY

Getting to know our sister parishes!

Establishment of Holy Ascension

On a trip to the Holy Mountain in 1998, His Eminence, Metropolitan Pavlos of America visited Esphigmenou Monastery and spoke with the Hegumenos Fr. Euthymios. During their conversation Met. Pavlos mentioned that he was about to establish a monastic community in America, and he asked the Fr. Euthymios for a suggestion regarding what to name the monastery. Geronda Euthymios asked, "What was the name of the cell chapel that Metropolitan Petros of Astoria lived at when he was a monk on Mt. Athos?" Met. Pavlos replied, "Holy Ascension." The following year, on the Feast Day of the Three Hierarchs, Metropolitan Pavlos established his monastery in the Catskill Mountains. He named it "Holy Ascension" in memory of Geronda Petros, the founder of the Cathedral of St Markella, and a struggler for Holy Tradition.

In the main building at Holy Ascension there is, to this day, an iron wood burning stove that inspired His Eminence, Metropolitan Pavlos, to purchase the house, and the 39 acres it stood on. Emblazoned on the side of the iron stove was an icon of the Holy Martyr St.

Eustathios! As the Lord would have it, Bishop Christodoulos would be ordained to the Episcopacy on the Feast Day of St. Eustathios in the year 2000, and His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius, the successor of His Eminence, Metropolitan Pavlos, was elected the Hegumenos of the monastery on the same Feast, in 2012! The Holy Martyr Eustathios remains a Patron Saint of Holy Ascension.

The monastery brotherhood outgrew the facilities in Bearsville, and Metropolitan

Demetrius established the Monastery of St John of San Francisco, in Cobleskill, NY. The brotherhood migrated to St. John's, and in 2019, Holy Ascension was designated as a parish.

Upon arriving to Holy Ascension, one is immediately greeted by its natural beauty: a wooden cross out in a field surrounded by mountains and cascading fog. Deer and bear frequently roam the premises, in keeping with the name *Bearsville*. Across the road, a little unpretentious Orthodox church is hidden amongst buildings, reminiscing an era of old farm life, and the scenery makes up for their depredation. As you walk in the church you feel like you're in another place in time. The iconostasis beautifully decorated with hand painted designs by the faithful parishioners. To the right, a wide

window looking out to where woodland creatures are often spotted. Suddenly you feel the warmth of the sun



Left to Right His Grace, Bishop Christodoulos, and His Eminence, Metropolitan Pavlos

shining down from the skylights which illumine the church with heavenly light. You grab a handmade candle, smell the sweet beeswax, venerate and say a prayer. You look around for a seat, only to find its standing room only with a few wooden benches along the perimeter. Doesn't take many faithful to fill the room but God always finds a way to make space for His children. After prayers you are drawn to the

warmth coming from the side door leading to the kitchen. There you find the famous wood burning stove....

St. Eustathius, Great Martyr: A Patron of Holy Ascension

Candle making has been a long time tradition at Holy Ascension. The faithful who work in the candle shop feel it has mirrored the struggle of the Holy Great Martyr Eustathius. Before Baptism he had the name "Placidus" [meaning "placid" or "calm" in Latin]. He was a military commander under the emperors Titus (79-81) and Trajan (98-117). Even before he came to know Christ, Placidus did acts of charity, helping the poor and destitute. And the Lord deigned not to leave the virtuous pagan remain within the darkness of idol-worship.

One time a hunting, he chased upon his speedy mount after a stag, which halted its run atop a high hill, and Placidus suddenly saw amidst its antler-rack a radiant Cross, and upon it – the Crucified Son of God. In surprise Placidus heard a voice saying: "Why pursuest thou Me, Placidus?" "Who art Thou, Master, Who dost speak with me?" – in fright

asked Placidus. In reply he heard: "I – am Jesus Christ, God, Who wast incarnated for the salvation of mankind and didst endure voluntary suffering and death by the Cross. Thou honourst Me even without knowing Me, since thy good deeds and abundant alms art come to Me. I have appeared here, to convert and to conjoin thee unto Mine true servants. For I want, that the



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About *The Spiritual Watch*

The Spiritual Watch is published with the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius of America.

The Spiritual Watch is mailed to the homes of faithful by request only.

Please see request information on opposite page.



There is Always a Road Back Cont'd from p.2

needed to attain repentance. These are, Condemnation of Sins, Forgiveness, Prayer, Almsgiving, and Humility. In condemning our sins, St. John Chrysostom talks about the ability to take responsibility and condemn our sins. "Accuse yourself and do not blame others for your actions". By taking onus for our deeds, we take an important step towards repentance. The second step, according to St. John Chrysostom, is forgiveness. St. John states that "In order to master our anger, we must forgive our enemies and those who have wronged us". This is one of the most difficult virtues to establish. We must, however,

"You are not alone. Our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to take up the fight for us. He is there to ease our pain.... St. Basil states, 'Out of labor comes health. Out of sweat comes salvation from the sins that bind you.'"

strive to forgive and be non-judgmental. St. John Chrysostom explains that prayer from the heart, almsgiving to the less fortunate, and humility, are essential to achieve spiritual health. Repentance cannot be achieved without these steps.

This road of repentance may seem to many a Sisyphean task - an impossible goal where the objective is never reached. Do not despair. Take courage that our Lord Jesus Christ will help us. In his letters, Saint Basil writes, "Make the effort to rise from the ground. Remember the good Shephard who will follow and rescue you". Christ is following us through all our difficulties. He is waiting to



rescue us from our sins. Like the Apostle Peter, He will not let us drown in the ocean of our sins. We must, however, reach out and want to be saved. St. Basil also states "Do not despair like the wicked in the pit of evil. There is a time of endurance, a time of long suffering, a time of healing, and a time of correction. Have you stumbled? Arise. Have you sinned? Cease".

Repentance can seem difficult, but it is not impossible. We must shake off this feeling of despondency and stop wallowing in our misery. You are not alone. Our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to take up the fight for us. He is there to ease our pain. We just have to let Him into our hearts. We must be assiduous towards our soul. St. Basil states, "Out of labor comes health. Out of sweat comes salvation from the sins that bind you".

Do not feel discouraged and embarrassed that you are confessing the same sins over and over. When the Apostle Peter asked our Lord how often he should forgive his brother, Christ answers "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Mathew 18:22). Repentance is a struggle, but with guidance from a good spiritual father, we can all make great strides in our spiritual growth. I know that many times we feel hopeless and lost, but remember, there is always a road back.

By Father Kleanthis Korkotas

HOW TO REQUEST THE SPIRITUAL WATCH

Each issue of *The Spiritual Watch* is mailed to the homes of the faithful by request ONLY. Suggested annual donation: \$100 (USD)

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***The Spiritual Watch*, c/o St. John's Monastery, 151 Heron Road Cobleskill, NY 12043**

Donations offered from **within the U.S.**, please make checks payable to:
"Metropolis of America" with "The SW" on the memo line

Donations offered from **outside the U.S.**, please make checks payable to:
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If you would like to receive *The Spiritual Watch*, but are unable to make a donation at this time, please let us know.

Note While the *SW* is a 100% volunteer effort, the periodical does incur significant expenses with printing, mailing supplies, and postage for each issue.

Questions? KeepSpiritualWatch@gmail.com



Monastic tactics

GUIDANCE FOR ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS, OUT OF THE SPIRITUAL BATTLEFIELD OF MONASTICISM

“HAPPY THANKSGIVING” ...according to the Holy Fathers



“*Happiness* can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude.”

— St John Chrysostom



“When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking Him for being so generous to you. If you drink wine, be mindful of Him who has given it to you for your pleasure and as a relief in sickness. When you dress, thank Him for His kindness in providing you with clothes. When you look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, throw yourself at God’s feet and adore Him who in His wisdom has arranged things in this way. Similarly, when the sun goes down and when it rises, when you are asleep or awake, give thanks to God, who created and arranged all things for your benefit, to have you know, love and praise their Creator.”

— St. Basil the Great, from *Homily V. In martyrem Julittam*. A different translation is quoted in the *Prolegomena in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II Volume 8*



Wouldest thou learn words of thanksgiving? Harken unto the Three Children, saying, “We have sinned, we have transgressed. Thou art righteous, O Lord, in all that thou hast done unto us, because thou hast brought all things upon us by a true judgment” (Prayer of Azariah; Book of Daniel LXX). For to confess one’s own sins, this is to give thanks with confessions unto God: a kind of thing which implies one to be guilty of numberless offenses, yet not to have the due penalty exacted. This man most of all is the giver of thanks.”

— St John Chrysostom, *Homily 3, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*

Let us give thanks to God continually. For, it is outrageous that when we enjoy His benefaction to us in deed every single day, we do not acknowledge the favor with so much as a word; and this, when the acknowledgment confers great benefit on us. He does not need anything of ours, but we stand in need of all things from Him.

— St John Chrysostom, *Homily 25, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*



Fourth(type of prayer) are thanksgivings. Unspeakably moved by the memory of God’s past kindnesses, by the vision of what He now grants or by all that He holds out as a future reward to those who love Him, the mind gives thanks. In this perspective richer prayers are often uttered.

Looking with purest gaze at the rewards promised to the saints, our spirit is moved by measureless joy to pour out wordless thanksgiving to God.”

— St John Cassian (*The Conferences, Conf. Nine sects. 9, 11, 12, 13, 14*)

“Prayer changes from entreaty to thanksgiving, and meditation on the divine truths of faith fills the heart with a sense of jubilation and

unimpeachable hope. This hope is a foretaste of future blessings, of which the soul even now receives direct experience, and so it comes to know in part the surpassing richness of God’s bounty, in accordance with the Psalmist’s words, “Taste and know that the Lord is bountiful” (Ps. 34:8). For He is the jubilation of the righteous, the joy of the upright, the gladness of the humble, and the solace of those who grieve because of Him.”

— St. Gregory Palamas, *The Philokalia Vol. 4*

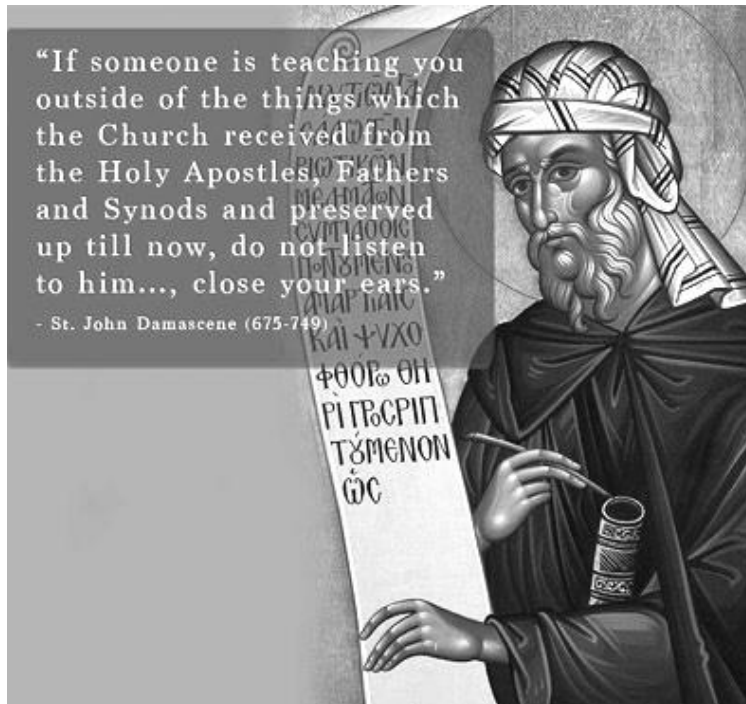


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Success and Growth: St. John of Damascus Orthodox Educational Initiative

With the blessing of Metropolitan Demetrius and the guidance of Metropolitan Moses, our Church's online education program has grown significantly during the Fall 2020 semester. Total enrollment rose to 79, and we have added new classes or discussion groups for all age groups. Some highlights:

- We laid the foundation for our future primary school curriculum with the introduction to classical rhetoric for the elementary grades, using writing exercises based on Aesop's Fables.
- This semester we also expanded our program to offer classes for the middle school student, including History of Ancient Greece, Logic for Younger Students, and Middle School Catechism. Catechism for high school students will be available starting in January 2021.
- We embarked on a new direction - teaching English literature from an Orthodox point of view - with a high school class on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
- Next semester our high school classes in History and Latin will be meeting *three times per week* - for the same tuition. The rigor necessary for these subjects, and the



"If someone is teaching you outside of the things which the Church received from the Holy Apostles, Fathers and Synods and preserved up till now, do not listen to him..., close your ears."

- St. John Damascene (675-749)

"This could be a game-changer: If we support the tireless labor of the St. John's OEI effort, we could end up with an extraordinary, international academic powerhouse of education that creates highly educated, analytical thinkers who are ready to tackle college and life with their understanding of Truth intact and thriving!"

-OEI Parent

desire of our teachers to help our students excel, have impelled us to make this important decision.

- A highly qualified young Orthodox mathematics teacher has joined the faculty. She is currently teaching Pre-Algebra, and she is available to offer classes and tutoring at all levels.
- Metropolitan Moses taught a complete course for adults on the theology of icons, and many of our faithful have enjoyed adult discussion groups covering topics such as the *Spiritual Psalter* of St. Ephraim, the *Catechetical Lectures* of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and *The Life of Moses* by St. Gregory of Nyssa.
- **We ask everyone's prayerful and practical support:**

- Tell everyone about the Initiative.
- Sign up your student-age children.
- Consider supporting us financially.
- And, as always, we ask your prayers.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, enlighten us to guide our young people on the path of salvation, through the prayers of St. John of Damascus and all the saints!

⇒ Learn more about the Orthodox Educational Initiative at <https://orthodoxlearninggoc.com/>

"God alone
can satisfy the soul..."

Why can man never be satisfied? Because his soul was not created for this world. The spirit engenders spirit. To the soul which comes from the divine source by the breath of God, everything temporal is alien. Therefore it can find nothing congenial to it on this earth. It cannot be quieted. Whatever earthly thing you give to the soul, it is unsatisfied. It wants more. God alone can satisfy the soul fully.

-Staretz Zosima



Kid Corner



Spiritual Word Scramble

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Instructions:

Unscramble each of the clue words.

Copy the letters in the numbered cells to other cells with the same number.

Word Search Key, previous issue:

T	Y	R	A	N	I	M	E	S
H	R	E	L	T	S	O	P	A
O	Y	A	R	E	L	I	C	S
P	T	G	D	C	D	O	Y	L
E	R	E	V	I	G	R	O	F
Y	A	F	A	S	T	I	N	G
O	M	Y	Y	K	V	I	N	E
C	O	M	M	U	N	I	O	N
S	T	R	U	G	G	L	E	N

WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL FOR??

Frame your gratitude! The picture to the right is from a Sunday School class in our Metropolis

Faithful Funnies...

Overheard a Sunday School student explaining to someone after class: "Do you know why they call them "Beatitudes?"

Because that should **BE** your **ATTITUDE** !!

Parish Pals

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

(1st Beatitude)



I have nothing to be thankful for this year!



Thank you, Lord, for my brother Leo!



100 Years: Saint Nektarios *Cont'd from front p.3*

taken back. As soon as he started preaching the word of God, there were a few people in the congregation that stood up and screamed, "Away with you, Pharisee! Leave this place, Fornicator!" Here we see, once again, that without a qualm, they just opened their mouths to the point of disrupting the Divine Liturgy and interrupting the sermon of the man of God. At that point, St. Nektarios flipped a few pages ahead, and tried to get closer to the end of the sermon that he was reading. When he finally got to the end, St. Nektarios went into the sanctuary, and the priest said to him, "Your Eminence, you will have to forgive the people because your bad reputation has followed you here. It is not their fault." After the service, St. Nektarios went to his cell, he sat down on his chair, and as a broken man, he started weeping. He was very saddened by this event, and by all the events which had taken place, which led him to this point. In the midst of his sorrow, as a human being, he had a moment, and he cried, "Why Lord?" And he looked up at that moment and saw the Crucifix of Jesus Christ, and he heard from the Crucified Savior, "I

endured This for you. Can you not also endure for Me?" Then the Saint recollected that the mobs had also screamed out at our Savior, "Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!"

So St. Nektarios decided, after hearing this voice within his soul, that he would continue in his struggle, and so, the following Sunday he served again. And once again, when he preached, the congregants screamed at him, "Away with you, Pharisee! Go away, Fornicator!" This happened for several weeks. Finally, the Saint said to himself, "If this happens one more time, I will go to the Holy Mountain of Athos and I will give up this effort. I will take it as a sign," the Saint reasoned, "The Lord expects me to go and live my life quietly on the Holy Mountain, if this happens to me one more time." The following Sunday, after the Saint had made this resolution, he noticed that the church was full, and, to his great surprise, no one said anything. On the contrary, after the service, people started to approach him and ask forgiveness. The parishioners realized, through God's mercy, that

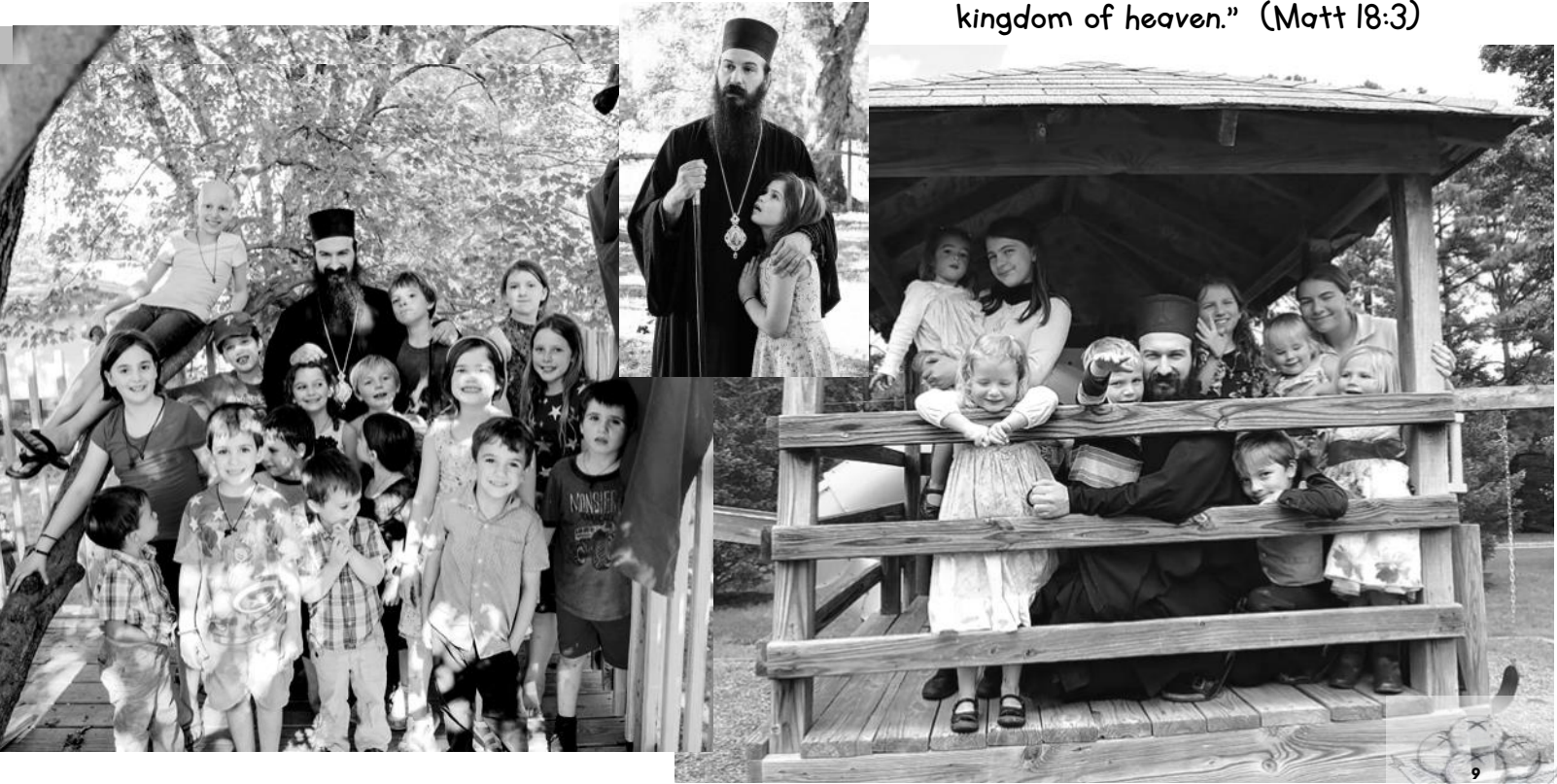
Cont'd on p. 11



Many Years to His Eminence, Metropolitan Moses of Toronto, Fr. Panagiotis, and all the Clergy and Parishioners of St. Nektarios Cathedral for their Feast! (Photo taken in 2018)

Kid Korner Gallery

"...Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 18:3)



Monastic Tactics: *Thanksgiving* Cont'd from p.6

“We should give thanks to Him, as it is said: ‘In everything give thanks’ (I Thess. 5:18). Closely linked to this phrase is another of St. Paul’s injunctions: ‘Pray without ceasing’ (I Thess. 5:17), that is, be mindful of God at all times, in all places, and in every circumstance. For no matter what you do, you should keep in mind the Creator of all things. When you see the light, do not forget Him who gave it to you; when you see the sky, the earth, the sea and all that is in them, marvel at these things and glorify their Creator; when you put on clothing, acknowledge whose gift it is and praise Him who in His providence has given you life. In short, if everything you do becomes for you an occasion for glorifying God, you will be praying unceasingly. And in this way your soul will always rejoice, as St. Paul commends (cf. I Thess. 5:16).”

— *St. Peter of Damaskos, “Book I: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge,” The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 3*

“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

— *St. Paul, Philippians 4:6 (RSV)*



“He who shall preserve the life bestowed upon him, and give thanks to Him Who imparted it, shall receive also length of days forever and ever. But he who shall reject it, and prove himself ungrateful to his Maker, inasmuch as he has been created, and has not recognized Him Who bestowed the gift upon him, deprives himself of the privilege of continuance forever and ever. And, for this reason, the Lord declared to those who showed themselves ungrateful towards Him: ‘If you have not been faithful in that which is little, who will give you that which is great?’ (cf. Lk. 16:11) indicating that those who, in this brief temporal life, have shown themselves ungrateful to Him Who bestowed it, shall justly not receive from Him length of days forever and ever.”

— *St. Irenaeus, The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1*

You should continually and unceasingly call to mind all the blessings which God in His love has bestowed on you in the past, and still bestows for the salvation of your soul. You must not let forgetfulness of evil or laziness make you grow unmindful of these many and great blessings, and so pass the rest of your life uselessly and ungratefully.



— *St. Mark the Ascetic, Letter to Nicolas the Solitary, The Philokalia Vol. 1*

“The truly intelligent man pursues one sole objective: to obey and conform to the God of all. With this single aim in view, he disciplines his soul, and whatever he may encounter in the course of his life, he gives thanks to God for the compass and depth of His providential ordering of all things.

— *St. Anthony the Great, The Philokalia*

“When you are subjected to the malicious and furious violence of the passions, and to the harassments of the Devil, during the fulfillment of various works for God, accept these sufferings as sufferings for the name of Christ, and rejoice in your sufferings, thanking God.

— *St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ*

“Every genuine confession humbles the soul. When it takes the form of thanksgiving, it teaches the soul that it has been delivered by the grace of God.”

— *St. Maximos the Confessor, Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice 3.62, The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 2)*



For if God does not for a moment tire of giving us good things, how can we tire of thanking Him for these good things?”

— *St. Nikolaj Velimirovic*

“We must begin with thanksgiving for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your situation.”

— *St. Ambrose of Optina*

100 Years: Saint Nektarios *Cont'd from p.9*

the slanderers were the guilty ones, and that St. Nektarios was a true Shepherd of the Lord. They understood that they had sinned greatly against the man of God, and that they should be more careful with their tongues.

For his part, St. Nektarios gives us a beautiful lesson in patience, and an extraordinary example of how we should pick up our cross and follow our Savior. We can see why St. Nektarios is glorified throughout the world, and why it is that God gave him such Grace to work abundant miracles. In Toronto alone, we had

enumerable miracles and appearances of St. Nektarios, particularly during the early years of the Cathedral, which was named for him. In fact, he would actually appear to people in real life, not only in dreams, and tell them to go to his Church. Some of these people had not even heard about him, and had not known about the church in Toronto. The miracles worked by the Saint could fill volumes. I remember one time there was a lady who was confused even though she understood, at some level, that the traditional Orthodox were the True Orthodox Church. Her new calendar priest had told her not to go to St. Nektarios, calling it a "schismatic" church. As a last recourse, in her confusion, she decided to pray to St. Nektarios to enlighten her path. She had gathered a bouquet of flowers with the intention of offering them to St. Nektarios, and then she went to her room and began to pray. As she prayed to the Saint, a Bishop suddenly walked into the room. The startled woman watched as the bishop stopped, turned back, and walked out of the room. When he had left, she noticed that her bouquet of flowers had been mysteriously arranged into an artistically perfect Cross! She took a picture of this; one would have to see the picture to truly appreciate the miraculous sign. She understood that the visitation was from God because of the sign of the precious Cross. There were so many other miracles.

Therefore, another lesson that we can learn from the life and struggles of St. Nektarios is that we should bridle the tongue. As we saw, we should be very careful with our mouths, lest we fall into the grievous sin of slander. There is a famous story that comes down to us from our Monastic Fathers, concerning a monk who went to confession. He was enumerating his sins, and finally he came to the sin of slander. The Elder listened quietly, but once the monk mentioned "slander," he said, "Stop! What did you just say?" "Slander," replied the monk. "Do you know what slander is?" asked the Elder, and then instructed the bewildered



monk to go fetch a pillow. The monk obeyed, and the Elder then instructed him to cut open the pillow, which was full of feathers, and scatter them. As it was a windy day, the feathers flew everywhere, and were carried by the winds in all directions. At that point, the Elder instructed the monk to go ahead and gather up all the feathers that he had let out of the pillow. The monk thought that this was a very unreasonable request and protested. The Elder explained, "It is the same thing with slander. When you slander someone, it goes to one person

and then it goes to another person, and then to the next, and the next, and so on, and, of course, the story changes, as it keeps going. To undo that damage is like trying to gather up all these feathers which have scattered throughout the mountain."

You cannot undo that damage. Therefore, slander is one of the worst sins. As we said, St. John of the Ladder teaches us that the slanderer opens his mouth, and without a qualm, slanders the achievements of others. "And how is it that the slanderer has such insight about his victim? How is it that he knows alleged information and detailed accusations?" we should ask ourselves. Is the slanderer enlightened? In most cases, exactly the opposite is true. The very manner in which the slanderer speaks, betrays his darkness: When the slanderer opens his mouth, he is not speaking with peace or Grace; he is angry. He does not show forth fruits of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, our Savior says, "You shall know them by their fruits..." With these words, our Lord helps us to understand that, if one is sincere, and humbles his heart, and searches for God, then he will recognize holiness.

Now, 100 years after his repose, it is very easy for us to recognize the holiness of St. Nektarios. We have his life, his writings, his icons, and his miracles, and his intercessions; and so we venerate him. But, if we had lived during the lifetime of the Saint, who knows if we would have been one of those who had been tricked by his slanderers to participate in the accusations against this holy man of God? God forbid! What a horrible sin that would have been on our conscience and on our soul. Therefore, let us be wise, and flee from slander against our fellow man.

Sermon by His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius of America, Feast of St. Nektarios, 2020

St. Thaddeus of Vitovnika:

Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture.
If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like. If we are focused on worldly concerns, we are drawn into a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility.

Holy Ascension, Bearsville *Cont'd from p.4*

man working righteous deeds, shouldst not perish in the snares of enemies".

Placidus cried out: "Lord, I do believe that Thou – art the God of Heaven and earth, the Creator of all creatures. I beseech Thee, O Master, teach me what I should do". And again resounded the Divine voice: "Go thou unto the Christian priest, receive from him Baptism, and he will instruct thee unto salvation". With joy Placidus returned home, and told everything to his wife. She in turn told him, how the evening before in a mysterious dream-vision she had been told: "Thou, thy husband and thy sons on the morrow shalt come unto Me and know Me – Christ Jesus, the True God, sent unto the salvation of those that do love Me". The spouses then proceeded to do as they had been bidden.

Then all his servants died, his cattle perished and the family abandoned their home. Saint Eustathius lost his Wife and 2 sons along his travels but didn't give up faith. And later on in life they were reunited. Soon after the family refused to worship the idols and accepted a martyr's end.

Candle Shop



Which brings us back to Holy Ascension candle shop. It's equipment was repurposed for a greater cause, her barn condemned by the Town of Woodstock, and no one left with the ability to make candles. With no means to support the parish, all seemed hopeless but the faithful carried on. The new candle shop construction started in November 2019. Production started in June 2020. In the beginning it was one struggle after another. With the refurbishing of used equipment, other expenses, no money for wax or to pay bills but the faithful carried on. All of a sudden, unexpected donations would arrive, people volunteered various skilled work, parishioners near and far dedicating their time and effort to form a team.

Everything was starting to come together, and things were looking bright for the little candle shop. But then... we couldn't seem to

make the tapered church candles. Weekend after weekend the candle makers labored to try and make the tapers but there were always defects. The team was losing time and every drop of wax counted. The pressure was on and despite all efforts and improvements implemented, we were scrapping more candles than packing out. There were times where entire days' worth of dipping were all defective. But the faithful carried on with their cross and didn't give up!

On September 20th/ October 3rd the team once again came together and tried different dipping techniques, tweaked the racks and prayed a little more deeper into their hearts. And then... one set of racks came out perfect, and then another. To the candle makers surprise NOT ONE BAD CANDLE!! The candle maker went to take a break and as a thanks to God decided to do some spiritual reading and see which saints were commemorated that day. To their astonishment it was the feast day of the Holy Martyr St. Eustathios! What joy filled their hearts and they couldn't wait for the rest of the team to show up and share the miracle that had happened! Ever since then the church candles have been coming out just fine. We still have our struggles, but we endure them as



they come, remembering that everything is sent from God for our salvation.

The candle shop is vital to the future of our parish. Candle Purchases will help support church operating expenses and fund the much-needed renovations. This parish holds a key place of history for the G.O.C. It is part of the legacy that our former Metropolitan Pavlos has bestowed upon us to enjoy in honor of our first Metropolitan Petros, who endured so much to further Orthodoxy in America. We want to preserve it for generations to enjoy. One of the first renovation projects will be the farm house. Once complete, the parish can then be able to host more guests and offer a home to a priest who

would be willing to serve there regularly. Currently Bishop Christodoulos, to whom we are grateful, serves so that the faithful can partake in Divine Liturgy. We are a small parish that struggle to preserve Holy Ascension and its legacy. We have future plans of creating additional spaces for all to enjoy worship, spiritual development, and fellowship. For the Nativity fundraiser we have a wide variety of molded candles. To ensure shipment on time for the holidays, email us at HolyAscension@yahoo.com to receive a brochure and order form.

The parishioners of Holy Ascension would like to thank everyone for their Prayers, donations, volunteer work, orders, etc. that helped keep our candle shop and parish alive. We are forever grateful for your acts of love and service. We pray that we can continue to glorify God and do His good works through the candle shop and everything we do.

2nd Annual Wood-Splitting Event

Holy Ascension Parish held their 2nd annual Wood splitting event, from Sept. 18th to Sept. 27th. This was over a week-long event filled with prayers, fellowship, and good old fashion work! It all started back in November 2019 when a parishioner from out of town came to visit the parish and saw a massive pile of logs stacked up against a barn. After talking with some parishioners, she realized that the main source of heat for the parish came from their wood burning stoves. They were struggling to finish it and winter was drawing near. Time was running out! In a last ditch effort, with help from social media and through the

grace of God, she was able to find volunteers from Canada, New Hampshire, and SPFL (Saint Paul's Fellowship of Labor). It was quite the adventure as people were driving and flying in from all over and working against mother nature and time to get the job done. Men swinging axes, maneuvering chainsaws, and rolling huge logs towards the log splitter. Women running wheelbarrows of logs down a muddy windy path, stretching from one side of the property to the other, and then stacking it for later use. It rained and snowed on us, the air was cold and harsh to breath in and yet, we felt so alive! Seeing each other struggling and pushing through encouraged us to keep going. It felt great to do work pleasing to God and we have a much greater appreciation for



Cont'd on next page

Holy Ascension *Cont'd from previous page*



central heating and cooling! Despite rain, snow, and unforeseen obstacles, within the first three weekends in December, the job was done!

This year we wanted to start earlier, expand our projects, host more volunteers, improve the wood splitting process, and provide an even greater spiritual experience. Glory be to God we had four times the number of volunteers from many near and far places, and were able to accomplish all the projects planned! Projects varied from Wood splitting, yard work, and completing the candle shop.

The first weekend we had 25+ volunteers from various parishes, and ages ranging anywhere from 10 to 70+ years young. It was a glorious sight to see and experience! One parishioner at Holy Ascension stated: "It was as if the parish came to life! Everywhere you looked people were working and laughing and it was great seeing the various generations working side by side".

Children are the future, therefore it is critical that they participate in the church in various ways to foster relationships and develop spiritually. As for the young adults, it gives them an opportunity to be a role model and remind them of the impact they have on the younger generation. If they were willing to try, we were there to support them!

We plan to have this event every year, around the same time, and continue to strengthen our fellowship and faith. We want to sincerely thank everyone who came to help physically, prepare meals, promote the event, offer donations and above all, your prayers. Our parish is small with big needs, and it gives us great comfort to see our fellow Orthodox Christians near and far coming to help. It gives us hope for the future of our parish. You are forever in our prayers and we look forward to seeing you next year!

The SW thanks Kat Chatzigeorgiou for submitting this article

With Glory & Honor

“O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honor.”

Coming together as one, under God, is an important aspect of our life now more than ever. Every day, the evil one attacks us, and one of the best things we can do is to fight back by creating more families, and growing our Church. After getting married myself in February this year, I realized that this is truly the way we can work together to defeat the evil one. By joining together with another, we are strengthening each other, no longer working for salvation alone but with someone else, of like mind. Most importantly when we come together, God willing, the joy of children will come of our union. I think it's important for us to celebrate our unions in the GOC. Many of our parishes are far apart and the purpose of my article is to recognize and celebrate those that have come together and have been crowned with glory and honor in their very sacred sacrament as well as announce to the GOC, friends both near and far, that their union has been blessed! If you would like to be featured, please don't hesitate to reach out to me after your wedding: gocweddings@gmail.com

May it be blessed! In Christ, Maria (Mia) Fotopoulos



On July 19th (NS) Sasha Vandalov and Keziah Gehring were joined in matrimony by Fr. Thomas Marretta at the parish of St. Maximus the Confessor in Owego, NY. The two met at St. Seraphim's Church in Virginia in the fall of 2017. Legend has it, that several of the parishioners had already placed the two of them together before Sasha had even moved to town, after leaving his career as a signal officer in the army. Due to these uncertain times, the couple faced many challenges and Fr. Thomas had said that, in all of the years he has married couples, he has never seen a wedding day that required the couple to overcome so many obstacles. Despite vendors being canceled and thunderstorms rolling through, the couple really enjoyed their intimate service, featuring both Russian and Byzantine choirs. The reception was held next door at the farm of Keziah's parents. A few chickens wandered on to the dance floor, and the out of town guests enjoyed visiting with the two donkeys that watched the party from across the driveway. They are now living in Virginia and attend the church of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Many years Aleksandr and Keziah!

On September 6th (NS), there were 3 couples in the GOC that were married!

In Massachusetts, at the St. Mark of Ephesus Cathedral, Mili Chang (daughter of Mr. Chun-yang Chang and Mrs. Chun-chen Chu) and Charles A. George (son of Mr. Arthur C. George and Mrs. Soteria L. George) were married. Their koumbari were Mr. Spyridon Antonopoulos and Mrs. Georgia Antonopoulos. There was a lovely outdoor wedding reception at the home of Charles' parents. The newlyweds now reside in Newark, NJ attending the cathedral of St. Markella's in Astoria, NY. They are happy to begin their new life united in Christ. Many Years Charles and Mili!



In Maryland, at the Church of St. Nicholas of Myra, Ekaterina Alexopoulos and Michael Gerassimou were married. three years ago, the couple met at that very same church. Having to change their wedding date four times, they were finally wed with their friends and family surrounding them at the church where it all started. Graced with the presence of Metropolitan Demetrius, as well as Fr. George Psaromatis, Fr. Christos Patitsas, Fr. George Liadis, Fr. Nicholas Chernjavsky and the deacons Fr. Andrew Wales and Fr. John Psaromatis. The couple celebrated at a large hall just 10 minutes from the church. Family and friends surrounded the couple as they danced through the night. Many Years Michael and Ekaterina!

In Michigan, at the church of Sts. Nectarios & George, Katherine Montie and Phil Delmedico were joined together. They met at a GOC Youth Conference in 2006. They had lost contact for several years. Phil explained that his mother would always tell him that God would put the right girl in front of him and that he would know right away, which is exactly what he felt when they met again in 2019. Fr. Steven Allen

performed the wedding service. The couple had their venue canceled last minute due to restrictions, however a restaurant that the Monties have been going to for years offered to help. Along with their guests the couple celebrated at George's Senate Restaurant and danced outside to the view of a beautiful sunset. Many felt like they were in a little Greek village for the evening. Many years Philip and Katherine!



Editor's Note: The author of this column also celebrated her own wedding on February 2, 2020 in Rochester, NY. Performing the service was the bride's godfather, Fr. Nicholas Chernjavsky and the groom's uncle, Fr. George Psaromatis, as well as the Deacons (both also uncles in the flesh) Fr. Peter Bushunow and Fr. John Psaromatis. Many Years, Panagioti and Mia!



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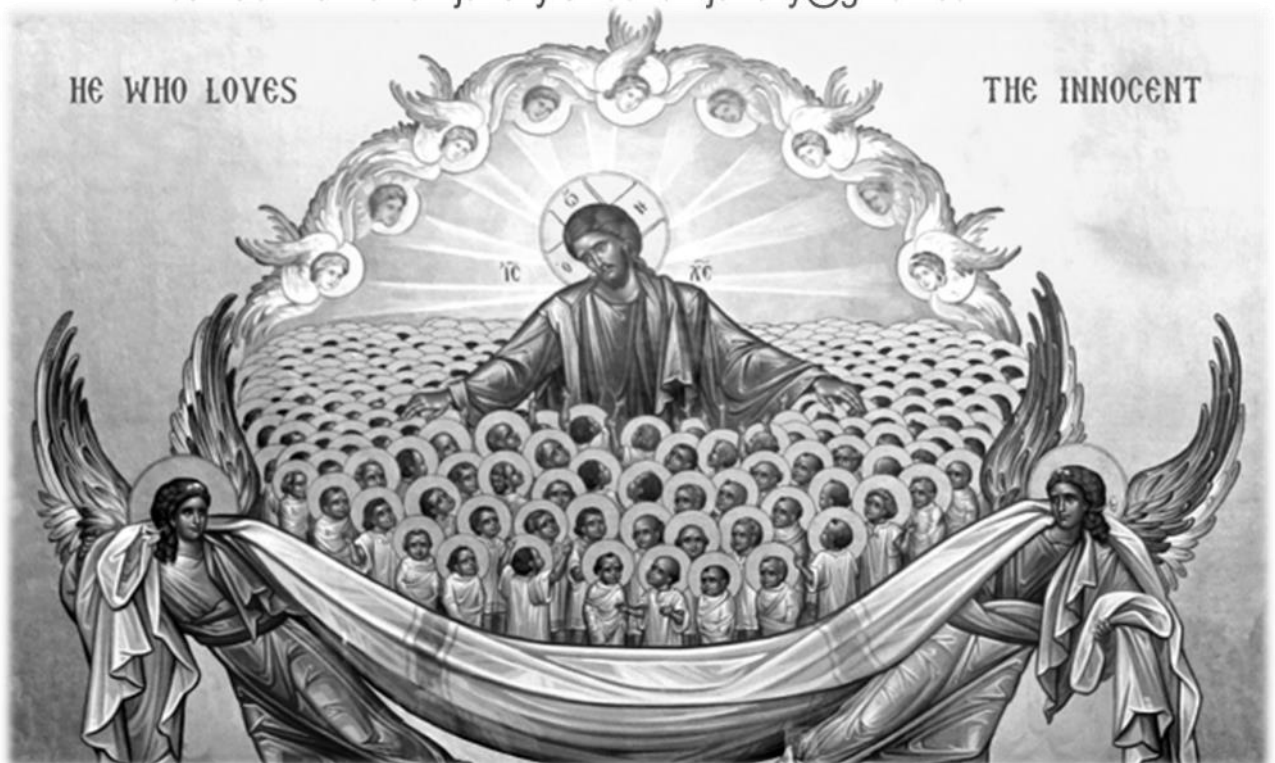
2021 MARCH FOR LIFE

Washington, DC

Friday
January 29, 2021

Join His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius, His Grace,
Bishop Christodoulos, Clergy, and many of the GOC
faithful in marching for the lives of the pre-born and
praying to end abortion in the 48th annual March For
Life in Washington, DC.

For more information about the March and travel details, visit
marchforlife.org. For more information regarding the GOC group,
contact Ben Chernjavsky at bchernjavsky@gmail.com.



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