



January 4th 206

1802 Pershing Ave. Rockford, Illinois 61108 - Father Jonathan Bannon  
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Blessed is he, who did not permit his enthusiasm to cool down. - Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
4 Sunday before Theophany Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM <b>Cutting Parish Vasilopita</b>	5 Strict Fasting Day	6 <b>DL 9:30AM</b> Holy Feast of Theophany Blessing Water	7 <b>DL 9:30AM</b> Synaxis of St. John Baptist  Vespers+ Bible Study 6:30PM	8	9	10
11 Sunday after Theophany Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM	12	13 <b>Liturgy 9:30AM</b>	14 Vespers+ Book Study 6:30PM	15	16	17
18 Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM <b>River Blessing!</b> 	19	20	21 Vespers + Bible Study 6:30PM	22	23	24
25 Zaccheaus Sun. Liturgy 10:00AM w/ Fr. Peter Sodini	26	27 No Service	28 No Service	29	30	31
<b>FEBRUARY 1 Lenten Triodion</b> Publican + Pharisee Sunday Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM	2	3. Liturgy 9:30	4 Vespers + Study NO FASTING	5	6 NO FASTING	7
8 Prodigal Son Sunday Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM	9	10 Liturgy 9:30	11 Vespers + Study Fasting	12	13	14
15 Last Judgement Sunday  Matins 9:00AM Liturgy 10:00AM	16	17 Liturgy 9:30	18 Vespers + Study Fasting	19	20	21

**Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ**

- **SUNDAY AFTER NATIVITY FEAST -January 4th- Matins 9:00AM, Liturgy `10:00AM**  
**Coffee Hour to follow.**  
**Inquiring Minds at 12:30PM “Catechesis and the inner life”**
- **JANUARY 5th Strict Fast Day (Day before Theophany)**
  - We have not been fasting in celebration of the Nativity. To prepare us to receive the newly blessed Holy Water, the church has a day of strict fasting before the feast. No Meat. No Dairy. No oil.
- **THEOPHANY FEAST**  
**JANUARY 6th! Blessing of Water! Major Holy Day**
  - **Liturgy 9:30AM bring a vessel to take home new Holy Water.**
  - **Schedule a home blessing! Call or speak with Fr. Jonathan.**
  - **Home Blessings will be offered on Weekdays.**
- **JANUARY 7th Synaxis of St John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:30 AM**
  - **Vespers + Bible Study 6:30PM**
- HOME BLESSINGS BEGIN January 6th!**
- Ask Fr. Jonathan and schedule a home blessing!**  
The water used for home blessings is from the Greater Blessing of Water service that is only allowed to be offered on the feast of Theophany. Consider it a blessing, a spiritual cleansing, a refreshment of grace.
- How to prepare for a home blessing:
  1. Schedule with Fr. Jonathan after January 6th.
  2. Set out a white cloth on a table with an icon and a candle.
  3. Have New Holy Water blessed at Theophany in a vessel.
  4. Be prepared to lead the parish priest throughout the home while he blesses with holy water and sings the Troparion.

NEW PARISH WEBSITE



Online Stewardship Offerings



Sign Up for COFFEE HOUR and CLEANING



13th Annual Rock River Blessing! January 18th 2026  
 Pan-Orthodox Event at Tinker Swiss Cottage 12:00PM



# A LOOK AHEAD: JANUARY TRADITIONS AND HOLY DAYS

- **Upcoming Tradition:** 2026 RIVER BLESSING TINKER SWISS COTTAGE BRIDGE  
Sunday Jan. 18th 12:00PM // 14th Annual Rock River Blessing // A Pan-Orthodox Service

## •HOME BLESSINGS BEGIN January 6th!

### •Ask Fr. Jonathan and schedule a home blessing!

The water used for home blessings is from the Greater Blessing of Water service that is only allowed to be offered on the feast of Theophany. Consider it a blessing, a spiritual cleansing, a refreshment of grace.

### • How to prepare for a home blessing:

1. Schedule with Fr. Jonathan after January 6th.
2. Set out a white cloth on a table with an icon and a candle.
3. Have New Holy Water blessed at Theophany in a vessel.
4. Be prepared to lead the parish priest throughout the home while he blesses with holy water and sings the Troparion.
5. Custom of hospitality: Consider offering a donation to parish for requesting the home blessing service.



- **Travel Notice:** Father Jonathan will be away from January 22nd to January 31st.  
Rev. Father Peter Sodini of Niles, IL will be serving the Sunday Divine Liturgy on January 25th 2026 at 10:00AM.

## • GREAT LENT 2026

### • LENTEN TRIODION (4 Pre-Lenten Weeks)

- |   |                                       |                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (Fast Free)        | <b>Feb. 1st</b>                       |                       |
| 2. Sunday of Prodigal Son (Regular Wed. Frid. Fasting week)   | <b>Feb. 8th</b>                       |                       |
| 3. Sunday of Last Judgement                                   | <b>Feb. 15th (Last day - meat)</b>    |                       |
| 4. Sunday of Forgiveness / Adam & Eve Cast from the Garden    | <b>Feb. 22rd (Last day - dairy)</b>   |                       |
| 5. Clean Monday - February 23rd                               |                                       |                       |
| 6. First Sunday of Lent / Sunday of Orthodoxy -               | <b>March 1st</b>                      |                       |
| 7. Second Sunday of Lent / St. Gregory Palamas -              | <b>March 8th</b>                      |                       |
| 8. Third Sunday of Lent / Veneration of the Precious Cross    | <b>March 15th</b>                     |                       |
| 9. Fourth Sunday of Lent / St. John Climacus (of the Ladder). | <b>March 22nd</b>                     |                       |
| 10. March 25th Feast of the Annunciation (Wednesday).         | <b>March 25th.</b>                    | <b>(Fish allowed)</b> |
| 11. Fifth Sunday of Lent / St. Mary of Egypt                  | <b>March 29th</b>                     |                       |
| 12. Lazarus Saturday  | <b>April 4th</b>                      |                       |
| 13. Palm Sunday (with outdoor procession / blessing palms).   | <b>April 5th.</b>                     | <b>(Fish allowed)</b> |
| 14. Holy Week April 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th,                       |                                       |                       |
| 15. Holy Monday   |                                       |                       |
| 16. Holy Tuesday  |                                       |                       |
| 17. Holy Wednesday  |                                       |                       |
| 18. Holy Thursday   |                                       |                       |
| 19. Holy Friday (Morning, Afternoon, Evening services).       | <b>April 10th (Strict Fasting)</b>    |                       |
| 20. Great and Holy Saturday                                   | <b>April 11th</b>                     |                       |
| 21. Great and Holy Pascha! Christ is Risen!                   | <b>April 12th (all foods allowed)</b> |                       |
| 22. Bright Week!  |                                       |                       |
| 1. Bright Monday Liturgy (Outdoor Gospel Readings)            | <b>April 13th</b>                     |                       |
| 2. Bright Tuesday Liturgy                                     | <b>April 14th</b>                     |                       |
| 23. St. Thomas Sunday (Blessing of Cemetery Graves)           | <b>April 19th</b>                     |                       |

## Ministries of our Parish

- **PROSFORA:** Pani Marianna
  - Today's Prosfora offered by Amber Hackiewicz
- **CHOIR:** Caroline Erber
- **ATRIUM (Montessori):** Laura Warmke
- **SCRIPTURE CLASS:** Kevin Shedd
- **LIBRARY & BOOK STORE:**  
Amber Hathcock, Christine Blanco, & Fr. Jonathan
- **HOSPITALITY/ COFFEE HOUR:**  
**Point Persons:** Manal & Maurice AlMassad, and Curtis Barnes
- **SISTERHOOD WOMEN'S GROUP:**  
President: Sophie Brucki  
Vice President: Jenna Shedd  
Treasurer: Irena Larson
- **Candle Ministry:** Curtis Barnes  
A day for making candles will be scheduled.  
Share your interest with Curtis!
- **Incense Ministry:** forthcoming. This is looking promising, Ask Ben if you want an update.
- **MEAL TRAINS:** Jenna Shedd, Savannah Diaz
- **OCLife Sanctity of Life Group:**  
Dan Daub, Tyler and Savannah Diaz
- **Venison Ministry!** Deer Meat locally bow-hunted and offered to care for others.
- **Love in Deed: (Current Needs: Snow removal)**  
(Caring for our Oldest Members):  
Christine Blanco, Vashawn Harshman, Curtis & Pam Barnes
- **Church Maintenance:**  
Victor Nafranowicz  
with Jesse Gruber, Jackson McCumber.
- **College Student Ministry:**  
**OCF Chapter: Rockford Region**  
Spiritual Advisor: Fr. Jonathan  
Are you a college student and seeking fellowship and the programs OCF provides? Speak with Fr. Jonathan and check out OCF.net
- **Serving Our Neighbor Food Pantry:**  
Non-Perishable Food Care for our immediate neighborhood: Naomi Reid, Curtis and Pam Barnes, Gerhard and Nicole Meier, and all who would like to join the conversation with designing the cross / container that will hold the items for those in need.
- **PARISH BOARD / COUNCIL:**

**Parish Priest:** Fr. Jonathan Bannon  
**Parish Board President:** Maurice AlMassad  
**Parish Board V. President:** Curtis Barnes IV

**Treasurer:** Jenna Shedd  
**Financial Secretary:** David Shinn  
**Recording Secretary:** Amber Hackiewicz

- Coffee Hour Set Up and Clean Up?  
Sign Up Online.
- **Interested in serving your God and His Church?**  
Ask your priest, a board member, and anyone of the main contacts of these growing ministries.

## A WARM WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS

We are happy you have joined us today. It is our pleasure to have you in our presence this morning and we wish God's Blessings to all who visit with us today & hope you stop in again soon!

You have just experienced the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. It is our ordinary service of worship on regular Sundays in the Orthodox Church. The Liturgy - as experienced this morning- stems from the 4th century though its practices were inherited from the time of the Apostles in the book of Acts. It also represents a time when all Christians worshipped in One Undivided Church. If you have any questions in regards to our worship or the Orthodox Church in general please see Fr. Jonathan and he will gladly answer any of your questions to the best of his ability. He looks forward to meeting you.

At our best, we are known for our welcoming attitude, hospitality generosity and compassion. At our worst, we are sinners, but we're working out our salvation together and could use your help. If you are looking for a church home, and a church where we work on our own hearts first we hope you prayerfully consider making Christ the Savior's that place. Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory Be Forever!

### SPEAKING WITH YOUR PRIEST:

Please know you can call me anytime if there is something troubling you. It is not a sign of weakness to share something that may be heavy on your heart or mind. As a priest and Father to our parish, I want you to feel invited to have confidence in calling if you need someone to listen or to pray for you. My cell: 815-721-4952. Every heart has a cross and you do not need to carry it alone. - Fr. Jonathan

# A Question for Romanian Mother Siluana:



Question: I feel completely powerless without God when I am depressed. But when I am not depressed, I sense that I do not need Him as much. What should I do? Should I ask for sorrows? Otherwise, I see that I am not drawing closer to God. Is it true that we can be saved only through sorrow?

Mother Siluana:

I see that this is the case for you. May God heal you from your depression and give you other sorrows if you cannot get closer to God in any other way, since you might be bored of depression. I am not joking. Depression is the cry of the soul: "I do not want to live without God!" You stay with God when you feel bad, then you renounce Him, and then depression comes, which is your cry. We are different in our depths than we are on the surface!

But we must not take depression lightly. There are people who suffer from depression or more severe psychological illnesses (because depression can also

be a way of life) who are, in a way, scapegoats for their families. There are families that have lived without God for many generations, perhaps; there are families where terrible things happen. Sometimes, dreadful deeds are committed in this darkness of intimacy in families, deeds which weigh heavily from generation to generation, and there comes a time when something snaps in the soul of a person in that family, and a psychological illness occurs as an escape, if you will. This psychological illness frees that person from that burden; God carries that burden somehow, God takes responsibility for it.

We have to be very careful in this matter. As a family, we must care tenderly for that person. And if you are ill, know that your illness does not take away your freedom. Ill people are aware when they commit evil deeds; they know they can stop, with God's help. And we have seen people who, though they struggle with certain problems, still come to Church and hold fast to it even more than we do.

And so, you who asked the question: when you learn to rejoice together with God, you will no longer be depressed. What should you do when you forget God? When you drink water, give glory to God! When you take a walk, give glory to God! When you dance, when you kiss your girlfriend, give glory to God! Did you sin? Repent, or else you will die! Repentance is one of the greatest gifts God has given to human beings. Then comes forgiveness, which lifts us again to the dignity of giving glory to God for everything!

Let us learn to give glory to God in all the small things, and we will discover the joy of being with Him everywhere and at all times. Then we will not forget Him, neither in good times nor in bad.

# HOLY THEOPHANY



## JANUARY 6th

### Bring a container to receive Holy Water

In the early centuries of Christianity, Nativity and Theophany were celebrated on the same day, because in both, Christ reveals Himself: first to the Magi and shepherds, and then at the Jordan, to the world.

The Church hears an echo of Genesis here. Just as the Spirit "brooded" over the waters at creation, so again the Spirit descends over the waters as Christ enters the Jordan. Christ, the Second Adam, refashions humanity within Himself. He is the Christos, the "Anointed One", not because He needs purification (He is purity personified), but because at every step of His saving work: conception, birth, in and out of Egypt, baptism, even death; He reclaims us and restores communion between God and man.

See the icon: there is a horizontal and vertical axis. Horizontally, to Christ's right stands St. John the Baptist (as humanity), and to His left, the angels (as the heavens). Heaven and earth meet in Christ, who unites both in His Incarnation and baptism. Vertically, Christ stands in the earthly Jordan as a man (human, anthropos), yet the Father bears witness "This is My beloved Son", and the Spirit descends as a dove. Indeed the shepherds who watched over the unblemished lambs of sacrifice raised in the valley of Bethlehem now by the desert-shepherd of souls John the Baptist,

Christ is called "the Lamb of God" come to offer Himself as both High-priest and offering. (lots going on with these two feasts indeed.)

We do not hear condemnation raining down, but a peaceful dove, like Noah's, announcing that Paradise is opened again, and the flow of fallen life toward the Dead Sea are being reversed. As Psalm 113 proclaims: "The Jordan turned back." The flow of wounded humanity turns away from the sea of death, figuratively and literally, and toward Life.

The feast of the Nativity was then given its own respective day 9 months from the March 25th feast of the conception of Christ at the Annunciation. So it is we celebrate it with fullness and joy, the virgin birth, then the feast of Theophany.

Theos-phania = Theophany.

## Stichera for the Feast:

You wrapped Yourself in the waters of the Jordan, O Savior who puts on light as a garment. You bowed Your head before the Forerunner, O Lord who measured the heavens with the span of Your hand, so as to turn the world back from error and to save our souls

## WHY DO WE BLESS WATER?

To the ancient mind, water was believed to be in everything. It is a symbol of life. While Christ was baptized he did not need to be. His actions in himself, refashion us. There is however a paradox. While Christ is baptized, he is also Purity personified, in the flesh. If water then symbolizes all matter, all created things, then what happens when God steps into, descends within the water? And the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in those waters... all of creation is blessed. So to bless water is two-fold: 1) We offer back to God what is his. We are stewards of his creation, both men and women make up what is called The Royal Priesthood. We collect and cultivate the created world and give it back to God that it make give glory to Him. Water is blessed so we can then use it sacramentally for baptisms, for blessing and setting apart, purification of people, places, things. The incarnate God (Christmas) the baptized God (Theophany) the God who reveals His Face to us and becomes one of us is a statement that Orthodoxy is "Matter-affirming." We do not disdain he created order. We uplift it, offer it, and receive it back blessed. We drink the Holy Water, we ask God to purify our mind, body and soul.

Above Articles by Fr. Jonathan.

We are grateful to everyone who has filled out a Stewardship 2026 Pledge Card. If you have yet to do so and would like to be a member of the parish it is required. They have been mailed in November and are available in the back of the Church. Return your Pledge Card to the black lock box on the candle table in the Narthex. Thank you! - Stewardship Team

**Timothy 4:5-8** (*Epistle, Sunday Before Theophany*)

*Priest: Wisdom!*

**Reader:** The Reading is from the Second Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to Timothy.

*Priest: Let us attend!*

**Reader:**

*Timothy my son,*

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

**Mark 1:1-8** (*Gospel, Sunday Before Theophany*)

At the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.'" John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. When all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**CAMP NAZARETH SUMMER CAMP 2026**

The time for Summer Camp is Rapidly Approaching!!! The clock is ticking!! REGISTER ONLINE STARTING MARCH 1, 2026

@ 6PM (Eastern Time)!!!

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Dates for the Summer Camping Program

Week 1: Sunday, July 19 – Saturday, July 25, 2026 – Johnstown, Pocono,

Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Week 2: Sunday, July 26 – Saturday, August 1, 2026 – Pittsburgh, Mid-

Atlantic, Washington D.C., and Tri-State Deaneries

Week 3: Sunday, August 2 – Saturday, August 8, 2026 -- New England, New

York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Florida and Canada Deaneries  
Science and Nature Camp: Sunday, August 9 - Wednesday, August 12, 2026

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Register Online Starting March 1, 2026 @ 6pm (EDT)

Register at – [campnazareth.org](http://campnazareth.org)

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Registration for Camp will be on a First-Come First-Serve Basis!! Once capacity for a given week is filled, all other campers will be put on a waiting list.

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Cost for Camp – Diocesan \$390/child, Non-Diocesan \$440/child  
\$20 Early Bird Discount Per Child!!!!

(one-time only, not per week)

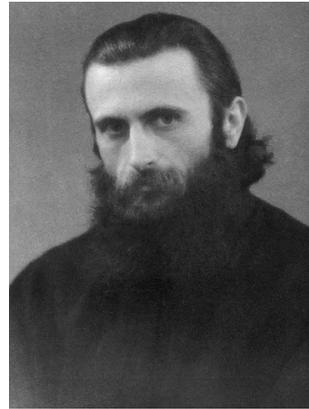
Must Register & pay by May 1, 2026!!!!

Online Registration MUST be complete AND payment must be submitted by

May 1 in order to qualify for the Early Bird Discount.

## St. Arsenie's words on prayer:

When you wake up in the morning, think that God is giving you a day you could never have given yourself. Set aside the first hour, or at least a quarter of an hour, of the day that has been given to you, and offer it to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and good supplication. The more diligently you do this, the more you will sanctify your day and the more strongly you will be fortified against the temptations you will encounter throughout it.

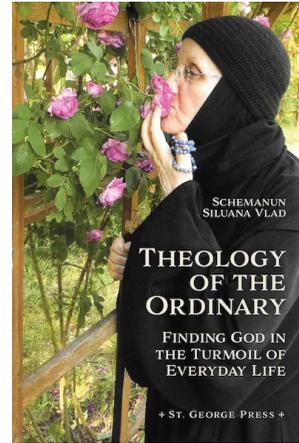


Whoever prays to God in the morning with proper attentiveness is happier and more at peace for the rest of that day. The mind occupies itself all day with what it was concerned about in the morning—like a millstone that, for the rest of the day, grinds either wheat or weeds.

Prayer is the soul's breath, and fasting is the water that quenches the fire of the passions.

People pray to God to deliver them from troubles, while God pleads with people to abandon sin. Now judge for yourselves: who should listen to whom first: God to people, or people to God?

Pray, and fear nothing; do not be frightened by troubles or terrified by afflictions, for prayer will remove them. Pray in any way you can, only be sure to pray continually, and do not be disturbed by anything. Be joyful and peaceful in spirit, for prayer will make you wise.



A new book has just been published at St George Press:

## “Theology of the Ordinary” by Mother Siluana Vlad.

A companion to “God, Where is the Wound?”, it contains three conferences presented by Mother Siluana in Romania in 2006: “The Theology of Small Things”, “Who Am I?” and “The Source of Depression in Modern Man” - together with extensive Q&A sessions for each conference.

Here is an excerpt from one of the Q&A sessions:

**Question: What should we do if people disillusion us? Is it better for us to live alone? Does true love still exist for people today?**

**Mother Siluana:**

You should get disillusioned until you get rid of your illusions! This disillusionment is your doing. My disillusion is my own doing; no one would be able to disillusion me if I did not have illusions! And every disillusion is a good deed, a service to us. We should kiss the hands of the people who disillusion us, kiss them on the cheeks, thank them very much, put them on prayer lists, and separate ourselves from them! It would be too much if we chose to continue living next to people who specialize in disillusioning us and find satisfaction in doing so.

We should learn from this first lesson: we carry illusions because we are full of demands and expectations from others. We want others to be as we wish them to be, as we would even like ourselves to be...and we have illusions about ourselves that we are this way or that. But disillusionment can be the beginning of knowledge, the beginning of love. If you can endure being disillusioned ten times and still love the one who has disillusioned you, you stand a chance to love him until the Final Judgment. In the meantime, tell him each time that his behavior hurts you and that you choose to forgive him, and that he should ask for forgiveness from you. Yet the most important thing here is to accept the consequences of his behavior without accusing him for what you suffer on his account. You have chosen this, and you accept it.

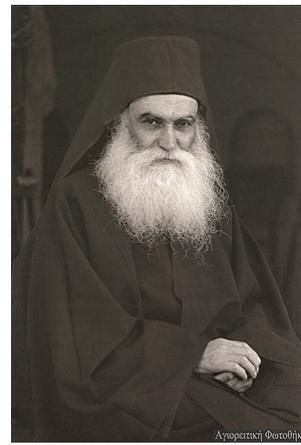
Yes, we cannot live alone, because life is communion. Loneliness is death. When we suffer in a relationship, that too is a kind of death, but a death that leads to resurrection. We die to a way of life centered on ourselves, and we are resurrected for others. No one escapes death. Only at the Final Resurrection will we escape death. But we can choose to die alone and sad, directing our love to a well-bred cat, or to die while being alive, surrounded by beings who love us and whom we love, despite all the wounds we have caused each other and the disillusionments we have experienced.

## Elder Adrian Fageteanu: Spiritual Advice

Fr. Adrian (1912-2011) spent twelve years in various Communist prisons. He was a co-celebrant with St. Sofian at Antim Monastery for many years.



1. The first piece of advice I give you: do not boast.
2. When you feel that everyone hates you and desires your destruction, only then can you truly feel God's love. He never abandons you.
3. You will not believe me, but in prison I was closest to God.
4. In the dungeon, in the midst of dreadful torments, I would tell myself: Endure! Do not make Christ a laughingstock!
5. Humility is the greatest gift from God, the source of all the others. Have humility and a spirit of self-sacrifice. And if you have upset someone, be sorry and try to reconcile with them.
6. If we wish to restrain our body from impurity and if we wish to pray, there is no such thing as "I cannot."
7. People seek God only in trouble, hardships, and suffering, but I advise all Christians to seek Him even when things are going well.
8. Go to your spiritual fathers; do not let them rust!
9. Pride lifts you up, but if you fall from there, you fall into despair. The humble person, on the other hand, has peace and joy.
10. Mount Athos, Jerusalem, and Sinai are in every monastic cell and in everyone's heart.



## SAYINGS OF ST. EPHRAIM OF KATOUNAKIA

- Everyone has a cross to carry. Why? Since the leader of our faith endured the cross, we will also endure it. On one hand, the cross is sweet and light, but, on the other, it can also be bitter and heavy. It depends on our will. If you bear Christ's cross with love then it will be very light; like a sponge or a cork. But if you have a negative attitude, it becomes heavy; too heavy to lift. Obedience doesn't set people free of the bodily passions only, but of the spiritual ones, as well.
- The mountains, the hills, the trees, the sea, and the fish all praise God. But because we've blackened the understanding of our souls, we understand very little of this, very little.
- The Jesus prayer gives you so much sweetness, so much joy. It's short, but it's got so much power. So much, that you say: "Even if I go to hell, I'm not afraid. I'll just say the prayer there, as well."
- Prayer has great power. If you say the Jesus prayer, you can even bring a soul out of hell.
- Be patient with your own passions and be patient with mine. Then you'll become a saint.
- The saints faced sorrows, trials, and temptations with patience. They never asked to be given a break from them and so they gained their reward in heaven.

# Katavasias of Christmas!

Starting Nov. 21st we began to sing about the Nativity

Katavasias means festal hymn and in Matins on Nov. 21st we start singing the first hymns of the Nativity. Why Nov. 21st? This is the feast of the Entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple where she lives in preparation of becoming the Mother of God. The Church is also never “surprised” by feasts. We anticipate them with hymns, we celebrate them when they arrive and after they pass we continue to sing of them until a final leave-taking date usually 7 days later or in the case of Pascha 40 days.

## **Katavasias of Christmas I Ode i. Mode 1.**

Christ is born; glorify Him! \* Christ is come from heaven; go and meet Him. \* Christ is on earth; arise to Him. \* Sing to the Lord, all you who dwell on the earth; \* and in merry spirits, O you peoples, praise His birth. \* For He is glorified.

**Ode iii.** To the Son, begotten \* without flux, of the Father, before the ages, \* and who was lately made incarnate \* of the Virgin without seed; \* to Christ God now let us cry aloud: \* You have exalted the horn of our strength. Only You are holy, O Lord.

**Ode iv.** Jesse's root produced a branch, O Christ, \* and You its flower blossomed forth, \* from the Virgin who by Habakkuk prophetically once was called \* overshadowed, dense mountain. \* From her who knew not man You came incarnate, \* the immaterial God. \* Glory to Your power, O Lord. [SD]

**Ode v.** God of peace and Father of mercies, Your Son \* You have sent unto us as Your messenger, \* the Angel of great counsel who is granting peace. \* Therefore having been guided to the light of godly knowledge, \* waking from the night to dawn, we sing Your glory, O Lover of man.

**Ode vi.** Such as it received \* Jonah as an embryo, the sea beast disgorged him from its bowels intact. \* With the Virgin, though, when the Logos had dwelt in her taking on flesh, \* He came forth from her preserving her yet incorrupt. \* For from her no fluxion suffered He, \* and He kept her unaltered in childbirth.

**Ode vii.** The Servants nurtured piously together, \* with contempt regarding the impious king's decree, \* intrepidly faced the threat of holocaust, \* and while standing in the midst of flames they chanted thus, \* saying: O God of the fathers, You are blessed.

**Ode viii.** We praise and we bless and we worship the Lord. Babylon's bedewing furnace bore the image \* of an extraordinary wonder. \* For it did not burn the youths it accepted, \* nor did the fire of Divinity consume the Virgin's womb wherein it went. \* So let us melodiously chant in praise: \* Let all creation bless and extol the Lord, \* and let it exalt Him supremely to the ages.

## **Tell Me About Sunday Matins (Orthros)**

**By Dr. Βασίλειος (William) Μπίτσας M.D.**

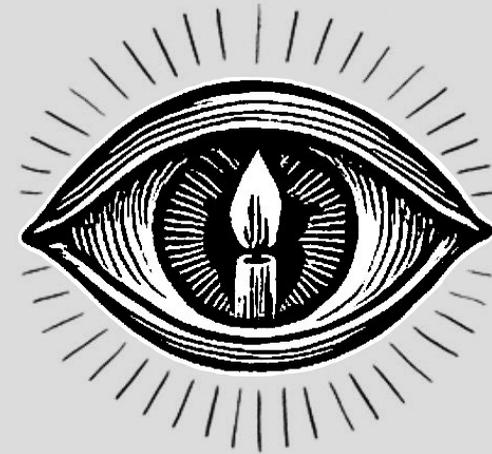
Orthros (or Matins) is the Church's morning prayer service. Orthros is the richest and most varied of the daily services, as it contains hymns for the tone of the week (8 tones, 8 weeks), for the saint or feast of the day, and for the liturgical season. Sunday Orthros also includes resurrectional hymns related to the Gospel readings. This wealth of theology has led some to say that Orthros, along with Vespers, is the **adult education program** of the Orthodox church. A summary outline follows.

1. Opening prayers and hymns. (Lord's Prayer with others)
2. **Six Psalms.** This represents the Second Coming of Christ, and so we are to be still during this time, not even crossing ourselves.
3. “God is the Lord...” and associated hymns.
4. **Kathismata** (singular kathisma). Hymns which originally were chanted between kathismata, or blocks of Psalms. Parish practice is to just do the hymns but not the Psalms, in the interest of time.
5. Blessed are you O Lord; teach me your statutes” is sung at this point in Sunday Orthros. This is to the same melody as the funeral/memorial hymns by the same name, but these are resurrectional in content.
6. **Anabathmoi.** Hymns of ascent, in the tone of the week.
7. Reading of the kontakion and oikos hymns of the day.
8. **Synaxarion,** the list of saints of the day with some small story of their life.
9. **Katavasies.** Orthros has nine odes, which change from liturgical season. Each ode is a group of hymns. The Katavasies are the last hymn of each ode. In parish practice, just the katavasies are chanted, and not the whole ode. Each katavasia has a typical theme: The first, Moses at the Red sea; the 3rd or 4th, the prophet Habakkuk; the 6th, Jonah; the 7th and 8th, the three Youths in the Fire.
10. **Gospel Reading.** There are eleven Dawn Gospels, read in rotation on Sundays. These are read from the side of the altar, the priest representing the Angel at the tomb of Christ.
11. On Sundays is read “Having beheld the resurrection of Christ”.
12. **The 50th Psalm,** chanted on Sundays, read at other times. On Sundays, the priest will come out with the Gospel at the verse “For you have loved truth”. The Bishop (if present) followed by the congregation will venerate the Gospel, which then is taken in procession to the Narthex.
13. **“More honorable than the Cherubim”,** ending with the katavasia of the 9th Ode. . Sometimes the whole 9th ode is substituted here. 9th Ode always honors the Virgin Mary.
14. **Exapostilaria,** hymns related to the Gospel and to the feast.
15. **The Praises,** in the tone of the week, with some hymns related to the tone, others related to the saint or feast or liturgical season. The second to last hymn is the Doxastikon, or the “Glory”, which typically relates to the theme of the Dawn Gospel, or to the feast of the day.
16. **Doxology,** which many think is the start of Liturgy, is actually the end of Orthros. In a full Orthros there are additional hymns and petitions that follow this; in typical parish practice, the Doxology leads into the start of Liturgy as the entire worship area is censed by the clergy.

# COMING SOON.

How does beauty reveal God?

Philokalic Anthropology is to consider the heart more than an organ to pump blood, but the ark of prayer and whose purity determines our vision of Christ, as He says.



PHILOKALIC  
COLLECTIVE

*Cultivating the Eye for Beauty*

Icon Study • Art Education • Aesthetics & Neuroaesthetics

# Parish Prayer List

## PARISH PRAYER LIST:

Share names with Fr. Jonathan if you have someone you would like to be prayed for and/or to have a name removed.

### Recently Illumined-

- ❖Garhart and Nicole (Pascha 2025)
- ❖Alexander and Jasmine (August 17th 2025)
- ❖Ismael and Jennifer and sons: Andrew, Loukas, David, John, Jack (August 24th 2025)
- ❖Tate and Paige (August 31st 2025)
- ❖Will (September 7th 2025)
- ❖Jairo and Valeria with their daughter Metzelli (Sept. 21st 2025)
- ❖Caleb (October 5th 2025)
- ❖Bart, Natalie, Paul (October 12th 2025)

### Catechumens/Inquirers:

- |                     |            |           |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|
| ❖ Issac             | ❖ Anthony  | ❖ Lee     |
| ❖ Isaac             | ❖ Jonathan | ❖ Joancie |
| ❖ Tyler             | ❖ Jackson  | ❖ Abraham |
| ❖ Brandon and Haley | ❖ David    | ❖ Boris   |
| ❖ Arianna           | ❖ Filip    | ❖ Eric    |
| ❖ Alyana and sister | ❖ Emiliano | ❖ Hunter  |
| ❖ Garriet           | ❖ Dominick | ❖ Jaden   |
| ❖ Benjamin and Amy  | ❖ Zachary  | ❖ Joshua  |

**Our Patriarch:** His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and those serving in the Patriarchate in Turkey (persecuted by government),

**Our Metropolitan: His Eminence Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa** and all those working in Johnstown and throughout our Diocese, our Spiritual Fathers and All Patriarchs and Bishops.

All College Students, OCF members and recent graduates.  
Seminarians of Christ the Saviour Seminary and all the Theological Schools of Orthodoxy, our Spiritual Fathers

### Safety of Local Law Enforcement and Firefighters and Emergency Care:

Loredona S., Sarah S. Matthew Z Sarah Z.

### For parish mothers growing babies:

Marisa Light

### For recovering mothers from having babies:

Savannah (with her daughter Vera)  
Rebeca (with her son Amos)  
Paige (with her son Bronson)

### For the Health and Peace of:

Eric (Amber's Cousin) Leslie and Teron (Naomi's Parents) Walter (*Vladimir*) Rakuc, Halina Wojtowicz  
Michelle (Gavin's Mother), Veronica, Steven, Zoey, Emily, Joshua, Molly, Paul, ChristyAnn, Lia and all parish members.

Jill (Jessie's Sister) and her son Craig.

Biljana (Request for prayer from Australia)

### Clergy Families In the Diocese: for health and recovery.

Pani Betty Jean Barnik, Pani Lina Barriger, Pani Dolores Zuder, Fr. Nicholas Wyborski, Pani Eleanor Pribish, Fr. Robert Prepelka, Fr. Edward Pehanich and Pani Kathy, Seminary Prefect,

Father Michael Rustick.

### For the Souls of the Reposed:

Newly Departed Servant of God our beloved Melissa Kiep, our beloved Alexander.

Fr. Michael Miklos, Pani Joan Mahler, Fr. Thomas Blaschak, Theodoros "Ted" Panagiotopoulos (owner of 5 Coins Restaurant in Rockford and neighbors to our parish home) Pani Andrea Kovich

The Hierarchs His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos Ware + His Grace Bishop Athanasius Akunda of West Kenya and Kisumu, + His Eminence Archbishop Gavriel - Paris, France (friend of Fr. Jonathan) and the priests: The Very Reverend Protopresbyter Fr. John Duranko. Fr. Peter Benyo (August 2022), Rev. Deacon Janke and Nina, Very Rev. Protopresbyter Fr. Ronald Hazuda, Fr. William George, Very Rev. Fr. Michael Macura, Fr. Tony Joseph and Pani Patsy, Very Rev. Fr John Baranik, Very Rev. Proto. Michael Polanichka, Subdeacon Jim Janeck, Fr. George S Zervos, Weira, Olga Moore (Sister of Maria Nafranwicz and Sophie Brucki, Thomas (Son of Lidia and Walter Rakuc) Halena (Friend of Irena Larson) Stephen & Sophie Harbachuk, William (Pani Marianna's Great Uncle/Aunt - Spring Valley), Geraldine (Paula Grady's Sister) (Esther Pronschinske - Mya Groza's Grandmother) Trevor Larry Koss (Laura Warmke's Grandfather (Kevin - Sara Erber's Uncle), Mary Andrews, Professor Dimitrios Liakos (Former Art Director of NIU and Orthodox Iconologist who led many trips to Meteora for NIU students) Daniel, Helen, Sandy, Francis J. Schmuck (Craig Warmke's Grandfather) and Beatrice, Weira Hryszcuck, William (Bill) Johnson. (husband of Mary Johnson Friend of Parish) Edward (Paula Grady's cousin) Soija Ageev (Natasha Wagner's Grandma) Anna Evanisko (Pani Miloro's mother), Danny, Nicholas, Maria. Lawrence, Valerie, Scott, Mary, Pearlene, Gary, Anne and, Glen, Raymond Bannon (Fr. Jonathan's Godfather) Luba Bremer, Lamonte Shonagel, Lidia Parfiaevich, Thomas Rakuc, Farid (Manal's Father), Youssef and Rasmeyah (Maurice's Parents) Thomas (Orthodox friend of Caroline) and Peter Tatsis (Father of His Eminence Metropolitan Gregory) Gary (Kevin Shedd's Father) Curtis III (Curtis Barnes Father) Bill and Jade (Parents of Ismael) Marsha and Baum (Parents of Will) Marie Strapko (Michael's wife) Melissa Kiep, Alexander, Adam Primak

### Anniversary of repose:

Please inform Fr. Jonathan if you have anniversaries and people to commemorate with prayer. Thank you.

### Monastics:

Hieromonk Athanasios, Abbess Christonimfi and her retinue of St. Stephen's Orthodox Monastery -Meteora Greece (They donated all of the 24" x 36" icons for our narthex and nave asking only to be prayed for as the "best donation" we could give them.

**Nuns of Piatra Fantanel Monastery** in Romania who made our vestments and sent many icons and prayer ropes as gifts to our children.

**Nuns of St. Jacob the Mangled** in Lebanon who made vestments for Fr. Jonathan and are currently making prayer ropes he purchased to give to those in need.

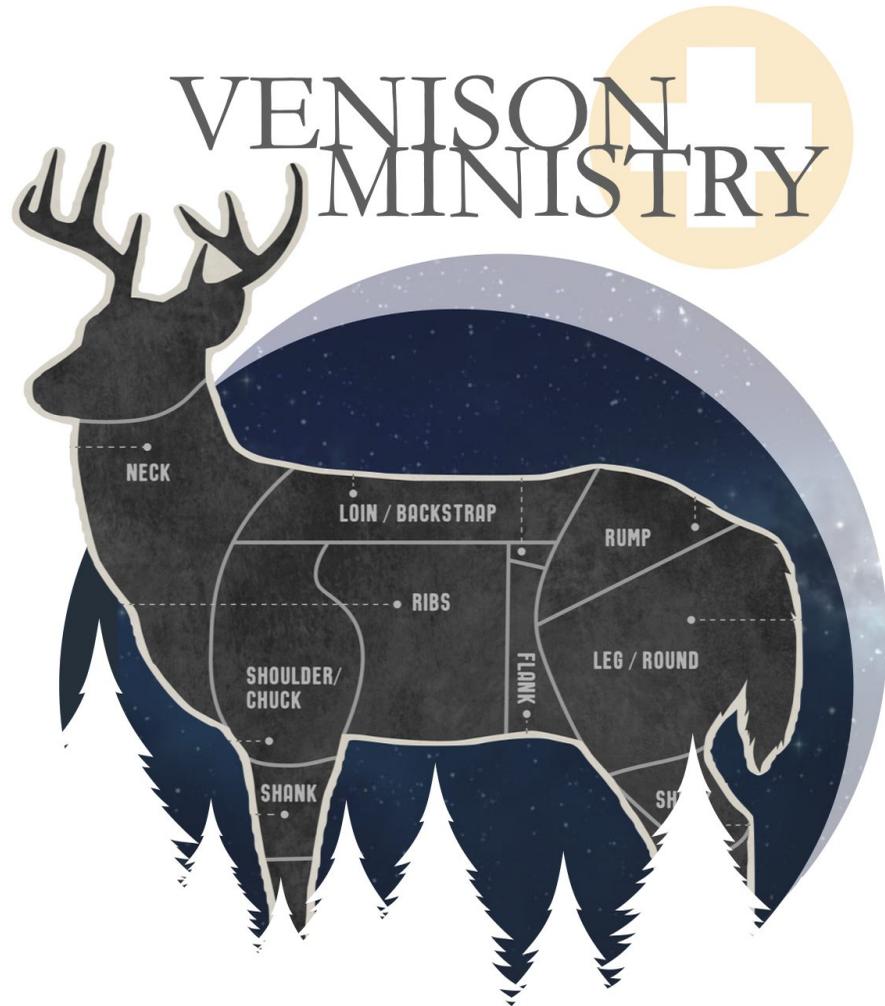
**Fathers of Lacu Monastery on Athos:** Romanian monks who make vestments and have sent us a kind book for our parish library all about Mt. Athos.

**Intentions:** The return of stolen Hagia Sophia to the Orthodox Church. The reopening of Halki Seminary in Constantinople that is unlawfully closed.

### PRAYER LIST FOR NEW SEMINARIANS ATTENDING

**Christ the Saviour Seminary in Johnstown, PA this Fall 2025:**

- **Deacon Maximus Cannaverde**
- **Alexander Hurtsellers**
- **Bradley Shaffer**
- **Nicholas Cizin**
- **John Bonnewicz-Coffey**
- **John Fedornock III**
- **Clay Raburn**
- **Ignatios Leonardo**



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Please keep them in your prayers as invited by our beloved Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

**WISDOM FROM ROMANIA:**

Many people are eager to say the Jesus Prayer, but don't want to cut their passions. The Jesus Prayer in the heart is a divine work, not a human one, and so **the Grace of the Holy Spirit needs to work the prayer in us**, needs to descend upon us. But we don't want to cut our passions, especially our proud minds, so that we can be acceptable to the Lord and so that Grace can descend upon us.

†

People with proud minds are in the devil's clutch. When the devil knows he has power over them in this way, he doesn't even bother them in any other way, because he knows they are losing their salvation.

Pray to the Lord to give you patience and a humble mind so that you have peace of soul. The greatest thing is to have peace of soul in any situation, no matter what someone says to you.  
†

Patience is the greatest power, and the one who is patient is the strongest.  
†

Listen! When someone blames himself in all things, you should know that he is close to God; and when he justifies himself, then the devil is with him.  
†

We need patience! Salvation is not hard, but it is delicate. If we followed the word of the Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Church, it would be very easy.  
†

When you engage in conversation with a passion, Satan himself is talking to you. It is a passion when you think that others are inferior to you. When you have humble thoughts that you are the last and the worst of everyone, unworthy and guilty of all things, then the grace of the Holy Spirit descends on the soul without passions.

Translated from "Geronda Dionisie from Colciu: Wisdom from the Holy Mountain Athos", Predania Press

# *Caring for the Whole Person Body, Mind, Soul*

## **Sacramental and Membership Information:**



Parishioners in “good standing” are those Orthodox Christians who, as members of Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church, strive to live according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church; participate in the life of the parish through regular church attendance, regular reception of Holy Communion and periodic Holy Confession (and receive these sacraments no less than once a year); and financially support the parish (especially through an annual “submitted stewardship pledge card”). Prospective members and returning members are asked to fill out a Stewardship Card, copies of which are available near Church entrance. Only members in good standing sacramentally and with stewardship are allowed a voice & vote at annual parish meetings and to be considered for serving on the parish board or any other ministry offered in our parish proper.

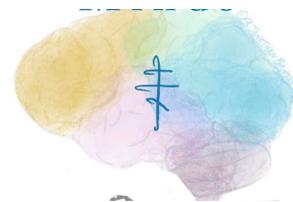
## **From Saint Porphyrios:**



Something which can help a person who is depressed is work, interest in life. The garden, plants, flowers, trees, the countryside, a walk in the open air – all these things tear a person away from a state of inactivity and awake other interests. They act like medicines. To occupy oneself with the arts, with music and so on, is very beneficial. The thing that I place top of the list, however, is interest in the Church, in reading Holy Scripture and attending services. As you study the words of God you are cured without being aware of it.... in our Church a cure is to be found through love for God and prayer, provided this is done with all the heart. - *Wounded by Love*

## **Orthodox Professionals:**

We are blessed to know professionals who are loving and have an Orthodox understanding of the heart and mind near Chicago. Please consider Dr. Arey Christofidis, and or Dr. Randa Anderson. The Orthodox



Christian Counseling Institute (OCCI) is a professional network of Orthodox psychologists, counselors, and marriage and family therapists. It was founded in 2004 by Dr. Ary Christofidis as a referral resource in the Chicago metropolitan area, including Northwest Indiana. Dr. Sofie Azmy is an Orthodox psychologist and wife of a Coptic Orthodox priest. She was our keynote speaker for the Lenten Mission in 2023.

Her website is: <https://lightchoicepsych.com/>

# You are not alone.

In our life as a parish family, we are called to bear one another's burdens and to walk together through both joy and sorrow. There may be times when grief, anxiety, or other struggles weigh heavily on the heart, moments of brokenness when we're unsure of the next step. Please know that no one needs to face such moments alone.

As your priest, I am here to serve you spiritually. Together, we can walk through the difficulties of life and explore a spiritual path/program that meets you where you are, especially if the Orthodox approach to God, prayer, salvation, relationships, or healing past wounds feels unfamiliar. **It is my deepest hope that no one in our parish ever feels alone in these struggles.**

I support the pursuit of mental and emotional health care without a stigma around it. In the bulletin there are trusted professionals we are blessed to know, to reach out to, and we have invited some of them to speak at our parish to further encourage an active dialogue and healthy rhetoric around mental health challenges.

In this we hope to lessen the stigma it is sometimes framed with.

While I am here to walk with you spiritually, there are occasions when mental or emotional pain requires the guidance of a professional counselor. We are whole persons, body, mind, and soul, and we must care for the entire person.

We do not just pray. What we watch on TV or online can affect us, what we eat can affect us. In this spirit, I encourage you to feel confident and supported in seeking help when needed. Here are some of the resources we often find in the bulletin:

## **Orthodox Christian Counseling Institute (OCCI)**

Founded by Dr. Ary Christofidis, OCCI is a network of Orthodox psychologists, counselors, and marriage and family therapists serving the Chicago area and Northwest Indiana.

Website: <https://www.occi-chicagoland.org>

**Dr. Ary Christofidis and Dr. Randa Anderson** both bring a deep understanding of the Orthodox Christian view of the person: mind, body, and soul.

## **Dr. Sofie Azmy**

An Orthodox psychologist and the wife of

a Coptic Orthodox priest, Dr. Azmy was our keynote speaker during the Lenten Mission in 2023. She brings both faith and clinical expertise to her practice.

Website: <https://lightchoicepsych.com>

If you ever wish to speak privately or are seeking direction during difficult times, I am here ready to listen, to pray with you, and to talk if words are needed.

While we all have a personal cross we carry, we do not have to carry it alone.

Please let me or someone trusted know if you are suffering, hurting, or feeling despondent in any way. While our personal cross may remain, knowing we are not alone is often a strength that helps us continue the path.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." - 2 Corinthians 12:9 RSV

## **Last June we explored the following as a parish class:**

Empathy: Tending to each other with active and empathetic listening skills. On June 9th 2024 we discussed approaches to care for others that do not involve trying to solve problems but to know how to sit with people in moments of suffering and have empathy rather than lots of words and answers. Sometimes someone suffering is not looking for answers but to not suffer alone. We explored how to move from instinctual responses to intentional choices, that is how to be intentional with our listening, and by asking questions we ask to show empathy and acceptance for others. This Sunday Christ models this behavior of compassion with the woman at Jacob's Well. We will have another class on Empathy in the upcoming 10 week catechesis.



# PREPARE FOR CONFESSION

**We are never ashamed to confess.**

**All of Heaven, Angels and the Saints are on our side and celebrate our bravery and return!**

During Great Lent and other fasting periods, Orthodox Christians are encouraged to confess their sins, ideally several times a year, based on their spiritual father's guidance and their participation in the Holy Mysteries. Preparing for confession involves sincere self-examination, ideally beginning at least a day before, with a heartfelt desire to confess fully and honestly.

The following questions are meant to help with this self-examination—not as a test, but as a way to recognize spiritual struggles. Before God's perfection, we all fall short, which is why we rely on His mercy rather than our own righteousness. No sin is greater than God's love. Even if we have failed in many ways, we should not despair but confess with humility, resolve to make amends, and trust in the grace and guidance of our confessor.

Specific Questions to Consider:

- **Regarding God:**
  - Have you used the name of the Lord in swearing or in a joking way?
  - Have you sworn or murmured against God?
  - Have you been ashamed to make the sign of the Cross in front of others?
- **Regarding Others:**
  - Have you given false testimony against anyone?
  - Have you spoken evil, told lies, or spread rumors about anyone?
  - Have you disclosed to anyone the sins and faults of another?
  - Have you made careless statements or done anything else to harm the name and reputation of another?
  - Have you engaged in idle gossip?
- **Regarding Your Own Actions:**
  - Have you acted with anger, envy, pride, or greed?
  - Have you been lazy or negligent in your duties?
  - Have you failed to forgive others or to show compassion?
  - Have you been unfaithful in your relationships?
  - Have you neglected prayer or other spiritual practices?

3. During Confession:

- **Confess Honestly:** Remember that you are confessing to God and the priest is your witness. The priest is also there to offer the prayer and help in case we are carrying things that are not ours to carry.
- **Be Specific:** Name your sins and trust that grace is given to the humble. It is a great feat to give over to Christ our sins.
- **Don't Mention Others:** Focus on your own sins and avoid complaining about others.
- **Listen to the Priest:** Pay attention to the priest's words and guidance.
- **Accept Penance:** The priest may assign a penance to help you grow in holiness. Accept it with humility and obedience. Penance is not a punishment but rather a spiritual discipline. If someone is greedy then being asked to find a charity to support is one idea. If someone is not concerned with the care of others perhaps the name of a person suffering an illness would be offered asking the person to pray for that suffering person every day for a week or two. These are things for our hearts, not punishments.
- **Express Gratitude:** After the confession, express your gratitude to God for His mercy and forgiveness.

# Confession

# How to Make a Good Confession

by little city hermit

By Fr. Alexey was a spiritual child of Fr. Seraphim Rose

We often wonder how often we should go to confession. The answer is simple—whenever you have a serious sin on your conscience. Examine your conscience and beg God to show you're your faults; if you don't know who you are then you don't know what Christ came to save you from. This can be a difficult process, but a necessary one. Such study reveals our self-love by which we blind and deceive ourselves.

Our sins offend the Almighty God. He wants to forgive us and share His mercy. We must be satisfied not just with avoiding serious sins, but even the smallest, in an ongoing striving for holiness. Our sins cause ourselves and others unhappiness—why would we want this?!

St. John of Kronstadt says that if you live just one day in obedience to all the commandments then you'll have a foretaste of Heaven. Once we know and detest our faults we can begin to replace them with virtues, but know that this won't happen all at once. Be the simple, difficult,

weak creature that you are, and start small—to try to stop sinning all at once is actually a manifestation of pride. Start with the baby milk of spiritual struggle before moving on to the strong wine.

**How should we examine our conscience?** You should do this daily, taking time at night to reflect. You can use the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and so on, as a guide. My spiritual father, Fr. Seraphim Rose, taught me to consider: How have I sinned against God? against my neighbor? and against myself?

Through examining our conscience we begin to discover what is our predominant passion(s)—that sin we fall into most frequently, which tries to master us. This can be the love of ease, love of power, complaining, judgmentalism, and so on. One of the worst things that can happen to us is when someone asks our advice, so we give “learned advice,” but in the end they don't follow it and we get very upset.

**To overcome vice we must practice the opposing virtue.** The Ladder of Divine Ascent is a great help in this regard. St. John Climacus analyzed each virtue and vice as a master of psychology, seeing cause-effect relationships in a theocentric framework. Identify your predominant vice, locate its opposite virtue and begin to cultivate it. Simply avoiding vice won't work because then the passion will simply be replaced with other passions. If we do this we will see that the spiritual life works! We don't like anyone to point out our faults, but in actuality we need our spiritual father to do this.

We each have our predominant virtue too. Studying and practicing this tends to draw the other virtues along with it. We can overcome vice by practicing the presence of God, by beginning to develop an awareness that at all times we are in the presence of God and He observes us. The icon corner serves this purpose. It is a two-way window to Heaven. Before doing or saying anything,

think to yourself: “Would I do this in Church in front of the altar?” If the answer is “no” then don't do it. Church is the place par excellence where we come into God's presence and receive Him.

The Theotokos practiced the presence of God more perfectly than anyone else. Her virtues grew and she thus had a powerful influence on other people. People were made better by her mere presence.

The predominant passion is pride; it is the mother of all sins. Its opposite is humility. No soul can have any holiness without some humility, and yet pride will lurk in our darkest recesses our whole life. Adam and Eve fell because they listened to the serpent and thought that they knew better than God. This is pride, and now most of us follow two masters—a little pride and a little humility. Pride is the love of self, the beginning of all sin, and the neglect of the fact that we depend on God for everything.

What separates us from death is so little. Our lives are very fragile, and pride places us in opposition to God because by it we work only for our own glory.

Pride places false regard on the opinion of others, and of ourselves, when the what you think matters more than what God thinks. It is also manifested as desiring a good reputation—to be thought well of, to be honored—and this is a great temptation for priests, with people looking for the latest guide or guru. A priest must do everything to remain humble about what people say. Actually, criticism against a priest is a blessing to keep him humble, which is in turn good for the whole parish. Pride is also seen in being overbearing towards others, insulting or critiquing others, being argumentative, and getting angry easily.

The Holy Fathers give us the antidote for going from vice to virtue. The spiritual life is a science, not an art form. Most of us aren't so spiritually talented so we need laws and cause and effect in order to learn the spiritual life. St. John Climacus says that the antidote for pride is prayer. Identify where the pride is in your life and ask for strength against it. Human effort can do very little. We must realize that everything depends on God. In prayer we make use of God's grace, and then we can do almost anything—we can move mountains!

Pride can also be turned into humility by acts of humility, and especially by accepting humiliations. If someone criticizes you, even unfairly, if someone insults you or talks about you behind your back, instead of becoming defensive, accept it! This cheerful bearing of small failures on the part of ourselves and others is bearing one another's burdens (see Gal. 6:2). It is important to bear the misunderstandings of others without complaint or self-justification. All too often we're prone to excuse ourselves and urge our opinions on others. When we learn to accept the humiliations that come our way then we're learning to be humble. As pride is the mother of all sins, humility is the mother of all virtues.

Another serious vice is avarice, which is the opposite of detachment and denunciation. It is the desire for many goods, for power over people, and so on. This passion is combated by cultivating a spirit of generosity. The Lord's command to give up your coat is quite literal (Mt. 5:40). St. John Maximovitch would often come back practically naked because he had given his clothes away to the poor and starving. St. John of Kronstadt did the same. You don't have to give away everything, but we should strive to not possess our possessions with our heart. We can have the spirit of poverty even if we aren't poor—only buying what is absolutely necessary.

There was a German Lutheran pastor named Richard Wurmbrandt who was a prisoner of Romanian and Russian Communists. When asked how he could manage solitary confinement he answered that he had had practice beforehand. He suggested that Americans with much wealth go into a store where they have no intention of buying anything, and every time they see something they like, they should go



up to it, look at it, and say “I don’t need this.” Do this repeatedly and you train yourself to be detached from worldly goods. He realized that who he is isn’t dependent on what he owns, whereas most of us really do define ourselves by what we surround ourselves with.

The Desert Fathers had a Psalter and a vigil lamp and that was it, and they were free and belonged to God.

Cultivate generosity and have a spirit of detachment. You can practice this by not using credit cards. We live in a world where it’s possible with a little imagination and a credit card to create an environment straight out of another time, such as colonial America, Tudor England, and so on. Never before was this possible. There’s something very abnormal about it when you think about it. Let’s just live simply and love and care for one another and use our blessings to care for the Church, for the poor, and so on.

We need a spirit of detachment from people too. You can have affections that are not immoral but simply too strong. Don’t define yourself in terms of other people. The spirit of Christian poverty allows for what is genuinely needed, but don’t go out and get something just because someone else has it. Of course detachment doesn’t mean laziness, dirtiness, slovenliness, chaos, carelessness, or anything less than orderly and clean—this is a form of self-love. Christian poverty isn’t stinginess—this is avarice.

Possession can be a passion that spreads even to things not worth keeping. Avarice regrets that you don’t have what others have. Avarice is stinginess. When you give to a beggar it’s for you. It’s not so much for the beggar—if you’re not willing to give that tells you something about yourself. We cannot rest in our diligence—there is always some way there for avarice or pride to creep in. And the antidote to avarice is prayer.

What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of His soul—put this in a frame in your house!

Regarding lust, we are taught that the clean of heart shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and see God, which refers to modesty and chastity according to our state in life, not just big things like fornication and adultery, although Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God is specifically about sexual sins. Our culture is awash in a cesspool of immorality and lust, dominating every aspect of our entertainment, commerce, and so on, but Christ encouraged chastity and celibacy amongst His disciples.

Even seemingly “innocent” things need more discipline, such as too much hugging in churches. For instance, monks and nuns don’t hug—they greet one another with a kiss of peace. I never hugged my spiritual father, Fr. Seraphim, but we loved one another. Of course, hugging is not an awful thing, but what I’m talking about is part of a general looseness of our culture, with looseness of dress, especially in Church, and so on. We see women in church in pants, men in shorts, women with uncovered heads—there was a time when this would never have happened.

If we had tea with the Queen we’d wear our absolute best, but we walk into Church with the Almighty God as if we’ve just come from a picnic. We need to rekindle the higher standard. Men shouldn’t wear short sleeves, or shorts, or pants that are too tight, and you don’t need a tie, which St. John called a noose.

You can combat lust by fasting. St. John of Climacus says in his Ladder of Divine Ascent that gluttony is the mother of many sins, particularly lust. If you struggle with lust you can begin fasting with the lessing of your spiritual father, beyond the fasts of the Church even. If you fast you will find that lustful temptations go away.

We need to learn how to guard our eyes. Monastics know not to look all around—keep your eyes on where you’re going. In photos of the saints we see that often they are not looking directly into the camera; they learned to discipline their eyes so that what comes into the soul via the eyes would not harm them. In the evening prayers we ask for forgiveness if we have seen anyone and been wounded thereby in our hearts. We seek to control our minds too, in disciplining the imagination, day-dreaming, curiosity, and so on.

The antidote for lust is prayer. The spiritual life is a constant battle that will end only at our death. We battle not against flesh and blood, but against the fallen angels (see Eph. 6:12). Examine your conscience, identify your predominant virtue and vice and seek the guidance of a spiritual father. The soul is a garden, though often choke with the weeds of the vices. Our task is to learn how to pull out the weeds one-by-one and plant flowers of virtue.

**Question:** If you’re on the path but still have passions will you see the Kingdom of Heaven?

**Answer:** We must make sure that we’re really on the path. We often delude ourselves into thinking we’re on the path when we haven’t actually repented. We don’t have to achieve absolute perfection, but we need some victory that shows our heart.

**Question:** Surely we can’t give to everyone who asks or we’ll go broke.

**Answer:** We are called to give but we do need to be discerning. Of course we need to keep some money to provide for our families, to give to charitable organizations, and so on.

**Question:** What is the difference between self-respect and self-love?

**Answer:** Some have the special grace to stay in and redeem abusive situations, but this is very rare—it’s almost like martyrdom.

We must be very careful about this, as our culture tells us we’re just a little higher than animals, or even less worthy than animals. We see people saving whales but not babies. Until 150 years ago we believed we were a little lower than the angels, and people tend to live up or down to the image they are given of themselves.

We must work with people very carefully to give them self-respect that isn’t pride. Self-respect comes from being made according to the image of God and knowing that He redeemed us. We should not define ourselves by other people.

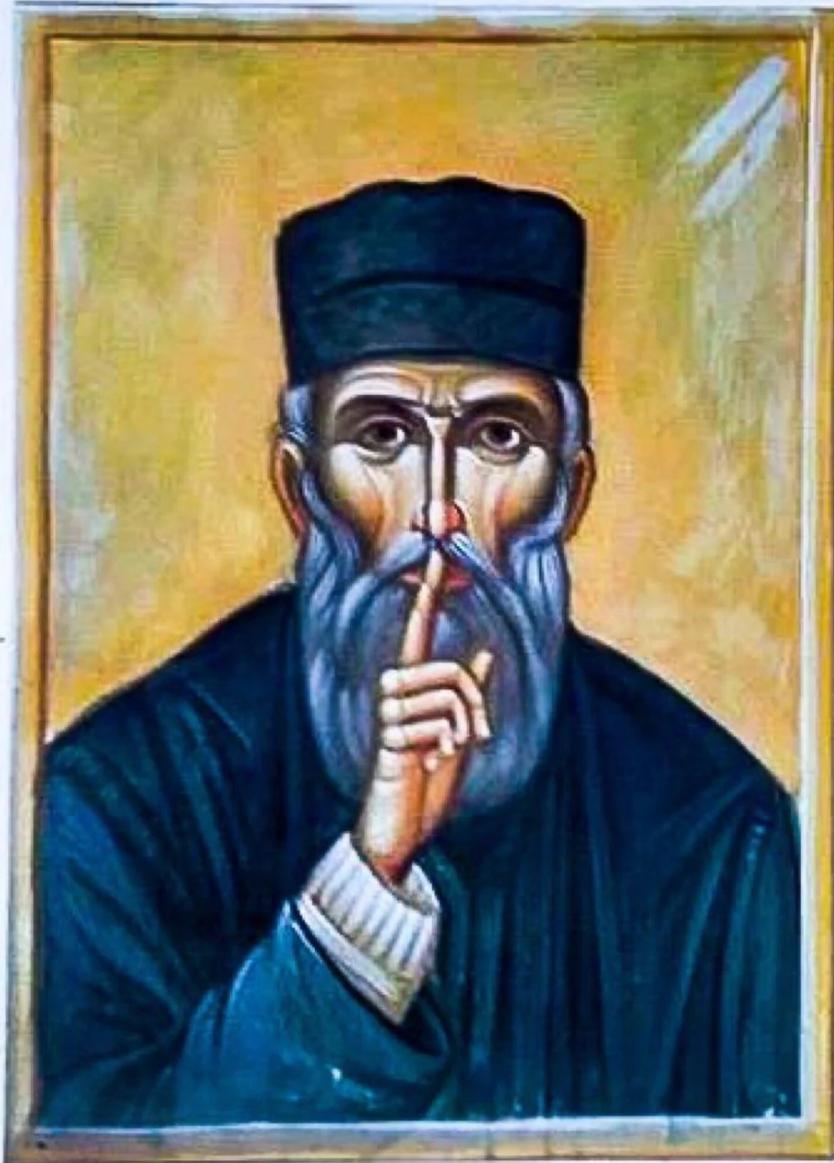
**Question:** How can we safeguard ourselves to keep a healthy balance? Is it a sin to decorate your house and things like that?

**Answer:** We have the responsibility as good stewards to make a pleasing environment, but we should use common sense about how much money we spend. Of course there are those who have lovely homes but are also very generous. Such questions are on a case-by-case basis.

We have to surround ourselves with beauty—that is a Christian virtue.

Illustrations and Articles  
*from previous bulletins offered  
here in the online edition.*

ΗΣΥΧΙΑ · ΤΙΣΙΝΗ



BE QUIET · LINISTE



#### FROM THE HOLY MOUNTAIN:

Callinicus the Hesychast was sought out by a monk whose soul was afflicted with intrusive thoughts and temptations beset him. He shared with Callinicus the situation and the holy Father told him to fill a bucket with water and throw some dirt in, give it a mix. Asking him if he could see anything in the water, the troubled monk responded, no it is clouded. So they continued to discuss and the meek Callinicus with love and care encouraged him. Callinicus told him to examine the water and the monk responded it has begun to clear up, so they continued for a bit more and Callinicus reminded him to look again at the bucket. It has become perfectly clear he responded, I can pick out some little pebbles from the bottom easily now. The kind Callinicus replied, "Something of the sort has happened to you, too. At the present, your mind is like the muddy water. Do not be upset, however. Have some patience, and in two or three months the trouble and muddiness, will settle, and you will see how much clearer and straighter you will think." " Things developed exactly as the hesychast had said.

- from the book Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos Vol.1



If two people are talking in each of our ears we hear sound but we don't actually hear. The brain is unable to discern both and it becomes noise as the ears work together. We are entering the desert of Lent when the devil doubles down on trying to deter us from the road of meekness, gentleness, self-control. He acts in small ways, like a simple thought so may each of us gird ourselves with prayer and be watchful. There will be countless voices, noise, distractions from the pleasures of this life like a flood, but in the stillness of prayer and in the heart our God is waiting in the Secret Place, that He speaks of. Turn off the music, the series, the news, and go meet He Who is unconditional love. God is not waiting like a judge, remember how He wanted to meet Zaccheaus, how He spoke with the women at the well and listened, how He welcomed the thief... He loves us.



## Holy Things are for the Holy

And so then he (St. Paisios) said we shouldn't compare each other to one another; we need to compare ourselves to the saints or to Christ, because if we compare ourselves to each other, we'll either become proud if we think we're better off, or we'll be depressed if we think we're worse off. But we need to compare ourselves to Christ and the saints because then that's a good mirror for us. Because some people say, "I don't go to the bouzoukia; I go to vigils. I'm holy!" He says but we shouldn't be comparing ourselves to one another; we should be comparing ourselves with Christ and the saints. I like that a lot, too.

- Recollection from Fr. Nicholas Palis
- Bulletin Illustrations by Fr. Jonathan Bannon



# On the Inner Heart



## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE JESUS PRAYER?

*from Blessed Elder Aimilianos of Simonos Petras*

The purpose of the [Jesus] Prayer is not a method, nor the words, or the place, or hesychia [stillness], or something else which this prayer involves.

We can say that the purpose of the Prayer is what is being worked by God in you.

What God works in our inner being... What He works is an experience. But it is not only the experience of God! It is also a revelation of the way He comes, of how the coming of God happens. The Personal God within the human personality... And of course, He comes in Light!

And one still feels and understands at the end of his or her ascent, the union which is performed... And with this union, the purification comes, the spiritual advancement comes, the growth of the little baby which is being born into man.

Even more, the Spirit gives one a permanent divine state from which he or she climbs towards illumination, towards light, towards a flourishing on different levels which God offers and opens to us. The purpose of Prayer, in a word, we could say, is a perfect mystery of the unseen God, the One now felt, and the visible person... a mystery performed by God. This mystery has been revealed to us by the Fathers of the Church.

We also know from experience, always, how to become a recipient of God. Not through reasoning and meditation, but in a way that God penetrates the human person, and transforms it entirely. And so, he or she becomes a person who can taste, understand and comprehend this mystery.

Now that we're talking about the purpose of the Prayer, we have to note something... There are several higher levels to which man ascends when he or she practices the Jesus Prayer. But, for the moment, we set them aside. Because, we can't talk about something that only a person knows, and only he or she can reveal it to another person.

So, it is a continuous climb. It is an ever-rising communion, perfect, unchanging. I mean, no person changes, neither one, nor the other. There is a divine vision and a communion with the unseen. This person lives this greatness... He or she lives the godly things in an inexpressible joy and happiness. And in his way, he runs without any obstacle, but, however, without being able to tell it to the others. He is the one who experienced it, he carried it, and hence, this man which climbs to the highest levels of prayer, which unfold in the depths of the heart.

These steps, this advancement of man, can't be interpreted by us, dear Mr. Werner, on the TV screen. It's something that cannot be observed by the human reasoning. From now on we should let God to search for the people who want it, fight for it and succeed to go up there with divine help.



# St. John Cassian

by Fr. Jonathan Bannon

## Holy Monastic of the 4th Century Who Influenced Western Monasticism

St. John Cassian, deeply formed by the Egyptian desert tradition and instrumental in transmitting its wisdom to the West, understood that the human person, the ἄνθρωπος, has a singular τέλος (aim), σκοπός (purpose) : to become united with God in love. This orientation gives meaning to every step of the journey, every temptation, every act of prayer. Without it, the soul wanders. His insight that “the mind without a headquarters (singular point to return) interpreted in Latin: sedes (seat), Greek: καθέδρα\*) gets tossed about like a ship without anchor, “shaped by every external stimulus” is not merely about concentration. It’s about identity.

Today, unlike in centuries past, temptations are no longer distant cities one must travel toward; they arrive as pop-ups. The demons of distraction have become ambient. The logismoi, those scattered thoughts the Desert Fathers warn about, now come bearing notification badges with algorithmic precision like refined arrows. What required a journey into the marketplace of idols now merely asks for a scroll.

And so the inner room, that chamber of the heart Christ speaks of in Matthew 6:6 becomes all the more vital: “But when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray (vow) to your Father who is in secret.” This is not only an architectural direction, but a spiritual one. In St. John's terms, it is the “headquarters” of the mind understood as the 'seat' of the heart (gr. phren / diaphragm), the inner, the place where the nous returns to be lit again by divine fire. The Desert Fathers call it hesychia, stillness and it requires a willful turning away from the whirlpool of sensory noise. This would be nepsis: sober watchfulness, literal translation in greek is: without drink.

So the question becomes: What shapes us when we are unmoored or without oars in the boat and only at the mercy of the tempest? Is it the liturgy of the Church that fills us or the liturgy of the feed that leaves us hungry and at times with less than we arrived? Do we dwell in the Psalms or in the infinite scroll?

To take Cassian’s image seriously in our time is to realize that closing the door means more than entering a quiet space, it may mean digitally fasting, refusing the formation that the world is always offering. It may mean actively creating boundaries around how and when we engage the online world, not in fear, but with discernment.

Ultimately, Christ does not just invite us to silence; He invites us into a dialogue of love, a daily return to the telos of our being. That return is not vague. It is a re-centering, a recollection of who we are in God, and whose we are. Consider the Jesus Prayer as solid path to both the inner room and an anchor for the outer storm.

\*both a throne, and can be further interpreted in Christian understanding as having a hierarch, being under a bishop as is vital to understanding the very Church greek: ecclesia "gathering" as it was considered in the Apostolic times: The Bishop, the Eucharist, the People gathered as the Body of Christ."

# Prayer of the Heart and Mind

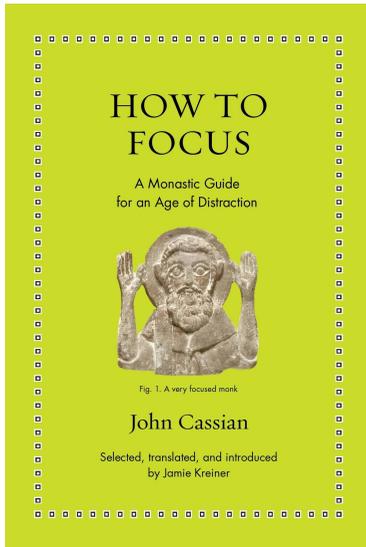
## Saint John Jacob of Neamt

**There is no more powerful weapon in heaven and on earth than the holy call of our Lord Jesus**

**Christ: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. - Jesus Prayer**

Saint John the Carpathian says that when we say the Jesus Prayer, that is, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!*, at every invocation of His Holy Name the Lord answers us in a mysterious way: *Son, your sins be forgiven you!*, and Saint John Chrysostom says that no matter how sinful we may be, **this prayer cleanses us when we say it from the heart**. There is no other weapon more powerful in heaven and on earth than the holy invocation of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we say: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God”, through these words we confess all the mysteries of our faith, for as some of the holy fathers say, these words contain the Gospel in short. For this reason, the Jesus Prayer is also called **the prayer of the mind**. And when we say the other words of the Jesus Prayer, namely, "Have mercy on me, a sinner!", then we confess our unworthiness and baseness, asking the Lord for mercy, for if we have His mercy, then we have all good things.

(Translated from Romanian: **Saint John Jacob the Hozevite**, *Spiritual Food*, Lumina din Lumina Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 444)



Princeton published this book recently and Pani Marianna had gotten it as a gift for Fr. Jonathan. This reflection covers some of the book’s topics.

## Better five words with the heart than a thousand with the mouth

**St. John Chrysostom says that, no matter how sinful we are, this [Jesus prayer] cleanses us when we say it from the heart. There is no more powerful weapon in heaven and on earth than the holy call of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

In the first book of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians he writes: "**Pray without ceasing!**" .

The Holy Fathers, interpreting these words, say that "to pray without ceasing" means **to mention the holy name of the Lord at all times.\*** This is further shown in the book to the Philippians, where the Holy Apostle Paul writes: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth, and every

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

**Saint John the Carpathian** says that when we say the Jesus Prayer (i.e.: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), at every invocation of His Holy Name, the Lord answers us in a mysterious way: "**Son, your sins be forgiven you!**" .

And **Saint John Chrysostom** says that, no matter how sinful we are, this prayer cleanses us when we say it from the heart. **There is no more powerful weapon in heaven and on earth than the Holy Call of our Lord Jesus Christ .**

When we say: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!", through these words we confess all the mysteries of our faith, for (as some of the holy fathers say) these words encompass within them the entire Gospel in brief.

These are the five words that the Holy Apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Corinthians, where he says: "I would rather speak five words with my mind than ten thousand words with my tongue. For this reason, *the Jesus Prayer* is also called *the prayer of the mind* .

And when we say the other words of the Jesus Prayer (i.e. "have mercy on me, a sinner!"), then we confess our unworthiness and baseness, asking the Lord for mercy, for if we have His mercy, then we have all good things.

( **Saint John Jacob of Neamț - the Hozevit** , *For those with a needy soul like me... Complete Works* , Doxologia Publishing House, Iași, 2010 , pp.417-418)

\*Prayer is also more than repeating the Holy Name, making requests, intercede, giving thanks, confession. Prayer is remembrance. It is to have the remembrance of God before the heart, the nous, to return the mind that wanders to the headquarters of the person, the inner heart and when there pursue a place for Christ, pursue a place of purity. - Fr. Jonathan

## *All others are Saints... we are the sinner.*

St. Paisios the Athonite spoke:

"You must also view all the others as saints.

And to see only yourself as a sinner, the smallest among all, even if other people may be sinners.

We have no right to see them sinners. We have no right to judge them!

We have no right to speak against a sinner.

We have to see only ourselves as sinners, and the smallest among all!

...

Let our soul always thirst for the knowledge of the truth,

let it thirst for the forgiveness of sins,

let it thirst for the peace of consciousness,

Let it thirst for the heavenly joy!

The most beautiful thirst is the one for the union with Jesus Christ!

Let it thirst for the Holy Communion!

Let it thirst for the acquisition of virtues!

Let it thirst for entering as quickly as possible into the Kingdom of Heaven, to free itself as soon as possible from the vanity of this world, to free itself from pain, from sorrow, from torment, from the wickedness which reigns in the hearts of people!

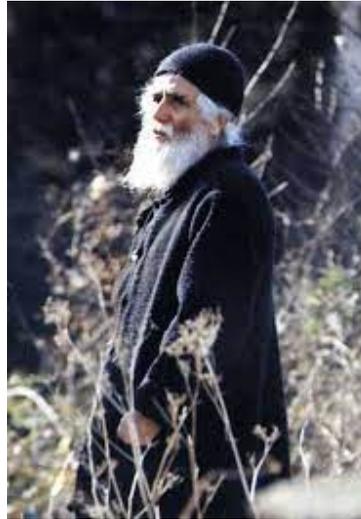
For becoming free!

For freeing ourselves from passions!

And finally, let our soul thirst for the eternal joy!

Let it thirst for the union with God, so that we may live forever with the saints!

Because... how long will be our life here on earth?"



## On the Jesus Prayer

By Fr. Gheorghe Calciu gives us precious details about the Prayer of the Heart, the fruits of this prayer and the signs of delusion. Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa (1925–2006) spent a total of 21 years in prison for his Christian evangelism and criticism of the communist regime in Romania.

Fr. Gheorghe Calciu:

You close your eyes, and direct your inner attention towards the heart.

The [spiritual] heart is not really here where we hear it, but somewhere above.

This is the place of the spiritual heart. When you make this connection, the mind begins to follow the spiritual direction of the heart.

**THEN YOUR ENTIRE BEING WILL CHANGE. AND THEN, TRULY, THE POWER OF PRAYER CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.**

Maybe we won't get there, but what's important is to organize your prayer life in such a way that you pray with your mind and heart as well. When you pray, you will feel a warmth, when you truly pray, when your heart descends into your heart, you will feel a warmth. If this warmth comes from below up, then it is from the devil, don't be deceived! If this warmth comes from above down, or finds a place in heart without passing from the lower part of the body, then, it is the Holy Spirit, who abides in you. You might even reach this state, after a long time...

I won't make now an extended exposition of the Jesus Prayer, I will say just a few words.

**PRAY! PRAY EVEN FOR FIVE MINUTES! FOR FIVE MINUTES YOU MUST NOT ALLOW EVEN A SINGLE STRAY THOUGHT, EXCEPT FOR THE THOUGHT TOWARDS GOD, AND FEEL AROUND YOU THE FLUTTER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PRESENCE.**

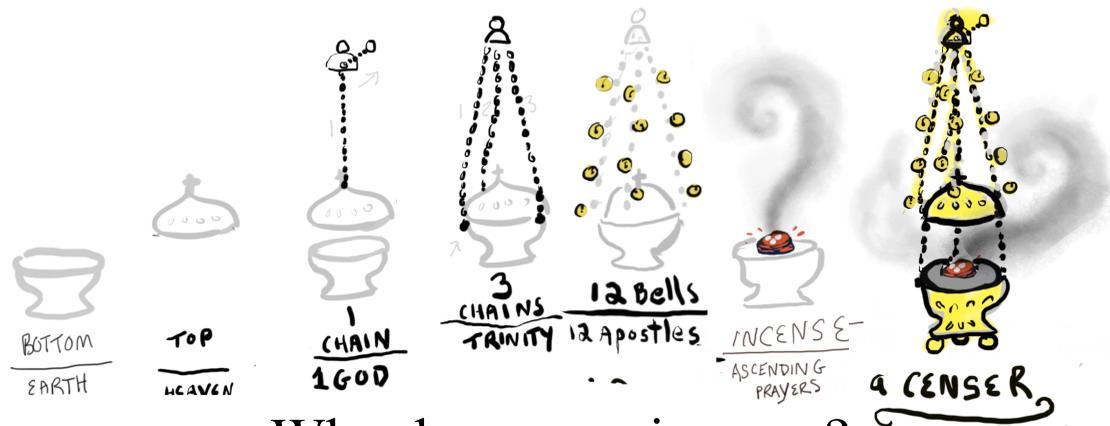
Next time I will talk more about the Jesus Prayer... And then you will feel how the Holy Spirit visits you, rarely in the beginning, but then more and more often, until it rests in your heart for long time.

I saw a man, a man who used to pray the Jesus Prayer. He was Father Benedict Ghiuş. He was already old and would rarely serve at the altar, because of his old age. He was at the Cernica Monastery [Bucharest, Romania], and when he was walking through the alleys of Cernica, or in the church, he was like a saint, like floating. Although he wasn't smiling, his face was radiating happiness. I had a revelation about him when I went to Cernica to serve the liturgy, and he was sitting on a chair somewhere over there, in a corner, in semi-darkness, in the altar. And the more he advanced in prayer, the brighter the father's corner became. If you had looked at him, you wouldn't have seen any halo above his head. But you would have seen that the entire corner where he was sitting, was brighter than the rest of the altar. The altar was illuminated by candles, not light bulbs. And then I understood what the practice of Jesus Prayer means. I knew about him (everyone did) that he practiced the Prayer of the Heart...

**HE REACHED SUCH HIGH STAGES, THAT TROUGH THE PRAYER WHICH WAS UNCEASINGLY UTTERED BY HIS HEART AS HIS MIND AS WELL, HE WOULD EMANATE SUCH LIGHT AROUND HIM... THAT WAS SOMETHING MIRACULOUS...**

Monks say that when you pray the Jesus Prayer and you reach the perfect form of this prayer, then even if you preach, or talk to someone, or sell candles, or do other things, dig in the garden, tend the flowers, your heart and mind unceasingly sings: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Unceasingly, without pause and without separation from God. As if the mind would divide itself in two parts, one preoccupied with the daily tasks, and another one which maintains a permanent relationship with God!

**MAYBE WE DON'T SEEK TO REACH THAT STAGE, BUT GOD IS GREAT, HOLY SPIRIT FULFILLS EVERYTHING!**



## Why do we use incense?

**Practical:** The pleasant aroma of incense on a practical level helps calm the mind and remind us of the beauty of God. We pray for peace at the beginning of every service, *“In peace let us pray to the Lord, Lord have mercy. For the peace of the world for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord, Lord have mercy.”* It is hard to engage in a dialogue when we are without peace. God is our peace. Peace is a person and that person is Jesus Christ. Peace much like Truth is a person, not a feeling. So on the most fundamental level incense simply can engage the olfactory system and bring us to a place of peace as we strive to be attentive to our God Who is “invisibly in our midst” as the priest prays at the altar in the quiet prayers only heard by God and those who may serve.

### Theological:

Because of the fall of humanity in the garden we read we will now till the earth and by the sweat of the brow work the fields. When many people who have been working all day gathered together in Temple ages ago before modern hygiene, incense would mask the aroma of so many people. A monk who helped our parish with Divine Liturgies when Fr. Jonathan would be away at various events once shared in a sermon that the incense can then be a reminder of this fallenness. When the priest censes us it is because of the shared humanity that has fallen and we are striving to return to the pre-fallen state of life in Christ. This is also the other side of the coin where being censed in Church just as the icons and the altar are censed is because the image and likeness of God is in every one of us. Censing someone or something is part of the church preparing us and the space around us to be ready for the sacrifice and worship of the Liturgy. To cense something is to set it apart, to bless it, to acknowledge that it is blessable, to prepare it for God’s work. So the symbolism has many sides. Even the censer itself has much symbolism which can be seen in the image above.

**Historical:** Incense is a burnt offering. it is an offering from the created world offered back to God to fill his house with a heavenly scent. Similar to making prosfora, wine, embroidered vestments, the articulation of sung hymns, all of this is a prepared offering. Incense is no different. The monks and nuns prepare the recipe prayerfully.

**Scriptural significance:** In the book of Daniel we read “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.” Here we see the 2nd Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ as one wrapped in the clouds. The clouds here are descriptive of the heavens. In spiritual geography with heaven above and the world below our feet the incense rising is a reminder of our prayers rising up to God. Further we read in the New Testament book of Revelation 5:8, “Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” and again in Rev. 8:4, “An angel offers incense on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke and prayers rise to God.” Our worship offered to God in the Church mirrors the revealed worship of the angels before God in heaven. As Orthodox Christians we never “make up” worship,. Instead we receive the tradition which came before us and the offering of incense is part of this spiritual inheritance.

**Final Thought:** As with many things in the Orthodox Church there are both practical and mystical symbols that are equally valid and important. Someone may say I don’t need candles and incense to pray to God. While this is true, one can pray wherever they are we are not a Faith of minimalism and we strive to engage and offer our entire person to God with all 5 senses. Our Faith is more than a cerebral /mental exercise of doctrines we hold to be true. It is a way of life and the fallen world and demons want our attention on anything other than God. The incense can catch our heart and mind before we even see an icon like walking into a the home of a grandfather or grandmother who has dinner cooking. Before we even see the food the love of hospitality has already affected us. It is the same with incense. - Fr. Jonathan



## Why do we light candles?

**Historical practicality:** They helped with illuminated the space of prayer and worship.

### Sacrifice:

Candles are lit because we no longer offer living animal sacrifices as the Jews had done in the Temple. Now the bloodless sacrifice of Christ is offered in the Eucharist every Liturgy. Candles are still a burnt offering and often a donation is given for a candle so there is a sacrifice of one’s alms.

### Devotion:

Candles symbolize devotion to God and remembrance of the faithful who have passed away.

### Spiritual significance:

Lighting a candle can evoke a sense of peace, and our embodied faith uses all of the senses in prayerful ways that help us become attentive to the inner life of prayer. The very action of picking up a candle and focusing on lighting it from another candle causes the person to be very present. It is in the present moment we encounter God. Psychotherapists speak of not ruminating on the past. Christ teaches not worrying about many things and the future. Engaging with an oil lamp or candle is both spiritually helpful and psychologically / emotionally healthy. The church has many practices that where this multi-layered care takes place. For example think of the ease that can come to the heart when smelling a pleasing aroma of incense in church. What is the first petition of the Liturgy? In “peace” let us pray to the Lord. In order to be present, in order to be still, in order to be prepared to encounter Christ we need peace. The traditions of the church help us succeed in this.

### Symbol of the Unwaning Light:

The burning of candles reminds us of our call to walk in the light and not in the darkness of passions and sin.

### ICONOGRAPHY AND REFLECTED LIGHT:

We have an older member of the church who converted to Orthodoxy from Lutheranism. He married Halina’s sister Virginia and was a dairy farmer from Wisconsin. His name was Lamonte and Fr. Jonathan visited him at Bildhal Street not far from the church for ten years before he fell asleep in the Lord. Lamonte would recall growing up on a farm as a child and the only light he had in his house at night was the light of the moon, and the light of kerosene lamps. We often experience life with the dead light of electricity that evenly distributes light but much of the churches aesthetic traditions relied on flickering candles and oil lamps and in some cases like monasteries many services were offered before the sun would rise. Think of being in a church where the icons have either a gold leafed reflective background or are covered with those gold or silver covers called Riza’s that only show the painted face and hands of the saint. These gold leafed backgrounds, and precious metal embossed covers, oil lamps, carved iconostasis’, perforated icon stands, all of these would have a relationship with the light of candles and the of day or night. The Church would look different and active when the sun rises as the Matin’s psalms are chanted. The icons would look alive when the chandelier would swing back and forth above the center nave of the church. The community of the saints depicted in the icons would feel very present as the incense caught our mind, the icons caught our vision, the wine and bread of the Eucharist caught our deepest thirst, the kiss of the cross sealed our lips, the sign of the cross and bow of our head caught our very body, and the chanting caught our ears and heart. Over and over the church is striving to adorn us with divine beauty, with the meekness of Christ and the triumph of mercy. - Fr. Jonathan

# *Parish Bylaws and Board Functions*

## **A Note on Bylaws and the Nature of the Church**

*Fr. Jonathan Bannon, June 11th, 2025*

As you begin—or continue—to explore the life of our parish and the structure of our community, you'll notice the inclusion of **bylaws** in this weekly email edition of our bulletin. These are practical guidelines (standard order of procedure) that help organize parish life. But before you read them, it's important to understand a deeper truth about how the Orthodox Church is ordered, so these details are not misunderstood or taken out of context.

The Orthodox Church is not a democracy, nor is it governed by congregationalism. We do not make decisions about doctrine or worship by popular vote. The Church is **hierarchical**, meaning it is structured with **Christ as the Head**, and under Him, in our diocese, a **Patriarch**, then a **bishop** (a successor of the Apostles), and **priests** who serve under their bishop and are assigned to care for parishes “in his place,” with **deacons** assisting in the life of the Church. This sacred order is not about power or control, but about **pastoral care, spiritual responsibility, and fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition**.

### **Blessings:**

Each Orthodox parish has a **priest** who serves as both spiritual father and administrator\* and a **bishop** to whom the parish and priest are accountable. While parish councils and lay leadership play an essential and honored role, especially in matters of stewardship (time, talent, and treasure) and the daily life of the parish, they do so **in collaboration with the priest**, not apart from him. A blessing or invitation is common and necessary for many things: to sing in the choir, serve at the altar, serve on the parish council, instruct the youth and lead classes, and begin official ministries. With or without bylaws about blessings, it is a traditional approach within an Orthodox community. This is shared here for catechumens who are preparing to join the Body of Christ.

### **Bylaws:**

Our bylaws are meant to reflect and safeguard the order of the Church—especially in a country shaped by many forms of Christianity that function quite differently. Old habits from non-Orthodox traditions can take time to unlearn, and the Church lovingly offers clarity to help the faithful grow in understanding and unity.

These guidelines help our community thrive in peace, love, and good order, all rooted in the ancient life of the Church.

If you're coming from a different Christian background—especially one where congregations vote on decisions or operate without the guidance of appointed clergy, we invite you to consider the Orthodox vision of the Church as a spiritual family. In this family, Christ shepherds us through His appointed servants. Everyone is welcome to attend the monthly board meetings and are expected to honor the rules of order for Annual meetings. This Tuesday we will vote on New Business shared at Annual Meetings needing to be submitted by the previous monthly board meeting so a timely agenda can be printed and shared with the parish body. Annual nominations for parish council positions will also be explored this Tuesday so people who may be nominated on the floor without prior preparation can have time to consider the role, responsibilities and expectations of the priest, bishop and diocese before accepting a nomination to serve on the parish council.

As always, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are honored to walk this journey of discovery with you.

\*to use the title / rhetoric of the ACROD bylaws.

**103.** The courses of study and text books shall be prescribed for all Parishes in the Diocese by the Bishop and the Consistory, who shall appoint a Priest as Diocesan Supervisor of Schools to administer and direct the entire system.

**105.** The Parishes are obliged to accept such uniform and systematized parochial school training as prescribed.

**106.** The Pastor of each Parish shall be responsible for the Religious education of the children of the Parish and is the head of the Sunday Church School. He may organize a board of several dedicated parishioners (including Sunday Church School Teachers) to aid him in implementing the Sunday Church School Program in the Parish.

**107.** In addition to a Sunday Church School, every Parish shall maintain a religious library for the use of faithful in which sufficient number of Orthodox and religious books and publications will be placed periodically.

**Parish Librarian:** Forthcoming appointment by parish priest.

**Atrium / Montessori Catechesis of the Good Shepherd on Sunday's at 9:15 to 9:45 AM**

**Teacher:** Laura Warmke

#### **Other Associations**

**108.** All other associations such as the Sr. and Jr. ACRY, Daylight, youth movement, Parish fraternal societies, Parish societies, Mothers' clubs, etc. whose purpose shall be to progress, aid, comfort, uplift, advance and educate the faithful belonging to this Diocese, shall be aided by the active co-operation of the Pastors of the Parishes.

**109.** It is strongly urged that the Pastors shall interest themselves in the cultivation of the youth and societies promoting their education and advancement.

**120.** The revenue of Parishes shall be applied: - First, to the support and maintenance of the Pastor, the assistant to the Pastor, Cantor, and any person regularly employed by the Parish; secondly, for the erection and necessary repairs of the church building; the Pastor's home and other buildings and property that belong to the Parish; thirdly, for the support of the Diocese.

**123.** Every Parish must secure ecclesiastical approval in accordance with the Church law before erecting a church building, chapel, shrine, iconostasis, altar, baldacchino, education unit, rectory, cemetery, etc.

#### **PARISH MEMBERSHIP**

**124.** A Congregation or Parish shall consist of the Pastor, as its spiritual head, and of lay members who are Orthodox Christians.

**125.** "Any person who shall deny, disclaim or refuse conformity by word or deed to the Doctrine, Discipline, and worship of the Orthodox Church **shall cease to be a member of the Parish and also of the Diocese** even if he or she shall have continued to meet his or her financial obligations to the Parish, and shall not be eligible to any office, nor be allowed to vote in any meetings, nor be allowed to exercise any office or function in, concerning, or connected with the Parish or with the Diocese.

**126.** It is the duty of every member of the Parish to glorify God, to seek His gifts of grace by receiving the Holy Sacraments instituted by Our Lord, Jesus Christ, to faithfully attend the Divine Services in their Church, to diligently pray for each other, for the Bishop, for their Pastor, and for all their superiors, to fearlessly profess Christ and the teachings of

His Church, to bring others to Christ and to His Church, to adorn their faith with a sober, righteous and godly life, to obey and abide by the Laws of God and His Church, to honor and respect their Pastor and to assist him in his work, to give a Christian training to their children and send them to their church school for catechetical instruction, to contribute liberally toward the financial support of their Parish and of the Diocese in proportion to their means, to live peaceably with one another, to help those who are in need and in distress, and in general, to seek, as much as in them lies, to further the life and growth of their Parish.

**127.** All Orthodox Christians are exhorted to accept their Pastor's invitation to Holy Communion: "So Strachom Boziim, Luboviju, I viroju pristupite" (With the fear of God, and with faith and love, come forward), and to cleanse their souls of sin in Holy Confession and receive the Holy Eucharist frequently, but they must do so at least once a year within the Lenten Season in order to be members in good-standing of the Parish.

**Bylaw 130.** The Church Board, charged with the administration of the temporal affairs of the Parish, shall consist of the following:

- a. Pastor
- b. President
- c. Vice-President
- d. Financial Secretary
- e. Treasurer / Auditors

**131.** The above lay officers of the Church Board must be members in good standing with the parish and they must be at least 21 years of age.

**132.** The members of the Church Board/ Parish Council hold the congregation property in trust and are considered merely executive officers of the congregation to execute the majority will of the legal members of the parish and have no right to decide in the change of ownership of the property, its sale, transfer, barter or mortgage.

#### **133. Pastor**

The duties of the Pastor or Priests are to conscientiously fulfill all the duties incumbent with the priesthood according to the regulations and prescriptions of the Orthodox Church, (Paragraph 67).

**134.** The Pastor is the head of the Parish in spiritual matters and is overseer in material matters.

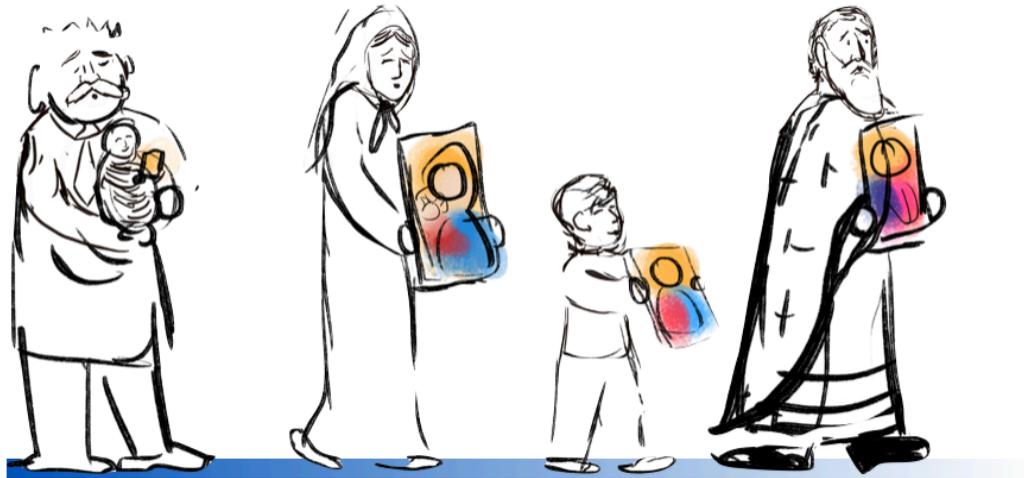
**135.** The Pastor calls the meetings of the Parish Council and Church Board with the understanding of the Church Board or at the demand of the majority of the parishioners and, must be present at and open all meetings in order that he may give to each the benefit of his wisdom and counsel.

#### **Bylaws on Official Meetings and the Peace and Harmony of a Parish:**

**136.** No official act of the Church Board or Parish shall take effect without knowledge of the Pastor and his having an opportunity of being heard; and in the involuntary or necessary absence of the Pastor, no business in the Parish or Church Board shall be finally disposed of, of such a character that the Pastor, as the head of the parish, has a right to be heard in it.

**137.** It is the duty of the officers of the Church Board to assist the Pastor in his performance of duties of his office, particularly in the cultivation of harmony among the members, and in the promotion of the general welfare of the parish.

# Membership Information



## STEWARDSHIP INFO:

### Three T's; Time, Talent, and Treasure.

Without a maximum or minimum amount, we are all encouraged to consider proportional giving. We find 10% is spoken of scripturally, 5%, 1%, whatever the amount, we can consider what God gives us and be intentional with how we give back which in turn helps our parish be forward thinking as we plan and work on projects.

Beyond finances we explore our talents and time. We have a choir, board positions, study groups, landscaping, the book store, library and spiritual resources, further we have ministries with prison, food banks and preparing for feast days with tombs and flowers. There is the Sunday Fellowship Meal and hospitality which is an extension of the Liturgy where we enjoy fellowship and share in a communion of agape. We also have simply being present, attending services and praying for each other, talking to a visitor and continuing to offer a warm and safe space we call the hospital of the Church.

### PLEDGE CARD

A Pledge Card will be available and is required of everyone each year to be considered a member. (This required aspect was voted on a few years ago at an annual meeting.)

We ask everyone to please fill out a pledge for 2025 after praying and thinking of how to respond to God with your time, talent and treasure. In addition to filling out a financial pledge you will be able to check off ways you are already giving of your time and talents. This is intentional because our value as members of God's church is not based on how large our financial giving is. We want you to see on the tangible card that whatever the amount we give, we also have responded with our whole person in other ways.

So I ask you as your priest, please consider the good words offered by our Stewardship Officer Maurice AlMassad and Parish Board President Jeremy Erber who will speak about Stewardship at this November's Annual Meeting on Nov. 10th. Filling out a pledge card will help us as we continue to plan and explore how to best care for our growing parish.

Your servant, Fr. Jonathan

## SACRAMENTS AND BLESSINGS

# Sacraments and Stewardship



**MINISTRY TO PERSONS WHO ARE SICK** - We urge Orthodox Christians who would like to receive Holy Sacraments but are unable to attend Church (hospitalized or at home) to contact Fr. Jonathan so Holy Sacraments can be administered to them (8157214952)

**If your loved one is hospitalized please call, even if the illness is not serious! In a holistic approach to healing and well-being, a visit from the priest can be very positive. Most hospitals do not inform us when they receive patients from our parish. We depend on you!**

**BLESSINGS OF INFANTS**—Forty days after birth, a child and its mother come to church to receive a 40 Day Blessing, imitating Christ who was presented in the Temple 40 days after He was born. Please call the parish priest to arrange this blessing.

**BAPTISMS**—Please see Fr. Jonathan to schedule Baptisms. Plan ahead!—There are some days when Baptisms are not performed (During Great Lent and some fasting seasons). Keep in mind that the Godparent shall be a practicing Orthodox Christian in good standing.

**WEDDINGS**—Please arrange an appointment with Fr. Jonathan at least **eight months** before the proposed wedding date to allow time for all necessary marriage preparation (Prepare Enrich classes). Regular attendance to an Orthodox Church is a requirement of the diocese for those desiring to enter the sacrament of marriage and they must be in good standing both sacramentally and with Stewardship. Marriages are solemnized on Saturdays or Sundays. Circumstances may require a dispensation from the diocesan bishop. Consult the parish priest before any plans have been made for the wedding reception. Marriages cannot be celebrated during the fasting seasons of the church, or on Fridays.

**CONFESSION**—Confessions are often arranged by appointment. Please call to schedule Confession. During the Lenten season time for Confession is made available before and after selected services.

**MEMORIAL SERVICES**—Memorial Services are offered for the eternal rest of persons who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Customarily, these services are offered at 40 days, at 6 months, at 1 year and at 3 years. When three years have passed, the departed are more properly remembered on the Saturdays of the Souls offering the Kutya/Koliva/Boiled Wheat.

### END OF LIFE ISSUES

#### 1 - The Right to a Proper Funeral

It is an honor to have a church funeral. When the funeral does not take place at the church it indicates that someone is not in good order. Sometimes out of convenience, we consider omitting a church funeral for our loved ones, not realizing that we are depriving them of their right to be honored. Let us honor our parents and relatives with the respect they deserve! Eulogies offered by family or friends are most appropriately offered at the meal following the Funeral service. Church Funerals are, under ordinary circumstances, provided for practicing Orthodox Christians who are current in their spiritual and material obligations to the parish; otherwise, the funeral service is conducted at the funeral home. The Church does not permit cremation.

#### 2 - About Cremation

Orthodox Christians believe that in the General Resurrection, our bodies and souls will be restored to each other. Cremation is the deliberate desecration and destruction of what God has made, an act of violence upon the body and is viewed as the denial of the Resurrection.

In cases where there is intention for the body of a deceased person to be cremated, thus choosing to disregard our understanding of the Resurrection, the honor of a church funeral is not given, either in the church, or the funeral home or any other place.

Additionally, memorial services are not allowed. There is nothing the church can offer when her traditions are disregarded with something so sacred as burying a loved one just as Christ was buried. The body is a sacred vessel and is required to be treated as such both in life and after death.

# Coffee Hour Setup & Cleanup

## Coffee Hour Setup & Cleanup: ☕ ✨

Your help makes all the difference! If you're curious about what's involved in setting up a standard Coffee Hour—with or without offerings from others—please let us know. Manal Massad, Curtis Barnes, Kevin Shedd are all ready to assist with sharing how to care for the hospitality ministry:

### A Few Friendly Reminders:

✨ **Arrive Early:** To ensure you don't miss the Divine Liturgy, please plan to arrive with plenty of time to set up before the service begins.

✨ **Team Effort:** Some tasks might require kitchen time during the service. Let's coordinate so that everyone can participate in the sacred moments without missing out. During the Matins service please be mindful of Laura's Atrium class with our parish children and of the prayers being offered upstairs.

✨ **Blessings After Service:** Eating together after the service is a true blessing. We need both the spirit of "Martha" for the hands-on tasks and the heart of "Mary" for thoughtful intentions.

✨ **Balance is Key:** If organizing Coffee Hour makes it hard for you to attend the Liturgy, it is best to reconsider what is being prepared. Your spiritual journey is just as important!

### Join the Team:

Choose a Sunday that works for you and sign up on the new sheet located at the basement entrance.

We're organizing Sunday Specific setup and cleanup through Pentecost 2025, so there's plenty of time to find a spot that fits your schedule. Lenten Wednesday Potluck meals will have its own sign-up sheet to help us prepare.

🕒 **Timing:** Arrive by 9:30 AM to help get everything ready, and/or stay until the end of Coffee Hour to assist with cleanup. Have friends you want to do this with? Pull your own team together and pick a Sunday once a month. The children of the parish are preparing a team for cleaning with their own equipment and talents in the areas they love: Mya with the candles, Adrian with the mop. Everyone is welcome to jump right in.

Our driving goal is not to just complete tasks; it is about being intentional in embracing the holiness of our services, recognizing the need for our growing parish to grow in healthy responsibility with asking people to step up and making sure there is room to jump in.

# Being an Orthodox Christian

The Orthodox Church is not just another organization, club or fraternal society. It is the Body of Christ, and a life-giving relationship with God. The Orthodox Church is the continuation of the Christian Church from the time of Christ until the present. As Orthodox Christians, we do not have a relationship with Christ in isolation, but alongside other Orthodox Christians. With these things in mind, Orthodox Christians are expected to:

- Strive daily to live a Christian life, according to the teachings of Our Lord in the Gospels, and the tradition of the Church.
- Regularly participate in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays (and on holydays as permitted by your employment).\*
- Regularly receive Holy Communion and participate in the Sacrament of Holy Confession. (The minimum is no less than once a year.)
- Strive to fight against the passions of the flesh by honoring the body, mind, and spirit. We harm ourselves when chasing after sin. In relationships, we practice abstinence until marriage.
- **For the Men of our Parish:** Strive to be a Levendis. An ancient and cultural pre-Christian Greek word: Λεβέντης, pronounced: Luh-ven-TH'EIS) is a man of honor. It is not honorable to objectify women. It is not honorable nor Orthodox to treat a wife as subservient. Husbands and wives are two halves of a whole unit in marriage and with love and respect, sacrifice for the other. The husband is likened unto Christ who gave Himself for the life of the Church. The wife is likened unto the Church who founded upon the blood of martyrs gave herself for the Life of Christ. This is what the two crowns represent in the Orthodox Marriage service. They are crowns of martyrdom in a spirit of freedom, self-offering, and love.
- **For the Men in our Parish:** Women are to be honored and protected. There is no honor in self-seeking fallen desires. Make the sign of the cross. Remind yourself whose image and likeness we carry and whose image and likeness women carry. Christ tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Nothing will cause more discord in the heart and mind than throwing aside prayer and leaving the doors of our heart and mind unguarded. Fallen desires are hurled by the devil like arrows that fly by day and he invites our mind to be like the pestilence that creeps along the ground at night. We are above such things. So let this be a goal for all men in our parish: **honor before all else.** When we are with women we are before holy icons and we should respond to that truth with our lives. Cultivate a pure heart and life of Philotimo (Greek for: love of honor)
- **STEWARDSHIP:** Offer your whole life to Christ, and offer the "Three T's"—time, talent and treasure—to sustain the church. Participate in parish ministries and activities. Volunteer to help. Give monetary support. Our parish does not survive on stewardship, we "thrive" on this form of voluntary giving of who we are. If we are unable to donate monetarily there are many other ways to give with time and talents. If you have any questions about Stewardship please as our Stewardship Officer and Board Vice President Maurice AlMassad or the parish priest.

*\*Those who are homebound and/or physically unable to attend services on a regular basis are asked to spiritually join in prayer on Sundays and holydays. The priest will visit with the Sacraments periodically throughout the year, as requested.*