

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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SERVICES

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Saturdays: Confession 5:00 PM, | Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sundays: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.



March 6, 2016 – Sunday of Meatfare or the Last Judgment

The first name of this Sunday is explained by the fact that from it the permission to eat meat is ended, and the second name comes from the Gospel reading about the future all-inclusive Dread Judgment of the living and departed, which is described in all church services. By the commemoration of the Dread Judgment the Holy Church more strongly prompts the sinners to repentance and points out the true meaning of hope in the mercy of God. God is merciful but at the same time He is the Righteous Judge, having to render to everyone according to his deeds; therefore sinners should not be mistaken concerning their responsibility for their moral condition and abuse of the long-suffering God. Recalling the Dread Judgment and turning our mental eyes on "the eternal fire, the multitude in darkness and the Tartarus, the dread worm, the gnashing of teeth and the unceasing anguish that befalls those who have sinned without measure," "the inscrutable trembling and dread," "the incorruptible torture" and "the soul corrupting Hades," the Holy

Church inspires us with the idea of the absolute necessity of repentance both of amending and preliminary plaintive prayer to the Lord, while there is still time and opportunity, and on behalf of all of us exclaims: "today let abstain from food, let us make haste to do good deeds and let us worthily repent our transgressions". The Holy Church especially calls us for spiritual struggles of philanthropy, so this order of struggles is the most possible for everyone and is most proper during the of time of fasting and repentance: "Knowing the commandments of the Lord, let this be our way of life: let us feed the hungry, let us give the thirsty drink, let us clothe the naked, let us welcome strangers, let us visit those in prison and the sick: Then the Judge of all the earth will say even to us: 'Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.'"

During our century the reminder of the Holy Church on this day about the Dread Judgment is especially timely. From this day we already enter into the very "preparation" of the holy fast, as it is called in the church language the stepping week, in which, according to the intention of the Holy Church even to already serve as the beginning of the Lenten effort and work; but, unfortunately, according to the usage of the world this week has become some kind of pagan feast, full of temptations and seductions, as a time of various and noisy amusements (see below). In order to not allow ourselves to begin to spin in this whirlwind of pleasures up to the self-denial and darkening of the senses in order to be warned of heavy falls among diverse seductions and temptations, it is necessary to be especially attentive to the reminder of the Holy Church: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:10). Although "of that day or that hour no one knows", "only the Father" (Mk. 13:32), but our day of judgment will come for us: for the days of our life are evil, running not stopping, passing by so soon and imperceptibly, that we do not notice their flow, and for each of us the hour of death is completely unexpected and can seize us and present us to the judgment of God. That is why we should also hasten to forestall the day of the judgment of God by judging ourselves, by sincere repentance, with tears of contrition and with complete sincerity; to free our soul from the bonds of sinful and forceful passions by deeds and persistence, with vigils and prayer, with fasting and studying the Word of God, to adorn it with the garment of good deeds, of faith and piety, truth and love, humility and meekness, by compassion and mercy to neighbors, let us with graciousness and courtesy turn to our Judge and Lord, let us listen with yearning for His voice: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34)."

The coming week received its name because the holy Church, gradually leading believers into the ascetical deeds (podvig) of the holy Lent, with the approach of

Cheese Fare Week puts them on the last step of the preparatory abstinence by prohibiting the partaking of meat and permitting the partaking of cheese and eggs, in order to accustom them to avoid pleasant foods and without grief to enter the fast. In popular speech it is called butter week or shrove tide (maslianitsi) week. The holy Church calls it "the light before the journey of abstinence" and "the beginning of tenderness and repentance." Such a meaning of Cheese Fare Week is detailed and explained in its Divine services. Especially the canons and the stichera of these Divine services contain the praise of Lent and the representation of its saving fruits. During this week the Divine services enter into a closer relation with the Divine services of the Holy Forty Day Fast as the time of the latter approaches.

Thus, the holy Church, highly honoring the time of the Holy Forty Day Fast as a sacred time for cleansing and immensely important for the Christian, with truly wise foresight and by sequence directs everything to lead us to "the most precious days of the Holy Forty Day Fast", cleansing us beforehand to prepare us for the fast and repentance.

In the sacred hymns for this week the Holy Church as mother appeals to all: "Let us now approach this week of cleansing before the all honorable sacred fast now at hand, illumining bodies and souls"; "Therefore let us hasten to cut off our evil deeds"; "Having come to the bright threshold of the holy fast, let us all with fervent hearts bring hymns of thanksgiving to Christ"; "Behold, all who love God, the door of repentance is already opened: come, let us hasten to enter therein, before Christ closes it, as if we were not worthy of it"; "The threshold to divine repentance is opened: let us fervently enter, purified in our bodies and observing abstinence from food and passions, as obedient servants of Christ, who has called the world into the Kingdom of Heaven"; "As we observe abstinence from meat and other foods, so let us also abstain from hatred of our neighbor, from lust and lies, and from all evil." "As we all stand at the entrance and threshold of the Fast let us all not begin this time of cleansing in a sinful way with self-indulgence and drunkenness; but let us enter fervently with purity of heart that we may receive the immortal crowns and the worthy fruits of our labor."

To our deepest regret Cheese Fare Week is changed into a week of excesses in food and revelry in amusements because of our warped human understanding and customs. These earthly customs of ours which have transformed "the bright journey to the fast " and "the beginning of tenderness and repentance" into days of over eating and incontinenes, into days of every possible sort of soul destroying worldly amusements and recreation, are directly the opposite of the good intention of the Holy Church and shameful for its true children.

Really, by that measure as the Holy Church strengthens and ennobles its summoning voice for fasting and repentance, the world, as is known, today multiplies its amusements and entertainments, trying to take hold of the souls and hearts of the worshippers. How many seductions, temptations and dangers to the pure and undefiled heart are hidden under a seductive cover, even the so-called, innocent amusements and entertainments in these pre-lenten days! How many Christian souls are turned, so to say, in their whirlwind up to self-oblivion! What darkness and gloom covers souls, betrayed by passionate, seduced hearts or to unrestrained inclinations of the flesh! How many people for whom it will be necessary to wail many and bitter tears over a few hours of immediate fun and ecstasy of feelings! Can the most cautious be praised if they regret nothing and repent nothing, if they lost none of the beneficial gifts of a pure and undefiled heart, if none have suffered in the calmness of his conscience? "Cheese Fare Week," teaches St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, "is the threshold and the beginning of the fast. That is why for the true children of the Church it is necessary to act all the more temperate in Cheese Fare Week than in the previous days, although they should always do so. However, will the Christian listen to the sweet odes of his loving mother?" "She ordains to revere these days more, but they commit more excesses; she commands to abstain, and they betray less control; she makes rules to cleanse body and soul, and they defile them more; she orders to lament committed sins, and they add more iniquities; she inspires God to be merciful, and they all the more anger the Most High God; she appoints a fast, and they overeat and revel more; she offers repentance, and they become more violent. A worthy voice of pity and weeping: "Sons are born and raised up, for you reject me! Listen, O heaven and inspire, O earth"! Children have turned away from their mother, Christians do not listen to the holy Church, those who renounced Satan and all his works are again converted to the works of an evil spirit, a lamentable and altogether terrible work! And whoever does not listen to the Church, is not the son of Church; whoever is not the son of the Church, Christ is not his shepherd; whoever Christ is not the shepherd, is not the sheep of Christ; whoever is not the sheep of Christ, vainly expects eternal life. Such are the results of a licentious celebration of Cheese Fare Week. The very celebration of butter week in the aforesaid manner is pagan work. The Pagan false god (the inventor of intoxicated drink) to whom they have established a special annual feast (so called Bacchanalia) was and spent these festivals in every dissolute abomination. Look, do not Christians also do the same in observing butter week, and is the same for many of these festivals? I do not have to show it to you: see it in the light of the midday. And once again I will say, that whoever spends butter week in excesses, it becomes obvious that he is disobedient to the Church and shows himself unworthy of the name of Christian." "In order to spend Cheese Fare Week according to the

Christian obligation, it is needful to act according to how the Holy Church commands during this time, namely: to drop every indecent care and to drop evil customs, remembering the Last Judgment and our ancestral Fall." (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 8:8-9:2

Brethren, food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 25:31-46

The Lord said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did

not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

CAMP NAZARETH SUMMER CAMP 2016

The time for Summer Camp is Rapidly Approaching!!! The clock is ticking!!

Dates for the Summer Camping Program

Week 1 -- July 17 - 23, 2016

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

Register at – *campnazareth.org*

From the Home Page, From the 2016 Summer Camp Icon, or From the Diocesan Summer Camp Tab found under the Program & Events Tab and look for Camper Registration.

If you are Clergy or a Volunteer go to the 2016 Summer Camp Icon on the Home Page or the Summer Camp Tab found under the Program & Events Tab and look for the paper forms under Clergy/Volunteers.

\$20 Early Bird Discount Per Child!!!!

(one-time only, not per week)

Register & pay by May 15, 2016!!!!

Online Registration MUST be complete AND payment must be submitted by May 15 in order to qualify for the Early Bird Discount.

Registrations after June 14 will incur an additional \$20 late fee.

- When you register online please note that **you will still need to submit a paper copy of the Medical Examination Form (i.e. Camper Physical)** which must be filled out and signed by a licensed medical professional (licensed physician or physician’s assistant). This form will be emailed to you after you complete the online registration process.

Payment by check, money order, or credit card is accepted. Checks and Money Orders are to be made payable to *Camp Nazareth* and sent to *Camp Nazareth at 339 Pew Road, Mercer, PA 16137.*

JR ACRY Prepares for their Lenten Project

Our Jr. ACRY will again be supporting the Safe Night Program by collecting non-perishable foods to be used in making up bagged lunches that will be given to the homeless throughout the year. Last year, with your help, we were able to donate (80) bagged lunches to be given out, which is (20) more than the previous year. We're hoping to up the ante and beat last year's total with your help this year.

The project is being done in cooperation with LifeStyles of MD (LaPlata) (<http://www.lifestylesofmd.org>) and the Good Shepherd United Methodist Church (Waldorf), who will be hosting the dinner for the homeless Sunday, April 10, 2016.

We are soliciting the following items that are needed to create the lunch bags:

- ❖ Tuna/Ham/Turkey/Chicken/Hummus Kits (meat/cracker combo found by the canned Tuna)
- ❖ Fruit Cups/Fruit Snacks
- ❖ Cheese/Crackers
- ❖ Granola/Cereal Bars
- ❖ Bottled Water

All items should be of single-serving size, suitable for repackaging into single lunches and can be placed in the Cry Room in the back of the church.

Thank you for your support in helping us help others.



On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 58: Giving Freely



“In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35 RSV)

The Holy Apostle St. Paul was untiring in his efforts to inspire among the converts a desire to do exceptional things for the cause of Christ and His Holy Church. In speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus about his work among them when he founded the church there, St. Paul was quite clear.

“I’ve showed you what to do by doing it myself: help the weak; give!”

Further, St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth concerning the collection for the poor and needy: *“...He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7 RSV).* Both of these stewardship “sermons” by St. Paul tell the giver to give freely.

The example St. Paul gives to the Corinthian church is that of the churches in Macedonia (northern Greece). These Macedonian Christians (and perhaps believers everywhere in St. Paul’s churches) were not rich in worldly goods. However, their hearts overflowed with love for God, and they gave freely for the support of the Church. When St. Paul wanted to show the Corinthians how to give, this is what he said: *“We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints...” (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).*

The willingness to sacrifice (with liberality, St. Paul says) on the part of the Macedonian believers was the result of a whole life given to God and His Church. St. Paul continues in his writing to the Corinthians: *“(The Macedonians) first ... gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5 RSV).* It was not necessary for St. Paul to ask, or beg, the Macedonian Christians to give. They rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. Such is the earliest Church’s example of understanding stewardship as a Way of Life. (*from acrod.org*)

DIOCESAN LENTEN RETREATS



For All Orthodox Christians, Family & Friends

EASTERN REGION

LOCATION: The Conference Center at Valley Forge
Phoenixville, PA **DATE:** Sat April 16, 2016 **TIME:** 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

	TOPIC:	PRESENTER:
Adults	<i>The Synergy of Faith and Works for Living and Sharing Our Orthodox Faith</i>	Fr. Michael Chendorain
Ages 12-18	<i>The Spiritual Life: Prayer in Action</i>	Fr. William Bennett
Ages 6-11	<i>We Are The Church: How Am I A Part Of God's Family?</i>	Fr. William George

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: 4/2/16

Come Escape From the World For A Day and Be Spiritually Renewed!



Sponsored By The National A.C.R.Y.

February Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! For the month of February our income/expenses were:

Operating income \$11,187.00 | Operating Expenses \$9,731.26

Over (Under) income for the month: \$1455.74 | for the year: \$630.05

This month's major expenses were snow removal and generator repair (\$732.42). Please remember to pay your diocesan assessment. Thank you for being good Stewards of God's House.

Kari David, Treasurer

AMAZONSMILE

The on-line shopping store, Amazon.com will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Diocese of the USA whenever you shop on AmazonSmile. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know – same products, same prices, same service. Simply go to the home page of our Diocesan website (www.acrod.org) and click on the AmazonSmile button in the far left column and then shop as usual.

Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers

His Grace, Bishop GREGORY will preside at and be the guest homilist for the Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers on Sunday evening, March 20, at 5:30 PM at St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral on Massachusetts Ave. Come if you can; this is an annual gathering that manifests the unity of the faith as all the Orthodox Churches in our region are represented.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Refuse to listen to the devil when he whispers to you: give me now, and you will give tomorrow to God. No, no! Spend all the hours of your life in a way pleasing to God; keep in your mind the thought that after the present hour you will not be given another and that you will have to render a strict account for every minute of this present hour.

– St. Theophan the Recluse

Also Commemorated Today: 42 Martyrs of Ammoria in Phrygia

The Holy 42 Martyrs of Ammoria: Constantine, Aetius (Aetitus), Theophilus, Theodore, Melissenus, Callistus, Basoes and the others with them. During a war between the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (829-842) and the Saracens, the Saracens managed to besiege the city of Ammoria (in Galicia in Asia Minor). As a result of treason on the part of the military commander Baditses, Ammoria fell, and forty-two of its generals were taken captive and sent off to Syria. During the seven years of their imprisonment they tried in vain to persuade the captives to renounce Christianity and accept Islam. The captives stubbornly resisted all their seductive offers and bravely held out against terrible threats. After many torments that failed to break the spirit of the Christian soldiers, they condemned them to death, hoping to shake the determination of the saints before executing them. The martyrs remained steadfast, saying that the Old Testament Prophets bore witness to Christ, while Mohammed called himself a prophet without any other witnesses to support his claim. They said to the soldier Theodore, “We know that you forsook the priestly office, became a soldier and shed blood in battle. You can have no hope in Christ, Whom you abandoned voluntarily, so accept Mohammed.” But the martyr replied, “You do not speak truthfully when you say that I abandoned Christ.

Moreover, I left the priesthood because of my own unworthiness. Therefore, I must shed my blood for the sake of Christ, so that He might forgive the sins that I have committed against Him.” The executioners took each one separately and led him off to be beheaded, then threw the bodies into the River Euphrates. In the service to them, these holy passion-bearers are glorified as: the “All-Blessed” Theodore, the “Unconquered” Callistus, the “Valliant” Constantine, the “Wondrous” Theophilus and “the Most Strong” Basoes. The betrayer Baditses did not escape his shameful fate. The enemy knew that it is impossible to trust a traitor, and so they killed him. (*from oca.org*)

THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN TODAY’S WORLD

Draft of document of the Pan-Orthodox Council approved by the Synaxis of the First Hierarchs of the Local Orthodox Churches in Chambésy, 21st to 28th January 2016.

Published in accordance with the Resolution of the Synaxis of First Hierarchs.

The Church of Christ lives ‘in the world’, but is ‘not of the world’ (cf. Jn. 17:11 and 14-15). The Church is the sign and image of the Kingdom of God in history, proclaiming the good news of a ‘new creation’ (II Cor. 5: 17) and of ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (II Pt. 3: 13), of a world in which ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain’ (Rev. 21: 4-5).

It is with this hope that the Church lives and foretastes it in particular when the Divine Eucharist is celebrated, bringing ‘together’ (I Cor. 11: 20) the scattered children of God (Jn. 11: 52) without regard to race, gender, age, social or any other station into a single body where ‘there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3: 28; cf. Col. 3:11).

In this foretasting of a ‘new creation’, of a world transfigured, the Church lives in the countenances of her saints who, through their spiritual endeavors in Christ, have already in this life revealed the image of the Kingdom of God, proving and affirming by this that the hope of peace, justice and love is not a utopia, but the ‘substance of things hoped for’ (Heb. 11: 1), attained through the grace of God by means of the human person’s spiritual endeavors.

In finding constant inspiration in this hope and the foretasting of the Kingdom of God, the Church cannot remain aloof from the problems of the human person in each historical epoch, but shares his concern and everyday problems, taking upon herself, as the Lord did, the pain and wounds, the cause of which is evil that is active in the world and, like the Good Samaritan, with a word of ‘patience and

comfort' (Rom. 15: 4, Heb. 13: 22) and through active love, pours upon his wounds oil and wine (Lk. 10: 34). Her word, addressed to the world, has as its aim first of all not to judge and condemn the world (cf. Jn. 3: 17) and 12: 47), but to offer it as guidance the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, hope and the assurance that the last word in history is not evil, no matter what form it may take, and that we should not allow evil to dictate the course of history.

Rooted in these principles, the accumulated experience and the teaching of her patristic, liturgical and ascetical tradition, the Orthodox Church shares the concerns and anxieties of modern-day humanity in relation to everyday problems that disturb the contemporary world and desires to act for their resolution so that in the world there should reign the 'peace of God, which passeth all understanding' (Phil. 4: 7), reconciliation and love.

1. *The Dignity of the Human Person.*

1. The dignity of the human person, proceeding from the creation of man in the image of God so that he may participate in the fulfillment of the God's design for the human person and the world, was the source of inspiration for the Church fathers who delved into the mystery of God's ordering of the world. As an example we can use St. Gregory the Theologian's words on the human person: 'The Creator makes a sort of second world, which is great in the small, he places on earth another angel, a worshipper composed of various natures, a contemplator of visible creation, a witness of the mysteries of creation as comprehended by the intellect, a king over all that is on the earth who is subject to the heavenly kingdom... a living being, prepared here and transported to another world and (which is the culmination of the mystery) who attains deification through striving for God' (Homily 45 *On Holy Pascha*, 7. PG 36, 632). The goal of the Word of God becoming man is the deification of the human person. Christ, having renewed within himself the old Adam (cf. Eph. 2: 15), 'made the human person divine like himself, the beginning of our hope' (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstrations on the Gospel* 4, 14. PG 22, 289).

For as the entire human race was contained in the old Adam, so too all of the human race is gathered in the new Adam: 'The Only-begotten One became man in order to gather into one and return to its original condition the fallen human race' (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, Book 9, PG 74, 273D – 275A). The teaching of the Church is the source of all Christian striving to preserve the dignity and majesty of the human person.

2. It is on this basis that it is essential to develop in all directions inter-Christian co-operation for the protection of human dignity and the preservation of peace so that

the peace-keeping efforts of all Christians may become more relevant and effective.

3. The general recognition of the lofty value of the human person may become the cause for wider co-operation in the field of peace-keeping. The Orthodox Churches are called upon to help in religious dialogue and co-operation, and as a result of this to overcome all manifestations of fanaticism for the strengthening of friendship between peoples, the triumph of freedom and peace throughout the world for the good of each human person, regardless of their race and religion. Of course, this co-operation excludes both syncretism and the attempt of one religion to dominate over all the others.

4. We are convinced that as ‘laborers together with God’ (I Cor. 3: 9) we can develop on local, national and international levels joint service for the good of humanity with all peoples of good will that strive for a peace that is pleasing to God. This ministry is a commandment of God (Matt. 5: 9).

2. Freedom and Responsibility.

1. One of the loftiest gifts of God to the human person both as a concrete bearer of the image of a personal God and as a member of a community of persons in the unity of the human race by grace reflecting the life and communion of the Divine Persons in the Holy trinity, is the gift of freedom. ‘He who created the human person in the beginning made him free and autonomous, limiting him solely by the laws of the commandment’ (St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 14, *On love for the poor*, 25. PG 35, 892A). Freedom allows the human person to ascend to spiritual perfection, yet at the same time includes the danger of disobedience, the abandonment of submission to God and through this the fall, the tragic consequences of which is the existence of evil in the world.

2. The consequence of this evil are the imperfections and shortcomings which predominate in modern-day life: secularization, violence, moral laxity, negative phenomena such as narcotic and other forms of dependency that can be seen in certain young people, racism, the arms race, war the social catastrophes that result from them, discrimination against certain social groups, religious communities and whole peoples, social inequality; the limitation of human rights in the field of freedom of conscience, in particular religious freedom, disinformation and the manipulation of public opinion; economic backwardness, the disproportionate redistribution or complete absence of the essentials of life, the hunger of millions of people, the forced deportation of populations and the trade in human beings, the uncontrolled use of genetic biotechnologies and the end of human life – all of this causes infinite anxiety in the life of modern-day humanity.

3. Faced with this situation, which has led to a degradation of the notion of the human person, the duty of the Orthodox Church today is, by means of preaching, theology, worship and pastoral activity, to reveal the truth of freedom in Christ. 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth... for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?' (I Cor. 10: 23-24, 29). Freedom without responsibility and love leads eventually to the loss of freedom.

3. *Peace and Justice.*

1. The Orthodox Church has since time immemorial recognized and proclaimed that peace and justice occupy a central place in the life of peoples. Christ's revelation is characterized as the 'gospel of peace' (Eph. 6: 5), for Christ 'made peace through the blood of his cross' (Col. 1: 20) and 'came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh' (Eph. 2: 17). He became 'our peace' (Eph. 2: 14). This peace, 'which passeth all understanding' (Phil. 4: 7), as the Lord said to his disciples before his crucifixion, is wider and more important than the peace which the world promises: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you' (Jn. 14: 27). For Christ's peace is the ripe fruit of all things united in Christ: the revelation of the dignity and majesty of the human person as the image of God, the manifestation of the organic unity of the human race and the world in him, the commonality of the principles of peace, freedom and social justice and, ultimately, the offering of the fruits of Christian love among people and the nations of the world. True peace is the fruit of the triumph on earth of all these Christian principles. It is the peace that is from above, of which the Orthodox Church constantly prays every day, beseeching it of almighty God who hears the prayers of those who approach him in faith.

2. From the above it becomes clear why the Church 'as the body of Christ' (I Cor. 12: 27) always prays for the peace of the whole world, which, according to St. Clement of Alexandria, is a synonym for justice (*Stromates* 4, 25. PG 8, 1369-72). And St. Basil the Great adds to this: 'I cannot convince myself that without mutual love and without peace with all people, in as far as it is within my possibilities, I can call myself a worthy servant of God' (Epistle 203, 2. PG 32, 737). As the same holy father writes, this is self-evident for a Christian: 'Nothing is so characteristic of Christian as to be a peace maker' (Epistle 114. PG 32, 528). Christ's peace is a mysterious power which flows from the reconciliation of the human person with the heavenly Father 'according to Christ's providence, who brings all things to perfection in him and who makes peace, ineffable and predestined from the ages, and who reconciles us with himself, and in himself with the Father' (Dionysius the Aeropagite, *On the Divine Names*, 11, 2, 4. PG 3, 953).

3. At the same time it should be emphasized that the gifts of peace and justice also depend on human inter-action. The Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts when the human person in repentance aims for peace and God's righteousness. These gifts of peace and justice are made manifest in the place where Christians exert efforts in the cause of faith, love and hope in our Lord Christ Jesus (I Thess. 1: 3).

4. Sin is a spiritual illness, the external symptoms of which are conflicts, division, crime and war with tragic consequences. The Church strives to remove not only the external symptoms of this illness but also the illness of sin itself.

5. At the same time the Orthodox Church believes it her duty to encourage all those who genuinely serve the cause of peace (Rom. 14: 19) and show the way to justice, fraternity, true freedom and mutual love between all the children of the one heavenly Father as between all peoples who make up the one human family. She suffers with all people who in various parts of the world are denied the benefits of peace and justice.

4. Peace and the Aversion of War.

1. The Church of Christ condemns war as such, believing it to be a result of the evil and sin which exist in the world: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?' (James 4: 1). All war threatens to destroy God's creation and life.

This applies in particular to wars with the use of weapons of mass destruction, the consequences of which are dreadful, for they cause the death of a huge number of people, while for those who remain alive life would not be worth living. Incurable diseases appear, genetic changes occur and other disasters happen which would have a catastrophic effect on future generations.

Extremely dangerous today are not only nuclear, chemical, biological but also other forms of weapons which create the illusion with those who possess them of superiority and dominance over the surrounding world. Such weapons create an atmosphere of fear and mistrust and are becoming the reason for a new arms race.

2. The Church of Christ, which has from the very beginning understood war to be the result of the evil and sin that exist in the world, encourages all initiatives and efforts aimed at its aversion by means of dialogue and other acceptable methods. In the instance when war becomes inevitable, the Church continues to pray and exercises her pastoral care for her children who take part in military maneuvers to defend their life and freedom, at the same time exerting all efforts for the rapid establishment of peace.

3. The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns various conflicts and wars caused by fanaticism justified by religious principles. Great concern is caused by the steady tendency towards increasing the discrimination and persecution of Christians and representatives of other religions according to their beliefs in the Middle East and in other parts of the world and the attempts to uproot Christianity from its traditional regions. In this way the existing inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations are threatened, and many Christians are forced to abandon their homeland. Orthodox Christians throughout the world sympathize with their fellow Christians and all those subjected to persecution in this region, and call for the working out of a just and final solution to the region's problems. Also condemned are wars inspired by nationalistic motives and which lead to ethnic cleaning, the changing of state borders and the seizure of territory. *[to be continued next week - Ed.]*

PARISH LIFE IN PICTURES

On February 21, we celebrated February birthdays and anniversaries. Last week, we celebrated Fr. Joseph's 13th anniversary of ordination. May God grant the celebrants many blessed years!



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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Grace Bishop GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Dominiacki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, Alex Holthus, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Deanna Jarrett, Tucker Karl and family, Robert Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Alex & Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Daria Virvan, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)