

# SOBORNOST

## St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## SERVICES

**Wednesday in Lent: Liturgy of  
Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

**Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM**

**Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:30 PM**

**Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM**

**Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM**

**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.**

## March 4, 2018 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent | St. Gregory Palamas Venerable Gerasimus of the Jordan

In the Orthodox Church today, the primary theme for the Second Sunday of Great Lent is the person of Saint Gregory Palamas and his struggles for the Orthodox faith. The reason he is remembered on this Second Sunday is to put a seal on the previous Sunday of Orthodoxy (when Gregory Palamas is hailed and his opponents condemned in the Synodikon), and therefore it is a second Sunday of Orthodoxy. However, Gregory Palamas, who reposed in 1359, did not become the focus of the Second Sunday of Great Lent until 1368, when he was officially canonized by Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, which is believed to have taken place during Great Lent in 1368 (possibly the Second Sunday of Great Lent, hence the commemoration). However, a Service to Saint Gregory Palamas did not appear for this day in the Triodion until 1519. This leaves us to wonder what the theme of the Second Sunday of Great Lent was previous to this time.

Originally, the Parable of the Prodigal Son was the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Great Lent, and with the Prodigal Son was remembered the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, though this Gospel reading was not done until the



following Sunday. This was because the period of Great Lent was mainly focused on being a period of catechism for catechumens, who were to be baptized on Lazarus Saturday or Holy Saturday, and the spirit of repentance was emphasized. It is still the case in the Roman Catholic Church for the Parable of the Prodigal Son to be read on this Sunday. In the sixth century, however, the Publican and the Pharisee became identified with the First Sunday of the Triodion and the Prodigal Son was moved to the Second Sunday of the Triodion - which is the three-week period immediately preceding Great Lent - and the reading for the Second Sunday of Great Lent was replaced with the Healing of the Paralyzed Man in Capernaum from the Gospel of Mark. This Gospel reading was the primary focus for the Second Sunday of Great Lent until 1368, though it still remains the Gospel reading for this day. Interestingly, some of the hymns from the Sunday of the Prodigal Son have remained in their original liturgical position on the Second Sunday of Great Lent, for example, the Second Canon for Sunday Matins, and also a number of the *idiomela* sung during the services of the week following the Second Sunday of Great Lent. *(by John Sanidopoulos)*

### **Venerable Gerasimus of the Jordan**

Saint Gerasimus was a native of Lycia (Asia Minor). From his early years he was distinguished for his piety. Having received monastic tonsure, he withdrew into the desert of the Thebaid (in Egypt). Thereafter, in about the year 450, the monk arrived in Palestine and settled at the Jordan, where he founded a monastery. For a certain while Saint Gerasimus was tempted by the heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus, which acknowledged only the divine nature in Jesus Christ, but not His human nature (i.e. the Monophysite heresy). Saint Euthymius the Great (January 20) helped him to return to the true Faith.

Saint Gerasimus established a strict monastic Rule. He spent five days of the week in solitude, occupying himself with handicrafts and prayer. On these days the wilderness dwellers did not eat cooked food, nor did they kindle a fire, but ate only dry bread, roots and water. On Saturday and Sunday all gathered at the monastery for Divine Liturgy and to partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. In the afternoon, taking a supply of bread, tubers, water and an armload of date-palm branches for weaving baskets, the desert-dwellers returned to their own cells. Each had only old clothes and a mat, upon which he slept. When they left their cells, the door was never locked, so that anyone could enter and rest, or take whatever he needed.

Saint Gerasimus himself attained a high level of asceticism. During Great Lent he ate nothing until the very day of the All-Radiant Resurrection of Christ, when he received the Holy Mysteries. Going out into the desert for all of Great Lent, Saint

Gerasimus took with him his beloved disciple Saint Cyriacus (September 29), whom Saint Euthymius had sent to him.

When Saint Euthymius the Great died, Saint Gerasimus saw how angels carried the soul of the departed up to Heaven. Taking Cyriacus with him, the monk immediately set off to the monastery of Saint Euthymius and consigned his body to the earth.

Saint Gerasimus died peacefully, mourned by his brethren and disciples. Before his death, a lion had aided Saint Gerasimus in his tasks, and upon the death of the Elder it died at his grave and was buried nearby. Therefore the lion is depicted on icons of the saint, at his feet. (*from oca.org*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 1:10-2:3**

Brethren, in the beginning, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail." But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*?

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 2:1-12**

At that time, Jesus entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive *them*, not even near the door, and He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men*. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But

that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw *anything* like this!”

## *A Word From the Holy Fathers*

I shall introduce my homily to your charity today with the Lord’s own words, the quint-essence, in fact, of the Gospel preaching: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17; cf. 3:2 and Mark 1:15). Not only is it at hand, but it is in us, for the Lord also says, “The kingdom of heaven is within you” (Luke 17:21). Nor is it merely within you, for before long it will come more openly to abolish every principality, power and might (cf Eph. 1:21), and to grant invincible strength, inexhaustible riches and unchanging, incorruptible and unending enjoyment, glory and might solely to those who live according to God’s will and have passed their time here in a way that pleases Him.

2. Since the kingdom of God is at hand and within us and will soon arrive, let us make our-selves worthy of it by works of repentance. Let us exercise force on ourselves, driving away evil prejudices and habits. For “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12). We should emulate the patience, humility and faith of our God-bearing Fathers. “Whose faith follow,” it says, “considering the end of their manner of life” (Heb. 13:7). Let us mortify those parts of us which belong to the earth: fornication, impurity, evil passion and covetousness, especially during these holy days of the fast. This is why the grace of the Spirit taught us first about God’s terrible Judgment which is to come, then reminded us of Adam’s exile, and afterwards pointed out to us the faith that is surest of all. For fear of the Judgment and in grief at the exile, we should hold fast to the faith, humble ourselves and neither yield to self-indulgence, nor open the door to all the passions and make room for them by means of our unbelieving, insatiable stomachs. This would mean following the wide and easy way, destroying ourselves with pleasure. Since we love the straight and narrow way which leads to life, and fasting is its starting point and first furlong, let us vigorously make our way through these forty days of fasting.

3. “To everything there is a season,” according to Solomon, “and a time to every purpose” (Eccles. 3:1). If anyone is looking for the right season to practice virtue, it is now, in these forty days. Our whole life is intended as a suitable means of attaining salvation, but this season of fasting is more especially so. Christ, the author and giver of our salvation, began by fasting. During that period, the devil, the inventor of the passions, attacked Him in all kinds of ways, but He overthrew him and put him to shame (Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:13, cf Luke 4:1-13). Just as

failing to restrain the stomach destroys the virtues and is the mother of passionateness, so self-control destroys the stains caused by self-indulgence and is the mother of dispassion. If it is the case that self-indulgence has given rise both now and in the past to passions which were not yet within us, it will without doubt increase and strengthen any that are there already, whereas fasting weakens them and makes them disappear. Fasting and self-control are yoked together, though at different times one or the other may be more advantageous to those who pursue them with understanding.

4. Let us not now unyoke these two. During the five noble weekdays which intervene let us hold more firmly to fasting, then on Saturdays and Sundays we should be more intent on self-control than on fasting, so that we may listen attentively to the words of the Gospel. Today these words tell us about the miraculous healing of the paralyzed man; not the healing which the Lord performed in Jerusalem (John 5:1-15), but the one in Capernaum (Mark 2:1-12, cf. Matt. 9:1-8, Luke 5:17-26). In those days, says Mark, "Jesus again entered into Capernaum after some days" (Mark 2:1). Matthew calls Capernaum the Lord's own city, because when he tells the story of this paralyzed man he says, "Jesus came into his own city" (Matt. 9:1). When He had been baptized by John in the Jordan and the Spirit had flown down upon Him from heaven, He was led out into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted (Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:13, cf. Luke 4:1-13). After His victory over the tempter, He came up and went round teaching near the Jordan. The Baptist bore witness to Him in many different ways, until the time that John was imprisoned by Herod (Matt. 4:11-12). Then, as Matthew says, "He departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast" (Matt. 4:13).

5. From there He used to go out into the desert places in order to pray, and into the small towns nearby to preach, then He would return to Capernaum. For that reason the evangelist Matthew referred to it as His own city. Mark, on the other hand, says, "He again entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door" (Mark 2:1-2). Since He spent most of His time there, He was extremely well known on account of His many great miracles and words, and the people had an especial longing for Him. When they heard that He was there once more, everybody flocked. According to Luke, they came from every city (Luke 8:4), and there were scribes, Pharisees and doctors of the law among them. "And he preached," it says, "the word unto them" (Mark 2:2). Such was His principal work, as He showed by saying in a parable, "The sower went out to sow his seed" (Luke 8:5), namely, the word of His teaching. He also says, "I am come to call sinners to repentance"

(Matt. 9:13), calling them through the word of His teaching. Paul, too, makes this clear, saying, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

6. Publicly and without reproaching anyone, He preached to all the word of repentance, the Gospel of salvation and the words of eternal life. Everyone heard but not everyone obeyed. For although we all love listening and watching, not all of us love virtue. By nature we all long to know about salvation as well as everything else. So people in general are not only pleased to listen to sacred teaching, but also enjoy passing their opinions on the words, each one apparently scrutinizing what is said, according to how ignorant or wise he may be. Putting the words into action, however, or reaping from them the fruit of beneficial faith, requires gratitude and good intent, which are not easy to find, especially among people who consider themselves righteous and are wise in their own opinion, as were the Jewish scribes and Pharisees.

7. They stayed there, heard the word and saw the miracles performed, but instead of commending the one who did good by His words and actions, they blasphemed against Him. While the Lord was teaching and everyone, or nearly everyone, was standing and taking in the gracious words which came from His mouth, "Certain men came," it says, "to him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where the Lord was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay" (Mark 2:3-4). You might think that the faith of those doing the carrying accomplished everything, and that the Lord went on to heal the paralyzed man because He was satisfied with their faith (cf Mark 2:5). It seems to me, however, that the reality was different. It is true that when the Lord healed the servant of the Centurion, He did not look for faith on the part of the servant (Matt. 8:6-13, Luke 7:1-10). Nor did He look for faith either from the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt. 15:22-28, Mark 7:24-30) or from Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21-43, Luke 8:40-56), because He was satisfied with the faith of those who approached Him on their behalf. Of these three, however, Jairus' daughter had died, the Canaanite woman's daughter was beside herself, and the servant was not even present. The paralyzed man, by contrast, was present and in his right mind, although his body was paralyzed. It seems more likely to me, therefore, that his bearers accepted faith in the Lord and ventured to approach Him as a result of the paralyzed man's own hopefulness and faith. Persuaded by him, they took him and carried him up on the roof and let him down from there in front of the Lord. They could not have done this against his wishes. Obviously being racked with paralysis had broken down, not his reason, but all barriers and obstacles to faith.

8. It was love of human honor that distanced the Pharisees from faith in the Lord, which is why He said to them, “How can you believe, who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor which comes from God only?” (John 5:44). Others were prevented from drawing nearby lands, weddings, or worries about the affairs of this life (Luke 14:18-20), but the paralyzed man’s physical weakness put an end to such things and removed them from his thoughts. There are times when illness is better for sinners than good health, because it helps them towards salvation and blunts their inborn evil impulses. Inasmuch as it repays the debt of sins by means of suffering, it makes them able to receive healing of their souls in the first instance, then healing of their bodies. This happens most of all when the sick person, understanding that the affliction is a remedy from God, bears it courageously, falls down before God with faith and asks for forgiveness, through whatever works he can manage. This was shown by the paralyzed man who did what he could, and proved by the Lord’s own words and actions. The Pharisees, however, were incapable of comprehending, and blasphemed and murmured among themselves (Mark 2:6-7). “When Jesus,” it says, “saw their faith,” the faith, that is, of the bed-ridden man who had been lowered, and of those who had let him down from the roof, “he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5).

9. What a blessed way to be addressed! He hears himself called “son” and is adopted as the child of the heavenly Father. He is joined to God who is without sin, having immediately become sinless himself through the forgiveness of his sins. In order that his body can subsequently be renewed, his soul first receives deliverance from sin from the Lord, who knows that in the beginning when the soul fell into the snares of sin, physical illness and death followed, in accordance with His righteous judgment.

10. But when the scribes heard, “They reasoned,” it says, “in their hearts, Why does this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:6-7). As the Creator of men’s hearts, the Lord knew the secret thoughts in the scribes’ hearts, and said to them, “Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your bed, and walk’?” (Mark 2:8-9). It seemed to the scribes that the Lord was unable to heal the paralyzed man, so He had resorted to something obscure, forgiving him his sins. Just to pronounce words of forgiveness, especially in such an authoritative and commanding way, was blasphemy; but it was also something easy that anyone could do. That is why the Lord said to them, “If I wanted to utter empty words without any practical outcome, it would be just as easy to declare that the paralyzed man should rise from his bed as that his sins were forgiven, both statements being of no effect. But so that you may know that

my word is not ineffectual, and that I did not resort to forgiving his sins because I was incapable of granting him healing of his illness, but that I have divine power on earth as the Son who is of one substance with the Father in heaven, although, according to the flesh, I have become of one substance with your ungrateful selves,” He then says to the paralyzed man, “I say to you, ‘Arise, and take up your bed, and go your way into your house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all” (Mark 2:11-12).

11. Although Christ’s words and the miracle were at odds with the scribes’ reasoning, in some ways they agreed with it. They show that no human being is able in his own right to forgive sins. They also show, however, that the Pharisees’ opinion that Christ was merely a man, not almighty God, was false and devoid of understanding. Something that no one had ever seen or heard of had now come to light. Christ was both God and man, twofold in nature and energy. On the one hand He spoke as a man like us, on the other hand as God He accomplished whatever He pleased through His word and command alone. He confirmed by His deeds that in the beginning, according to the psalmist, “He spoke, and it was done, he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). Now the deed immediately followed His word. The paralyzed man stood up at once, “and took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed” (Mark 2:12). Often men can bring about by a word the forgiveness of the sins of someone who offends against them. But only God can put to flight such an illness as this merely by a word of command. The evangelist remarks that everyone watching was amazed and glorified God, for it was clearly He who had done this wonder. They glorified Him who does innumerable glorious and extraordinary works, saying, “We never saw it on this fashion” (Mark 2:12).

12. They said that they had never seen anything like this, glorifying God by their words and showing that this miracle was greater than any previous ones. But we are unable to say the same now, for we have seen many much greater miracles performed not only by Christ but also by His disciples and their successors, just by calling upon Christ’s name. Let us then, brethren, glorify Him now by our actions, regarding this miracle analogically as a pattern for virtue. Anyone addicted to sensual pleasures is paralyzed in his soul, and is lying sick on the bed of voluptuousness with its deceptive bodily ease. Once, however, he has been won over by the exhortations in the Gospel, he confesses his sins and triumphs over them and the paralysis they have brought upon his soul. He is taken up and brought to the Lord by these four: self-condemnation, confession of former sins, promising to renounce evil ways from now on, and prayer to God. They cannot, however, bring him near to God without uncovering the roof, scattering the tiles, earth and other building material. Our roof is the reasoning part of the soul, which



is set above everything else within us. But it has lying on top of it, like a large quantity of building material, its connection with the passions and earthly matters. Once this connection has been loosed and shaken off by means of the four things we have mentioned, then we can really be let down, that is, humbled, fall down before the Lord, draw near to Him and ask and receive His healing.

13. When did these acts of repentance take place? At the time when Jesus came to His own city, which means, after He came in the flesh to stay in the world which He created and is therefore His own. As the evangelist says of Him, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become sons of God, even to those who believe on his name" (John 1:11-12). So when we fall down before Him with such faith, our paralyzed mind immediately hears Him saying "Son," and receives forgiveness and healing. In addition it receives strength to lift up and carry the bed on which it is lying. The bed is to be understood as the body to which the mind which pursues fleshly desires clings, and through which it applies itself to sinful actions.

14. After being healed, our mind has our body under control and leads and carries it about. Through it our mind brings to light the fruits and works of repentance, so that all who see them glorify God. For they see that yesterday's publican is today's evangelist, the persecutor an apostle, the thief a theologian. Even the man who used to live among pigs, if you please, is now the son of the heavenly Father. Having planned in their hearts ways to ascend, they advanced "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), progressing day by day towards excellence. The Lord says to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). He does not say this to urge them to show off, but to urge them to organize their lives as is pleasing to God. Just as light effortlessly attracts people's gaze, so a way of life pleasing to God draws their minds along with their eyes. We do not praise the air which shares in the brilliance of the sunlight, but the sun which is the source of this brilliance and bestows it on us. Even if we do praise the air for its brightness, we praise the sun much more. So it is when someone makes the brilliance of the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2) visible through his virtuous deeds. As soon as anyone looks at him, they are immediately led towards the glory of the Father in heaven of Christ, the Sun of righteousness.

15. Leaving aside for now the higher virtues, when I am standing with you before God in the holy church and I turn round and see people offering up hymns and prayers to God with understanding and contrition, or someone standing silently listening in deep thought, then this sight alone immediately inspires me, my soul is filled with delight and I glorify Christ, our Father in heaven. For without Him

nobody can do anything good (cf John 15:5), and all men's attainments are due to Him.

16. But what can I say to those people who neither stand in silence, nor join in the singing, but instead meet one another and mix our reasonable worship of God with worldly chatter? They do not listen them-selves to the divinely inspired words, and prevent others who want to listen from doing so. "How long do you halt between two opinions?" as Elijah the Tishbite would say (1 Kings. 18:21). You want simultaneously to come together for prayer and for worldly, ill-timed words. Of course you succeed in neither purpose, because you destroy the one with the other, or rather, they destroy each other. How long before you stop talking idly in this place? You make this house of prayer into a place of business or impassioned speech (cf Mt. 21:13, Mk. 11:17, Lk. 19:46). In this house the words of eternal life are both spoken and heard, on the one hand by us, as we beseech God for eternal life with unashamed hope, and on the other hand by God, as He gives eternal life to those who ask with their whole heart and mind. But he will certainly not give it to those who do not even apply their whole tongue, as it were, to asking.

17. Nowadays, brethren, our sacrifice to God is not accomplished through fire, as in the time of Moses, but through words. In those days, when God used to receive the sacrifice carried up by fire, when Korah and his fellow-rebels against Moses offered strange fire from outside, they were completely burnt up by the holy fire which spontaneously sprang out at them (Num. 16:31-35). We should be afraid lest, when we bring strange words from outside into this place of sacrifice, by which I mean the church, we should be condemned once and for all by the divine words there. For by so doing we shall have made ourselves liable to hear that abominable voice which pronounces our condemnation. Let us instead be afraid, and as long as we are here let us stand with fear before God and make our supplication. After leaving this place, we should give proof of the resulting change for the better in our ways. We should not be enslaved to gains, especially if they are dishonest. We should avoid oaths, especially false ones. We should renounce shameless words, and shameless actions even more so, slander, cunning and arrogance. By means of godly prudence of mind, we should train and motivate every part of our body and all our senses, leading our body upwards with godly reasoning and fear. We must not let our body bring us down and overpower us by its own servile and disgusting appetites. As we have learned from Paul, we know that if we live after the flesh we shall die, but if through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live forever (Rom. 8:13).

18. Let us stir up all who see us to glorify God as they recognize that this house has Christ within it, who gives strength to those whose souls are paralyzed and commands them to lift up and offer up to Him, with a spiritual understanding

pleasing to God, their physical senses and perceptions, instead of being mindlessly carried away and brought down by them. In this way they will go into the house that is really ours, by which I mean the country in and above the heavens, where Christ now is, the Heir and Bestower of our inheritance.

19. To whom belong glory might, honor and worship, with His Father without beginning and the holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen. – St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily on the Second Sunday of Great Lent (adapted from Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies, Mount Thabor Publishing)*

## **We are Coming to Confession not to Be Judged and Condemned**

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

When we come to Confession we come to meet a friend face to face. We are not coming to be judged and condemned. We do not come in terror of what will happen. We come to the One who, being God, beyond suffering, beyond death, has chosen, for the love of us, to become Man, to take upon Himself all our human destiny and to give His life for us. His life, His death are to us evidence that we are so loved of God that we can come up to Him whether we are good or bad with hope that He will receive us with open arms; that if anyone is to cry over our unworthiness and our sins it is Him, for compassion, for pity, for love — with a readiness, as He said in a vision to one of the saints, that if there was only one sinner in the world He would again become Man and again die for him, because He cannot endure the thought of anyone perishing.

This is the God, the Christ, to Whom we come when we come to Confession — to the One who is open to us with all His life and death; One who waits for us to come to be healed, to be consoled, to be supported — not to be condemned, not to be judged. And then, what is the role of the priest? In the prayer which is read before Confession we are told, ‘I am but a witness.’ What does it mean? A witness to what? To the fact that you have come? That would not be enough.

But if you think of what witnesses are: there are accidental, occasional witnesses. You are present in the street when an accident takes place. You are asked: what did happen? You are neither in favor of the ones or the others. You are just telling what your eyes have seen. It’s for others to judge and to know.

There are other forms of witness. At times a friend of ours is brought to judgment. And we come to defend him, to testify for him, to save him. That’s another kind of witness. And then there is the witness which the Holy Gospel mentions speaking of St. John the Baptist: as the friend of the Bridegroom, the one who comes to the wedding, invited both by the bride and the bridegroom, because he is the nearest, the closest, to them both. And he is there to share their joy, the miracle of their

encounter, the miracle of a blessing that will come upon them and out of two make one, unite them so that they are inseparable forever in the mystery of eternal love, of divine love shared with them. This is the position of the priest.

He is called by Christ to be before the person, the sinner, a witness to the fact that he the sinner is loved, that Christ is there, that He has no other desire or intention but the salvation and the joy eternal of the one who has come today. And he comes also in the name of the sinner saying: Christ, my God, our Lord, this person has sinned, yes, but look, he trusts in You, he believes in You, we all love him with the same love as You possess. We are prepared to give our lives for him to be reconciled and find peace and joy and be at one with You, our Lord, our God, our Savior, our Lover.

When you come to Confession next time, think of these things. Think of the way you come: not with fear of punishment or of rejection but with open heart to pour out everything evil or doubtful there is in this heart. And Christ will receive you. Your confession may be to Him a new crucifixion but He accepts it. He doesn't reject it. He does not reject you. Come, open your heart, speak in all truth to Him, knowing that you are loved beyond judgment, to the point of sacrifice and death: His death, and your life — life in time and life eternal. Amen.

## *Monthly Parish Council Meeting*

All parishioners are welcome to join the newly elected parish council in the first monthly parish council meeting today, Sun, March 4th. Meetings will be scheduled for 12:30-1:30 pm on the first Sunday of the month (but may be moved as needed). For March, we will discuss the following:

- dead tree removal
- parish hall supplies ordering
- special project funding priorities
- calendar for the upcoming quarter.

Please join us!

## **Myrrh-Streaming Kardiotisa (Tender-Hearted) Icon Visit**

This coming Friday, March 9, the Myrrh-streaming Kardiotisa icon from St. George's in Taylor, PA will be in the area at St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral (15100 New Hampshire Ave. in Silver Spring). Following the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts at 6:00 PM, there will be a supplicatory service to the Theotokos at 7, a free Lenten buffet at 9, and a multi-lingual all-night vigil from 10-midnight served by local clergy.



*Office of the Bishop*  
312 Garfield Street  
Johnstown, PA 15906

February 21, 2018

Protocol No. 5/2018

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Diocesan Seniors,

Our Diocese is pleased to offer its first annual Seniors' Retreat this year from April 23-25 at Camp Nazareth in Mercer, PA. I am calling upon all our Seniors, age 65 and older, to join me at the Camp for 3 days of fellowship and prayer in order to be spiritually rejuvenated. The Retreat is being offered with you our Seniors specifically in mind.

The central theme of the Retreat comes from Psalm 77:5, "I consider the days of old, I remember the years long ago...I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord..." The Retreat will focus on gratitude for God's many blessings in our lives and the hope that His mercy creates in us. The schedule will include worship, fellowship, learning, fun, time for reflection and relaxation, and time spent together.

The Retreat is designed specifically for you, so Come! if you are "of age".

Don't miss out on this opportunity for yourselves. This will become an annual event in our Diocese, but for now you are its pioneers.

Register online at our Diocesan website: ([www.acrod.org](http://www.acrod.org)). There you will also find the Retreat flyer and other necessary information about the Retreat. Alternately, you may print the Registration Form from the Diocesan website and send it in via mail.

I am looking forward to spending time with each of you at this first annual Seniors' Retreat. Come, let's have some fun!

With blessings I remain,

Working in His Vineyard with much love,

+Bishop Gregory of Nyssa

## *St. Barbara's Meeting*

There will be a St. Barbara's meeting on March 11 during lunch. Ladies, please attend as several topics will be discussed, including cleaning of the house and church, fundraising and use of funds.

### **Follow Our Diocese On-Line**

**Diocesan Website:** <http://www.acrod.org>

**Camp Nazareth:** <http://www.campnazareth.org>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/acroddioocese>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/acrodnews>

**You Tube:** <https://youtube.com/acroddioocese>

***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, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Fr. Vincent Saverino, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiacki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, 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.)