

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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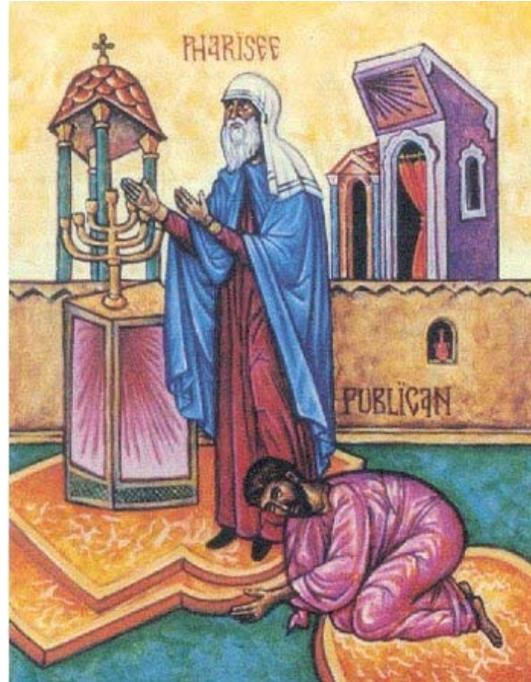
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

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

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



February 21, 2016 – Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

The name of this first preparatory Sunday was received from the appointed Gospel reading of the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, from which the first, from the image of the parable, left the temple for his house more justified than the second. By the example of one and the other the Holy Church points out the true beginning and basis of repentance: humility and, on the other hand, the main source of sin and obstacle to repentance, pride. According to the words of the Holy Church, "every good deed is made of no effect through foolish pride, while every evil is cleansed by humility." Without the humble consciousness of one's sinfulness one cannot alone have the appropriate sense of one's high external righteousness. In this idea the faithful also should begin the ascetical effort of fasting and repentance. In accordance with this core content, the Holy Church in all its services for this Sunday, especially in the Vespers and Matins stichera and in the troparia of the canon, denouncing, agreeing with the Gospel parable, the self-righteous pride of the Pharisee, praises the humility of the Publican and calls each of us to reject "the swollen boasting and evil folly of the Pharisee, his loathsome pride, and the wicked cruelty hateful to God" to lay aside self-conceit about one's imaginary worthiness and perfection, the self-sufficiency of one's imaginary righteousness to humble oneself by consciousness of one's unworthiness and guilt before God, to condemn oneself, as a sinner, worthy of condemnation and

judgment, and beating one's breast to pray: "God be merciful to me a sinner." If each of us will pray, according to the example of the Publican, with a broken heart and humble spirit, undoubtedly, we will receive great mercy from the One to whom all hearts are open: the Lord opens to us the door of repentance, will lead us into the holy and redemptive days of the Holy Forty Day Fast, will enable us by His grace to bring us to true repentance that we may receive complete remission and forgiveness.

The preparation for Great Lent begins soon after the feast of the Theophany of the Lord corresponding to its historical commemoration that soon after His baptism Jesus Christ left for the desert for a fast, in commemoration of which the Holy Forty Day Fast was established. Beginning with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the preparation for Great Lent comes to an end with Cheesefare Sunday. The Holy Church for a long time begins to prepare the faithful for Great Lent as a redemptive time for an all general spiritual cleansing and sanctification. This cleansing and sanctification are possible only under the condition of the complete remission of sins, the complete change of a life view in ideas, feelings and actions, the complete renewal and spiritual revival. But such revival requires the sustained, serious, painful and tenacious spiritual struggle, by which it gradually should revive to compel and ingrain itself. Besides this the determination for such a spiritual struggle and its persistence also depends on us, but it depends more on the mercy of God, who revives it in the heart and is accomplished by His all-acting grace. Therefore we should pray a lot and with diligence, so that the Lord will send us to the door of repentance, to break the hardness of our hearts and to stir up grief about our sins, without which there cannot be true repentance; to inflame our heart with love for Him, without Whom even the most sincere repentance would not be strong enough; to enliven and give wing to our spirit with sacred hope, without which the trembling heart would be suppressed with sorrow. That is why the Holy Church prepares us beforehand for our entrance into the sacred and redemptive days of lent and repentance, and beforehand makes an effort to remove everything that interferes with our coming to true repentance, and beforehand makes an effort to teach us that the sincere spirit of humility and contrition to be acquired is required from us.

Preparing believers for the Holy Forty Day Fast, the Holy Church in its services, according to its own expression, acts as the commander who with timely and wise words encourages the warriors before doing battle with the enemy. Therefore in its preparatory services it does not forget to tell everything that may position the faithful for fasting and repentance. In its sacred commemorations it returns to the first days of the world and mankind, to the blessed condition of the forefathers and their fall, to show the beginning of sin and to awaken in us contrition for sins, and

to the time of the coming on earth of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind in order to turn us to God. Continuing in the preparatory season, the Holy Church accustoms the faithful to the ascetical struggle of fasting and the gradual incorporation of abstinence. After eating meat all during the week following the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, it reinstates the Wednesday and Friday fasts and then builds up to the highest degree of preparatory abstinence by prohibiting the eating of all meat products but with the allowance to use cheese products. The special preparation for the Holy Forty Day Fast is undoubtedly an ancient established practice of the Holy Church. Thus, the already famous preachers of the Fourth Century Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and others left us their discussions and sermons, spoken by them in view of the fast not already come, but only expected. (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15

My son Timothy, you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 18:10-14

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

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.

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 56: "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29 RSV)



In the familiar story found in the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, a story called "The Good Samaritan," a lawyer tests Jesus by asking, "*And who is my neighbor?*" Rather than trying to define who the neighbor is for the lawyer, Jesus instead tells the story of what a neighbor did on behalf of a man who fell into the hands of robbers who left him on the roadside to die. Good neighbors, as good stewards, are those who go beyond requirements and do what is needed for the neighbor. St. Matthew wrote these words of Jesus in his Gospel: "*...if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak*

as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you" (Matthew 5:40-41 RSV). Shortly after Jesus spoke these words in the Sermon on the Mount, He added: "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*" (Matthew 5:43-44 RSV)

In both the story of the Good Samaritan and in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus links our earthly neighbors to the same love God has shown us in Jesus Christ who gave Himself completely for us, His neighbors. Stewards are those who are generous with the things God has loaned them to build up the Kingdom of God. In the Good Samaritan story, the most likely persons to assist the man dying in the ditch were the priest and the Levite. But they "*passed by on the other side.*" It was the hated Samaritan who came to the aid of the Jewish traveler. As we know, that Samaritan was not only generous with his time, but also with the extravagance of his support, financially, of the injured man to see to his full recovery. Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan actually began when that lawyer had asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" When asked that same question on another occasion, Jesus' answer to the rich young man who asked the question? "*Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*" (Luke 18:22 RSV).

This time in answer to the same question, Jesus points out that eternal life is available to the one who in his abundance shows mercy to his neighbor – whether he likes the neighbor or not! (from acrod.org)

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

Week 2 -- July 24 - July 30, 2016

New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

Week 3 -- July 31 - August 6, 2016

Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

Register Online Starting Feb. 22, 2016

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.*

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.

PRE-LENTEN RETREAT AT ST. NICHOLAS

The Practice of Contemplative Prayer and Meditation with Sr. Rebecca and Br. Christopher of New Skete Monastery

When: SATURDAY, February 27 from 3:00 to 5:00 PM followed by Vespers

Where: St. Nicholas Cathedral 3500 Massachusetts Ave. D.C. 20007

Contact: Mary Jane Maxwell

maxwell.maryjane@gmail.com or (802) 342-1823

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Sinners that repent are still saved; both publicans and fornicators cleansed by repentance enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The compassionate God still calls to Himself all that have turned away, and He awaits them and promises them mercy. The loving Father still receives His prodigal sons come back from a far country and He opens the doors of His house and clothes them in the best robe, and gives them each a ring on their hand and shoes on their feet and commands all the saints to rejoice in them.

– St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

Also Commemorated Today: Ven. Timothy of Symbola in Bithynia

Saint Timothy of Symbola was of Italian descent. He became a monk at a young age and pursued asceticism at a monastery called “Symbola,” in Asia Minor near Mount Olympus. At that time Theoctistus was the archimandrite of the monastery. St Timothy was the disciple of Theoctistus and also of St Platon of the Studion Monastery (April 5). Attaining a high degree of spiritual perfection, he received from God the gift of healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits. He spent many years as a hermit, roaming the wilderness, the mountains and forests, both day and night offering up prayer to the Lord God. He died at a great old age, in the year 795. (*from oca.org*)

St. Eustathius the Archbishop of Antioch

Saint Eustathius, Archbishop of Antioch (323-331) was born in Side, Pamphylia in 324. He was Bishop of Beroea (modern Aleppo), and enjoyed the love and esteem of the people, and at the request of his flock he was elevated by the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council (325) to the See of Antioch. St Eustathius was a learned theologian, and was also distinguished by his broad knowledge in secular sciences. When the heresy of Arius began to spread in the East (Arianism denied the consubstantiality of the Son of God with the Father), St Eustathius struggled zealously for the purity of the Orthodox Faith through his words and his writings. The First Ecumenical Council was convened in the year 325 by the holy God-crowned Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337). The first to preside over this Council was St Eustathius. The Council condemned the heretical teachings of Arius and incorporated the Orthodox confession into the Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed). But the mad Arius, as St Eustathius called him, refused to renounce his errors. He and those who shared his opinion were excommunicated from the Church by the Council. Among the bishops who signed the Nicene Symbol of Faith were some who sympathized with the heresy of Arius, but signed the Acts of the Council through fear of excommunication. After the Council, his enemies plotted against St Eustathius. With great cunning they gained his consent

to convene a local Council at Antioch. Having bribed a certain profligate woman, they persuaded her to appear at the Council with an infant at her breast, and falsely declare that St Eustathius was the father of the infant. The Arians declared St Eustathius deposed, violating the Apostolic Rule that accusations against the clergy must be substantiated by two witnesses. Without a trial he was sent off into exile in Thrace. But the lie was soon unmasked: the woman repented after falling grievously ill. She summoned the clergy, and in the presence of many people, she confessed her sin.

St Constantine the Great died around this time, and his son Constantius (337-361), who shared the heretical views of Arius and favored the Arian bishops, succeeded his father on the throne. Even in exile, St Eustathius struggled for Orthodoxy with the same zeal. He died in exile, in the city of Philippi or Trajanopolis, in the year 337. Convened in the year 381 at Constantinople, the Second Ecumenical Council confirmed the Orthodox Symbol of Faith, which St Eustathius had so vigorously defended. The Arian heresy was once again anathematized. In the year 482 the relics of St Eustathius were reverently transferred from Philippi to Antioch, to the great joy of the Antioch people, who had not ceased to honor and love their patriarch. St Eustathius was esteemed by the great hierarchs of the fourth century, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Athanasius of Alexandria, Epiphanius of Cyprus, Anastasius of Sinai, and Jerome of Stridon. The renowned church historian Bishop Theodoret of Cyrillus calls St Eustathius a pillar of the Church and a man of piety, of equal stature with St Athanasius of Alexandria and the other bishops at the forefront of the struggle for Orthodoxy. (*from oca.org*)

**HOMILY BY HIS ALL-HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
BARTHOLOMEW DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY AT THE CHURCH
OF ST. PAUL (CHAMBÉSY-GENEVA, JANUARY 24, 2016)**

Your Beatitudes and most honorable Brothers in Christ, Primate and Venerable Representatives of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches, beloved and precious children in the Lord, blessed people of God:

Assembled here during these days at this sacred Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy for the sessions of the Synaxis of the Primate of the most holy Orthodox Churches, and already in the midst of our deliberations with the grace of the Paraclete, we have the joy and blessing of concelebrating at this time in order to glorify the All-Holy Name of the Trinitarian God, who grants all of us an abundance of gifts and benefits.

Therefore, as we surround the Holy Altar with profound joy, already comprising one body and one blood with our Lord, we also commune with one another “in the bond of love” and “in the breaking of bread,” giving thanks first and foremost to

our Thrice-Holy God for the blessing of the communion that we all share in Him and subsequently to all of You, the most honorable and most holy Primates, as well as the esteemed Representatives of our Brothers in the local Orthodox Churches that were unable to be with us in person, for Your dedicated and dignified response to our invitation.

Your presence and participation demonstrates the significance and value of our Synaxis, whose results and proceedings will definitively contribute to our common journey, to the credible witness and completion of preparation for the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church. We especially rejoice that, through the common Chalice of Life, we are sealing the unity and love of us all, strengthened by the Divine Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the Lord, in order to accomplish the very responsible and arduously difficult task of this Synaxis and our ecclesiastical ministry everywhere in general.

This Synaxis of the Primates of the most holy Orthodox Churches constitutes, as one Body, yet another proclamation of the unity of the Orthodox Church and affirmation of the voice of St. Paul, the apostle to the nations: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call: one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph. 4.4-6)

Likewise, our presence expresses the focus of all on Conciliarity as an essential dimension of Church life, as a central function of the ecclesiastical body and as a principle of unity in the Church. In this way, we promote this fundamental principle that vitalizes the communion of our Churches even while respecting their identity. This bond of love, which revitalizes the Church in time and space, is the expression of its catholicity. Catholicity and conciliarity are interdependent in the Church. From the outset, Councils functioned as the expression and guarantee of catholicity for the Church of Christ. All of us are well aware of the burden and responsibility of serving as leaders in the local most holy Churches, especially in changing and demanding times when the witness of the Orthodox Church, as a voice of unity and martyrdom, is rendered necessary and mandatory not only for the Orthodox or Christian people but for the entire world. Our holy Church bears the responsibility of promoting and witnessing to “the whole truth” for the salvation of the flock that was entrusted to us as well as for the edification of all people of goodwill throughout the world.

At the end of our Synaxis, we shall be in a position to know about the particular details of the forthcoming Holy and Great Council. We fervently pray that no impediment shall prevent this ultimate mission of the Church of Christ. We are convinced that, in light of this event, each one of us would like to hear the silence

that is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, during that description of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15.13), in order that, through the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, we may be able to decide with the synergy of the same Spirit (Acts 15.28) about the convocation of the Holy and Great Council.

We mystically and sacramentally discern the voice of St. Paul through the centuries, as we heard in today's Epistle reading, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance" (1 Tim. 1.15), as we appreciate the supreme significance of this ascertainment with regard to the way of our holy Church. Indeed, the saying is trustworthy, brethren and children in the Lord, and it is in this trustworthiness of the saying, of the word of God and the Church, that we move and have our being, in the hope of preserving this faithfulness and conviction as an authentic experience along our common way through history. And at the same time, it is deserving of full acceptance inasmuch as this word does not simply comprise a theory or teaching, but the very way of man's journey from creation "in the image of God" to "the likeness" of eternal life "with all the saints."

We clearly perceive the voice of St. Paul bearing witness to the foundation of obedience in the Church and its canonical shepherds through the perpetual and ever timely exhortation to every ecclesiastical flock: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." (Heb. 13.17) St. Paul proclaimed this apostolic conscience of responsibility when he underlined: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Cor. 4.1-2) These words of the apostle to the nations doubly affirms the obligation and responsibility both of the flock that owes obedience to those who are vigilant for their formation in Christ as well as to us as shepherds that will have to give an account to God as the righteous judge. It is in this spirit today, as shepherds and shepherded, at this moment around the Holy Altar wherefrom springs true life and eternity, that all of us receive joy and strength on our way of struggle in this life, "looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith." (Heb. 12.2) The Synaxis of the most holy Primates of the Orthodox Churches firstly constitutes a Eucharistic event inasmuch as it has a doxological character. Without the Sacred Mysteries that are the mark of the Church, there can be no true communion of persons; no dialogue can be fruitful or constructive. This is why our Eucharistic Synaxis in the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries forms the basis and principal source of every other activity – whether administrative, pastoral, charitable or other – that essentially comprise an extension of the Divine Liturgy, the liturgy beyond the liturgy or the liturgical ministry, also extending to every detail and dimension of human life.

Our Synaxis, together with the forthcoming Holy and Great Council, are both ecclesiastical actions par excellence because administration in the Church constitutes a gift that is equal in value to all other gifts; this is why it is not relegated to an inferior status, as some people deliberately endeavor to reduce it in order to promote or project other supposedly more “spiritual” gifts. The Theology of our holy Church well knows and ceaselessly witnesses to the fact that Eucharistic communion is the source of every ecclesiastical ministry but also the guarantee and foundation of true life in Christ for our faithful, for whom his or her liturgical identity permeates every aspect of their life. Consequently, even this Synaxis of Their Beatitudes the Primate of the most holy Orthodox Churches throughout the world can especially declare “the unity of the faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit” in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, so that all of the initiatives, activities and decisions of this important Inter-Orthodox Church Body may constitute a prolongation and reflection of our Eucharistic and liturgical unity, the fruit of the All-Holy Spirit that conducts the sacraments and constitutes “the whole institution of the Church.”

In this spirit, then, of defining and acknowledging even the administration of our holy Church as a charismatic service – a Church that is afflicted but never overcome as the Ark of salvation for the human race – all of us who bear the Cross of this sacred responsibility must constantly invoke the grace and mercy of God for the safe navigation of the Church.

The tenacious voice of St. Paul, who assures us that “we are convinced that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things” (Heb. 17.18), arguably also indicates and reflects the Pan-Orthodox reality in the modern world, as this is witnessed by the participation and presence of all of You here, Your Beatitudes and dearly beloved Brothers. In this conviction of our common agony and love for the most holy Orthodox Church, we trust in and look forward to the most beneficial proceedings and necessary decisions during our deliberations these days, as the fruit and result first and foremost of prayer and of the invocation of the All-Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, for the glory of God and the edification of the souls entrusted to us all over the world.

Dear brothers and children in Christ, for decades, in this Orthodox Centre of Chambésy, under the direction of the late Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou of blessed memory and today of His Eminence Metropolitan Jeremiah of Switzerland, the secretary for the preparation of the Holy and Great Council, whom we thank for his intensive work, we have worked in order to establish in a more precise way the place and vocation of Orthodoxy in the world, by recognizing the evolution of our ecclesial landscape and social transformations. This period of preparation has been long. It was nevertheless necessary in order to enable the development of a

synodal and catholic conscience in the frame of Panorthodox fermentations. This work serves already as a light for the life of our Church and constitutes a source of spiritual enrichment. For this reason we may apply the words of St. Cyprian of Carthage on the nature of the Orthodox Church: “Thus also the Church, illumined by the light of the Lord, sheds forth its rays over the whole world; yet it is one light which is everywhere diffused, for the unity of the body is not separated. Its fruitful abundance spreads its branches over the entire world. It broadly expands its rivers, liberally flowing; yet its head is one, its source one; and it is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated.” (*De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, 5)

We are now standing at the crossroads of history. For the major difficulties that our contemporaries are encountering require responsibility that exceeds our ecclesial institutions. Christ is in the midst of history. Christ is in the heart of our life. He walks within time. He passes by us, just as He did in Jericho with the blind man. According to today’s Gospel reading, can we hear him in the crowd? Can we see him, lost as we are in our poverty and mendacity? According to the commentary of St. Ephrem the Syrian, “when our Lord saw that the eyes of the blind man’s heart were open while the eyes of his body were blind, He enlightened the eyes of the body just as those of the heart in order that when the blind man chose to hasten towards Him, he would clearly see his Savior.”

The advent of the Holy and Great Council will serve as a testimony to the unity of the Orthodox Church. Its convocation, which we invoke by our prayer in the upcoming days, will mark a decisive step in the life of our Church. The Council is not merely an event, but must be understood as an all-encompassing process that deploys itself in the past as well as in the future. We are determined to proclaim the message of Orthodoxy. We acknowledge that the only way to exit from the confessional isolationistic temptations passes through dialogue in constant exchange with the “other,” whether our neighbor, Christian or not, or whether society in general, whether other religions or the entire creation, in order to invalidate the irreversible clash of civilizations which tempts the most worried of our coreligionists. Orthodoxy is a culture of dialogue through which God speaks to the world. God is identified with the Word, as St. John the Theologian states: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1.1) Nevertheless, in order to give consistence to the life and ministry of our Church, we must promote open and honest dialogue, without any compromise with what we are and with the hope that is within us, but also without any compromise with the compassion and love that we owe to the world. This is certainly the ambivalence mentioned in the famous *Epistle to Diognetus*, when it states: “Christians are in the world but not off the world.”

It is our duty to listen and at the same time to speak this Word of God: in favor of persecuted Christians and minorities endangered throughout the world; in support of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing from war and suffering uprooting; in advocacy of the most vulnerable persons who are rejected; in defense of victims of terrorism and fundamentalism misuse religion and abuse it for political reasons or even for purely nationalistic interests. Our hope is that the Council will serve as a catalyst for all of humanity, thanks to the power of unity that it will bear among the different Orthodox Churches. Today, we pose a historical marker. And we entrust to the prayer of a larger number the advent of the Holy and Great Council. We are attached to the theological continuity of our faith in Jesus Christ, expressed in the teaching of the Apostolic Church and the Church Fathers. If our Tradition is so rich and truly alive, it must discover the appropriate words that speak to the challenges of our time. This was indeed the prophetic intuition of our predecessor, the late Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, who confided to Olivier Clément: “The Great Council that we are preparing will enable the people of our Church to live their faith in a better way. It will try not only to adapt our Tradition to the contemporary world, but will replenish it with the power of inspiration and renewal. Thus, it will be an ecumenical event. Renewal cannot be separated from sharing and from unity.” Conciliarity – which, as we have emphasized, is inseparably linked to the eucharistic identity of the Church – is an expression of the experienced “shared,” according to Nicholas Cabasilas, ecclesiastical freedom of the blessed loving communion among persons. The “mystery of the Church,” as a renowned contemporary theologian observes, refers “to the mystery of the Trinitarian God, to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.” In this sense, conciliarity comprises a primary charismatic expression of the Body of the Church. In this spirit of shared conviction and expectation, in a dialogue of love and freedom, we already intensely feel that the all-powerful grace of the All-Holy Spirit fills the hearts of all of us, supporting the work that we do in our successful and productive ministry for the benefit of the Orthodox Church and for the glory of the All-Holy Name of our God, who is worshipped in Trinity.

As we conclude our address to Your love, we urge and entreat You with fraternal affection, profound solicitude and much esteem, with the words of the Apostle Paul: “May the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13.20-21); “to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Tim. 1.17)

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The annual Parish meeting and Potluck will be held following Liturgy on 06 March. Information to review will be distributed in advance so you can discuss topics with the officers or clergy prior to the meeting. We will review the past year, our financial status, and look ahead at goals for 2016 and beyond. Importantly, we will also adopt a 2016 budget, elect delegates to the Diocesan Sobor to be held in October, and elect officers. Anyone who is interested in a great volunteer/leadership opportunity, consider serving your Parish as an officer. See any current officer (Kari David, Dana Dewey, Olga Dewey, and Phyllis Thomidis) or Father Joseph if interested.

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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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Alicia Barosio and family, Millie Borys, Jeffrey Carey, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Tina Crull, Ron Domieniecki, 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.)