

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

(301) 638-5035 Church

4419 Leonardtown Road

Waldorf, MD 20601

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 380-9673 Cell

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

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.

May 1, 2016 – Holy Pascha – Christ is Risen!

Christ, beloved brethren, heralded His resurrection to His Disciples, when He told them that the Son of Man must "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matt. 16:21). The Disciples were unaware as to what it meant that the Son of Man will be killed and will arise after three days from the dead, and moreover "they were afraid to ask" (Mk. 9:31-32). The phrases "Son of God" and "Son of Man" denote the two natures of Christ, the divine and human, which acted together in Christ, without either losing its properties. After His resurrection, Christ appeared first to the Myrrhbearing women who went very early in the morning to the tomb in order to anoint His body with spices, and on the same day He appeared to His Disciples. One would have expected Him to appear to those who crucified Him, to the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests, to Herod and Pilate and those who contributed towards His passion and crucifixion, and in this way He would cause them to believe. He did not do this, however, because there are special reasons. First, Christ does not perform actions simply for social reasons, nor to display His divinity to people who do not believe. Even when He performed wonders and healed people, He did this because He first saw their faith. Also, the appearance of Christ to each person is an event with eternal proportions and dramatic consequences for humanity. To encounter God is to be convicted if not properly prepared. Just as when one



observes the sun without any protection, and the excessive glare of sunlight can destroy the eyesight, the same is true when a person does not have the proper spiritual eyes; they cannot withstand the bright light of the Resurrection of Christ.

Thus, it was out of love and philanthropy that Christ did not appear to those who crucified Him, so that they would not suffer any harm. They would have had to be informed about the resurrection from a third party, and perhaps they would have believed and been saved. There was still time for them to believe from their own free will, to correct themselves, so that at His Second Coming they could finally see Him in His glory and be saved and convicted. However, the encounter with Christ is crucial, as it consists of either eternal life or eternal hell.

Still, Christ after His resurrection appeared to His Disciples, who had prepared, and despite their falls they were appropriately able to see the Light of the Resurrection. The main thing is that Christ appeared to His Disciples after His resurrection, not simply so they could believe, but in order to lead them to theosis. This was the underlying purpose of the appearances of the Risen Christ to His Disciples, who had previously been purified and illumined and they had to thus reach theosis. Certainly, throughout the forty days He properly prepared them, so that on the day of Pentecost they received the Holy Spirit and became members of His Church.

What took place with His Disciples has taken place with many people throughout the centuries. Already, immediately after Pentecost, the Apostle Paul saw the Risen Christ (Acts 9:3-9), the Protomartyr Stephen saw "the glory of God and Jesus seated at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55), and millions of Christians until today have become witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ. This means that the purpose of man is to be properly prepared, through asceticism, the Mysteries, purification and prayer to see the Risen Christ and to be led to theosis.

This is the underlying purpose of the Orthodox theology of the Church. Orthodox theology is not philosophical, reflective or moral, but mysterious and ascetic. And the Church does not aim merely at meeting the social and material needs of people, though it does do this by extension, but its purpose is to sanctify humanity, in order that they may see the Risen Christ and be led to theosis. Within this perspective we should look at the lives of the saints throughout the centuries, namely the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Fathers, Ascetics and generally those Christians who are betrothed to Christ. All these are witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ, who will grant to us theosis and sanctification. We need to look at the purpose of the Church and the meaning of her feasts within this context, so that we do not secularize the work and purpose of ecclesiastical life, and to have a certain hope in

our hearts that we do not only live for material goods, but we should feel the power of the resurrection of Christ within us.

The Church with its festivities is not content to lead people to psychological respite, but it tries to turn their attention to the core tragic problem that concerns them and, of course, to overcome it. The person of the God-man Christ is always at the center of the festivities, and He is at the center of all history and all humanity, negatively and positively. Indeed, He "is the cause for the fall and rising of many in Israel and a sign to be spoken against" (Lk. 2:34).

The Resurrection of Christ especially is a great historical truth, but at the same time it is a great mystery. It is a truth because it took place in a moment of history, "under Pontius Pilate," but it is also a mystery because it is experienced existentially and personally. It is not only an event of an intellectual conception, but an extraordinary experience of overcoming death within the limits of our personal life.

Certainly there exist historical testimonies for the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, because Christ was a historical person, but there exist existential testimonies that Christ is the conqueror of death, since God raised up human nature and conquered the greatest enemy that torments humanity - death. Witnesses of the Resurrection were the Apostles, the Confessors, the Martyrs, the Venerable Ones, the Holy Fathers, men and women who bravely faced their problems in life with hope in the resurrection. It is those who leave this world "with hope in the resurrection to eternal life." All these shed their blood and sacrificed their lives, refusing biological joys and material pleasures. Therefore, the Resurrection of Christ is not an ideology, a worldview, a metaphysic or a mysticism, but it is true life that transforms the entire human existence and overcomes death, mortality and the corruption of nature, and creates a transformation of the person and a renewal of all creation.

With the resurrection of Christ we come out of the prison of the senses and emotions, from the darkness of hell. In the myth of Plato's Cave we clearly see the tragedy of humanity, since we are forced to live chained in a dark cave while observing shadows, but there is also a human tragedy when we come out of the cave and try to help the other chained captives. In the trilogy of Aeschylus - *Prometheus Bound*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and *Prometheus the Fire-Bringer* - we are presented with the image of a struggling man to discover the mysteries of nature, and is punished when he exceeds the limits of human nature, and it seems that his punishment did not last forever. It is essentially about the human adventure, who eventually is subjugated to death and awaits a redeemer.

But Christ is not a superman, but the God-man who liberated humanity from the dark prison of the senses and death, and carried over to us the light of divinity, igniting and illuminating us, making us deified, resurrected. With the God-man, biological life gained perspective and was filled with hope and life. The God-man Christ is our light and life, our hope and our everything.

+Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – The Acts of the Apostles 1:1-8

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 1:1-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

This is the Day of Resurrection. Let us offer God its first-fruits – which is ourselves. Let us, as his most precious children, return to the likeness of God, what is verily his likeness in us. Let us reverence our worth. Let us honor our Exemplar. Let us come to understand the power of the ‘mystery’ wherein Christ died. – St. Gregory the Theologian, Hymn for Easter

Patriarchal Encyclical For Holy Pascha 2016

† B A R T H O L O M E W

By God’s Mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Peace and Mercy from Christ, who has Risen in Glory

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, we wholeheartedly address you from the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the joyous greeting “Christ is risen!” The resurrection of Christ is the center of our Orthodox faith. Without the resurrection, our faith is “in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Through His resurrection, the divine Word rendered humanity – created in the image of God but wounded and stained by sin – incorrupt and deified, granting us once again the possibility of achieving divine likeness, of which we were deprived through disobedience. However, what does the feast of Pascha signify as the victory of life over death in a world of violence and war, especially in the name of religion and God?

Many philosophers endeavored to find a solution to the problem of death and to overcome death with various theories. We Orthodox Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead and boldly declare the destruction of death. We know that it is the Word of God who bestows life and in whom “was life” (John 1:4). We have the joyful experience of the Church, that death was conquered through the resurrection of Christ. “All things have been filled with joy, having received the experience of resurrection.” This faith brightens all expressions of church life and culminates in the divine Eucharist. The fact that, in the Christian world, it is especially the Orthodox Church that preserved the divine Eucharist as

the center of its life and spirituality is inseparably related to the fact that the resurrection is the nucleus of our faith, worship and ecclesiastical ethos. For this reason, the Eucharistic liturgy is always festive, joyous, and primarily linked with the Lord's day as the day of the resurrection.

The most striking expression and interpretation of the resurrection as well as of its regenerative power is the image of the descent of our Lord Jesus Christ to Hades, as this is wonderfully depicted at the Chora Monastery in Constantinople. The Lord of glory descends to the depths of Hades, destroying its gates, arising victorious and resurrecting Adam and Eve in Himself, and in so doing resurrects the entire human race from beginning to end. "Now, all things have been filled with light, heaven and earth and all things beneath the earth." Creation rises from the dark realm of death to the heavenly kingdom, whose light has no evening. The faithful, as participants in the resurrection, are called to declare the Gospel of freedom in Christ "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Mother Church, which lives the mystery of the cross and the resurrection simultaneously, today invites us "to approach with lit candles" "and together to celebrate the salvific Pascha of God."

Through the resurrection of our Savior, all of humanity has become one people, united in one body. Through His cross and resurrection, Christ definitively destroyed all existing hatred. Thus, the Orthodox Church, as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, is the Church of the reconciliation of all, the Church of love toward all, friends and enemies. Reconciled, filled with new life, filled with true life, we all become fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (cf Eph. 2:15-20).

Unfortunately terrorism, war, and bloodshed continue to this day. The lament and agony of victims, particularly as these are rapidly disseminated through modern technological means, tear the world apart and break our heart. This is why the world's leaders – political, religious and church – are obliged and compelled by love to do everything that is possible to avoid such unacceptable conditions.

In the midst of this modern "irrational world," we Orthodox Christians are called to offer a positive witness of love and sacrifice to our fellow human beings.

For us as Orthodox faithful, Pascha is not a fleeting moment of escape from the ugly reality of evil in the world; it is the unwavering conviction that Christ, who trampled down death by death and rose from the dead, is with us "always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Beloved brothers and sisters, such is once again this year the message of the resurrection from the most holy Apostolic and Patriarchal Ecumenical Throne, the

sacred center of Orthodoxy, to all people: that Christ has risen and the power of death was abolished; the authority of the powerful over the weak has been destroyed. “Life reigns” and the nurturing love, profound mercy, and endless grace of the risen Christ cover the whole world, from one end to the other. It is sufficient for us to realize that Jesus Christ is the true light, that in Him is life, and that this life is the light of all people (cf John 1:3-4). This is our message to all political and religious leaders of the world.

Therefore, approach and receive the light from the unfading light of the Phanar, which as the light of Christ and the light of love shines upon all; in Him “there is no darkness” (cf 1 John 1:5). Let us hear this Gospel of joy and light; and let us Orthodox alleviate the pain of today’s world with our own love and sacrifice.

Glory be to Him who bestows life, who has shown the light and love and peace to the world as well as to each one of us. Glory to Jesus Christ, the king of glory, the conqueror of death and champion of life.

At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2016

Your fervent supplicant before the risen Christ,

† **Bartholomew,**

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Palm Sunday at St. Thomas



Fr. Joseph blesses palms as altar boys AJ McNeil, Luke Connour, and Caleb Karbowsky look on. *(left)*
Good times!





On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Part 66: Motivation

“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:1 RSV)

There were certain religious people in the time of Christ whose aim it was to practice their religion in order to be seen by others, and thus gain some worldly (or heavenly) honor. Such persons attracted attention to themselves and thus tried to gain a reputation for their “religiousness.”

Christ Jesus was clearly opposed to such an approach. God does not recognize practicing religion in that way. The only reward for such persons would ultimately be the admiration of others – God would look the other way. *“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”* (Matthew 6:2-4 RSV).

This does not mean that every act of kindness should always be kept secret. Apostle St. Paul told the Corinthian Christians this about their generosity: *“I boast about you to the people of Macedonia ... your zeal has stirred up most of them”* (2 Corinthians 9:2).

Christ Himself made it clear: in acts of giving (stewardship) the aim should not be to receive praise and honor in return. Those who do their acts of giving and kindness out of a motivation for praise from others are misunderstanding Christ’s words *“...Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them.”* By their actions, Christians are to bring glory not upon themselves, but to the Holy One by whose grace and power they are given both the opportunity and the means to act.

Whether it be in prayers, in the giving of support, in acts of kindness and self-denial, in whatever actions one carries out as an Orthodox Christian, self is not ever the theme. In conversation and communication, all glory belongs to the Father in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

King David, the greatest of the Kings of Israel and forefather of Christ Himself, learned that lesson the hard way. He was a proud and mighty King who wanted all for himself – all the power and glory. When he was humbled due to his own pride, he came to understand. This is what he wrote: *“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness”* (Psalm 113:9 LXX). (from acrod.org)

Young Women's Encounter

Registration is now open for the Third Annual Diocesan Young Women's Encounter which will take place from Sunday, June 26th to Wednesday, June 29, 2016 at Sts Peter and Paul Church in Windber, PA which is open to young women in our Diocese ages 12-18. This engaging experience will highlight how young women can live our Orthodox Faith and serve the Church with their own unique gifts. This year we are really looking forward to having Katrina Bitar with us. She is the YES North America Program Director (Youth Equipped to Serve) for FOCUS North America (Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve.)

Space is limited to the first thirty respondents, so participants are urged to register as soon as possible. **Registration Deadline is June 1, 2016.** For more information, please visit <http://www.acrod.org/news/7283/ywe2016>

Diocesan Altar Boy Retreat

The annual Diocesan Altar Boy Retreat will happen at the same time as the Young Women's Encounter. More information will be forthcoming as the date approaches.

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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.

Parish News

Yard sales will be held at St. Thomas on the following Saturdays this year: May 21, June 18, July 9, Sept. 3, Sept. 24, and Oct. 15. Please sign up on the sheet in the fellowship hall if you are able to help. Contact Dennis or Phyllis at thomidg@comcast.net or 410-535-3005 if you have items that you would like to donate to arrange for item pickup.

Papers for the 2016 Summer camping session at Camp Nazareth are now available at http://www.campnetwork.com/Register/Register.php?camp_id=396857. Start your planning now; your kids won't want to miss this. Get 'em while they're hot!

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

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

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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, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, 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 Dominiecki, 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, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, 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.)