

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM,

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

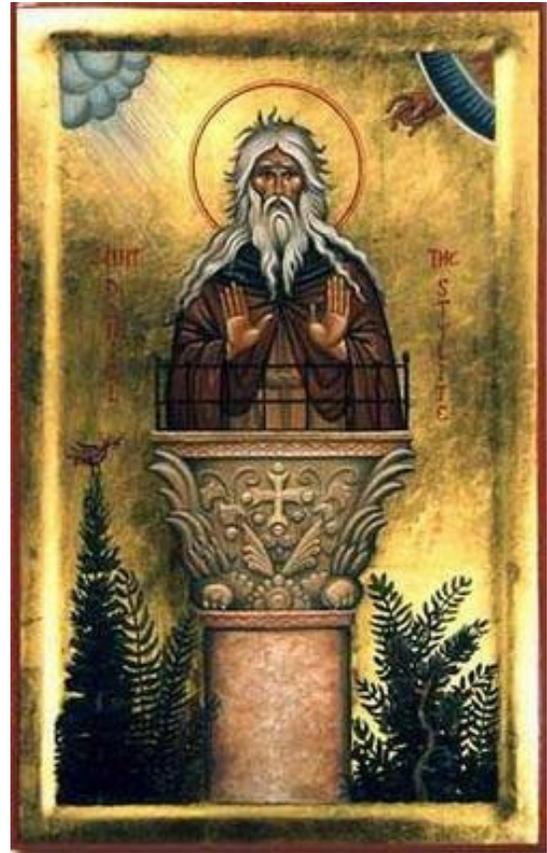
Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

**December 11, 2016 – Ven. Daniel
the Stylite of Constantinople**

Sunday of the Forefathers (2nd Sunday Before Nativity)

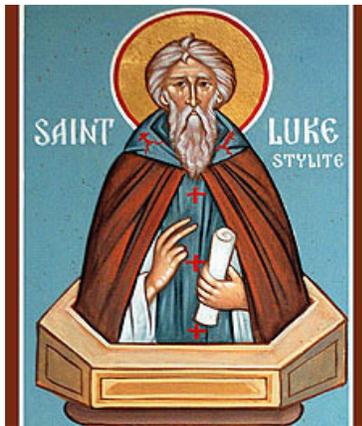
Saint Daniel the Stylite was born in the village of Bethara, near the city of Samosata in Mesopotamia. His mother Martha was childless for a long while and in her prayers she vowed that if she had a child, she would dedicate him to the Lord. Her prayers were heard, and Martha soon gave birth to a son, who was without a name until he was five years of age.

The boy's parents desired that since he was born through the good-will of God, he should also receive his name from God. They took their son to a monastery located nearby and approached the igumen. The igumen gave orders to take down one of the service books, and unrolled it at random. He found the Prophet Daniel (December 17) mentioned in it. Thus did the boy receive his name. The parents asked that he might remain at the monastery, but the igumen would not accept him, since he was still only a small boy. At twelve years of age, saying nothing to no one, the child left home for the monastery.



His parents were happy when they learned where their son was, and they went to the monastery. Seeing that he was still going about in his worldly clothes, they besought that the igumen should clothe him in the angelic garb. That Sunday the igumen fulfilled their request, but permitted them often to visit their son. The brethren of the monastery were astonished at the saint's ascetical efforts.

Once, Saint Simeon the Stylite (September 1), visited the monastery. He foretold to the young monk, that he too would undertake the feat of pillar-dwelling. Saint Daniel continued with his ascetic life in seclusion. When the place of a new exploit was revealed to him in a vision, he withdrew into the Thracian wilderness together with two disciples. They set up a pillar, upon which Saint Daniel dwelt for 33 years. People thronged to the pillar, the unfortunate and those who were sick, and all received help and healing from Saint Daniel. Byzantine emperors also sought the prayers of the holy ascetic. The most notable of the saint's predictions was about a great fire in Constantinople. Saint Daniel possessed also the gift of gracious words. He guided many onto the path of correcting their lives. The monk reposed in his eightieth year.



Also commemorated today is Venerable Luke the New Stylite of Chalcedon. Saint Luke the New Stylite was a soldier under the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (912-959). During a war with Bulgaria (917), Saint Luke remained unharmed through the Providence of God. After this he became a monk, and having succeeded in his efforts, was ordained as a presbyter. Striving for an even higher degree of perfection, the monk put chains upon himself and ascended a pillar.

After three years standing on the pillar, through divine inspiration, he went to Mount Olympos, and then to Constantinople, and finally to Chalcedon, where he chose a pillar upon which he remained for 45 years, manifesting a gift of wonderworking. He died in about the year 980. (*from oca.org*)

ALSO COMMEMORATED TODAY: MARTYRS AKEPSIMAS AND AITHALAS OF EGYPT

The Holy Martyrs Akepsimas and Aithalas were from Persia. Akepsimas was a pagan priest in the city of Arbel. Having received healing through the prayers of a Christian bishop, he was converted to the faith in Christ and boldly confessed it. For this they threw Saint Akepsimas into prison. Soon Saint Aithalas, a deacon of the Arbel Church, was imprisoned with him. They brought the martyrs before the ruler, where they again confessed their faith and were beheaded. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:4-11

Brethren, when Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 14:16-24

The Lord spoke a parable, saying, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"

On Stewardship and the Orthodox Life – Parts 103-104:



Self Love & (The Church As) Spiritual Hospital

"For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?" (Matthew 16: 26 RSV)

The past two blogs were forums to discuss Theosis, Illumination, nous, and the passions. The previous terms, embedded in Orthodox Spirituality, are seldom discussed in homilies. However, Orthodox Spirituality is an essential part of our Church life. And an understanding of Orthodox Spirituality brings our worship into perspective.

We must appreciate the fact that when our nous becomes darkened by our desires, sin, and passions, we no longer worship in a proper manner. In this darkness, we are filled with self-love and the desire to please ourselves instead of seeking constant communion with God.

Self-love creeps into our lives in a very subtle manner, so subtle that we do not recognize it. It disguises itself hiding its darkness and ugliness. Matthew Gallatin in his book *Thirsting for God in a Land of Shallow Wells* describes self-love: “When I am self-concerned, practice self-justification, act on self-desire, follow paths that are self-centered and self-directed - in fact, any time the word “self” can be used in the description of what I am doing - I am dancing to a dangerous drummer called self-love.” Did Jesus not tell us to deny ourselves - “*Let him deny himself.*” (Mt 16:24 RSV)? Do we deny ourselves or do we self-indulge ourselves?

The Church is a spiritual hospital to heal us of our sins. And the greatest root of all sins is **self-love**. When we approach God in thanks and gratitude for what He has given us, we may then experience joy. We cannot be truly joyful without being grateful. Our thanks are evident by giving back to God in proportion to what He has given us.

It is at this point that we open ourselves up to the spiritual healing the church provides. Then we move closer to the illumination of our nous and Theosis, the ever present communion with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desire. If we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5: 25 RSV)

Again, the Church is a spiritual hospital. Within the church, we find the "medicine" that will heal our spiritual diseases, our sins and passions. However, the purpose of the "treatment" we receive in the church is not to make us better adjusted to society. On the contrary, Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos in his book, *Orthodox Psychotherapy* states that “the aim of therapeutic treatment is not to make people sociable and to be an anthropocentric (man-centered/self-centered) exercise, but to guide them to communion with God, and for this vision of God not to be a fire which will consume them but a light which will illuminate them.”

Therefore, the basic aim of Orthodox therapeutic treatment is to attain communion with God.

What does "walking by the Spirit" mean? It means that we give ourselves to God in every way, shedding our passions. The fourth-century anchorite monk, Evagrius Ponticus, in the book, *Despondency*, tells us that the desires and passions of the

flesh come from eight thoughts which continuously bombard us. These eight thoughts, in order of occurrence, are gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia (sloth, laziness or listlessness), vainglory, and pride. All eight have their root in self-love!

Healing of the passions - the eight thoughts - requires the work of God and man, a synergy. Man is healed first by the grace of God, after which man must persevere in the holy sacraments of the Church to purify himself. Working within the Church, giving generously of time, talents, and resources enable us to keep God in our focus and "walk in the Spirit." A person "walks in the Spirit" when he has the grace of the Holy Trinity; then he is healed inwardly. *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh."* (Galatians 5: 16 RSV). (from *acrod.org*)

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS

The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers occurs between the 11th and the 17th of December. This Sunday commemorates all the ancestors of the people of God, the holy patriarchs living up to the law, given on Sinai, and under the law, - from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed; together with them are commemorated those who preached Christ - the holy prophets - from Samuel to Zechariah and to John the Baptist, and all the Old Testament righteous men, who were righteous in the faith in the coming of the Messiah. Especially in the service for this day are praised the pious youths Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who in faith were thrown into the fiery furnace and who in the middle of the flames were cooled by the dew of the Spirit and who walked about rejoicing, are mystically a prototype of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ from the Virgin, who after giving birth remained a virgin. With these holy youths are commemorated also the righteous Daniel and the wonderful prophets, who, clearly revealing the divine second coming, saw Christ, coming to all nations as Judge, and who, their minds illumined by divine radiance, saw that clearly the Virgin would give birth represented in mystical images.

"Today as we celebrate the Forefathers' memory," the holy Church exclaims: "let us offer praise to the fathers, who shone forth before and during the law, with righteous minds they served the Lord and Master who shone forth from the Virgin, now they delight in the unending light." "Let us offer songs of praise to the prophets of God." "Let us honor the holy youths, for they quenched the flaming furnace, together with the prophet Daniel, and all the righteous ones who shone forth before the law, together with those who served the Master under the law." By accomplishing "now the honor of the memory of the forefathers," the holy Church edifies us, that we, in the expectation of the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of Christ, is reflected by the faith and life of the holy Forefathers and, through them, has prepared ourselves, by their example, to the worthy meeting of

the Lord Who came from Heaven, who has adorned their soul with virtues beforehand to be ready for the great and light-bearing day of the Nativity of our Savior worthily to meet Him with the lamp of faith and with the oil of charitable deeds, with the firm hope of life everlasting, with the light of both the joyful face of cleanliness and purity.

Together with them the holy Church on the present day, that its appeal be not in vain, places in the Gospel reading by the clergy about those called in Vespers, inspiring us, that we can be distracted from worthily meeting the Lord by the predominance of flesh over spirit, the attachment to the terrestrial, the blinding by gleam of worldly goods, the predilection for vanity, the unwillingness to deny one's self-love and pride every day, the enslavement to passions and covetousness, and in the Epistle reading directly commands us to destroy our earthly members: fornication, impurity, passion, evil lust and cupidity, to lay aside anger, evil, blaspheming, slander, lies, and in general to take off the old man and put on the new in the image of the Creator (Col. 3:4-11). (*from Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., by S. V. Bulgakov (Trans. Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris)*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

When during the winter the day's span begins to lengthen as the sun turns again on his upward course, we keep the feast of the Theophany of the true Light (*referring, actually, to the Incarnation - Ed.*) who shone through the flesh upon human life. But now when the luminary has in his cycle already reached mid-heaven, so that night and day measure an equal interval against each other, the return of human nature from death to life becomes the theme of this great and universal festival, which the whole life of those who have welcomed the mystery of the Resurrection joins in celebrating at the same time.

What then does the premise of my letter mean? Since it is our custom in these public holy festivals to manifest in every way the affections in our hearts, and there are some who express their good cheer by offering presents of their own, we thought it right not to leave you without the homage of our gifts, but to salute your lofty and high-minded soul with the scanty offerings of our poverty.

And the offering we bring to you through this letter is the letter itself. Here is no discourse wreathed with mellifluous and well-constructed phrases, that this letter might be thought a gift in literary circles. Instead, may the mystical gold, which is wrapped up in the faith of Christians as in a kind of envelope, be my present to you - that it is, when it has been unwrapped in these lines as far as it may, and has shown its hidden lustre.

We must then go back to our introduction. Why is it only when the night has advanced to its further limit and the nocturnal increase admits no further addition, that he appears to us in flesh - he who holds all in his hands and holds all things in his sway by his own power, who is not contained even by all that exists, but himself circumscribes the whole and dwells in the smallest thing, and whose power at the same time so coextends with his beneficent will and so shows itself wherever his will inclines, that neither in the creation of the world was the power found weaker than the intention, nor when he determined to stoop down to the lowliness of our nature for the benefit of human beings, was he powerless to do so, but indeed came to be in that state, though without leaving the universe ungoverned?

Since there is some reason for the two seasons, why does he appear in the flesh at that time, but when the day is equally proportioned he who had returned to the earth through sin restores man to life? By briefly expounding this in a discourse as best I can, I shall make my letter a present to you.

Surely you in your wisdom have guessed the mystery hinted at in these coincidences: that the advance of night is cut off by the access of the light, and the darkness begins to diminish as the length of the day increases through successive additions. This much may perhaps be evident even to the many, that the darkness is closely related to sin - indeed this is how vice is named in the Scripture (cf. Jn 3:19, Rom 13:12).

Therefore the season in which our mystery has its beginning is itself an interpretation of the dispensation on behalf of our souls. For when vice was already poured forth without bounds, we needed the day made bright for us with virtues by him who infused so great a light in our souls. This was in order that the illumined life might be extended to the greatest degree by growing through increments of the good, while the life of vice is diminished to the smallest degree through gradual attenuations - for the growth of the good amounts to the same thing as the lessening of the bad.

But the occurrence of the feast of the Resurrection at the equinox offers in itself this interpretation, that we shall no more contend in equally opposed ranks, vice grappling with the good in an equal match, but rather the illumined life shall prevail, the gloom of idolatry being consumed by the superabundance of the day.

For this reason also, when the course of the moon has reached the fourteenth day, it shows her facing the sun's rays, filled with all the richness of his brilliance, not permitting any alternation of darkness to appear in any part. When she takes the place of the setting sun, she herself does not set before she mingles her own with the true rays of the sun, so that there remains one light continuously through the whole course of day and night, uninterrupted by any interval of darkness.

We offer these reflections to you, dear head, as a gift from our hand, poor as it is in discourse; and may your whole life be a festival and great day, purified as much as possible, from nightly gloom.

– St Gregory of Nyssa, Letter to Eusebius

Parish Life in Pictures

St. Nicholas paid the parish a visit last Sunday, spoke to the children about his famous almsgiving (right) and handed out stockings and coins to the children. Olivia Brady (*below*) is shown receiving her gifts.



Parish News

We will celebrate the Nativity of Christ on the Eve of the Nativity, December 24th, with a vigil at 5:00 PM and a Divine Liturgy the next morning at 8:00 AM. Please note that there will be no meal after liturgy. If you would like to donate money for poinsettias to decorate the church for the Nativity season, please use the flower fund line on the donation envelope to so designate it.

Giving Good Gifts

In this Nativity season, we have an opportunity to help establish a young family in their first apartment. So, if you have beds, couches, chairs, tables, TVs, microwaves, and other working furniture and household items, please let us know who you are and what you have on the sign-up sheet in the social hall. The need is imminent so don't delay!



Follow Our Diocese On-Line

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

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acroddiocese>

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

You Tube: <https://youtube.com/acroddiocese>

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, Alicia Barosio and family, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Cary Cooper, 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, John Sparks, 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.)