

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

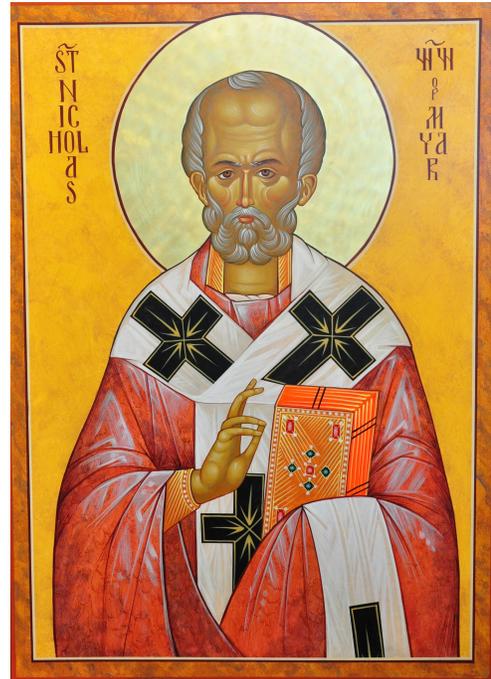
Wed: Moleben to the Theotokos 6:00 AM

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

Saturday: Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



***Please note that attendance is currently limited by restrictions dictated by local response to the COVID-19 pandemic; if you are currently not assigned to an attendance group, please contact outreach@apostlethomas.org for information on when you may attend.**

December 6, 2020 | 26th Sunday After Pentecost | Holy Hierarch Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycea

By Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

The truth of things revealed you to your flock as a rule of faith, an image of meekness and teacher of temperance; wherefore, you have attained the heights through humility and riches through poverty; O hierarch Nicholas our father, entreat Christ God, that our souls be saved.

The state of the imitator of Christ and popular wonderworker Saint Nicholas, the patron of those at sea as well as all those who seek his God-persuading intercessions, exudes the fragrance of faith. A lively and genuine faith, which is expressed as a way of life. Rightly has he been called a "rule of faith", since he held the faith of vision, that is, he had the personal experience of the existence of God. He saw the uncreated Light and acquired knowledge of living beings. "For You are the Source of Life, and by Your Light shall we see Light." At the First Ecumenical Synod (325 AD), in which he participated, he gave his own testimony

and confession of faith and imprinted his own stamp on it. With the boldness that distinguished him he put to shame the insolent mouth of the heresiarch Arius. When he blasphemed Christ, the Saint, who is called an "image of meekness", stood up and slapped him. For meekness, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is not an impassioned state, but a dynamic state of life. A meek person is not one who is not angered, but one who angers without sinning, as the Scripture says: "Be angry, and sin not." When anger has its root and cause in the passions, then surely it will lead to sin and the loss of divine Grace. The saints, however, as dispassionate, do not become angry out of personal touchiness or to salvage their individual dignity. They are enraged without losing control of themselves when God is blasphemed and dishonored and the Faith is in danger of being altered, on which the salvation of humanity depends. This anger is not passionate and its motive is an unselfish love for God and man. Those who dishonor the name of God and mock divine things bear a heavy illness and urgently require a "scalpel", that is, strictness until the illness is healed. The case of the High Priest Eli is known from the Old Testament, who was punished by God for not being as strict with his children as he should have been, for they repeatedly disdained God and His Law and were scandalizing the faithful.

The Saint was also among other things a "teacher of temperance". Temperance as a way of life encompassed his entire behavior: he was temperate in joy and in sorrow, temperate in food, laughter, vision, hearing, everything. In all things, he was a balanced man.

For his great philanthropy he received the gift of wonderworking. With this gift he helped very many people. He runs to help all those who call upon him with faith and he carries out their request, of course if it is for the persons interest, which is salvation. In his synaxarion, as well as in a hymn on his feast, it is mentioned that he saved three people, who were victims of slander, from certain death. Indeed, this incident shows the great boldness he has before God. He appeared in a dream to Emperor Constantine, revealed the innocence of these people, and ordered him to release them. He also strictly stressed that, if he disobeyed, he would denounce him before God, the true and eternal King, and he would have to deal with Him. As the sacred hymnographer very beautifully says: "But if you will disobey me, I will petition the Lord and King against you when I pray!"

However, the gift of working miracles is not the only, nor the greatest, gift in the Church. We have written in other places about the other gifts, such as the gift of Theology, the gift of Love, etc. The gift of wonderworking is usually given to those saints who have great love for people. For the people of God a miracle is not surprising or an unlikely thing, but it is something very natural, since God is Almighty and for Him all things are possible. During the course of a miracle

physical laws are not removed, since there are no physical laws, but God simply wants to do some act at that moment, and He does it in His own way. In creation there are uncreated spiritual logoi, in other words, there are things like love and the providence of God which govern the world. For God did not create the world just to abandon it, but He personally governs it Himself with His uncreated grace of foreknowledge.

Finally I would be remiss not to mention, even in writing, two other gifts of his, that are referred to in his Apolytkion: humility and poverty. All the effort and struggle of the faithful in the Church are to learn the meekness and humility of Christ. "Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." The Saint acquired great and high things with lofty humility. He experienced, however, like all the Saints, deliberate material poverty. But he was truly rich because he had a rich heart and held a spiritual treasure. He was poor, like all the Apostles, but he made many rich, because he was, like them "having nothing, he had everything".

Father Hierarch Nicholas, you who are, and as your name reveals, the conqueror of the people, as well as their protector and consolation, "entreat Christ our God, that our souls may be saved". (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 13:17-21

Brethren, obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in us what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 6:17-23

At that time, Jesus came down with the apostles and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed *them* all. Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed *are you* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are you* who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed *are you* who

weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

O man of God, faithful servant and steward of Christ's mysteries, and man desiring the things of the Spirit! Receive the sermon we deliver to you as a gift, and consider it our gratitude in return for grace for the miraculous and ardent help you have shown toward us. Indeed, we call you the pillar and foundation of the Church and the illuminator of the world, who maintains the word of life. Virtue has made your names many, and no good thing has escaped you, most good shepherd and most praiseworthy high-priest Nicholas! You have stowed away the most precious of virtues in your blessed soul like a treasure of gold and jewels, therefore becoming renowned in the entire world. For a lamp, set on a high and gilded lamp-stand, does not illuminate the blindness of the night as much as you do of late, being set on the throne of a high-priest by Christ, the True Light. As in a dry place, a dark space of the world, you light, like a torch-carrier, all your flock towards the nightless light, and as if from a high observation point you illuminate not only those who are close, but also those who stand far away, with the unwavering brightness of knowledge in Spirit. The angelic way of life has truly made you sublime; the pure and contemplative [quality] of true mingling with the Divine prepared you to fly above, near the heavenly arches. From this very place, the many kinds of virtues are assembled through practical philosophy by you, who selectively gather the lifestyles of the saints like a bee and, from them, bring together the first-fruits of virtues.

For which of the saints have you not zealously imitated, O father? Or whose footsteps have you not followed exceedingly? Or, better put, which of those who lived in virtue have you not striven to resemble? The righteous Abel was praised for his deeds: you yourself, O most righteous father, have dedicated yourself wholly and completely to God as a rational offering. Enos put his hope in the Lord: you yourself have already received visible proofs for the hopes set before us (cf. Hebr. 6:18), while still roaming on earth. Enoch, who pleased God, was transposed [to a heavenly existence]: you yourself have completely transposed the mind of [your] soul from earth to heaven, being wholly dedicated to God, and exchanging things that pass away for permanent ones. The righteous Noah's sacrifices were truly accepted, because he saved the races of irrational animals with the wooden ark, when a cataclysm had covered the earth. You yourself carry to God mystical adoration as offerings and spiritual sacrifices, showing that the

Church of Christ is another ark that saves human generations, just like the various animal species, through the accuracy of your words when the Arian heresy had flooded [the world]. Abraham is wondered at for his hospitality and his love for God. Likewise, he is blessed for carrying the son born out of [divine] promise as an acceptable sacrifice to God, without sacrificing him: you yourself lead [your people] by consuming Christ himself and distribute [the offerings] of the spiritual sacrificial table to those who are present. You do not sacrifice your beloved son or a lamb that was brought instead of him, but you have behaved yourself entirely like a burnt offering for all and, following the Gospel, you send forth your own soul for the lambs. Isaac is glorified for his righteousness: you yourself run about everywhere in Spirit as a kind of standard of righteousness; with great courage, you stop those who deliberately do wrong, appearing clearly in dream to sleeping kings. Jacob was famous for his simple lifestyle and abundance of children; he also beheld the ladder that reached heaven, thus depicting beforehand the image of a greater mystery: you yourself have "given birth" to patriarchs, shepherds and flocks for the sake of the arch-shepherd, Christ, who also entrusted you [your] flock. Also, you did not fail to plan to ascend in your heart, being transfigured step by step, from glory to glory, ascending from earth to heaven in contemplation. Job was exceedingly famous for his innocence and steadfastness in sufferings: you yourself have striven at imitating him, when you did not fall down by giving up to the attacks of heresies, but rather were fixed like a tower that breaks the waves, as if protecting a treasure. Joseph was renowned for his prudence and gratuitous distribution of wheat: you yourself have wholly become an image of prudence, and you have done the business by distributing wheat within the eparchy of Lycia, through the teachings of your honey-sweet voice. Moses is hailed for his mildness and [his ability to] rule the people, and God is named as the one leading of [both] Pharaoh and Israel : you yourself, O most blessed father, are, on one hand, mild towards everyone, but, on the other, terrible towards sinners, ordering all the people to abstain from careless deeds, and drowning the rebellions of passions like another Pharaonic power, through the inundation of your virtuous actions. David is noble, and he conquered the arrogant Goliath through the armor of the Spirit: you are even more powerful, since you daily defeat the supernatural tyrant of souls, [another] Goliath, and chase the rapacious wolves of heretics away from the rational flock of Christ.

O most sacred one, through practical virtue you have entwined yourself in this listing of righteous men, as well as prophets, and you have zealously imitated their courage, zeal, mildness, sympathy, and their elevated lifestyle. And [you have] not only [imitated] their [virtues], but also [those of] Christ's disciples. They possess mercy and truth that throws away the collar of law and shadows and reveals

strongly to us the mysteries of true worship in the Spirit. You, [O Nicholas], have become, together with the apostles, an attendant eye-witness of these mysteries for the whole church, and you are called care-keeper and well-sounding trumpet. Now it is truly time to express the scriptural saying: "The memory of the just is praised, and the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Prov. 10:7; Ps. 112:6), and even more suitably [the Scripture] says: "When the righteous are praised, many peoples rejoice" (Prov. 29:2).

And who would worthily perform honorable praises or chant hymns to the greatness of the great deeds you have performed during your life, O father, [who are] praised with many hymns? For whatever we would call you, our speech would lack truth in all ways: and if we wished to compare your virtuous actions with those of others, it would be necessary to go through all examples of deeds.

What should we now call you? A farmer? Our word will at least be true when it is perceived in terms of contemplation: for you have both cultivated the spiritual fields of the whole eparchy of Lycia, and chopped down the thorns of disbelief. Instead, you have sown the living word of practicing faith and stored the crop spiritually in some kind of storehouses of the soul.

Should we call you an architect? [By saying this,] we would not lie: for you have broken down the sacrificial altars of idols, and the shrines of defiled demons, with the bulldozer of your teachings and, instead, built churches for Christ in their places, and constructed sacred and honorable temples, and shrines of the martyrs. And like a farmer you have shown that newly planted, spiritual vineyards are fruitful by cultivating them. Like a wise architect, you have founded the newly built churches of believers on the firm foundation of faith, through the architecture of Spirit.

So, what should we call you? A soldier? Yes, a soldier! Like some armed army-leader you fight a war against invisible enemies and have been saved by wearing the full equipment of the word around you. Because of this, you have driven away the attacks of the passions with the spear of faith, standing stable and unshaken like a rock. You push away all webs of deceit of the adversary, using the shield of firm hope, and you shoot arrows, combating those who dare to attack. Therefore, you nobly protect by standing around [your people] and make those disappear, who rage in battle against your flock. And, in this way after the fight in close order, you lift up the sword of faith with the right hand of your deeds and cut off the pugnacious concision of Arius, together with the contraction of Sabellius, by the roots. Indeed, those who dare to assimilate or divide the providential incarnation of Christ, the true God, who is one of the blessed and honored Trinity itself, and those who do not understand it correctly, or, on the other hand, those who do not confess

the principle of defining natures in the hypostatic union of natures, that came together in one Christ and God himself, to be unconfused and completely inseparable. With the one and the same whip, according to the zeal of Phinehas, you collect those who turn away to different directions and propitiate the God of all with everyone.

What should we, now, call you? An angel? Indeed, you were not far from the fleshless state of angels, since you truly are called bodiless in body and some ethereal man or angel on earth, visible to everyone. For did appearing to the king, through dreams, and provoking amazement in him, who planned to commit a murder soon, and calming down, with a whip that did not hit, the mad right hand that aimed to slaughter out of a senseless impulse, and saving from death men who had done nothing wrong, being unexpectedly present, differ from angelic flight? Has the angel done something more extraordinary [than this], when he transferred Habakkuk from Zion to Babylon, the land of Media, to serve excellent food to Daniel, who lay in the lions' den?

Should we call you a steersman? We would be speaking the truth: for you steer most orderly those, who sail through a big and wide sea and those who are at sea near the land with the tiller of intercessions towards God and the steering-paddle of faith, turning a hurricane into a breeze and a storm into a calm, by the vigils of prayers, and, O most sacred one, you lead those, who come in faith, to the harbor of detachment. This is manifested by you being clearly seen standing by seamen in the manner of a sailor in the past, at the time when famine was repressing your metropolis. The harbor of Andriake knows these things: for you persuaded those, who did not intend to do so, to sail through it, so that you could feed the starving people and restrain the force of famine. As the story says, you left behind three gold coins after disappearing from the ship, but the care-taker and protector of the people of Lycians was not to remain unknown until the end, O Nicholas, who are angelic in your deeds and way of life.

For when you were still roaming in flesh and before you were set free [to go] to Christ, you visited the sorrowful in many ways and helped swiftly those who were in need, removing attackers from bloodthirsty slaughter – What else would this prove you to be than being dressed in angelic fleshlessness, and doing easily marvelous things in this [state of being]? Indeed, who would not be amazed by your patience? Who would not be struck with [your] gentle speech and mildness with them? Who [would not be struck] with your peacefulness and supplicatory character? As it is said, when you were inspecting the vine twigs of [your] true vineyard in the past, you encountered Theognes of blessed memory. He was, then, a bishop of the church of the Marcianists, until you brought the man to return to what is considered good, with perhaps a hint of some kind of irritation that

[separation] had come about between you. You pronounced gently, but with a loud voice, the apostolic saying and exhorted [him]: "Come to reconciliation, O brother, before the sun sets on our anger."

But, O most admirable father of fathers, illuminator of the inhabited world, the sanctuary of churches, the support and swift assurance of believers, the defender of those who experience injustice, now you are much more our shepherd, and you comfort us more greatly, sitting in purity near the pure God, the perfect and worshiped Trinity. [Rejoicing and] dancing around Him spiritually, together with the angelic orders, you oversee us from above with apostolic graces and fatherly succor, O divine and sacred head, and do not withdraw from us, but support [those who need support] and arm [those who need to be armed], O father, interpreter of the Scripture, and master and teacher of ineffable [mysteries]. Strengthen the like-minded successor of your sacred dwelling, who follows you after a long time, but who directly follows you in reverence, as well as his sons – your grandsons – with manliness and true speech. And holding them in fatherly embrace – together, above all, – may you chase away those, who dare to attack your rational flock, with the spiritual javelins of your words, so that this small flock of yours would survive fearless, [the flock] that you have brought up and pastorally have comforted. O divinely inspired, do not cease to strengthen the priests, the hierarchy and all the Christ-loving people with the living and unfailing teachings of Orthodox faith and with the magnitude of marvels. And the more you now exceedingly and more purely approach God, and hence are even more dazzled by the brilliance of the apprehension of light, the more shining and distinct is the radiance you receive in return for the pure trust in Christ.

I call you blessed, O city of Myra, metropolis of the Lycians. Oh, what kind of child-loving shepherd and protector you happened to have! You received him as a truly venerable crown and as a gift, worth being boasted of. Who is it? Nicholas, who appears clearly, with exceedingly divine wisdom, to those who are in need, the swiftest helper of those who are being harmed, the most sacred glory of priests, who is great in miracles and terrible in [divine] marvels, who guards the innocent in dangers, and who recalls to their senses those who willingly wish to do wrong. Therefore you are blessed among cities, having brought up and having set in your [bishop's] seats such a guardian of the city. About him we have said: "Let us walk in light" (cf. Jes. 2:5) and let us live in rest in his shadow, as the divine Scripture somewhere says. Alongside with him, you also have the noble champions of practicing faith, I mean Crescens, Dioscorides and Nicocles, the three martyrs who, in the unity of their minds, sacredly shine forth the [brightness] of the Trinity, whom this very same Trinity has elevated into honor through the combats that made them worthy of gaining the Kingdom. So, once more, crown your famous

head worthily by bringing him harmoniously together with these, on the one hand because he has nobly shown equal struggle with them through his deliberate attitude, on the other because he also, already in the old times, honored the martyrs with his own pains, and because of his zeal [to imitate] them is now worthy of the crown that is woven together [for him and the martyrs].

But come together today, everyone, the most sacred and faithful audience! Having come into this temple, let us celebrate the sacred and high feast, and let us keep the memory, most worthy of praise, of our God-bearing father. Let us do this by staying far from taking pleasure in the deceitful pretenses of any worldly procession or festival, and from all things that wretchedly present the evil deceit of Hellenic mysteries , and from all games that are connected to shallow confusion and pretentious theatrical performances : for games worthy of laughter are those through which some hunt after vainglory, which is more wretched than anything else. Instead, let us cover [our] saint with rosebuds or anoint him with the fragrant myrrh – our own deeds – and let us crown him with the spiritual flowers of hymns. Our holy father Nicholas is fond of experiencing such things: he makes peace with such celebrations and festivals: he delights in such things more than the processional decorations, in which lay [hidden] the national [cults] and evil spirits of the Hellenes. In such things, [namely, spiritual celebrations,] also the threefold unity of mind and breath of the most noble athletes shines forth. O Nicholas, with them you graze together in the dwellings above, with them you shine forth, together with them you rejoice, exulting in God the Father, as far as it is possible , seeing and being seen, and you are illuminated by the brightness that surround Him. O father, with their petitions towards the Divine and your prayers that are acceptable to God, may we all be liberated from all heretical and demonic attacks, from the scourges that cause illness and through which people are unexpectedly put into bondage and confined, and from all dangers, through the grace and mercy and benevolence towards mankind of the One, who redeemed us with the venerable blood from His life-giving side, and delivered us from the deceit of slavery, our Lord Jesus Christ, together with whom all reverence and glory, might and magnificence is due to the Father and the Holy and Life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Andrew of Crete

Preparing for Confession

This excerpt comes from "The Service of Confession with Supplements for Preparation." This booklet prepared by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Denver Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry provides both the service prayers and this wonderful walk through the Beatitudes by Fr. Thomas Hopko.

What is sin? The Greek word for sin, *amartia*, means “to miss the mark.” As Christians, our “mark” or the “target” for which we “aim” is a Christ-like life, lived to the best of our ability according to the teachings, precepts, and commandments of God. When we miss this mark or fail to hit this target, we sin.

Murder is a sin. Pride and envy are sins. Stealing a car is a sin. Stealing a candy bar is a sin. Refusing to attend the Liturgy is a sin—but so is attending the Liturgy with hatred for others.

Missing the mark is missing the mark. If we aim at the bullseye and miss, it makes no difference if it is by an inch or a yard. In both cases, we have failed to achieve our goal.

There are many ways to prepare for confession. Often, a person will spend time in contemplation of the sins they know, perhaps working to make a list of them, and also spend some time praying to be shown those sins they don’t see -- for we all sin in ways we don’t even realize.

You can find different lists of sins and writings to help you think of the various kinds of sin you might consider repenting and confessing. Some are based on the Seven Major Sins (Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony Avarice, Sloth), some are based on Ten Commandments or on other Scriptural readings, and some are just lists of sins known to be common. The goal is to help you examine your own heart, and to find those sins that you need to bring to your confession.

Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory wrote a beautiful self-examination based on The Beatitudes. The questions are offered as a general indication of what our approach should be.

Self-Examination Based on The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (St. Matthew 5:3) – Am I poor before God and men? Do I cultivate the attitude of poverty? Do I realize that all is God's and from God? Do I use my life and everything I have as that which belongs to God? Do I share the goods of the earth with others, knowing that all is God's? Do I take my opinions and ideas from God? Do I acknowledge my spiritual and intellectual poverty before God, accepting his wisdom and truth? Am I possessive, selfish, self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-seeking? Am I an idolater of my own opinions, ideas, possessions? Do I lust after status, power, authority, wealth, position? Do I really love and value poverty as the perfect ideal?

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. (St. Matthew 5:4) – Am I a person who mourns? Do I lament over the suffering of men? Do I weep over the troubles in Church and state, family and society? Do I suffer with all who suffer, in poverty and squalor, in misery and sin? Do I weep over sickness, disease, tragedy,

and death? Or do I simply "take it as it is", passing off as courage what is really hard-heartedness and lack of sympathetic concern? Do I have compassion on the lowly, the lustful, the addicted, the selfish, the wretched, the evil and sinful of the world without judgment or condemnation? Am I sad over the sins and of others? Or do I, in fact, laugh and gloat and mock the faults of others, and take perverse pleasure in those things about which true Christians, in imitation of Christ, can only mourn?

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. (St. Matthew 5:5) – Am I meek with the meekness of Jesus? Am I meek in the sense that I only fight evil with good? Do I accept and practice the fact that humble love and truth and courage in goodness is the only weapon available in any battle with sin and sinful people? Do I lord it over others, at home, at work, at church? Do I love and actually use force, brute command, blind authority, intimidation, coercion, to accomplish my will? Do I bless those who curse me, pray for those who abuse me, do good to those who hate me, serve those who misuse me, speak to those who shun me? Do I love my enemies and forgive my offenders? Do I believe in the method of the meekness of Christ as the only way for genuine achievement?

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (St. Matthew 5:6) – Do I hunger and thirst for God? Do I desire to be righteous? Do I work to be holy? Do I read or study or make any continued effort for love and for truth, for the Spirit of God? Do I pray? Do I fast? Do I read the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, the lives of the Saints, and other spiritually profitable works?

Do I do any "spiritual exercises" which train me in goodness? Do I come to Church? Do I participate in the Mysteries? Do I go out of my way to help, to teach, to serve in some way? Do I do the things which I know bring righteousness?

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (St. Matthew 5:7) – Do I show mercy to others? Do I forgive those who offend me? Do I try to understand those who are different? Do I take pleasure in judging and condemning? Do I talk about others? Do I revel in gossip? Do I say things, though possibly true, which need not be said but only can harm? Do I rejoice in wrong? Am I legalistic, loving the law more than the Spirit? Do I cover offenses, or do I stir things up by picking and condemning? Am I petty and small? Do I slander and shame? Am I prejudiced, making judgments and coming to conclusions without proper facts but with pre-formed opinions? Do I actually prefer strict judgment to tender mercy?

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (St. Matthew 5:8) – Do I love purity, cleanness, and wholeness? Am I polluted by filthy thoughts and words and actions? Is my mind stained by demonic rationalizations and prejudices? Or am I

pure in my openness to all that is good? Is my body corrupted by beastly sensuality and lust? Are my thoughts and deeds pure, or are there always hidden motives and intentions? Am I trusting and trustful, with a singleness of purpose and total integrity in everything? Or do I connive and deceive, cheat and lie? Am I hypocritical and pretentious? Am I caught by some passion: eating, drinking, smoking, working, playing, sleeping, or something else which has more control over me than I have over it? Is there any darkness or impurity which blinds me and holds me from freedom and wholeness with God?

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God. (St. Matthew 5:9) – Do I love and make peace? At home, at work, at church, in society, and the whole world? Am I angry and impatient? Preparation for Confession -- 12 Do I look for fights and arguments? Do I provoke others to anger? Do I believe in turning the other cheek? Or do I take refuge in physical force? Do I love violence? Do I worship aggression and power? Do I seek inner peace and quiet which is the basic condition for peace in the world?

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (St. Matthew 5:10-11) – Am I ever persecuted for what is right? Am I ready to be? Am I ready to give my life, without vengeance, for what is true? Do I participate in good activities which may bring criticism from others? Or do I take the easy road of non-involvement in human affairs, in family or job or church or society at large? Do I go along with things which are wrong from fear or cowardice or laziness? Do I flee responsibility? Do I worship security? Am I defending my own small life in contradiction to the righteousness of God? Am I, in fact, ashamed of Christ?

Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (St. Matthew 5:12) – Is my joy and gladness in God? Or Is it In this world with its passions, powers, possessions, and praise? Am I mean and grouchy or jealous and moody? Am I despairing and without hope? Am I pessimistic and anxious? Do I complain and spread darkness and irritation to others? Is my faith of no consequence in my actions and attitudes to the events of life? Do I really consider the lilies of the field and trust in God and rejoice in this trust? Is my treasure in God or in myself? Is my life hid with Christ in God, or am I, in fact, a man of this age in body, mind, and spirit? Do I believe and have in truth the “joy of believing”? -- **Fr. Thomas Hopko, If We Confess Our Sins, Department of Religious Education, The Orthodox Church In America, 1975.)**

A Miracle of St. Nicholas and St. Symeon the God-Receiver

How great a glory in heaven befitted St. Symeon the Receiver of God, who held the Savior of the world in his hands, which the following incident clearly shows as, related in the hagiography of St. Peter the Athonite (June 12).

As a commander during a battle, Peter was enslaved, chained and cast into prison in the town of Samara on the shores of the Euphrates River. Languishing in prison for along time Peter, in tears, prayed to St. Nicholas to beseech God on his behalf to liberate him from prison, promising that he will completely dedicate himself to God. St. Nicholas appeared to him in a dream and told him that although he [St. Nicholas] prays to God on his behalf, God delays his deliverance because he [Peter] earlier made a similar vow to God and did not keep it. And further, St. Nicholas counseled Peter that he ought to pray to St. Symeon the God-Receiver "who is very mighty before God and stands close to the Throne of God together with the All-Holy Virgin and St. John the Forerunner."

Peter heeded the counsel of St. Nicholas and proceeded to pray to St. Symeon. Again St. Nicholas appeared to him, together with St. Symeon, not in a dream but in reality. Peter saw Symeon glorious in appearance, face glowing, and attired in the vestments of an Old Testament priest with a golden staff in his hand. St. Symeon said to Peter: "Do you want to fulfill the vow and become a monk?" To that, Peter replied: "Yes master, with God's help." Symeon then touched Peter's chains with his staff and the chains melted like wax. Opening the doors of the dungeon, the Saint led Peter from prison. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

October & November Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! Thanks to God and your dedication and generosity, in October we received \$12,177 in weekly collections. We paid out \$10,350 in expenses. For November we saw donations totaling \$11,783.40 against expenses of \$9349.86. Thank you all for your continued support! To God be the glory!

Herman Blaydoe, Treasurer

Prepare for Christmas with SPF50

The November-December 2020 edition of SPF50 is now available digitally on acrod.org. This issue begins the week of November 15th and includes a Scripture reading guide and prayers designed specifically for families to prepare to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord. If you haven't tried SPF50 yet, consider joining in now. While the holiday season is undoubtedly a busy time, by making a commitment to read from the Bible and pray together for 50 minutes a month, your family will "keep Christ in Christmas" while spending quality time together. To access this

material or to find out more about how SPF50 can help your family grow in Christ, visit the Diocesan Website at acrod.org and look for the SPF50 logo.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbyteria Katie Baker & family, Santiago Alzugaray, Patty Blaydoe, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Howl family, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl & family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, Luke & Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Nicholas Pavlik, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore & Christina Ristas, Robinson Family, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Joe & Darlene Waters, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Dcn. Nectaros & Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)